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**MANIPULATION STRATEGIES IN MODERN LIBERAL AND
CONSERVATIVE ONLINE NEWSPAPERS**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores linguistic manipulation strategies in liberal and conservative online newspapers in the United States. As digital media becomes more polarized, understanding the ways in which political ideologies shape language is increasingly relevant. The study aims to analyze and compare the specific manipulation strategies used by news websites to influence public opinion, particularly in the context of politically polarizing issues such as COVID-19, immigration, police reform, and Donald Trump's policies.

The object of the research is the manipulation strategies found in news articles, while the subject is the specific linguistic tools used to convey ideological perspectives. Methodologically, the research involves critical analysis and synthesis of existing literature on linguistic manipulation, combined with comparative textual analysis of 24 news articles collected using the Ground News platform. These texts were selected from both liberal and conservative sources to ensure ideological balance. The structure of the thesis includes an introduction, a theoretical review, a practical analytical section, and final conclusions. The study ultimately underscores the importance of linguistic awareness for promoting media literacy and critical reading skills in a politically divided society.

The findings reveal that while liberals and conservatives employ similar manipulation strategies - such as playing on emotions and factual manipulation - they differ in how these are expressed. Liberal sources often use passive constructions, modal verbs denoting uncertainty, and a tone that ranges from neutral to concerned or anxious, especially when their values are perceived as threatened. Conservative sources, by contrast, favor directness, emotional intensity, and accusatory language, often expressing anger or indignation. Stylistically, both camps relied heavily on antithesis, irony, parallelisms and metaphors.

***Keywords:** manipulation, polarization, news, liberal, conservative, ideology, political spectrum*

АНОТАЦІЯ

Ця робота досліджує лінгвістичні маніпулятивні стратегії в ліберальних та консервативних онлайн газетах у Сполучених Штатах Америки. У міру того як цифрові медіа стають дедалі більш поляризованими, розуміння того, як політичні ідеології впливають на мову, набуває особливої актуальності. Метою дослідження є аналіз і порівняння конкретних стратегій маніпуляції, які використовуються новинними сайтами для впливу на громадську думку, зокрема в контексті політично поляризованих тем, таких як COVID-19, імміграція, реформа поліції та політика Дональда Трампа.

Об'єктом дослідження є стратегії маніпуляції, що використовуються у новинних статтях, а предметом - конкретні мовні засоби, які використовуються для передачі ідеологічних поглядів. Методологія дослідження включає критичний аналіз і синтез наявної наукової літератури з теми мовної маніпуляції, а також порівняльний текстовий аналіз 24 новинних статей, зібраних за допомогою платформи Ground News. Ці тексти були відібрані як з ліберальних, так і з консервативних джерел для забезпечення ідеологічного балансу. Структура роботи включає вступ, теоретичний огляд, практичний аналітичний розділ і фінальні висновки. У підсумку дослідження підкреслює важливість мовної обізнаності для розвитку медіа грамотності та навичок критичного читання в умовах політично поділеного суспільства.

Результати дослідження показують, що ліберали й консерватори використовують подібні стратегії маніпуляції - такі як емоційний вплив і маніпуляція фактами - однак по-різному їх реалізують. Ліберальні джерела часто використовують пасивні конструкції, модальні дієслова, що виражають невпевненість, а також тональність, яка варіюється від нейтральної до стурбованої або тривожної, особливо коли їхні цінності під загрозою. Консервативні джерела, навпаки, надають перевагу прямоті, емоційній насиченості та звинувачувальній лексиці, часто виражаючи гнів або обурення. У стилістичному плані обидві сторони часто використовували антитезу, іронію, паралелізми та метафори.

Ключові слова: маніпуляція, поляризація, новини, ліберальний, консервативний, ідеологія, політичний спектр

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INTRODUCTION

News have always been at the core of any society, making any news outlets the main source of not only information, but also influence and manipulation. With the advancement of technology, newspapers from all over the world have migrated to online websites. Thanks to the easy Internet access combined with the rise of free speech and democratic values, the media landscape has grown significantly to incorporate voices from all over the political ideological spectrum, which has both its advantages and downsides. As the media landscape expands, more views and opinions get shared, with some growing more prominent and influential. The liberal and conservative ideas have become the most prominent, gaining a huge number of supporters, particularly in the United States. However, being on the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, they create a huge divide and the political polarization has grown significantly in the past decade. Trying to gain audience's attention, both sides are relying on and incorporating various manipulation techniques to influence people's opinions, which can affect the transparency and objectivity of news reporting.

Thus, **the relevance** of this work is in identifying how language is strategically employed to persuade, manipulate, or align readers with particular viewpoints and getting better understanding of the linguistic strategies used by conservative and liberal news outlets to shape news coverage in the United States, which is crucial for promoting overall media literacy and critical reading skills.

The aim of this study is the analysis and comparison of the various strategies employed by liberal and conservative media in order to uncover how language reflects political ideologies and affects news coverage.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To research the phenomenon of manipulation in the context of liberal and conservative news coverage.
- To compare how conservative and liberal newspapers frame similar political or social events using different linguistic strategies.
- To examine the influence of ideological bias on language choices, including lexical selection, grammatical structure, and stylistic devices.

- To identify the similarities in manipulation strategies in liberal and conservative online newspapers and what distinguishes them from each other.

The object of the study are the linguistic manipulation strategies used by liberal and conservative online newspapers.

The subject of the study are the specific lexical, grammatical and stylistic means used in the texts of conservative and liberal online news articles.

Research methods are based on the critical analysis and systematization of existing research on linguistic manipulations and linguistic indicators of liberal and conservative speech. The paper also includes comparison of various news articles from both conservative and liberal news outlets side by side to see what kind of linguistic tools each of them use to sway the public opinion. The subjects of those articles will be dedicated to the most polarizing issues in the United States (COVID-19, illegal immigration, police reform, Trump's recent policies), as they will provide the greater variety of news coverage and contrasting ideological views. The study will also rely on the use of Ground News – an online platform that aggregates news articles from different news outlets and sorts them based on the ideological bias present. It will be used to collect articles about a certain subject or event from all sides of ideological spectre, so they can be further analysed in this paper.

The **novelty** lies in comparative linguistic analysis focusing specifically on manipulation strategies across liberal and conservative ideological divides within online news platforms. The theoretical value of the study lies in the contribution to the field of linguistics, political discourse and media studies by highlighting both subtle and overt language choices that guide reader interpretation. From the practical standpoint, the findings offer valuable input for promoting media literacy and more critical engagement with news sources.

Language data was collected via online research papers, Internet sources and news articles from online newspapers. Overall, 24 news articles were analysed.

The structure of the study includes an introduction, theoretical and practical parts of the research, as well as conclusions to these parts and the list of literature.

1. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF MANIPULATION IN MODERN LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

1.1. The concept of manipulation and manipulation strategies

People influence each other constantly, as it is a natural part of social interactions. However, the forms of this influence vary greatly in directness, intentionality and purpose. On the one hand, one might openly try to sway someone's opinion or decision-making process by providing strong logical arguments; on the other hand, they might resort to tricks, hints and scheming to plant certain ideas into the other person's mind. Some forms of influence are unconscious in nature: one might inspire the other to adopt certain views or opinions with their own actions and words, but without having a clear intent to do so. At the same time, other individuals can resort to drastic measures, like lies, blackmail, pressure, coercion, etc., to get a certain result from the other party. In terms of purpose, people can have unlimited amount of goals and agendas to influence others. All these factors combined create a huge spectre of ways people impact each other on a daily basis.

One of the first ways we influence each other that comes to mind is usually manipulation. Due to its complexity, it might be somewhat tricky to place such a nuanced concept as manipulation on the spectre. Many researchers from various scientific fields have tried to define what constitutes manipulation, as it encompasses not only psychological phenomenon, but is also part of a sociolinguistic, political, journalistic and many other spheres, too. T. van Dijk, most famous for his scholarly work in critical discourse analysis, notes that manipulating people involves manipulating their minds, that is, people's beliefs, such as the knowledge, opinions and ideologies, which in turn control their actions [8]. Aliyeva explains, that the manipulator constructs a new situation for the audience, which is the target of the influence, namely: words used, behaviour (gestures, hand movements), repetition of words or sentences to emphasize an idea, tone of voice, compliments of the audience, hasty generalization, attitude, analogy, false dichotomy, ad hominem argument, invention of new situational elements (often negative) [1, p. 237]. According to Gasparyan and Harutyunyan, manipulation can be viewed as not only the way to reach

one's goals by fooling others, but also as a way to gain people's trust by concealing certain details or misinterpreting facts [15, p. 12]. The most extreme example of manipulation in terms of online news coverage would be the creation of fake news websites and articles, as they predominantly provide false or distorted information. According to Mikuláš, this type of news is not always intended for informational purposes, because some of it is purely persuasive and intended to persuade, not inform [30, p. 45].

It is important to make a differentiation between manipulation and persuasion, as they are not the same thing. Modeyin and Adeyemo argue that persuasion is an overt and obvious attempt to try to influence and change somebody's opinion, usually through logic, facts and reasoning. Manipulation relies on hidden, covert ways instead [31, p. 229].

However, the secretive ways in which manipulations are employed doesn't always mean that they are inherently based on lies and deception. According to Alexander Fischer, manipulations often draw on both reason, logic and facts, and strong emotional states and personal biases [12]. Put simply, manipulations often have enough truth behind them to not be considered outright lies, but primarily rely on psychological factors, like personal beliefs and heightened emotions regarding a certain subject, to shape perceptions. Skilled manipulators target certain beliefs, emotions or blind spots a person or a group of people might have and use those to shape their overall opinion. Also, Fischer claims that while manipulation may restrict and modify rational freedom, it does not necessarily render the subject unfree. They don't limit the person's free will, unlike more extreme ways of coercion, which makes it possible for people to see through the hidden tactics.

Manipulation strategies and their classifications are numerous, especially depending on the context when and where they are used. We will be looking at manipulation strategies in terms of news coverage in online newspapers. Over the years, several common tactics have been identified by various researchers, with some overlap between their studies. According to Mialkovska et al., some of the manipulation strategies include factual manipulation, ideological polarization,

whipping up fear and denunciation [29, p. 349-352]. Factual manipulation is just what it sounds like: conscious altering of information, concealment of certain facts and details, avoidance of specific topics or events that might not suit the chosen narrative. It also often tries to shift audience's attention, distract them from inconvenient facts. The goal of ideological polarization is the creation of "us" vs "them" mentality, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Whipping up fear, often referred to colloquially as fear mongering, takes a certain event and spins it in a way that makes audience feel like tragedy, danger, negative consequences and calamity are inevitable. This strategy can also be directed at a certain person or an organized group and their actions to discredit them. Taken one step further, it can easily turn into denunciation – belittling of the opponent, accusing them of crimes and mistakes (real or alleged) to erode public's trust in them.

Denunciation is also quite similar to some other manipulation strategies described by other authors. For example, Krisagbedo, Eze and Mamah expand on the concept of the ideological square that was first developed by van Dijk's in 1993 [25, p. 845]. When used, the main focus of the ideological square is as follows:

1. Express/emphasise information that is 'positive' about us;
2. Express/emphasise information that is 'negative' about them;
3. Suppress/de-emphasise information that is 'negative' about us;
4. Suppress/de-emphasise information that is 'positive' about them.

It is also quite similar to ideological polarizations, as it divides people into groups. Those within a group support and praise each other, highlight the positives and ignore, downplay or even defend negative actions or beliefs of the in-group. However, when it comes to their opponents, the script flips: the other group's mistakes are emphasized and mocked, they are ostracized and heavily criticized, while their achievements are downplayed and disregarded. Taken to the more extreme end, this turns into what Ilie calls blame game and "discourse justification" [19]. This strategy is often used by organizations and politicians that don't want to admit to their mistakes, and instead shift the narrative. They either paint their opponents in the bad light, or make it seem like their good actions were negatively impacted by the other party.

Additionally, European Parliament has published an article on its website listing several more manipulations strategies, such as playing on emotions, flooding the information space, taking advantage of confirmation bias and attacking or silencing critical voices [10]. Playing on emotions is a very popular strategy. By exposing people to emotionally charged content, it is easy to provoke their anger, fear or sympathy. Under the influence of strong feelings it is difficult to stay objective and think rationally, so information can be taken at face value. Flooding the information space refers to exposing audiences to large amounts of inconsistent and even contradictory information. This causes overwhelm and makes it likely for people to give up and stop looking for more objective sources. We are all prone to believe certain people or sources that we believe to be reliable and that align with our own opinions and values. That is where taking advantage of the confirmation bias comes in: manipulators subtly feed into our pre-existing beliefs, while adding more of their biased perceptions into the mix. Attacking and silencing critical voices is connected to denunciation and emphasizing the negative about the opponent, but can be more extreme. This strategy can include insults, defamation, harassment, personal attacks and even use of AI to create fake videos and images of a person.

Manipulation strategies are a complex and multifaceted form of influence that differs from situation to situation. While manipulation does not always rely on falsehoods, it typically targets individuals' beliefs, emotions, and biases to subtly shape their perceptions and decisions. It is characterized by its covert, emotionally charged, and psychologically strategic nature, and the more strategies are being used simultaneously, the stronger the desired effect. However, none of the manipulation strategies, despite their depth and sophistication, guarantee a perfect result. This highlights the importance of critical thinking and media literacy in resisting their influence. With enough knowledge, experience and critical thinking it is possible to spot the signs of manipulation and avoid being swept up by another person's narrative.

1.2. Language as a tool for media manipulation and political polarization

It is through language that all manipulation strategies are expressed and gain power. The phenomenon of language manipulation has repeatedly been researched and its analysis is in high demand in linguistics. Language is not just a means of communication. Nordlund argues that attached to the words are conceptions, which affect our way of interpreting what we hear or read, and can also disclose our attitudes and values towards persons or events [33, p. 7]. Whether consciously or not, we often use specific words or word combinations that reflect our opinions and feelings towards the subject of the discussion. The careful choice of words, tone, and framing can subtly alter perceptions, encourage certain behaviours, or distort truth. Thus, language easily becomes the primary mechanism of manipulation.

Language drives political and media discourse and becomes an integral instrument for polarization. As Kuzmenko et al. explains, politics is inseparable from people's lives, and therefore is reflected in the language [26, p. 206]. It is the main tool used by politicians to engage potential voters, build and reinforce their public image and rally support. According to Shchyhlo and Korovai, linguistic manipulation as a tool serves as a means of influencing the audience by selectively conveying information to shape public opinion, a crucial requirement for a specific political force or political leader [39, p. 188]. Euphemisms mask harsh realities, slogans simplify complex issues, and repetition implants ideas into the collective consciousness. Over time, such manipulations can deepen divisions, as language begins to define “*us*” vs “*them*”, reinforcing group identities and demonizing opposing views. Polarization thrives in these linguistic battlegrounds, where dialogue is replaced by rhetoric, and understanding gives way to ideological entrenchment. In this way, language is not merely a reflection of thought—it becomes the backbone of manipulation and a primary driver of societal division.

The issue of political polarization is prominent in many countries all around the world. The concept refers to the political views, values and beliefs that stray far from the central, moderate positions and are drifting closer and closer to the extremes. The language used in news outlets plays a significant role in shaping online political

discourse. Research indicates that semantic polarization in online newspapers can forecast similar trends in social media discussions, which point to the connection between the two. Several researchers – Huszár et al., - have conducted a study that showed that in 6 out of 7 countries studied, the mainstream political right enjoys higher algorithmic amplification than the mainstream political left. Consistent with this overall trend, their second study in the U.S. media landscape showed that algorithms favour right-leaning news sources [18].

The rate of polarization has grown significantly over the past decade, if not more, and many see it as a disturbing trend, prompting researchers and experts to attempt to figure out the causes of the issue, possible consequences and ways of navigating them. One of the main reasons for increased division could be the popularity of social media. Thanks to its development, people can freely share their polarizing thoughts and opinions through articles, tweets, texts, blogs and direct messages. Since there is mostly no censorship on the Internet, anybody is free to engage with whatever content they like. The same goes for online newspapers and blogs. While most online newspapers hold themselves to a very high ethical journalistic standard, the freedom of the Internet gives rise to accounts and news websites that are not monitored, which often leads to biased and highly subjective reporting. Since online users have free and easy access to so much information, they are likely to stumble on some very divisive and inflammatory texts, which can impact their beliefs.

Moreover, Internet algorithms have a strong effect on what we get to see. Content with emotionally charged language is more likely to be shared. There is also an abundance of politician speeches and debates, where polarized language is used heavily. A study by Suwarni, Aliah and Natsir, analysing 10,000 campaign posts, found that 72% employed emotional language, 65% reinforced political ideologies, and 83% adapted content to platform-specific contexts [43, p. 67]. By using divisive language and framing issues in a manner that accentuates differences and demonizes opposing viewpoints, media outlets can entrench partisan identities and reduce the potential for constructive dialogue. Headlines that invoke fear or anger can heighten partisan sentiments and reduce the likelihood of encountering opposing viewpoints. People are

very susceptible to emotional manipulations, so all of these factors combined have a strong influence on their opinions and emotional responses to opposing ideological beliefs.

We can observe the consequences of ideological polarization in real time. The rise of echo-chambers, - environments where a person is exposed only to the ideas similar to their own, - is stark. Borghouts et al. claim that people tend to follow accounts with whom they already agree and who further confirm and solidify their beliefs [4]. Humans like familiarity and comfort, so seeing other people employ similar language to express similar beliefs makes us gravitate towards them. As if in a bubble or a confined space, these views bounce back and forth from one person to another, amplifying and growing more rigid, emotionally charged and, in worst cases, more extreme over time. Rim, Berman and Leong state that this in turn fosters negative perception of members of the political outgroup and intergroup hostility [37].

Such animosity affects how society functions overall and is damaging to democracy. Carothers and O'Donohue claim that in Turkey the polarization has grown so much that people often refuse to engage with those who have different political views. Eight out of ten people there would not want their daughter to marry someone who supports another party and about three-quarters would not even consider that person as a potential business partner [5]. Constructive dialogue becomes impossible when terms like “*radical left*”, “*virtue-signalers*”, “*woke*” or “*extreme right*”, “*fascist*” are thrown around, evoking strong emotional responses from both sides.

When considering societal problems, it is also worth mentioning how some common societal issues get buried under tons of polarizing headlines. As tensions grow, both sides can become hyper-fixated on certain problems, which often get reflected in news outlets. Articles with keywords like “*immigration*”, “*systemic racism*”, “*police brutality*”, “*gun-control*”, “*identity politics*” become the center of attention and heated discussions, while less inflammatory issues, like healthcare, taxes, housing prices get sidelined. Since those subjects don't have the same colorful language attached to them, they become less of a priority and therefore are left unresolved. The strategic use of language to manipulate public opinion can also erode trust in media institutions and

democratic processes. When individuals perceive news outlets as biased or manipulative, they may become disengaged or skeptical of information.

Language can become a formidable force when exploited. It becomes an especially powerful tool in the hands of politicians and journalists. Through the subtle choices of words, language not only shapes public opinions, but also reinforces larger societal divisions and conflicts. It dehumanizes and fosters hostility instead of cooperation. The rise of social media and ever-changing algorithms has only intensified this dynamic, oftentimes causing more harm by emphasizing harmful polarized narratives and tanking more grounded and moderate perspectives.

1.3. Types of linguistic means of manipulation in modern online newspapers

In the current informational climate, where readers are constantly bombarded with content, news outlets resort to various manipulation techniques to engage them, influence public opinion and shape political discourse. According to Martino et al., influencing other's perspective is achieved through a series of rhetorical and psychological techniques [28]. Usually these techniques are covert, expressed through subtle shifts in vocabulary, syntax, grammatical structures and stylistic choices. These strategies are designed to evoke certain emotional responses, which in turn will influence person's further actions.

This chapter will focus on the most used lexical, grammatical and stylistic means of manipulation.

Lexical means

Lexical means of manipulation refer to the use of carefully chosen words to form sentences. They have special connotations, whether positive or negative, to resonate with the readers on an emotional level or to subtly guide their interpretation of the news. According to Shchyhlo and Korovai, lexical manipulations are usually expressed through euphemisms, pejorative terms and linguistic hedging [39, p. 189]

Euphemisms are substitutions of the words that might be perceived as unpalatable. For example, the word “*war*” can be replaced with “*invasion*”, “*armed aggression*”. It downplays the gravity of the situation, shields the audience from a more triggering word, but still aligns audience perceptions with the desired narrative.

Pejorative terms are words with an inherently disapproving and even insulting meaning that are used to create shock value. Since the reader most likely expects an objective news reporting, seeing inflammatory words like “*wokeshit*”, “*bullshit*”, “*moron*”, etc., will create a strong emotional response, engage the person more and most likely instill a sense that the subject discussed is so vital it warrants such crude language.

Linguistic hedging is somewhat similar to euphemisms. It involves using vague or cautious language to soften the impact of words that otherwise might make the speaker a target of audience’s indignation. For example, replacing the word “*war*” with “*military operation*” or “*combat mission*”, or “*civilian casualties*” with “*collateral damage*” helps mitigate the emotional impact and reduce reader resistance, especially when the person speaking is the one responsible or supportive of the war. Euphemisms, on the other hand, mostly shield the audience.

According to Mialkowska et al., manipulative lexical tools are often tied to integration tactics, which include pronouns such as “*we,*” “*you,*” “*us,*” and “*our*”, which are used to foster a sense of solidarity between the writer and the reader [29, p. 352-353]. This inclusive language builds trust and group identity, subtly persuading the audience to adopt the publication's perspective.

Another lexical manipulation device worth mentioning is dysphemism, which is an opposite of euphemism. This term refers to words which have a derogatory meaning and are supposed to create negative perception of people or events. A protest may be described as a “*riot*” or its participants as “*agitators*” rather than “*activists*” or “*demonstrators*”.

Styrnik notes that political discourse is saturated with vocabulary carrying strong positive or negative connotations and ideological implications [42, p. 104]. For instance, the term “*patriot*” often has a positive connotation and is closely associated

with loyalty and heroism, while “*nationalist*” may carry a negative undertone and is linked to extreme ideologies - even though both refer to strong allegiance to one’s country. Phrases like “*baseless claims*” vs “*widespread fraud*” carry vastly different implications, though both might refer to the same set of allegations. Similarly, collocations such as “*violent protestors*” or “*concerned citizens*” frame participants according to the ideological position of the outlet. Depending on the word used and who used it, the context can change drastically.

Fadhil expands on this idea. On top of positive and negative emotive terms, they also note value-laden terms, which are emotionally charged words meant to influence reader attitudes implicitly and that usually have one specific evaluative meaning [11, p. 600]. A good example being the word “*murder*”, which cannot be used in a positive way, therefore evoking only negative associations.

Grammatical means

Grammatical constructions also serve as powerful tools of manipulation. Nordlund identifies several such tactics, including the use of active and passive voice, nominalization and modal verbs [33, p. 9-11]. Shchyhlo and Korovai also highlight the use of conditional mood [39, p. 189].

The active and passive voice allows to either take accountability or deflect blame. For example, saying “*An attacker shot dozens of people*” (active) directly assigns blame, while “*Dozens were shot*” [58] (passive) removes the agent, so the reader’s first reaction is to focus on the victims, not the attacker. Depending on the context, the passive voice can be used to draw attention to and emphasize the negative consequences of someone’s action to gain sympathy. For instance, saying “*mentally ill people are 3 times more likely to be targeted*” puts emphasis on mentally ill people and their struggles. Also, active voice is used to proudly showcase achievement and accomplishment.

Nominalization, or turning actions into abstract nouns (e.g., “*the attack*”, “*the escalation*”, “*the repression*”), distances the reader from the agents involved and paints events as inevitable or natural occurrences rather than choices made by

individuals. As Nordlund explains, this tactic often suppresses agency, making the events seem impersonal and harder to contest.

Modal verbs such as “*might*”, “*could*”, “*must*”, “*should*” indicate levels of certainty or doubt. Statements like “*The policy might lead to economic collapse*” introduce fear and uncertainty without directly asserting a claim. Conversely, “*This must be stopped*” implies urgency and moral imperative, rallying emotional reactions.

Finally, the conditional mood is a strategy that presents predictions and their outcomes as probable rather than hypothetical. Phrases like “*If the government doesn’t act, chaos will follow*” exude certainty and evoke a sense of urgency and even fear as to the consequences if no action is taken. Also, when presenting hypotheticals referring to past events, like Trump’s claims: “*If I were president, this would have never happened*”, showcase the speaker’s certainty in their claims, but also cannot be fact-checked or proven wrong, since the action never actually happened.

Stylistic means

Stylistic means of manipulation encompass rhetorical devices, such as tropes and figures of speech that enrich content, while simultaneously manipulating reader’s attitudes and emotions. According to Shovak and Petii, and Mialkovska et al., most common stylistic manipulation devices include figures of speech, such as metaphors, simile, allusion, irony and sarcasm, antithesis, repetition, inversion, parallelism, clichés, rhetorical questions [40, p. 256; 29, p. 348].

Metaphor is a trope that uses one word or concept to describe another, considered to have similar characteristics to it. The reason metaphors can be used as a manipulation device is because, according to Jamet and Terry, they act as “cognitive filters”, with different metaphors filtering different particles of truth [20, p. 5]. Phrases like “*flood of immigrants*”, “*economic storm*”, or “*war on democracy*” evoke vivid imagery that convey urgency or threat and have clear ideological biases attached to them. These metaphors often elicit immediate emotional reaction, especially in those, who align with those views. Similarly, similes - “*as destructive as a wildfire*” - heighten rhetorical impact and simplify complex issues.

Irony and sarcasm, especially in opinion pieces and blogs, subtly frame subjects as foolish or out-of-touch without direct accusations. These stylistic features create distance between the speaker and the target, encouraging readers to adopt a similarly critical stance. They can also be combined with allusions – references to either historical events, or works of fiction and non-fiction, as explained by Regmi [36, p. 78]. Irony and sarcasm often go hand-in-hand with antithesis – figure of speech that contrasts opposing ideas (“They promise *peace*, yet spread *fear*”) to highlight tension, hypocrisy or a mismatch between words and actions. As a manipulation device, antithesis can also be used to further fuel polarization and opposing values.

According to Neborsina, parallelism or parallel structure refers to the use of similar syntactic patterns [32, p. 19]. It can be expressed through either the exact repetition of words (“*There is a pleasure [...], There is a rapture [...], There is society [...]*”) or through the repetition of grammatical structures (“Their main focus is on *improving healthcare, solving housing problem and bettering education*”; “*Live, pay taxes and work*”). This figure of speech helps emphasize and expand on the idea by adding more layers to it, therefore creating stronger emotional feedback from the reader.

Additionally, the use of rhetorical questions, like “*How long will we let this continue?*” engages the reader, makes them think and creates a sense of urgency. Such questions are not really meant to be answered; rather, they lead readers toward a predefined conclusion. Hyperbole and understatement are a common pairing of tropes. The former refers to a deliberate exaggeration, while the latter to the opposite. Azimova explains that hyperbole aims to make the speech more attractive, impressive and expressive [2, p. 128]. Understatement, on the other hand, can diminish or conceal the impact of certain actions.

Baranova emphasizes the persuasive potential of phraseology, such as idioms and fixed expressions that carry pre-established emotional or cultural weight. Terms like “*to have cards on one’s hand*”, “*watchdog*”, or “*peace formula*” [3, p. 63].

Linguistic manipulation in online newspapers is a sophisticated and multifaceted phenomenon. In real-world news coverage, these strategies are usually used in

combination with each other. That way the persuasive effect and engagement are maximized. Euphemisms soften, dysphemisms vilify, hedging obscures, metaphors dramatize, and passive voice shifts responsibility. Through lexical choices, grammatical structures, and stylistic devices, news outlets craft narratives that subtly influence public opinion, shape how audiences interpret facts and perceive opponents.

1.4. Linguistic indicators of liberal vs. conservative rhetoric

The reason why the United States are at the forefront of the discourse on ideological polarization is that its political structure consists of Democratic (liberal) and Republican (conservative) parties, and, according to Churcher, research shows that political polarization is most frequently addressed in terms of a binary, two-party political system [6]. Furthermore, the issue is often discussed and analyzed in the countries outside of the United States, as it is the greatest political force in the democratic world and everything happening there often has ripple effect on other countries beyond its border.

Before jumping into linguistics, it is worth defining what an ideology and political spectrum are, and how liberals and conservatives fit on the latter. Cambridge Dictionary defines *ideology* as “a set of beliefs or principles, especially one on which a political system, party, or organization is based”. Dictionary.com defines *political spectrum* as “the range of political positions or opinions that exist from the progressive left wing to the conservative right wing”. According to Garimella et al., there are three coherent, frequently co-visited groups of news domains with vastly different leaning distributions, corresponding to left-leaning, center, and right-leaning news domains, respectively [14]. Left (liberal), center (moderate) and right (conservative) are the backbone of the political spectrum, with center being in the middle of ideological spectrum, while left and right are on two opposite ends of it. Moderates are associated with more neutral and objective positions on many societal, economic and political issues. So, for the purpose of this study, we will focus on the two extremes – liberals and conservatives.

Liberals and conservatives adhere to an array of often opposing ideas and beliefs. According to Fuertes, people both in the United States and outside of the country have a pretty good grasp on what both ends of the spectrum entail, as they have existed and evolved for a long time and are relatively similar in their ideas and values in the current day and age. Fuertes explains that liberals are usually associated with change, evolution, government intervention to solve social problems or inequality (social welfare), equality, women's rights, community, etc. In contrast, conservatives are more about tradition, status quo, individualism, free enterprise, less government intervention into the economy, tolerance for inequality, respect for authority, religiosity [13, p. 49]. However, since concepts like *liberal* and *conservative* refer to a political spectrum, there are a lot of differences even within these specific political wings, too, as some people will identify as strongly liberal or conservative, while others might see themselves as closer to the center, therefore adopting some beliefs from the other political wing. Pew Research notes, that Republicans disagree on some principles long associated with the GOP, which refers to affinity for businesses and corporations, advocacy for low taxes and opposition to abortion. Democrats, on the other hand, have long-standing arguments about the place of religion in modern society. They also agree that there is an issue of inequality in the United States, but can't compromise on whether there is a need for systemic change to achieve the goal of equality [35].

Furthermore, over the past decade the dynamics between the two political wings have shifted drastically. Recent research, conducted by Kleinfeld, shows that Democrats have moved to the left on racial issues and some social issues over the last decade, and Republicans have moved to the right on immigration under Joe Biden's administration, with some overlap between the two sides [24]. On top of that, in the past several years Trump and some of his supporters have become more open to the idea of government involvement in the country's economy, which we are seeing now as Trump officially became the President of the United States in January 2025. Another noticeable trend about the dynamics within political wings is that Republicans might adopt certain Democratic ideas and values, but since the latter usually progress much faster to the left, conservatives are often seen as more rigid and resistant to change.

Most of liberal and conservative beliefs and values stem from certain presuppositions and experiences that both sides hold as true and absolute. It is important to understand these cognitive differences between the two camps, as this defines the differences not only in their political ideology, but also in the language that they use. Clifton claims that conservatives usually believe in the intrinsic value of hierarchy and structure in the world and respect natural boundaries and lines between concepts and categories. They are more likely to be of an opinion that the world is full of intrinsic differences and it is important to take them into account as something significant and innate to our world. Liberals, on the other hand, often see these lines and boundaries as silly, self-limiting and therefore arbitrary [7].

Furthermore, the study by Leong et al. says that liberal and conservatives have different levels of threat sensitivity and look at the world through different “moral lenses” [27]. What it means is that what conservatives might see as a major transgression might be absolutely normal and moral in the eyes of liberals. Also, what right wing might perceive as a threat might be just a sign of natural evolution of things on the left wing’s part. This understanding of basic cognitive differences between liberals and conservatives make it easier to understand where they are coming from and to analyze the differences and similarities between the two.

With both sides being so polarized and opposed to each other’s values and beliefs, the differences between them sip into the way they speak, so much so that recent research claims they might as well be speaking two different languages. Russell claims that American politicians on the Republican side tend to use more polarizing language and rhetoric compared to Democrats [38]. KhudaBukhsh et al. conducted a study where they trained AI to interpret liberal and conservative texts as two separate languages. What they found is that people on opposing sides of the political divide often use different words to express similar ideas. For instance, the term “*mask*” among liberal commenters is roughly equivalent to the term “*muzzle*” for conservatives. Similar pairings were seen for “*liberals*” and “*libtards*” as well as “*solar*” and “*fossil*” [23, p. 3]. On top of that Ding, Horning and Rho noted that CNN and Fox News, two of the most popular liberal and conservative news outlets, became increasingly

semantically divergent in how they used certain topical keywords [9, p. 164]. What they meant is that both news outlets use similar keywords, like “*racism*”, “*police*”, “*black lives matter*”, “*immigration*”, “*climate change*”, etc., but frame or contextualize them in very different ways that reflect their ideological biases. Fox News used words like “*illegal*”, “*enforcement*”, and “*order*”, showcasing conservative’s striving for law and order, while liberals used “*parents*”, “*family*”, “*children*”, “*daughter*”, and “*communities*”, thus humanizing immigrants.

Sterling, Jost and Bonneau conducted research that offered a lot of insight into the cognitive differences that contribute to the difference in the liberal and conservative rhetoric. They separated five categories that explain the differences between liberal and conservative communication styles [41]. Those categories and finding related to them were as follows:

1. **Affiliation and Power:** conservatives used more power-related language on Twitter (“*god*,” “*win*”), while liberals used more affiliation-focused words (“*show*,” “*say*”).
2. **Personal Values:** conservative tweets more frequently referenced values like power, security, tradition, and achievement. In contrast, liberals were more likely to highlight benevolence.
3. **Ideology as Motivated Social Cognition:** conservatives, motivated by a desire for certainty and structure, used language, expressing resistance to change, threat and risk awareness, and references to the past. Unexpectedly, they also used more tentative and future-oriented language than liberals.
4. **Needs for Uniqueness and Conformity:** conservatives showed a stronger preference for conformity and group identity, using more first-person plural pronouns (“*we*”). Liberals, who tend to view themselves as more unique, did not use more first-person singular pronouns (“*I*”) as hypothesized.
5. **Emotional Expression:** liberals expressed more positive emotions and moral outrage, while conservatives used more language reflecting anxiety and risk avoidance, consistent with a prevention-focused emotional style.

The last point was also confirmed by Sylwester and Purver, although they attribute anxiety language to liberals, and they also claimed that liberals did use more “*I*” and “*me*” pronouns [44].

According to another study by Jost and Sterling, conservative legislators used more language than liberal legislators pertaining to inequality, the past, inhibition and risk and were more likely to mention “*religion*”, “*defense*”, “*prevent*” and “*oppose*”, whereas Democrats were more likely to mention words such as “*save*”, “*refuse*”, and “*[do not] forget*” [21].

Research study by Holtgraves and Bray indicated that liberals show greater linguistic complexity, and use longer words and more complex sentences. They are also more cognitively flexible. Conservatives, on the other hand, demonstrated an intolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, so their language is more concrete than abstract, and they use more nouns [17, p. 7]. According to Wicke, Democrats often emphasize values like collective responsibility, empathy, and inclusivity. In contrast, Republicans emphasize individual responsibility and freedom from government intervention, often emphasizing values like personal accountability and traditional family structure [45, p. 2].

All things considered, ideological divide between liberals and conservatives is deeply rooted in differing values that also affect the language each group uses. These linguistic patterns reflect broader political, psychological, and cultural differences, shaping how each side perceives and communicates about critical issues. Conservatives seem to lean towards more concrete terms, rely more on law, structure and order, are more cautious of dangers, threats and risk; therefore, they use a lot of language related to those concepts. Liberals, on the other hand, value compassion, unity, community and empathy, which influences the fact that they use predominantly positive emotive language.

Conclusion to Part 1

Ideological polarization, particularly in the United States, is not only political but also deeply linguistic. The divide between liberals and conservatives manifests in

the very language they use to articulate their values, shape their arguments, and appeal to their audiences. Language is not a neutral vehicle of communication - it reflects and reinforces biases, emotional reactions, and moral priorities. In this context, political ideology is both shaped by and expressed through linguistic choices, which vary significantly across the ideological spectrum.

Liberals, for instance, often employ language that underscores empathy, diversity, and complexity. Their discourse tends to embrace nuance, acknowledge uncertainty, and emphasize social justice and equality. Words associated with change, progress, inclusion, and compassion frequently characterize liberal rhetoric. On the other hand, conservatives often use language that promotes tradition, law and order, stability, and moral clarity. Their communication tends to favour authority and in-group loyalty. Conservative rhetoric is more likely to emphasize certainty, structure, and the preservation of established norms and values.

The linguistic divide between liberals and conservatives is not limited to casual conversations or theoretical debates; it is magnified in political discourse, media representation, and especially in online newspapers. In these contexts, language becomes a powerful tool of persuasion and manipulation. Media outlets and political figures deliberately craft their messages to resonate with their ideological base while distancing or vilifying the opposing side. Subtle linguistic strategies such as euphemisms, emotionally charged language, syntactic choices, and strategic repetition are frequently used to shape perceptions and reinforce group identities. For example, the use of passive voice can obscure agency in negative events, while active voice can assign blame or credit more directly. Similarly, loaded language carries ideological weight and can activate emotional responses, elicit loyalty or outrage, depending on the audience.

Understanding these linguistic patterns and their cognitive roots is essential for critically engaging with political content. It allows readers and listeners to become more aware of how language is used not just to inform, but to influence and polarize. By identifying common linguistic markers associated with liberal and conservative ideologies, and by recognizing manipulation strategies hidden behind political

language, individuals can better navigate media bias and develop a more nuanced understanding of ideological discourse. Moreover, awareness of these dynamics can serve as a tool for fostering dialogue rather than division. When individuals recognize that opposing viewpoints are often rooted in different moral foundations and rhetorical styles rather than mere ignorance or malice, it becomes possible to approach political disagreements with greater empathy and intellectual curiosity. This does not mean abandoning one's own beliefs, but rather cultivating a deeper awareness of how language shapes perception and social division.

2. PRACTICAL ANALYSIS OF NEWS COVERAGE IN LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

2.1. Manipulations in COVID-19 articles

The COVID-19 pandemic rattled the world and even several years after all restrictions have been lifted, scientists, politicians, activists and news outlets are dealing with its aftermath. In the recent years media discourse was shaped significantly by new scientific reports that claim that COVID-19 restrictions and mandates, such as obligatory masks, school closures, traveling cancelations, etc., might not have been as effective as expected. Immediately, this became a topic of great political polarization between liberals and conservatives. According to Kerr, conservative political ideology is strongly tied to greater trust in government authorities to manage COVID-19, but much lower trust in scientists and the World Health Organization (WHO) and also demonstrated lower perception of risks of the virus. Liberals, on the other hand, showed greater care for others and stronger concern in regards to potential harm to others [22].

News coverage - both liberal and conservative - played and still plays a pivotal role in constructing narratives regarding the subject of COVID-19. This chapter will analyse 6 opinion/editorial-style articles, 3 from liberal sources (the Guardian, CNN, The New York Times [46; 53; 57]) and 3 from conservative sources (Fox News, The New York Post [48; 52; 56]). All four articles talk about COVID-19 restrictions and rules, like wearing masks, school and boarder closures, quarantines, etc., and highlight new data that potentially all those measures weren't as necessary and effective as the public was told. Liberal sources analyse in detail failures and some advantages that these measures had, highlight their consequences and provide new information. Conservatives do the same, but they mostly focus on criticizing the way liberals approached the pandemic.

When comparing these four articles, the difference between liberal and conservative manipulation strategies is stark. Conservative newspapers employ a wide range of manipulation technics: factual manipulation, ideological polarization, denunciation and blame game and playing on emotions. Factual manipulation is evident in the way they downplay the severity of the pandemic and the importance of

taking care of each other to not spread the virus. They also focus more on the new data and the failures of the policymakers, and completely ignore that the spread of the virus was rapid, so the response and the established measures were predictably sporadic. Ideological polarization is also very prominent in Fox News and The New York Post articles as they emphasize the dichotomy between the "elite" and the "public," positioning the former as out-of-touch and responsible for the crisis. Also, The New York Post highlights how some Democratic and Republican states had a different approach to the pandemic, with some red states opening up schools much earlier than others and not facing any noticeable spikes in sick cases or mortality rates. This paints Republicans in a more positive light, as they were not forcing children to stay at home and interfering with their normal learning process and socializing, unlike the Democrats. Other strategies, employed by conservatives, are denunciation and blame game. They are very confrontational and direct in the way they criticize the policymakers and country's administration at the time, express doubt in WHO and healthcare in general. Finally, both articles, particularly the one by the New York Post, employ a lot of emotional language, playing on the public's emotions of righteous anger and indignation.

Liberal sources, on the other hand, keep a very neutral and diplomatic tone, so it is difficult to assign any particular manipulation strategy to them. They admit to the mistakes made and seemingly take accountability for them. However, they do so in a very passive and indirect manner. They lean slightly on factual manipulation: while admitting to the failures, they also emphasize their good intentions, the dangers of the pandemic and the importance of taking any measures necessary in the first days of its spread to prevent the tragedy. In both articles, liberal news are trying to appeal to the public, to show them that COVID-19 was an unexpected crisis, so it is natural that healthcare organization and country's officials were not ready and did not have a specific algorithm for what to do. On top of that, the author even admits that conservatives could be right in their reservations. All of this combined poses liberals in a positive light, where they take accountability and try to rectify their mistakes, while still saving their face and re-gaining people's trust. There is also a slight hint of blame

game, as liberals focus on how the elites overlooked the needs of less privileged communities, as if separating themselves from them.

Next, a detailed analysis of specific lexical, grammatical and stylistic manipulation strategies from all four articles will be conducted.

Lexical Means of Manipulation

All three liberal articles [46; 53; 57] used measured, institutional language, aimed at projecting credibility and scientific caution. For example, they use words such as “*evolving science*”, “*emerging evidence*”, “*adjusting policy*” to frame earlier missteps as natural to scientific progress. More technical terms, like “*herd immunity*”, “*airborne transmission*”, “*mRNA vaccines*”, give more authoritative tone, make the article sound more logical and objective.

While liberal news sources acknowledged the mistakes that were made during the pandemic, they try to softly deflect blame or mitigate negative feelings by appealing to the positives. Linguistic hedging like “*recommendations*”, “*guidance*”, instead of “*mandates*” or “*restrictions*” softens negative emotions that readers might experience when reminded of the COVID-19 limitations. Terms like “*misguided*”, “*wrongheaded*”, “*overreaction*”, “*unfortunate*” are critical, yet soft. These allow acknowledgment of mistakes without sounding accusatory or partisan. “*Vaccines saved millions of lives*”, “*ventilation improvements*”, “*masking worked if done right*” – these statements reframe government’s decisions, showing that even flawed measures were necessary and are therefore rehabilitated. The idea of scientific humility is framed as “*a lesson learned*”, offering redemption through growth rather than judgment.

Despite the neutral tone, The Guardian, CNN and The New York Times used politically polarizing words related to class, sex and race differences. “*Laptop class*”, “*rooted in sexism, racism, and misogyny*” and “*a recipe for ... structural racism*” - these labels are evocative and ideological, dividing the population along class and moral lines.

By contrast to the diplomatic tone of the liberal news outlets, conservative articles [48; 52; 56] adopt a strongly emotionally loaded vocabulary. “*Gaslighting*”, “*catastrophic errors*”, “*villain*”, “*needless pain*” evoke a sense of betrayal and deception. Words such as “[*lack of*] *freedom*,” “[*lack of*] *liberty*,” “*shutdowns*,” “*forced*,” “*mandates*”, “*pressure campaign*” frame public health policies as draconian and borderline authoritarian. Also, repetitive use of words “*masks*” and “*lockdowns*” emphasizes inconveniences that people had to suffer through.

The use of derogatory labeling and pejorative terms, like “*villain who kept the poorest kids out of classrooms*” personalizes blame and fans the flames of resentment, while terms “*virtue-signalers*”, “*cancel culture*” and “*liberal tribe*”, which are often used by conservatives, reinforce an “us” vs “them” mentality. To further spread doubt, they use “*instead*”, “*in reality*”, “*contrary to evidence*” to frame official policy as misleading or deceptive.

Grammatical Means of Manipulation

In the three articles presented, particularly the one in *The Guardian*, liberals rely on various passive constructions to pacify the readers and to avoid assigning blame: “*schools were closed*”, “*people were ostracized*”, “*guidance was issued*”, “*schools were closed*”. Use of modal verbs like “*should*”, “*may*”, “*might*”, “*could*” conveys uncertainty, emphasizes hypothetical responsibility, while hedging criticism, for example, in phrases like “officials *should have acknowledged* uncertainty” [57], “While that *may have slowed* the spread of the virus in the U.S. a bit” [53], “*might have been better served*” [46]. The articles avoid certainty, using constructions like “*may have been unpopular*”, “*seemed like a great way*”, “*could do more*” to help preserve institutional credibility. Conditional mood like in “*If policymakers had been more honest*” [46] and nominalization of actions, such as “*public health response*”, “*school closures*”, “*lockdowns*” also distance agency and personal accountability. These speculative forms are used to suggest error without directly assigning blame, keeping critique within neutral tone.

Unlike liberals, conservatives favor active voice and direct attribution of blame, going so far as to include specific names: “*Randi Weingarten kept the poorest kids out of classrooms*” [56], “*Fauci politicized school openings*” [56], “*Face masks made little to no difference in preventing spread of COVID*” [48]. They directly state their opinions and openly criticize people they consider guilty of the disastrous consequences of COVID-19 restrictions.

Stylistic Means of Manipulation

The first thing that immediately catches attention is the amount of rhetorical questions written by liberal sources, starting with the title of one of the articles: “*Were conservatives right to question COVID lockdowns? Were the liberals who defended them less grounded in science?*” [46]. This technique subtly leads readers to consider the author's framing as plausible, even before arguments are introduced.

Metaphors like “*case study in groupthink*”, “*wounds fester*”, “*toothpaste back in the tube*” (for herd immunity failures), “*grasping at straws*” make liberal errors seem both systemic and damaging. The title “*Case study in groupthink*” [46] also has an allusion to George Orwell and “groupthink,” evoking associations with the novel *1984* and totalitarianism. This rigidity and short-sightedness is further emphasized through irony in “*only bad people would do it a different way from the way we’re doing*” [46]. This statement mimics moral absolutism and criticizes lack of pluralism, variety of solutions at the time. Additionally, liberal newspapers used parallelism in “*lockdowns, mask-wearing, school closures, vaccines, and the best drugs for treatment*” [53] to amplify scale and impact of the COVID-19 policies.

Conservative articles were brimming with stylistic manipulations. Some metaphors included “*herd mentality*” and “*tribe*”. While liberals also used the former, conservatives utilized it not in a scientific, but in a more sarcastic and ironic manner, reducing liberals to primitive instinct or cult-like loyalty. The sarcastic and ironic nature of conservative narrative was further driven by phrases, like: “*She super-duper, really and truly wanted schools open*” (implying Weingarten is lying) [56], “*Francis*

Collins casually confessed to a completely incorrect decision calculus” (paints him as unserious despite being in a position of power and mocks him) [52] and “*No one supported any of that, and none of it was anybody’s fault*” (sarcastic paraphrasing of liberal denialism) [56]. Another example of an ironic statement implying catastrophic policy failure would be “*Not as easy as it looks to switch an economy off and then on again*” [56].

Through their tone, conservative articles show an unwillingness to see the other side as human and therefore capable of failure, and use antithesis to build tension and division between the two camps. Antithesis “*red states safely operating*” vs. “*blue states stagnating*” highlights alleged superiority of conservative governance. “*Instead of informing the public... they spread fear*”, “*not when they should be discarded... but when they are most needed*”, “*normal functioning*” vs. “*strict limits on civil liberties*” [52] - these direct binary oppositions simplify complex policy debates into good/bad dichotomies and villainize the other party.

Finally, the utilization of parallel structures paints a disastrous picture of country’s stagnation: “*Schools shuttered, businesses destroyed*” [56], “*Whether to keep their businesses open, whether to socially isolate, attend church, send their children to school*” [52], “*Economic, social, educational and health harms*”. By layering various societal issues, conservative newspapers amplify the indignation that the public may be feeling after suffering through described consequences of lockdowns.

2.2. Manipulations in articles regarding immigration issues

As was mentioned in theoretical section, liberals and conservatives have very opposing viewpoints on immigration, with latter shifting more towards the right of the spectrum on the issue in recent years. Republicans place particular importance on border security and deportations of immigrants who are in the country illegally, while Democrats place greater importance on paths to legal status for those who entered the country illegally – especially those who entered as children, according to a new Pew Research Center survey by Oliphant and Cerda [34].

The next set of 6 articles will attempt to identify manipulation strategies used by liberal (CNN, CBS News [50; 64; 62]) and conservative (Fox News, Daily Wire [54; 63; 61]) online newspapers regarding the issues of immigration. Two articles on each side are talking about Trump's intention to strip Venezuelan migrants of their temporary protective status, while the remaining articles are dedicated to the Operation Tidal Wave that took place in Florida and was targeting potential illegal immigrants for possible future deportation.

In this case, both sides used exactly the same manipulation strategies, but in different ways. Liberals used factual manipulation to showcase the humane side of the immigrants, to emphasize their struggles, concerns and dangers of going back home if they are deported. At the same time, liberal news sources barely mentioned any accusations of terrorism, drug smuggling and other criminal activity, unlike conservatives, who used these allegations as the focal point to justify the Operation Tidal Wave. Likewise, conservatives barely acknowledged the struggles that immigrants face and how stripping away their protection can have damaging consequences. There is also ideological polarization, with liberal side accusing conservatives of racial and political bias and prejudice, while the latter use denunciation to critic previous administration that opened country's borders to immigrants. All liberal articles make use of loaded emotional language and play on readers' emotions, trying to evoke sympathy and moral outrage. There is also a hint of whipping up fear technique, as liberals emphasize the pressure on some institutions to co-operate and musing that these operation might be just a start of something bigger. While conservative article about Venezuelan immigrants has a more neutral tone, the article describing the Operation Tidal Wave uses triumphant style of writing, showing the audience that their actions were worthy of praise.

Lexical Means of Manipulation

Liberal news reporting [50; 64; 62;] on termination of Venezuelan Temporary Protection Status (TPS) and Operation Tidal Wave in Florida is laden with loaded emotional language. In order to humanize the immigrants and for the readers to

emphasize with them, the authors use sympathetic words with positive connotation: *“human relief”*, *“hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans”*, *“protections”*, *“extraordinary conditions”*. Some words related to documents and legal procedures contrast with conservative’s accusations of illegal immigration: *“covered by protections”*, *“taxes”*, *“permits”*, *“visas”*. To deepen the sense of empathy, these articles refer to the struggles (*“great suffering”*, *“war”*, *“armed conflicts”*, *“disaster”*) that immigrants were fleeing when coming to the United States for protection.

With recent government actions regarding the immigrants, their future has become more uncertain and the articles reflect that with words like *“stroking fears”*, *“less friendly, less welcoming, more prosecutory state”*. This leads to words laced with negative connotation that denounce government’s actions: *“unwind protections”*, *“revoke”*, *“strip away”*, *“blocked”*, *“wade into”*, *“sweeping crackdown”*, *“restrict”*, etc.

Liberal articles about Venezuelan immigrants blame conservatives for their *“racial/political bias”* and *“negative stereotypes”*. The article on Operation Tidal Wave goes a step further, using words with negative connotations to show the opposing side as borderline totalitarian: *“massive, multi-agency immigration enforcement crackdown”*, *“pressure”*, *“required/mandated by the state”*, *“we’re being threatened”*, *“force”*, *“flurry of arrests”*, *“under fire”*.

The two conservative articles on Venezuelan immigrants [61; 63], on the other hand, are written in a relatively neutral and professional tone. Majority of the words are connected to law and order, which gives the sense of not only professionalism, but also authority: *“executive branch”*, *“foreign policy”*, *“judgement”*, with the following collocations giving the sense of power, determination and rigidity: *“overriding lower court ruling”*, *“expressly committed to her judgement”*, *“unreviewable”*, *“discretionary determination”*. Also, the articles use euphemisms/linguistic hedging to downplay the negative effects of conservatives’ actions. Instead of using words with negative connotations like *“strip away”* or *“revoke”*, they use *“move forward to end*

protections” (implying that it is the right strategy and a move in the right direction), “*terminate TPS protections*” (has a more impartial, bureaucratic tone).

All three articles refer to the immigrants with pejorative terms and dysphemisms like “*inadmissible illegal aliens*”, “*illegal immigrants*”, “*undocumented migrants*”, “*violent gang members*”, “*sex offenders*”, “*members of terrorist organizations*”, “*strain on local resources*”. Also, these negative-laden connotations can be seen when the articles mention a judge appointed during the time when Democrats were in power. They are referred to as “*Obama-appointed judge*” with the intention of discrediting and othering them. The third article further uses value-laden words to describe other administrations and their policies as “*null and void*” and “*rendered useless*”.

The article on Operation Tidal Wave [54] uses a lot of positive connotation words to emphasize the size, scale and success of the operation: “*first of its kind*”, “*historic marker*”, “*record-breaking*”. This event is painted like one of the many victories yet to come. The article also uses a lot of militaristic language to assert dominance: “*we’re going to continue to lead*”, “*new sheriff in town*”, “*keep our communities safe*”.

Grammatical Means of Manipulation

Passive voice is the main tool used by liberal newspapers and is used to avoid directly blaming anyone for the potential struggles and deportation of immigrants. This might seem counterintuitive, but in actuality, it shifts focus towards the victims of new policies and emphasizes their plight, which evokes a more emotional response from the reader. Some examples are “*have been temporarily left in place*”, “*was motivated by racial and political bias*”, “*protections were blocked*”, “*was predicated on negative stereotypes*”. Structures like “*are required by the state*”, “*we’re being mandated/threatened*”, “*were accused*”, “*was charged*” paint a picture of ordinary people being persecuted and pressured by the larger powers. Furthermore, use of Continuous tense (“*we’re being mandated/threatened*”) [50] implies an ongoing threat.

Conservative newspapers employ active voice to boast their success and first victory in the fight against illegal immigration:

“ICE and Florida announced the arrests...” [54];

“Florida state agencies assisted federal authorities...”[54];

“Kristi Noem terminated the program for Venezuelan nationals...” [63].

It is also used as an accusation or in a disapproving tone towards Senior District Judge Edward Chen, who prevented the TPS termination in April: *“Chen... blocked Noem”* [61].

Modal verbs of uncertainty also appeared in the articles. Saying *“termination may have been predicated on negative stereotypes”* [63] allows the authors to create a sense of objectivity by addressing the opposing side’s concerns, but still framing it as something purely hypothetical and not necessarily true. Another similar tactic that conservative news outlets used was the juxtaposition of Quoted Voice vs. Narrative Voice. Most criticism of the judge or defense of the administration appears in direct quotes (e.g., Sauer’s words). This allows the newspaper to report strong conservative positions without openly supporting or siding with it, a common strategy in partisan, but seemingly objective journalism.

Stylistic Means of Manipulation

All of the liberal articles are heavy with parallel structures. They use the former to expand on the struggles that immigrants are facing back home, thus trying to evoke more sympathy from the reader: *“Wars, natural disasters, extraordinary conditions”* [62], *“disaster, armed conflict or other “extraordinary and temporary conditions”*” [62]. In the sentence *“Live in the state of Florida, pay taxes and work”* [50], verbs *“live”*, *“pay taxes”* and *“work”* serve as a way to humanize the immigrants and describe them as any other working American citizen. Moreover, parallelisms show the devastating toll that administration’s actions have on their mental state, as the atmosphere becomes more tense and the future more uncertain. This message is exemplified by the phrase *“creating less friendly, less welcoming, more prosecutory state”* [50] and further expanded on through parallel structures that start with the word

“where”: “[...] *where worker shortages increase, where communities are less safe because they’re afraid to report crime, where police departments are overburdened, doing work that they shouldn’t be doing*” [50].

When discussing the pressure from the government on local institutions, the articles use parallelisms to refer to various agencies, operating in Florida:

“Statewide agencies, including *the Florida Highway Patrol, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Florida State Guard, the Florida Department of Agricultural Law Enforcement and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*, all signed collaboration agreements with ICE” [50].

“More than 200 *state, county and municipal* law enforcement agencies... have entered into collaboration agreements with ICE” [50].

Through these phrases the articles send a message that many agencies and institutions are now cooperating with ICE to identify and detain potential illegal immigrants, which serves as a threat for more operations like Tidal Wave to take place in the future. This both acknowledges the fears and anxiety that immigrants must be feeling now, and stirs more negative emotions and doubts about their future.

To further showcase the pressure that ICE puts on Florida institutions, antithesis is used:

“*Approved cooperation agreements with ICE while expressing opposition...*”

“*Voted unanimously to approve an ICE collaboration agreement earlier this month, but council members made clear they were required to do so under state law*”.

“Fort Myers City Council members *voted against* the ICE collaboration, only to *backtrack and approve it* after Florida’s attorney general sent them a letter warning that the governor could remove them from office” [50]. This last sentence in particular shows how through coercion Florida officials have to go against their own principles and support ICE.

Finally, the articles incorporate some simple metaphors and irony. The use of metaphors like “*unwind protections*” [64] and “*wade into*” [62] imply the undoing of something structured and well-organized and a sense of intrusion respectively. Subtle irony can be seen in how liberal sources put “*Operation Tidal Wave*” and “*highly*

successful” [50] in quotation marks. While it can be explained as a simple quote of the opposing party, the use of quotation marks on these specific words seems deliberate.

In their articles, conservative authors used metaphors, antithesis, hyperbole and irony.

Metaphor “*new sheriff in town*” [54] is a folksy metaphor that exudes control, justice, and leadership, while appealing to a culturally conservative base. “*Coyotes*”, “*home free*” [54] are informal phrases painting immigrants as a sneaky and opportunistic. The next conservative statement is laced with irony, mockery and dismissiveness, putting the immigrants down even further: “[...] *claimed that TPS recipients were more educated than American citizens*” [61]. Parallelism also plays a role in dehumanizing and vilifying the immigrants:

“Officers arrested various *violent offenders, gang members, sex offenders, fugitives from justice and those who pose significant public safety threats*” [54].

“Arrests include members of several different notoriously violent foreign terrorist organizations such as *MS-13, Tren de Aragua, Brown Pride Aztecas, Barrio Azteca, Surenos (sur-13) and 18th Street Gang*” [54], - in both sentences immigrants are described as dangerous, vicious individuals and members of criminal organizations, which can cause feelings of hostility towards them from the readers.

To put their opponents down and to show pride in their own achievements, conservative articles use antithesis and hyperbole. Antithesis is evident in how the articles refer to previous and current presidential administrations, painting one as weak and the other as strong: “*under the previous president, you could pay coyotes...*” vs “*new sheriff in town*” [54], “*null and void*” vs “*leading the nation*” [54]. Hyperbole is used to emphasize the scale of achievement of the Operation Tidal Wave: “*first of its kind*”, “*historic marker*”, “*record-breaking*” [54]. This describes the operation as something monumental and grandiose, a great accomplishment for the new administration.

2.3. Manipulations in articles regarding police reform

Police brutality has been at the center of heated discussions in the United States for a long time, igniting with renewed force after a policeman murdered a black man in Minneapolis. Protests ignited all over the country, emphasizing the problem of police cruelty, especially towards people of color. People wanted to see change, and the protests gave rise to the movement for police reform called "defund the police". The main goal of the activists and supporters of the movement was to re-assign funds, dedicated to police, to social services, youth centers, healthcare and other social welfare programs.

This chapter will look at 6 articles from liberal (Politico, The Guardian, The Washington Post, [47; 59; 51]) and conservative (The Washington Times, Fox News [49; 55; 58]) sources dedicated to the subject. Conservative newspapers share a common perception of the defund movement and see it as a threat to the safety of the American cities, citing numerous statistics of crime rates rising since police funding cuts, particularly in the vulnerable and minority neighborhoods. These articles use factual manipulation and whipping fear techniques to influence readers' opinions. They emphasize violent crimes taking place all around the country since the reform's start, trying to ignite fear and a sense of urgency, while presenting the police as a necessary, life-saving institution. On top of that, conservative newspapers claim that minority neighborhoods, that are often the target of police brutality according to liberals, are actually the ones suffering from the defund movement, which flips the script completely. This highlights ideological polarization and, combined with negative comments towards the left-wing activists, turns into denunciation.

Contrast to that, liberal articles have varied opinions on the subject. The Guardian [59] shares cases of several cities where the reform has taken place and portrays it in a positive light and as a victory. Politico [47] also expresses support for the movement, but notes that a large portion of the Democratic party acts as an obstacle towards radical, but necessary change. Finally, the Washington Post [51] takes an extreme left-wing partisan stance, claiming that "defund the police" is not a real thing, that nobody wants to abolish the police and the only thing people want is police reform

that will make them feel safe and protected. At the same time, it uses extremely hostile language towards the Republican party, seeing them as the source of systematic racism and white supremacy that the article alleges is mirrored in police's actions (ideological polarization, blame game and denunciation tactics). All of the articles ignore concerns about potential crime rates rising, which is a sign of a factual manipulation tactic.

Lexical Means of Manipulation

The language used in liberal articles [47; 59; 51] can be characterized as mostly positive and optimistic in nature. Liberals use a lot of positive words that reflect their ideological values: *“care”, “community”, “healing”, “safety”, “justice”, “support”*. They view the “defund the police” movement as something necessary and good and their language reflects that: *“successfully”, “dramatically”, “significant”, “constructive”*. Despite that, these articles also employ euphemisms and hedging to soften public’s potential negative perceptions of their reforms: *“paradigm shift”, “reinvestment”, “redistribute”, “rethink”, “transform”, “reimagine”, “appears to be”, “tend to think”*.

At the same time, certain lexical units with negative connotations can be found in these articles. Usually they are directed at the conservatives and certain groups of Democrats, who liberal newspapers perceive to be resistant to change: *“fearmongering”, “misinformation”, “backlash”, “bureaucratic games”, “aggressive PR campaigns”, “racist myths”, “resistance”, “skepticism”, “grappling”*. The last partisan article [51] takes it even further, using dysphemisms and pejorative terms like *“doddering, racist president”, “traitorous white nationalists”, “party of white grievance”* to refer to the members of the right-wing political spectrum and characterizes their actions as *“fueling the flames of fascism”, “incites violence”*. Terms *“fringe slogan,” “pretend,” “demonize,” “false choice,” “no more than”* are supposed to minimize the legitimacy of the “Defund the Police” label as a real or widespread Democratic policy, portraying it as a Republican straw man.

Conservatives have strong respect for authority, law and order, so the idea to defund the police goes against their core values. Hence why their reporting on the issue [47; 59; 51] is full of negative value-laden words, that aim to evoke a sense of threat and urgency, maybe instill caution and fear: “*murders*”, “*violent crimes*”, “*deadliest*”, “*mugger*”, “*rampant gun violence*”, “*crime epidemic*”, “*crisis*”, “*exodus*”, “*warzones*”. When describing the rise in crime, they also use negative connotation words like “*soar*”, “*skyrocket*”, “*uptick*”, “*surged*”, “*slashed*”. Negative language is further exacerbated by dysphemisms and pejorative terms, such as “*White leftists*”, “*Antifa*”, “*so-called progressive prosecutors*”, “*social justice elites*”.

Unlike liberals, who focus on reassignment of police funding to “*mental health teams*”, “*youth jobs programs*”, conservatives only briefly mention them without going into detail about the purpose of these groups and their potential usefulness.

Grammatical Means of Manipulation

Unlike in previous cases, liberal newspapers do use active voice here, primarily to report their achievements:

“*Activists successfully pressured...*” [59];

“*Austin has made some of the most dramatic changes*” [59].

Modal verbs and hedging words are also used to include uncertainty: “*likely*”, “*may*”, “*could*”.

To attract attention to various processes surrounding the police and its funding, these articles employ nominalization: “*police spending skyrocketing*”, “*reinvestments*”, “*redistributions*”, “*defunding*”.

The third partisan article [51] is distinct through its use of declarative/absolutist grammar:

“*Let’s stop pretending...!*”

“*Nobody is going to defund the police*”.

Such grammatical structures appear to be unquestionable and certain, with no room for doubt, questioning or compromise.

Also unlike in previous two chapters, here conservative newspapers lean more towards passive voice as it better showcases issues that plague justice system since the first appearance of the “defund the police” movement: “*funds were designated to be redirected*” [55], “*dozens were shot and some killed*” [58], “*cadet classes were delayed*” [55], “*the criminal justice system is being manipulated*” [49].

To solidify the fact that the consequences of “defund the police” movement have already permeated society, conservative news outlets use past tense constructions like “*LAPD reported a 38% increase in murders*”, “*went up*” [55]. Furthermore, to create an image of further reforms potentially becoming an ongoing threat, Continuous constructions were employed, as is evident from “*justice system is being manipulated*” [49].

Stylistic Means of Manipulation

This set of liberal articles probably has the largest number of stylistic manipulation strategies out of all the other source materials.

“*Provided a new window into understanding...*” [59] is a metaphor and implies clarity, transparency, revelation and enlightenment that was achieved by the people and the society through the protests. Allusions to BLM, George Floyd, Trayvon Martin’s mother reinforce the subject of race, racism and injustice.

The title of the second article, “*Defund the police’ faces skepticism — even in deeply liberal cities*” [47] is an ironic statement that highlights the ridiculousness of the fact that Democrats themselves are often obstacles to a progressive change in police reform. This conflict is further showcased in the sentence: “*While party infighting was dominating headlines, local activists were campaigning to make the catchphrase a reality*”, where antithesis is used to juxtapose the inner tensions within the Democratic party driving reforms to a halt, while activists are doing their best to bring those changes to reality.

There are many more examples of antithesis in liberal articles. One of them is in the form of binary oppositions: “*community vs. police*”, “*care vs. criminalization*”, “*investment vs. oppression*”, “*activists vs. institutions*”. While not opposites of each

other in a general sense, here, in these articles, they are presented as such. These binaries imply moral clarity, reinforcing the idea that the reader should side with one over the other. “While *they are playing bureaucratic games, people are suffering*” [59] juxtaposes activists and bureaucracy, highlights urgency versus stasis. “Solve the mental health crisis *with treatment and care, not with handcuffs and jail*” [59] moralizes the choice between compassion and rigid institutionalization. “There are two stories here: 1) *Democrats, backed by a dramatic shift in public opinion, have a bold reform agenda* and 2) *Republicans have nothing so far*” [51] paints a clear divide between proactive Democrats vs indifferent Republicans. “*Bowser...painted ‘BLACK LIVES MATTER’... But proposed a 3.3% increase in police spending*” [47] highlights hypocrisy and conflict between Bowser’s rhetoric and actions. Despite him acting in support of BLM movement, painting its slogans on the streets, he still voted for the increase of police funding, which is seen as betrayal by the article.

Parallel structures are used to showcase and emphasize liberal’s values and rally public support for their reforms:

“Cities are slowly beginning to redistribute law enforcement money to *housing, mental health programs, food access and other programs*” [59].

“Should instead prioritize the programs that have been defunded over the years that would address root causes of crime and poverty, like *education, healthcare and homeless services*” [59].

“The Austin police funds were reallocated to *emergency medical services for Covid-19, community medics, mental health first responders, services for homeless people, substance abuse programs, food access, workforce development, abortion services, victim support, parks and more*” [59].

All these examples show liberal’s priorities and paint them as humanitarians, who care for the well-being of the society, especially those who have long been disadvantaged. For example, in “*Improving best practices and outcomes of sexual assault reporting, processing, investigations and prosecutions*” [59] parallel structure is used to mirror bureaucratic structure, accentuating that thorough improvement of

these processes will be a top priority and will make it easier for assault victims to navigate the legal and investigation processes.

Meanwhile, the same parallelisms are used to highlight the shortcomings of current police enforcement agencies and their work, like in this sentence: “We are underfunding black communities — *whether it’s economic development, whether it’s education, whether it’s health* — and other communities of color” [47]. “For decades, Austin has spent so many dollars *policing homelessness, jailing the homeless, and paying for emergency rooms and 911 calls instead of reinvesting...*” [59] reinforces the contrast between past and proposed policies, painting the former in the negative light.

Conservative newspapers relied heavily on antithesis as well, but in their case they used it to assign blame to the “defund the police” movement, juxtaposing and equating police funding cuts to crime surge: “*City Council voted to cut... from NYPD budget. Murders in NYC are up 11.8%*” [55]. “*Data-driven policing*” vs “*soft-on-crime policies*” [58], “*victims*” vs “*criminals*” create oppositional pairs, evoking a sense of urgency and righteousness. “*Minorities want policing, not activism*” [58] contrasts “*policing*” and “*activism*” as the two enemy forces, but there can be a deeper meaning to it. Liberals claim that they care about minority groups and vulnerable neighborhoods and aim their policies to better the lives of these people. However, what this sentence implies is that liberal activism is what is harming minorities to begin with. It also frames the police as necessary for protection and safety.

Conservatives use parallelisms to emphasize the losses and struggles that police departments have faced since the start of the reforms:

“Such cuts have led some departments to *lay off officers, cancel recruiting classes or retreat from hiring goals*” [55].

“Cuts came from *canceling a nearly 1,200-person police recruiting class* for over the summer, *halving overtime spending, redeploying officers* from administrative functions to patrol and *ending police responsibility* for school crossing guards and homeless outreach” [55].

“The unrest was often *violent and destructive*” [55].

Another tool used in one of these articles in the use of nostalgia. A phrase “*It was not always this way. Just a few short years ago, our communities were safer*” [49]. This might tug on people’s heartstrings, make them think about better times and ask themselves what has changed and why.

2.4. Manipulations in articles regarding the dismantling of USAID

USAID is an American agency that has been responsible for the allocation of civilian foreign aid and development assistance in many countries outside of the United States. However, after Trump's election and Elon Musk becoming his senior advisor, the new President and his administration have decided to shut the agency down due to allegations of wrongful use of funds. This event drew attention from foreign countries, since a lot of them relied on USAID humanitarian aid and healthcare services.

This chapter will delve into another set of 3 liberal (The Guardian, CNN, NPR [65; 66; 69]) and 3 conservative (Fox News, The Washington Times [60; 68; 67]) articles. The similarity lies in the use of manipulation techniques such as playing on emotion and factual manipulation by both sides of the ideological spectrum. Liberal sources focus their and readers’ attention on the humanitarian side of USAID, showcasing the services it provided and the difference it was making in the world. They presented the idea of saving lives and the mental images of children in refugee camps, babies born with HIV and healthcare workers losing their jobs as worthy of compassion and moral outrage at the closure of many USAID programs. On the other hand, conservative newspapers posed allegations of USAID being connected to a notorious terrorist organization Al-Qaida, Taliban regime and Chinese labs in Wuhan, suspected of COVID-19 virus leak. This should serve as a strong emotional trigger for the audience and evoke a sense of horror and guilt in anyone who might have been connected to or supportive of the organisation.

Due to the nature of USAID aid, its closure is portrayed as tragic in liberal news articles, affecting and endangering thousands of lives all around the world. The uncertainty of the agency’s future and the swift actions taken by the current government to shut the organisation down raise concerns (whipping up fear) about

what might be coming next. As for the conservative side, they lean heavily onto ideological polarization and denunciation, referring to liberals and USAID workers as if they were enemies, while also blaming them for wasteful spending of their funds.

Lexical Means of Manipulation

The main manipulation strategy that liberal news outlets [65; 66; 69] used to report on the dismantling of USAID is emotionally charged language and occasional value-laden terms. To showcase the unfair closure of the organization and its programs, the articles use colorful words with negative connotations and repeat them over and over again: *“eliminate”*, *“forced leave and firings”*, *“gutted USAID”*, *“systemic dismantling”*, *“assault on USAID”*, *“eviscerating”*, *“target”*, *“sudden and sweeping freeze”*, *“stalled”*, *“severely impacted”*, etc.

“Retreat from USAID” reframes the dismantling of the agency as a loss, a sign of weakness and a failure rather than an achievement on conservatives’ part. Adding *“at breakneck speed”* to that, – and the decision becomes reckless and irresponsible in the eyes of the reader.

The articles implore to the audience’s empathy by using words laced with doubt and anxiety: *“extremely uncertain future”*, *“forced leave and firings”*, *“struggling”*, *“in doubt”*.

Lexical units used in conservative articles [60; 68; 67] are predominantly negative in nature due to their attitudes and beliefs about the agency. The authors use pejorative and value-laden terms, as well as dysphemisms to cast shade on USAID and its programs: *“viper’s nest”*, *“radical-left Marxists”*, *“criminal organization”*, *“corruption”*, *“crap”*, *“radical left lunatics”*, *“fraud, waste and abuse”*. These are further reinforced by collocation *“meals for al-Qaida”*, *“benefiting the Taliban”*, – this not only discredits the agency, its goals and purpose, but also aims to evoke disgust, guilt and shame in USAID supporters. However, the allegations and accusations are incorporated into text through *“hearsay language”*, meaning that there is no proof or mentioning of a source: *“reportedly”*, *“accused of...”*, *“found to be...”*, *“alleged”*.

Words with overall negative connotation are used to describe the functions of the agency: “*bloated overspending*”, “*not functioning*”. In contrast, the actions of the conservatives are painted in a much more positive light and with the use of positive connotation words and euphemisms such as “*cutting government fat*”, “*mission in efficiency*”, “*bold overhaul*”, “*re-evaluating and re-aligning*”.

Grammatical Means of Manipulation

To focus on the dire consequences of the agency’s closure, liberal news outlets turned to passive voice and nominalization, so as to not distract the reader from the emotional turmoil of the situation. Following constructions were used: “*contracts were terminated*”, “*global aid efforts were largely stalled*”. The use of *Past tense* solidifies that the damage has already been done. Examples of nominalization include “*contract terminations*”, “*funding freeze*”, “*termination of awards*”, “*aid freeze*”.

Conservative newspapers were more direct and used active voice to pose allegations against USAID [68]:

“*USAID helped fund terrorist organizations*”;

“*Samantha Power met with Soros-linked groups*”;

“*USAID diverted funds to Chinese labs*”.

The only time these articles used passive voice was in relation to emails sent to fired agency workers:

“*Emails sent to USAID staffers...*” [67].

This grammatical construction allows the authors to glaze over the fact that many people have lost their jobs due to dismantling of USAID.

Stylistic Means of Manipulation

These liberal articles employed sharp metaphors to make the reader judge Trump and his team for their actions and to sympathize with USAID. “*Feeding USAID into the wood chipper*” [69] creates a vivid, violent mental image for the brutal and destructive way USAID has been targeted. “*Hatchet job*” [69] is a metaphor implying

reckless, vindictive cuts. “Skeleton staff” [69], while can be seen as a reference to the core of USAID working staff, also paints a picture of an organization that has been stripped off of its major workforce and is now struggling to continue functioning with just the minimal team on board.

“*Few surviving projects*” is an example of litotes and is a softer way of saying “*almost no projects survived*” [65]. Combined with “*en masse contract terminations*”, it forms an antithesis pair, contrasting the small amount of remaining USAID projects and countless workers fired.

Another example of antithesis is “*cutting the bone and the muscle*” vs “*can’t touch the stuff that’s really been increasing*” [69]. This juxtaposition shows how conservatives, driven by their ideology, are ready to attack essential, useful USAID projects, while leaving really important issues on the backburner. The next example points out the hypocrisy in the words and opinions of Marco Rubio: “In 2019, Marco Rubio [...] hailed the agency's "amazing achievements". [...] On a trip to El Salvador this week, Rubio took a different perspective, telling reporters: "We fund programs irrespective of whether it's aligned or not aligned with the foreign policy. That's ridiculous" [69]. The purpose of this paragraph is to put on display the inconsistency of one of the major representative of the Republicans, therefore putting all of their claims and accusations into question.

The articles also pose a number of rhetorical questions [69]: “*Why is a global health and development agency suddenly a target?*” “*Why is the Trump administration targeting USAID?*” “*Where is the consequence?*” which evoke a picture of an organization unfairly targeted despite their contributions to world’s prosperity.

Due to highly emotional and prominently negative portrayal of USAID in conservative news, the metaphors used in these articles can have a combative tone:

“*Viper’s nest of Marxists*” [60; 68] – snake metaphor implying danger and betrayal.

“*On a warpath*” [68], “*gone to war*” [67] – suggests a confrontation between two opposing parties.

“*Cutting government fat*” [68] – economic metaphor to justify harsh actions.

The use of a rhetorical question “*What are they doing with the money?*” [68] appeals to taxpayers’ right to transparency, to have a say in where their tax money will be directed. It also attempts to further incriminate USAID by implying that the money wasn’t going where it should have. In fact, in these articles, the authors use many parallelisms with this specific accusation in mind:

“Taxpayer funds were redirected to entities including *the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the Wuhan University and the Academy of Military Medical Sciences...*” [68].

“Questionable places the money went, including over \$2 million for *electric vehicles in Vietnam, \$2 million for sex changes and “LGBT activism” in Guatemala, \$6 million to help tourism in Egypt, meals for al-Qaida fighters in Syria, “personalized” birth control devices [...]*” [67].

The articles contrast these allegations with where the money could potentially have gone: “Use that money to rebuild our *tunnels, roads, bridges and schools*” [68]. This is supposed to evoke feelings of indignation in the audience and make them feel as if they have been robbed.

Conclusion to Part 2

While both liberal and conservative online newspapers often use similar manipulation techniques, the specific linguistic tools that they employ vary. Conservatives and liberals predominantly used factual manipulation, ideological polarization, playing on emotions and van Dijk's ideological square. Conservative news outlets predominantly used emotionally charged language related to anger and indignation; liberal outlets, on the other hand, played on emotions like sympathy and compassion, while also validating any existing fears and anxieties that society might experience. Both ideological wings used blame game and discourse manipulation, but liberals did so to a lesser extent and in more subtle, diplomatic manner. Conservative news outlets, on the other hand, relied heavily on shifting blame, whipping up fear and denunciation of the opponent.

From the lexical perspective, conservative newspapers were more direct and confrontational on most subjects. They used a lot of emotionally loaded language, usually expressed through negative value-laden terms and words with negative connotations. Half of the time they would go as far as to directly insult their opponents, calling them degrading and ideologically extremist names (pejorative terms and dysphemisms). Analysis of grammatical structures in conservative newspapers showed their preference for active voice both for emphasizing their achievements and for confronting their opponents. They were also more likely to use modal verbs that expressed certainty.

While liberals often use palatable language and often implore to positive change, helping those suffering, etc., they often use more underhanded and subtle techniques to influence their audiences. From the lexical point of view, they used mostly neutral, diplomatic language or news reporting full of words with positive connotations. The only exception being an extremely partisan populist article from The Washington Post regarding police reform. Its style was reminiscent of aggressive conservative news articles with extreme polarizing language, harsh dysphemisms and pejorative language.

Grammatically, liberal newspapers turned out to be more passive than conservative ones. Both ideological camps used active voice to convey their achievements and celebrate their accomplishments. However, liberal news articles show a tendency to use passive voice when their actions and decisions fail and attract public scrutiny. While they can take accountability, they usually describe their action using passive voice to avoid tying themselves directly to negative outcomes. Also, when liberal and conservative ideologies and policies clash, liberals are more likely to avoid direct confrontation. When they feel like their values are being threatened, they use predominantly passive constructions to direct readers' attention towards negative consequences of certain policies, showcasing the struggle of vulnerable groups and evoking sympathy towards them and moral outrage at the offending party. The only exception, again, was the article from The Washington Post, which used mostly active voice, attacking Republicans and certain parts of the Democratic party, who were perceived as an obstacle to "Defund the police" movement.

Stylistically, both liberal and conservative newspapers predominantly used antithesis, parallelism, irony and metaphors. Antithesis was used to point out inconsistencies and deepen polarization and division between both political wings. On the other hand, liberal and conservative articles employed parallelism to give more details and expand on their views (both positive and negative) to make readers sympathize with their beliefs. They also incorporated irony and emotionally loaded metaphors, particularly when referring to each other's policies. However, conservatives' metaphors tended to be more harsh and combative than liberals'.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to analyze and compare linguistic manipulation strategies used in modern liberal and conservative online newspapers, focusing on their lexical, grammatical, and stylistic tools in the context of politically polarized topics. The main objectives were to research the wider phenomenon of manipulation and gradually focus on the way specific linguistic tools are used by liberal and conservative news outlets to frame similar events and societal or political issues.

The term manipulation refers to the covert ways in which people and media try to influence or reshape our perception of the world and specific topics. With the development of the Internet and social media, the informational landscape has grown significantly, incorporating more and more views and opinions that are polar opposites of each other. These divisions are what is called political or ideological polarization. The more news sources with varied ideological leaning appear, the more they try to catch the audience's attention before their opponent does. Hence, they resort to various manipulation tactics to gain followers and keep them engaged.

Main manipulation strategies employed by liberal and conservative online newspapers include factual manipulation, ideological polarization, whipping up fear, denunciation, blame game, playing on emotions, and attacking and silencing critics. These strategies are usually expressed through a variety of lexical, grammatical, and stylistic tools. Lexical means of manipulation most often appear in the form of emotionally charged language that carries either positive or negative connotations. Such language is deliberately chosen to provoke emotional responses in readers - sympathy, anger, fear, or approval - depending on the intended ideological framing. Euphemisms are frequently used to soften controversial or harsh realities, while dysphemisms and pejorative terms serve the opposite function, making neutral or complex subjects appear more negative or threatening through harsh or disdainful language. Grammatical tools of manipulation include the strategic use of passive and active voice. Passive constructions and nominalization are often employed to obscure agency or responsibility, especially when discussing negative outcomes or controversial decisions. On the other hand, active voice is generally used when the

intention is to highlight responsibility, often to credit allies or blame opponents. Modal verbs are instrumental in shaping the level of certainty or obligation expressed in a statement. Stylistic manipulation devices include the use of metaphors, antithesis (opposing ideas are placed in contrast to highlight differences and create rhetorical tension), rhetorical questions, irony and parallelism (repetition of similar grammatical forms). Each of these stylistic tools of manipulation can have their own purpose depending on the context and who is using them.

The practical analysis revealed that liberal- and conservative-leaning articles both rely on factual manipulation and play on readers' emotions to influence their perception. Liberal sources usually try to maintain a diplomatic tone and often use words with positive connotations to engage with the audience. They were also more passive when it came to admitting their faults or failures and directly confronting conservatives on their controversial policies, with some exceptions in the shape of extreme partisan left-leaning sources. In contrast, conservatives turned out to be more direct and confrontational, using a lot of negative emotionally charged language and often resorting to personal attacks and insults. Their grammar reflected this nature, too, as they mostly used active voice and modal verbs of certainty in their news reporting.

Stylistically, liberal and conservative newspapers turned out to be quite similar. Both sides of the political spectrum predominantly used parallelisms, antithesis, irony, and metaphors, with occasional use of other tropes and figures of speech. Antithesis was used to highlight inconsistencies, hypocrisy, or general tension between opposing ideas. This manipulation tool serves further polarization and division by emphasizing the core differences in liberal and conservative approaches to various societal and political issues. To emphasize their ideology and entice more people toward it, liberal and conservative newspapers extensively used parallel structures. The same way as with antithesis, they also turned to irony to make fun of and ostracize the other part. Their metaphors also had a clear reflection of liberal and conservative biases and beliefs. These linguistic tendencies were consistent across all topics, though especially noticeable in articles about immigration and the dismantling of USAID.

These findings suggest that language not only reflects political ideology but also shapes and reinforces it. By subtly constructing specific narratives through linguistic choices, both liberal and conservative media contribute to the formation of ideological echo chambers and hinder cross-partisan dialogue. This role of language as an active agent in maintaining political division is particularly important in our current era, where people are often exposed primarily to ideologically filtered content. Furthermore, this highlights the danger of manipulation that is not always overt or easily recognized by the average reader. What may appear to be neutral or fact-based reporting may in fact be steeped in ideological bias, carefully crafted to provoke specific emotional responses or reinforce preexisting worldviews.

Therefore, with the stakes of political polarization being so high and manipulation strategies being so diverse and easily hidden in plain sight, it is imperative to exercise caution when engaging with politicized content. This study underscores the crucial importance of critical thinking and media literacy as tools to identify and resist manipulative narratives. Future research could benefit from extending this analysis to other forms of media, such as video journalism, podcasts, and user-generated content, where the interplay of tone, visual elements, and discourse adds further complexity to manipulation strategies. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the need for greater media literacy and critical engagement with news content, particularly in highly polarized informational spaces, in order to foster a more informed, reflective, and open-minded public discourse.

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SUMMARY

У сучасному світі новини відіграють не лише інформативну, але й ідеологічну роль, значно впливаючи на громадську думку. Особливо це стало помітним у США, де ліберальні та консервативні джерела інформації представляють два протилежні кінці політичного спектру. В умовах політичної поляризації, яка лише посилилась протягом останнього десятиліття, обидві сторони активно використовують мовні засоби для формування певних точок зору, нерідко застосовуючи приховані стратегії маніпуляції.

Метою цієї роботи є аналіз і порівняння стратегій мовної маніпуляції у ліберальних та консервативних онлайн-ЗМІ, а також визначення, як саме мова відображає і формує політичні ідеології. Актуальність теми дослідження зумовлена необхідністю критичного аналізу мовних засобів впливу у все більш поляризованому суспільстві та необхідністю у підвищенні медіа-грамотності для уникнення впливу політичних маніпуляцій. Об'єктом дослідження є лінгвістичні маніпулятивні стратегії в текстах ліберальних і консервативних новинних сайтів США. Предметом дослідження стали конкретні лексичні, граматичні й стилістичні засоби, що використовуються для впливу на читача. Робота базується на критичному аналізі наукових праць, порівняльному аналізі новинних статей, а також використанні платформи Ground News — сервісу, що агрегує новини та класифікує їх за ідеологічним ухилом.

У теоретичній частині було досліджено, що таке маніпуляції і які є їх види; яким чином мова впливає на поляризацію суспільства; які лексичні, граматичні та стилістичні засоби маніпуляції існують і яку функцію вони виконують; а також були визначені ключові когнітивні відмінності між консерваторами та лібералами та як ці відмінності впливають на лінгвістичні ідентифікатори цих політичних ідеологій у онлайн ЗМІ. Поняття маніпуляцій у ЗМІ стосується прихованого впливу на сприйняття людиною інформації з метою формування бажаного ставлення до подій чи осіб. Ідеологічна поляризація, яка посилилась з розвитком цифрових платформ, призвела до конкуренції між ЗМІ за увагу

аудиторії. Щоб її здобути, медіа дедалі частіше вдаються до мовних засобів емоційного або ідеологічного тиску.

Серед основних стратегій маніпуляції було виявлено наступні: маніпуляція фактами, ідеологічна поляризація, нагнітання страху, звинувачення та очорнення опонентів, гра на емоціях. Маніпуляція фактами включає в себе уникання певних деталей або вибіркоче викривлення фактів задля створення зручної картини подій. Найчастіше подається лише частина правди, що може докорінно змінювати суть подій. Завдяки ідеологічній поляризації суспільство ділиться на окремі табори, щоб посилити конфлікт між ними, що змушує людей обирати певну сторону і унеможлиблює компроміс. Нагнітання страху використовується для залякування або перебільшення загроз. Звинувачення і очорнення опонентів полягає у їх дискредитації, приписування їм помилок, сумнівних рішень, а в крайніх випадках і злочинних дій, незалежно від правдивості обвинувачень. Таким чином одна сторона намагається підірвати довіру людей до другої. Гра на емоціях використовує апеляцію до сильних почуттів та переживань (страху, жалості, гордості тощо) замість об'єктивності та фактів, що часто заважає раціональній оцінці подій.

Маніпулятивні стратегії реалізуються через комбінацію лексичних, граматичних та стилістичних засобів. Лексичні засоби включають у себе використання емоційно забарвлених слів, евфемізмів, пейоративної лексики, лексики з позитивними/негативними конотаціями, а також лексичних засобів оцінки. Структури на кшталт активного та пасивного стану, номіналізації та модальних дієслів (для вираження впевненості/невпевненості) є основними граматичними засобами маніпуляцій. У перелік стилістичних прийомів входять метафори, риторичні питання, іронія, сарказм, антитеза, паралелізм, алюзії та літоти.

У результаті практичного аналізу було проаналізовано 24 статті на теми, що спричинили найбільші суспільні суперечки у США: пандемія COVID-19, імміграція, реформа поліції, розформування Дональдом Трампом організації USAID. Для аналізу було відібрано по 6 статей за кожною із зазначених тем, по

З джерела з ліберальних (The Guardian, CNN, NPR, The New York Times, Politico, The Washington Post, CBS News) і по 3 джерела з консервативних (Fox News, The New York Post, Daily Wire, The Washington Times) онлайн газет. Спочатку були порівняні загальні маніпулятивні стратегії, які використовували онлайн ЗМІ, а потім досліджувалися і порівнювалися лексичні, граматичні та стилістичні засоби втілення цих маніпуляцій. Дослідження виявило, що ліберальні ЗМІ зазвичай вдаються до більш нейтрального або дипломатичного тону, використовують позитивну лексику та уникають прямої критики опонентів (за винятком крайніх лівих джерел). Вони також рідше використовують активні конструкції для визнання власних помилок. Натомість консервативні ЗМІ схильні до прямолінійності, жорсткої риторики, вживання активного стану й емоційно насичених негативних висловлювань. Вони не уникають прямих звинувачень, часто вдаються до особистих нападів на політичних опонентів. Серед стилістичних засобів обидві сторони надають перевагу антитезі, паралелізму, іронії та метафорам. Антитеза і іронія часто стають джерелом додаткової поляризації, адже вони використовуються для висвітлення прогалин у політиці та риториці кожної зі сторін та для розділення на "ми" і "вони". Паралелізми використовуються для глибшого розкриття поглядів, принципів та цілей кожної зі сторін задля привернення уваги та прихильності більшої кількості людей.

Мова у ЗМІ — це не лише засіб передачі інформації, а й інструмент ідеологічного впливу. Лінгвістичні вибори, зроблені редакторами та журналістами, формують сприйняття подій, підсилюють наративи і сприяють подальшій політичній поляризації. Як ліберальні, так і консервативні медіа сприяють формуванню «інформаційних бульбашок», у яких споживач новин чує лише підтвердження власної думки. Робота підкреслює необхідність розвитку медіаграмотності та навичок критичного читання, особливо в умовах інтенсивної ідеологічної боротьби та високої маніпулятивності інформаційного простору.