# Cultural Splits and Media Shifts:
## The Rise of Politicized Media

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**MEDIA & CULTURE**
Mass Communication in a Digital Age

# Cultural Splits

**Where we are today:**

- Antipathy to legacy journalism organizations, which have a history of accountability journalism, is off the charts.

- In other media sectors, disinformation often passes as journalism.

- Press freedoms are being curtailed, and the First Amendment is being sidelined.

- To talk about this cultural split in the classroom can be **anxiety-inducing** because the environment has become so politicized.

**Trump administration**

# Associated Press barred from Oval Office for not using 'Gulf of America'

Agency says its reporter wasn't allowed into event in effort to 'punish' style guide on upholding use of Gulf of Mexico

POLITICS

## White House bars Associated Press from spaces like Oval Office and Air Force One

U.S. NEWS

## AP reporter and photographer barred from Air Force One over 'Gulf of Mexico' terminology dispute

# Cultural Splits

- This is a moment where we are most needed.

- As educators, we need to provide the **context for understanding** how we got into this split, and give our students **the tools** to think about it.

- This is a moment where we tell the story about the relationship of the news media and the independent press (i.e., **not affiliated with a political party**) to our country's political history.

- Our students can better understand what is going on by having us guide them through the discovery of the historical context, and the use of critical tools.

These events are part of the **CULTURAL SPLITS** we are now experiencing.

They have their roots in the **MEDIA SHIFTS** of the 1950s and 1960s.

But, the whole story goes back more than 200 years.

# More than 200 years ago…
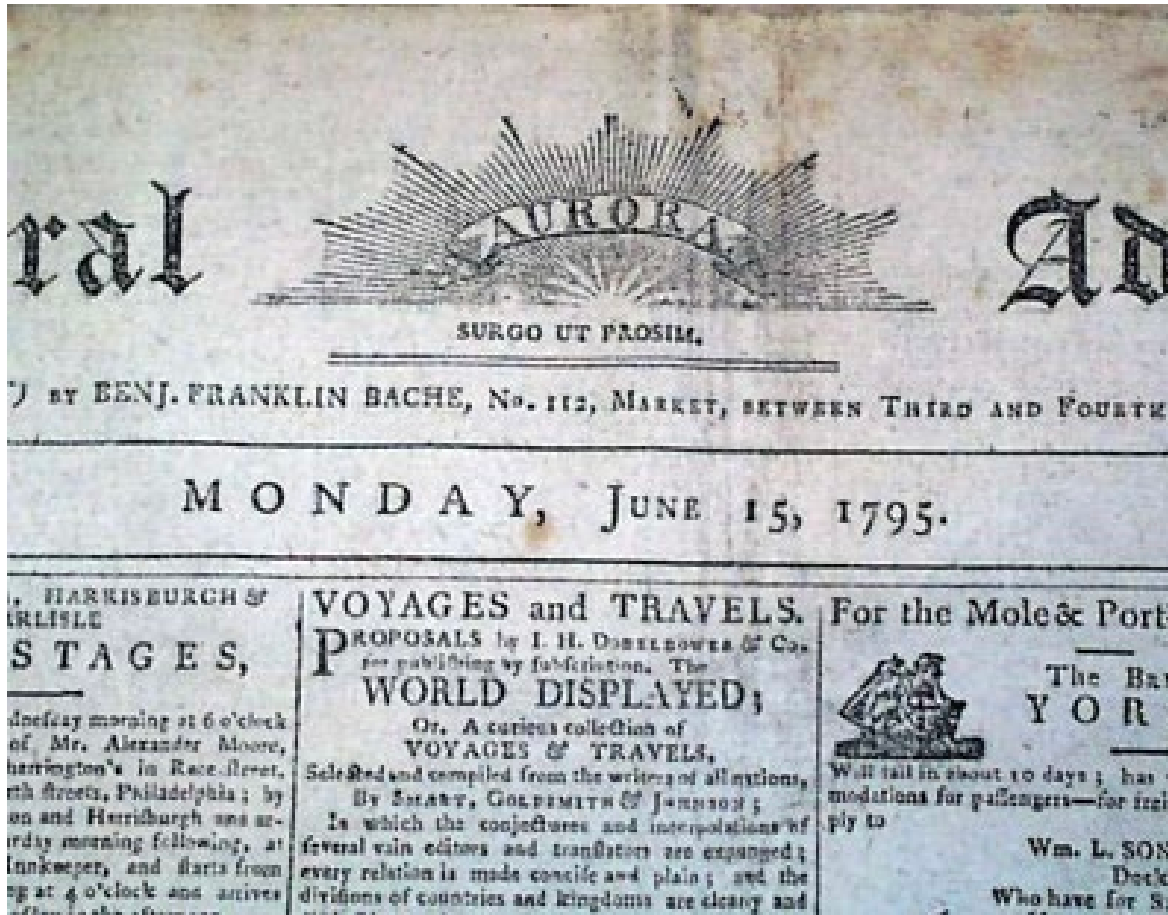


From the colonial era into the first decades of the new United States, there were two main types of newspapers:

- the **partisan press**, which pushed the ideology of the political group that subsidized the paper – e.g., Federalist newspapers, Democratic-Republican newspapers

- the **commercial press** served business leaders, who were interested in economic issues

The *Aurora General Advertiser* newspaper (Philadelphia), June 15, 1795.
Edited by Benjamin Franklin Bache, a Democratic-Republican Party supporter.

# An Early Media Shift, 1830s – results in more consensus



**Newsies, 1890s**

By the 1830s:

- new technology introduced cheap, machine-made paper and mechanical presses; the telegraph; and steam engine trains to collapse the distances

- The rise of middle-class literacy, public education, and leisure time

**Enter the Penny Press** –newspapers that for the first time favored human-interest stories.

By gradually separating daily front-page reporting from overt political viewpoints on an editorial page, penny papers shifted their economic base from political parties to the market — that is, to advertising revenue, classified ads, and street sales. Post-Civil War, the consensus grows.

# An Early Media Shift – consensus through most of 20th century





That Media Shift to mostly nonpartisan news lasted through most of the 20th century.

The centrist independent mainstream media dominated news storytelling through much of the 20th century, and covered a range of views and political thought – with **limits at the far left and far right**.

# Media Shift – toward a cultural split

But, by the 1950s and onward, conservatives (the most right-leaning group in the Republican Party) moved against mainstream independent media and began to create their own media system.

# Media Shift – toward a cultural split

Why? For political advantage.

"One of the main objectives of this right-wing media—a controversial one, to be sure—was to work in counterpoint to the mainstream news media and label it as 'liberal news' in support of the Democratic Party, thus damaging its perceived independence and credibility (the neutrality that was so highly valued by members of the mainstream press)."

# Media Shift: Cultural Split realized



- Fast forward to 60 years later...

- In 2016, for example, reporter Leslie Stahl of the CBS program *60 Minutes* asked then president-elect Trump why he kept "hammering" at the press.

- According to Stahl, Trump candidly replied, "You know why I do it? I do it to discredit you all and demean you all so that when you write negative stories about me no one will believe you."

# Cultural Split – How did this happen?

1. Slowly build a separate conservative media sphere

2. Tear down trust in independent mainstream media – advance the idea of "liberal media bias"

# Media Shift 1 – build the infrastructure, 1950s-2020s

- **The rise of the conservative media (in U.S.)**

    - Magazines, books, direct mail          (1950s-1960s)

    - Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post*      (1976) NEWSPAPER

    - Christian Broadcasting Network       (1977) CABLE

    - Rush Limbaugh on national talk radio   (1988) RADIO

    - Matt Drudge - *Drudge Report*         (1994) INTERNET

# Media Shift 1 – build the infrastructure, 1950s-2020s

- **The rise of the conservative media (in U.S.), continued…**

  - Rupert Murdoch's Fox News          (1996) CABLE NEWS

  - Breitbart.com on Internet          (2007) INTERNET

  - OAN          (2013) CABLE/STREAMING

  - Newsmax          (2014) CABLE/STREAMING

  - Truth Social          (2022) SOCIAL MEDIA

  - Twitter → X          (2022) SOCIAL MEDIA

# Media Shift 2 – change the discourse

Media scholars Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph Cappella describe the results of such a strategy: "These conservative voices portray[ed] themselves as the reliable, trustworthy alternative to mainstream media, while at the same time attacking 'liberals' and dismissing or reframing information that undercut . . . conservative leaders or causes."

# Media Shift 2 – change the discourse

TOOLS
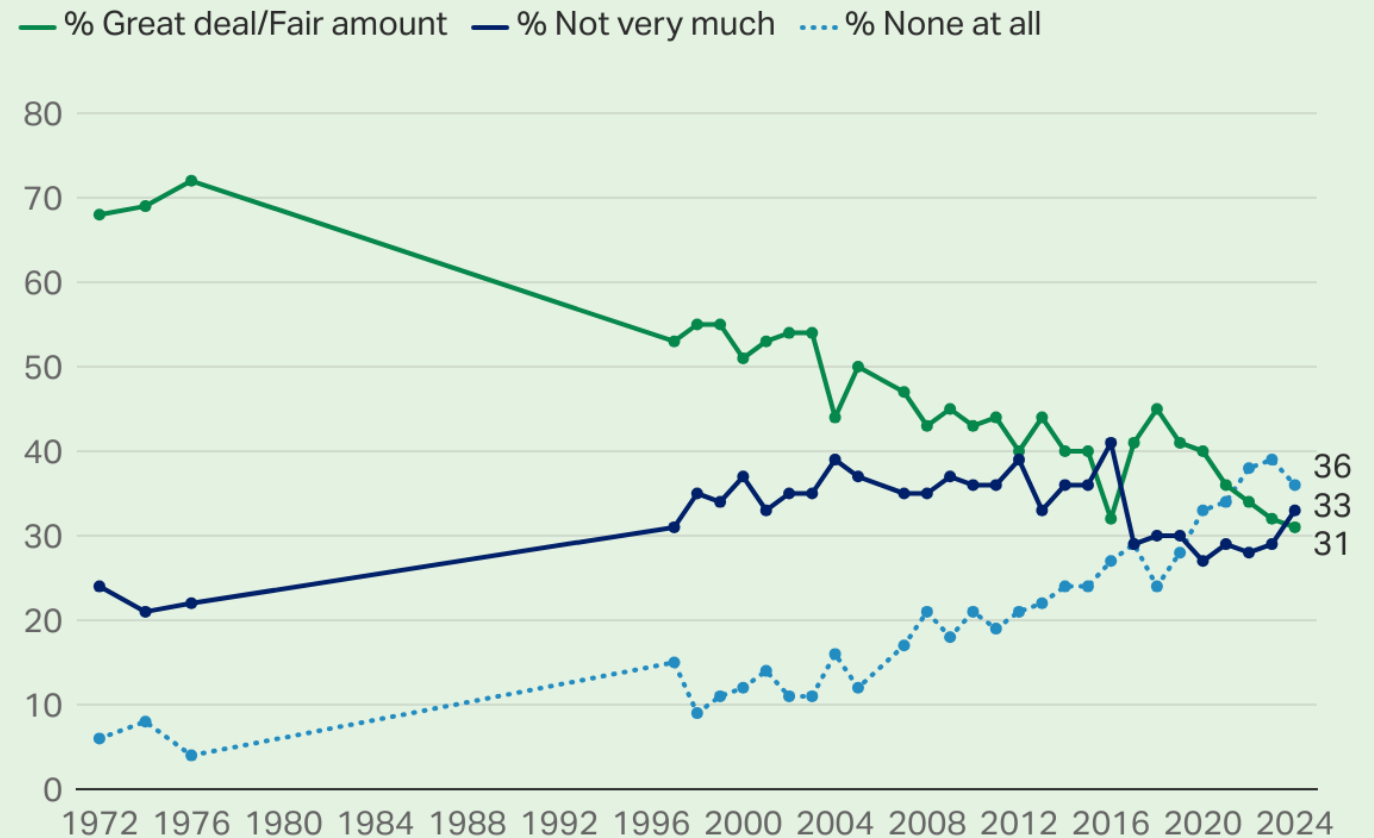- ✓Information anarchy
- ✓Bias confirmation
- ✓False equivalency

# The Result: Cultural Splits of Today

**Falling trust in the news media**

# Americans' Trust in Mass Media, 1972-2024

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media -- such as newspapers, TV and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly -- a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?
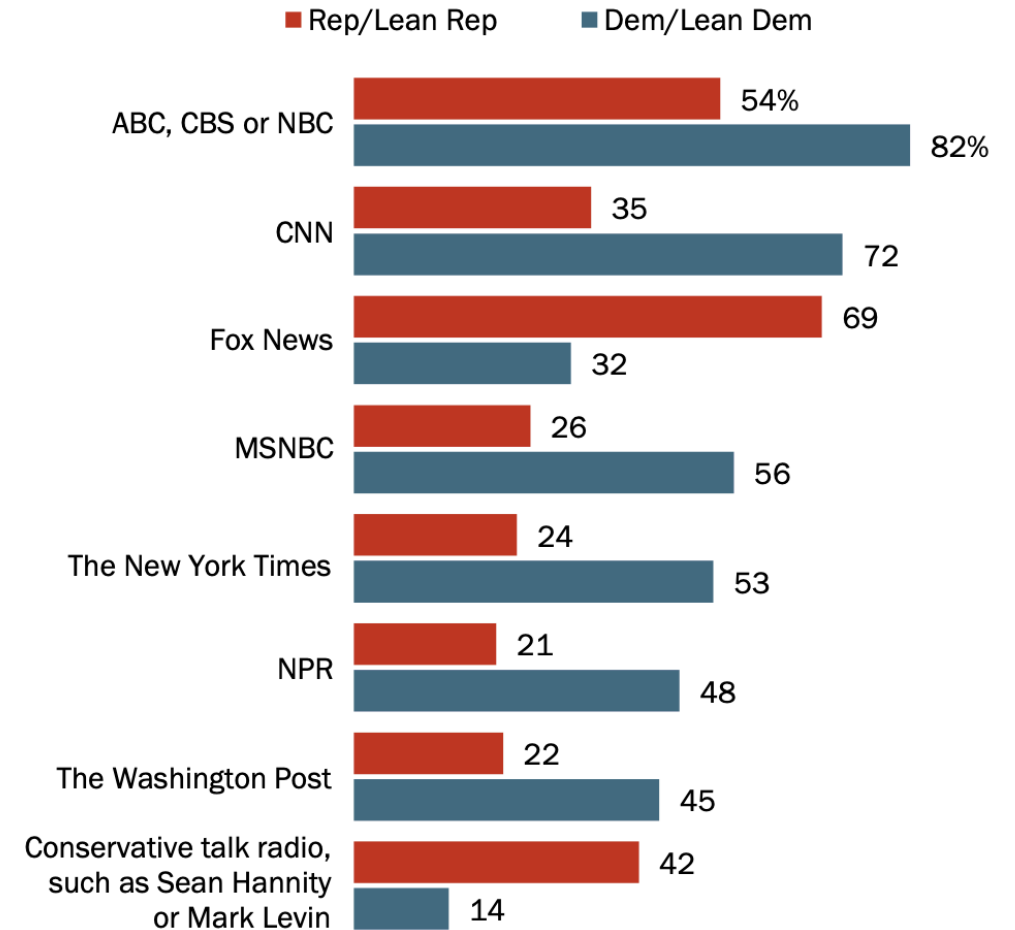
— % Great deal/Fair amount    — % Not very much    ···· % None at all



36
33
31

1972 1976 1980 1984 1988 1992 1996 2000 2004 2008 2012 2016 2020 2024

GALLUP

**Two separate media spheres**

- "**Republicans** are much more likely than Democrats to say Fox News and talk radio are at least minor sources of election news for them."

- "But **Democrats** are far more likely than Republicans to get election news from all of the other news outlets mentioned in the survey."

  ➢ Pew Research Center, Sept. 2024

**Republicans and Democrats differ in shares who use several major news outlets for political news**

*% who use each of the following as a **major/minor source** of political and election news*

■ Rep/Lean Rep　　■ Dem/Lean Dem

| Outlet | Rep/Lean Rep | Dem/Lean Dem |
|---|---|---|
| ABC, CBS or NBC | 54% | 82% |
| CNN | 35 | 72 |
| Fox News | 69 | 32 |
| MSNBC | 26 | 56 |
| The New York Times | 24 | 53 |
| NPR | 21 | 48 |
| The Washington Post | 22 | 45 |
| Conservative talk radio, such as Sean Hannity or Mark Levin | 42 | 14 |

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 16-22, 2024.
"Americans' Views of 2024 Election News"

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

# A hope for healing cultural splits?

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**Education – it's what we do!**

# A hope for healing cultural splits?

**The Question:**

**How do we talk about the news media and their role in culture?**

# A hope for healing cultural splits?

**The Question:**

**How do we talk about the news media and their role in culture?**

**1) Correctly define the problem**

    **a) We now have two media spheres**

- One politically independent, and mostly centrist
- One closely linked to a political party, and conservative

    **b) There has been a concerted effort to undermine independent news media in US and elsewhere**

# A hope for healing cultural splits?

**The Question:**

**How do we talk about the news media and their role in culture?**

**2) We should evaluate the news on the basis of truth/verification, not political bias**

a) Recognize confirmation bias

b) Call out false equivalencies – they aren't based in fact, but rather in offensive or defensive political stances

c) There are professional standards and codes of ethics for legitimate journalism

d) Recognize our field's long-standing criticisms of mainstream media (We are not asking for the destruction of fact-based journalism -- we are asking for it to do better!)

e) See Case Study Form – Is It Fake News?

# A hope for healing cultural splits?

**Analyze a story with 15 questions.**

**The worksheet covers 3 areas:**

1) **Fake Presentation – Credibility of the News Organization**

2) **Fake or Misleading Claims (Validity of Claims)**

3) **Misleading by Design (Ethics of Purpose)**



A GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING FAKE NEWS

**Is It Fake News?**

Select a story and use the questions below to analyze whether it might be fake news. For each question, choose YES or NO.

Story reviewed: _____

| | Fake Presentation (Credibility of the News Organization) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Does the story provide reporter bylines and bios? | YES | NO |
| 2 | Does the site hosting the story include the news organization's address, telephone number, and e-mail address? (Tip: This information may be located in an "About" or a "Contact Us" link.) | YES | NO |
| 3 | Does the site provide a link or an email address to report corrections or errors (possibly in an "About" or a "Contact Us" link)? | YES | NO |

| | False or Misleading Claims (Validity of Claims) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Does the story provide verification by doing original reporting that cites multiple sources? | YES | NO |
| 5 | Does the story use credible and verified quotes and information? (Be wary of stories that accept potentially untruthful or incorrect quotes or allegations from sources at face value and fail to question them.) | YES | NO |
| 6 | Does the story cite original sources? (Be wary of stories that rely heavily on secondary sources—including social media posts and other published media reports—as their main form of reporting.) | YES | NO |
| 7 | Does the story cite external sources beyond its own news organization? (Be wary of stories that rely on other stories from the same outlet.) | YES | NO |
| 8 | Does the story check out? That is, do other reliable news organizations verify the information it contains? | YES | NO |

| | Misleading by Design (Ethics of Purpose) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Does the site disclose the company's ownership and funding sources? | YES | NO |
| 10 | Does the news organization provide an accessible code of ethics or a standards and procedures document? | YES | NO |
| 11 | Does the story consider a range of valid opinions rather than just one position? | YES | NO |
| 12 | Does the story call out misleading information rather than give equal weight to truth and lies in the name of fairness? | YES | NO |
| 13 | Does the headline accurately represent what the story says rather than exaggerate? | YES | NO |
| 14 | Does the story avoid personal attacks on certain people or sources? | YES | NO |
| 15 | Does the story avoid using stereotypes to make its point? | YES | NO |

480   CASE STUDY ● A GUIDE TO INDENTIFYING FAKE NEWS

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# A hope for healing cultural splits?

- Too much information, but know this is a bipartisan approach:

A 2021 Pew study found that the two highest factors for both Republicans and Democrats in deciding whether a news story is trustworthy:

- The news organization that publishes the story

- The sources cited in the story

# Thank you!