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POLITICAL GRIDLOCK AND NEW MEDIA

A CASE STUDY OF ONLINE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

BACHELOR THESIS AMERICAN STUDIES

Faculty of Arts

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June 2022

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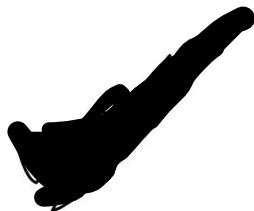
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GLOSSARY

An overview of the key words.

Algorithm: Websites like Youtube and Facebook are algorithm based websites. This means that when you consume content on these websites, there is an algorithm in charge of providing you recommendations on what to consume next. In Youtube for example, the video recommendations are made for you based on the content you consume. When watching videos you will often see new content pop up right as you finish watching a video.

Ben Shapiro: A very popular conservative political pundit and the founder of the Daily Wire, a rightwing conservative news outlet.

Filibuster: A way to prolong the decision making process in a legislative body. Historically in the US this way to stall and avoid the voting on certain bills has been used by both major parties and is not necessarily a one sided political tool. In a modern context the filibuster has been used more extensively by the Republican party to stall legislation.

Gerrymandering: In a representative democracy like the United States gerrymandering refers to the manipulation of electoral district boundaries. The idea behind it is to create an unfair advantage for a certain group or in the case of the US a political party. In a US context, gerrymandering is done by the party in charge of a certain voting district and usually ensures that this party remains the dominant party in that voting district because it forces the opposite party to overperform electorally.

New Media: I use the term new media instead of social media because I believe that Youtube is not necessarily a social media website but rather a video blog site due to its structure and anonymous nature. New Media also covers websites like 4chan, a popular anonymous community site which spawned the famous QAnon Conspiracies. I think new media is a more accurate and inclusive term because it basically refers to any media that exists through the internet and I do not want to limit the discussion to just social media.

PragerU: A very popular conservative Youtube channel that generally produces short propaganda-esque videos related to politics and culture through a conservative and often very Christian lens.

QAnon: A pro Trump right wing conspiracy theory that also evolved into a political movement. It centers around false claims of an anonymous figure known as Q.

Socialblade: A statistics website related to social media. This website allows you to analyze subscriber and view counts of Youtube channels over time. It also has data for Twitter and Instagram and Twitch. A link can be found at the end of the bibliography.

Stop the steal: This was a political campaign aimed at discrediting the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election. Its goal was to keep President Trump in power. This campaign eventually culminated into the Capitol riot on January sixth.

Subscriber: On Youtube you have a lot of content creators that upload videos. When you want to see more of a certain creator you can subscribe to their channel. This means that everytime they upload new content you can be notified and the video will appear in a special

‘subscriptions tab’ on your Youtube homepage. Subscribing to someone's content generally means the person is an avid consumer of the content and serves as an important indicator of a creator's popularity. Subscribing to a channel also influences the way the algorithm recommends (new) content to you.

Transparency Tube: A website that tracks the political sphere on Youtube. It is a well organized statistical tool that allows us some insight into the popular website's politically oriented content. It tracks channel size and view counts and can be organized by year and political leaning. A link can be found at the end of the bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

As an American Studies student I actively keep up with US politics and news. Every day when I look at the news, there are mass shootings. When I go on Reddit, I see what I can only describe as horror stories about the dysfunctional healthcare system. When speaking with my American friends I hear about their student debt problems. Yet in Washington, none of these issues seem to be adequately addressed. Adequate legislative action on major issues like healthcare, gun control, student debt and political accountability seem to be almost non-existent. This is because of political gridlock. However in recent years, we have seen some very large protests and civil unrest spread throughout the US from both sides of the political aisle, from the riots at Capitol Hill on January sixth to the BLM movement. The political landscape in the US is shifting and I believe these recent events to be heavily influenced by the opportunities that the internet provides. Politics in the US are more divided than ever in the post-Civil War Era. It is a noticeable development that coincides with the shifting of the political discourse to the online space. Systematic control of the political discourse seems to have lessened, as fringe political ideologies and conspiracies have gripped certain factions of the US electorate.

This is where I wanted to situate my thesis contextually. I want to analyze the shift that new media has brought to US political discourse and ultimately find out what effects new media has had on the gridlocked American system. How does new media affect this gridlock? In order to find this out, we first have to find a working definition of gridlock and explore why the US is the one industrialized nation that seems to have such a big problem with political gridlock. We will do this by analyzing the structure of the government and going over the way political gridlock affects legislative policy. In the second chapter, I want to cover the media landscape in the US. I will start by analyzing the way traditional media was

used and controlled by looking at the famous 1988 work of Noam Chomsky '*Manufacturing consent*'. This work will provide a critical and realistic context for US political discourse.

After looking at traditional media, I want to cover new media and look at the statistics on the topic as well as the way the internet affects the processes that Chomsky describes. In the third chapter, I want to zoom in on online political discourse as well as critically analyze multiple studies related to the political effects of new media. Then I will show how the previously covered effects culminate and manifest themselves in the form of the partisan divide. It is here we can really see how new media has impacted American politics by deepening the divide. Before writing this thesis, I thought this partisan divide was a more double sided event but while analyzing the statistics and research on the topic it has become clear to me that new media carries a significant responsibility in driving one side of the legislative political aisle almost completely off the edge of the spectrum, thus increasing political gridlock. My original hypothesis was that new media has an equally double sided effect on American politics, having both positive and negative effect on gridlock. For one, new media is making it easier for people to organize politically but on the other hand making it easier to spread misinformation and propaganda. However, after research I have come to the conclusion that the detrimental effects of new media like misinformation campaigns and propaganda far outweigh other politically relevant effects. This is why political gridlock has only increased, as polarization has risen, in significant part due to new media.

CHAPTER 1 GRIDLOCK IN THE AMERICAN SYSTEM

Political Gridlock

Before we can discuss the intricacies of political gridlock in the United States, we have to find a working definition for it. This thesis is not about political philosophy. Therefore I will not go too deep into the discussion of the definition but I will go over some of the academic ideas on how to best conceptualize a functional definition. When I personally think of political gridlock, I think of congress having big issues when trying to produce legislation, in other words a stalling of the political process. However when we look into it more, this definition is lacking. A more accurate description would be more concisely focussed on government as well as promoting a relation to the political agenda. If these factors are not met in our definition, we can never really label a political situation as gridlocked. Most scholars label political gridlock as *“policy stability or the maintenance of the status quo”* (Lee & Dodge, 2017). However this definition is missing context. According to Dodge and Lee a more accurate definition would be *“a process by which interactive framing dynamics (re)structure the discussion, to produce conflict and deny the development of a shared discursive space capable of building consensus or reasoned agreement.”* In other words gridlock is a process that occurs because there are interest groups trying to reframe and restructure discourse in order to divide and create conflict. This in turn makes it impossible to find the agreement necessary to pass legislation. With ‘interactive framing dynamics’ Lee and Dodge refer to how so-called ‘discourse coalitions’ frame discussions. A discourse coalition is a group of actors that shape policy discussion by using their shared interpretation of said policy. These loosely connected actors share a certain opinion or interpretation and they can use this to frame conversations in their favor. Political gridlock occurs when this framing is done in a way that prohibits cooperation or agreement. When the groups in power have a very

difficult time to pass their legislative agenda, we can speak of political gridlock because no agreements can be made that would affect the status quo. This in turn creates policy controversy and if this persists political gridlock occurs and or worsens (Lee & Dodge, 2017).

Systemic Susceptibility

So now that we have a working definition of political gridlock, we can analyze how this process works in a US context. Political gridlock is closely related to democracy. Some democratic countries can have difficulties when forming their governments or have issues passing legislation, but I want to make a case for why democracy in the US is inherently more susceptible to political gridlock. For one, certain aspects of the US system of government are still stuck in the past. Representation between voters and representatives is disproportionately divided when compared to other democratic countries. This imbalance allows for a more concentrated distribution of power. Back in the 1790s, a member of the house represented around 57.000 people. Now, this number has risen to around 747.000. When we use these numbers in an international context, we can see what a big outlier the US is on this front. The runner up to the US is Japan which has the second highest representation ratio out of all other OECD countries at around 272.000. The US is head and shoulders above Japan in this regard (Pew Research, 2018). It makes the House quite an exclusive club of representatives, in other words it results in concentrated power. Another factor in US democracy is the fact that a presidential candidate can win without having the majority of votes, because each state needs a majority. This has two effects. First off, gerrymandering, the process of rearranging voting districts in the favor of one's own party, makes it easier for the winner of a state to win that state again, securing power for longer. Secondly, it allows for very strange representation imbalances as people in smaller states have a lot more relative power when it comes to for example the senate. If there were more representatives, the

district imbalances would not be as relevant but as it stands, one voter in Wyoming has about four times the power a voter in California has (Himes, 2021). All of the previously named factors culminate in making the US a more strained democracy (Chomsky, 2022). This entails that while the country is democratic, a potential presidential candidate can actually become president by only winning 23-30 percent of the popular vote (Kurtzleben, 2016). This is a sign that points towards severe problems in the way the American public is represented by their leaders.

The bipartisan nature of American politics is also at the center of its gridlock. The political divide between the two parties has generally made cooperation between the parties necessary for legislation to pass but in recent decades the parties have drifted further away from each other. This split occurs because the Republican party moved more to the right (Pew Research, 2022). Right wing politics and democracy have never worked together and as the Republican party is moving more and more to the right, we can see a big wave of anti-democratic legislation that Republicans have been pushing. The Brennan Center, a center for statistics and democracy, has tallied over 250 bills in 43 states this last year that would restrict access to the ballot (Brennan Center, 2021). When less people vote, Republicans gain ground and they know this. Most of these laws were created in response to the massive voter turnout the 2020 election brought upon the Republicans and saw them lose significantly. Yet despite their loss, the Republican strategy to simply stop the Biden Agenda to ensure poor Democratic leadership is bearing its fruits, as their grip on cultural issues seems to be enough to ensure political relevancy. Because of the two party system, Republicans become the alternative when Democrats fail. When Republicans take power, they use that power to further ensure the breaking down of American democracy as it is to their benefit. It seems like Republicans need political gridlock in order to remain politically relevant and the Democrats have so far been unsuccessful in finding a solution. This results in political actors

like the US's former president Donald Trump having staged a coup at the Capitol last year and still not acknowledging the results of the 2020 election. Another example is conservative Supreme Court Judge Clarence Thomas. Recently the Supreme Court had to vote on whether or not the Trump administration could block efforts to essentially uncover documentation that was requested to be seen pertaining to January sixth. The vote came out eight to one with only Thomas voting against the exposure of these papers. This was because Judge Thomas's wife Ginnie Thomas was in these papers, since she repeatedly urged Chief of Staff Mark Meadows to overturn the 2020 election results. She later even apologized for causing a rift among the Supreme Court members (CNN, 2021). Ginnie Thomas also believes in the conspiracy of QAnon. Her husband, who resides in one of the most powerful institutions in the American Government, is covering for her. This blatant account of corruption and conflict of interest has had no impact on Judge Thomas's career and he is currently still serving a lifelong term on the Supreme Court. Lack of accountability serves to keep unfit leaders in power, which also aids in the country's gridlock.

While on the topic of the other branch of government, the Supreme Court, we should consider its impact on politics further. This powerful institution is limited to nine lifelong seats that are appointed by the current President, should one of the justices pass or retire. This institution has a very strong political bias turning them into political ideologues who in theory should remain politically neutral. But as Harvey and Friedman conclude: "*the Court's constitutional agenda is systematically influenced by Congress*" (2009). I believe this is very visible not in their current rumored attempts to revoke Roe v. Wade. Additionally, a series of decisions from Buckley v. Valeo in 1976 until McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission in 2014 have made it possible for very wealthy individuals and large companies to donate as much money as they please on elections and other political goals. Supreme Court decisions like Citizens United v. FEC (2010) resulted in a massive increase in political spending among

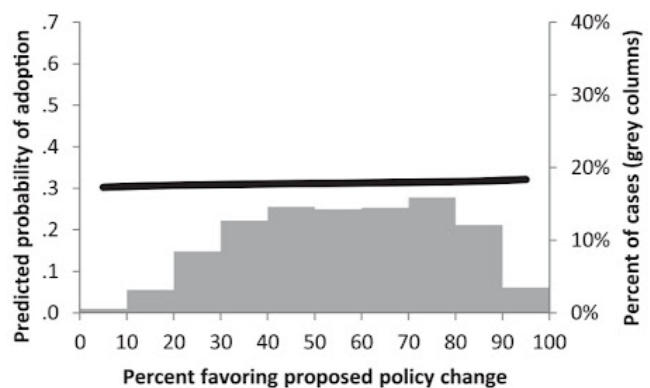
larger corporations. This in turn effects policy to become more friendly towards shareholders (Coates, 2012) meaning that public representatives have a higher likelihood of facing a conflict of interest, should a situation arise where the needs of the people and those of relevant shareholders are competing. The political biases that shape the decision making processes of the Supreme Court make the institution in practice an extension of the senate or house but with very few members and a lack of term limits both increasing their potential power. These factors make the institution very powerful for the party that has the majority. Supreme Court decisions have big consequences for human rights and general social cohesion. We can even see it in the current rumored overturning of Roe v. Wade, a historic decision that would strip federal protections on abortion, effectively leaving the decision to the state itself. This would mean that certain states could make abortion a criminal offense. The ruling which has remained unconfirmed so far, also featured a justification with far reaching consequences for all aspects of American life. The Supreme Court is currently conservative in its majority and combined with the filibuster, a technique for a minority party (currently the Republican party) to halt bills in the senate, it makes the Biden Presidency feel more like a Republican Presidency. This is because despite sixty percent of Americans being opposed to this potential ruling, it is still set to go into effect. It is these factors that combine and shape a democracy with a susceptibility to gridlock because the minority party can force a very strong and in my view somewhat disproportionate opposition.

American Policy (The Princeton model)

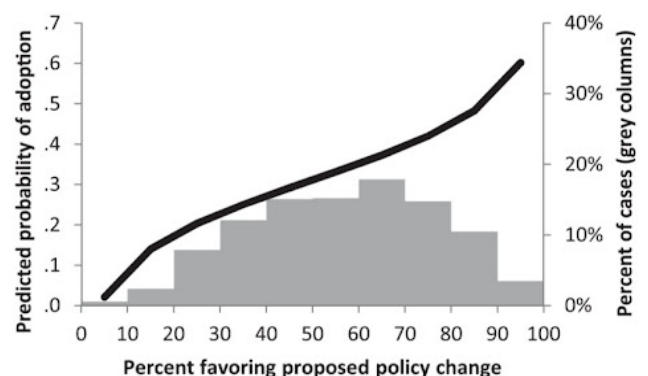
The will of the American people does not seem to drive policy in the US. Research on this topic has been clear as well. In most democratic countries public opinion drives legislation. If more people want something the more likely it becomes for that something to become public policy. In the US this is not the case. A 2014 Princeton study compared 20 years worth of

data to see how much impact public opinion had on US policy (Page & Gilens, 2014). They created a model with two axes: the vertical axis represents the likelihood of legislation passing and the horizontal axis represents public support. An ideal democracy would have a rising line that perfectly matches support and likelihood of passing. This means that if something is supported by sixty percent of the population, it has a sixty percent chance of passing, that would be an ideal republic. However the reality in the US is much different: instead of being a rising line the US has a straight horizontal line at thirty percent likelihood (see images). Meaning that legislation with both zero or even one hundred percent public support has an equal chance of being passed at thirty percent. Therefore the number of American voters in favor or against any idea has no impact on the likelihood that Congress will make it law. The Princeton researchers Page and Gillens concluded that *“The preferences of the average American appeared to have only a miniscule near zero statistically non-significant impact upon public policy”*(2014). But, when they looked at the top ten percent of Americans in terms of income, the ones with business interests and lobbying groups, they found a completely different line, one much closer to the ideal. When these groups of economic elites want something, they have the power to get it done.

Average Citizens' Preferences



Economic Elites' Preferences



Page, Gillens 2014

Alternatively, when they do not want something, they have the power to shut it down, something the bottom ninety percent of Americans do not have.

When we use this information to further analyze the current Biden Administration's gridlock, we can better understand why he was having such a hard time passing his bipartisan bills. Last year, Biden wanted to set up an infrastructure plan as well as a social plan to fight climate change and revive the damaged American economy. Both bills would be combined through Budget Reconciliation. But due to backlash from his own party he had to settle for a measly one trillion dollars compared to the six trillion originally proposed. This backlash came in the forms of two specific democratic senators, Manchin and Sinema, who as the New York Times reports *"have won growing financial support from conservative-leaning donors and business executives in a striking display of how party affiliation can prove secondary to special interests and ideological motivations when the stakes are high"* (2021). The original bill was dubbed by senator Sanders as *"the most consequential piece of legislation for working people since the 1930s"*. But as we now know, the bill was gutted completely despite its overwhelming support among the American people at around sixty percent (Data For Progress.org). Even Biden himself recognized these issues on gridlock when he admitted during a session with reporters that he did not expect *"[s]uch a stallworth effort to make sure that the most important thing was, that president Biden can't get anything done"* (CBS News, 2022). This is quite the admission from a sitting American President who was also the vice president during the eight years of Obama, a period that also knew its fair share of opposition from the Republicans. The fact that the sitting President, who controls both the house and the senate, is not able to pass his own legislation without severe cutbacks is a strong indicator for political gridlock.

American political gridlock occurs when the status quo is maintained through discourse that is so muddy it becomes nearly impossible to pass legislation. In the US this process has its roots in a fundamentally flawed system that allows the party in power to enhance their chances of winning re-elections. The unbalanced nature of voting districts and the fact that Presidential elections can be won by a minority of votes gives leeway to bad faith actors to take advantage as well as wealth concentration. Because the Republican party is not afraid to take advantage of this in order to win elections, we can see a rightwing shift in the Republican party which in turn damages democracy by restricting access to the ballot. The problems that are inherent to the governmental structure of the US combine with a lack of accountability for its leaders. What results is what we see reflected in the Princeton model, as public opinion has no effect on public policy, unless you are part of the economic elite. What this means is that any president who wants to pass a legislative agenda which includes policies that would harm the status quo is met with gridlock.

CHAPTER 2 MANUFACTURING CONSENT & NEW MEDIA

The Princeton model has given us a major insight into American policy making and the way the American economic elites disproportionately control the policy making process. The way economic elites make their agenda palatable to the American Public is by producing massive amounts of system supportive propaganda. This process is called manufacturing consent and this term originated in linguist and political scholar Noam Chomsky's famous book '*Manufacturing Consent*' (1988). In it he writes: "*Mass communication media in the U.S. are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function, by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, and without overt coercion.*" Media in the United States has always been a cornerstone of its political discourse. If you wanted to become a successful politician before the internet came around, you had to go through the well known media gatekeepers like Sixty Minutes, Meet the Press or the weekly Sunday Night Shows. It shaped a world where getting mainstream political attention required certain things like being a white male, an Ivy League degree, wealth and connections. Traditional media gatekeepers made sure that those who wanted to become influential, followed the status quo to large extents (Chomsky, 1988). The role of the media to hold the leaders of a country accountable and to promote transparency to the public, was not its first priority (Chomsky, 1988). Becoming politically relevant before the internet generally required a very pro-establishment stance as well as a lot of connections (Bonney, 2018). Now however, we can see this ideal shift, an example of this being Trump, a reality star. In this chapter I want to explain how manufacturing consent works and identify how the internet has changed media in the last twenty years.

Manufacturing Consent

News media in the US has always been controlled by a small number of companies. This was also the case in the 1980s when Chomsky and Herman wrote their now famous but at the time infamous work '*Manufacturing consent*'. Nowadays the problem of concentrated media ownership has only gotten worse as only five companies control the mainstream media compared to the amount of media companies back in the 80s and 90s. The concept of manufacturing consent confirmed what many in the US already felt, a distrust towards major networks. For the bigger public this distrust is usually labeled as media bias, a problem that can just be solved by simply choosing a network that aligns more closely to your political leaning, be that conservative or liberal. But this does not tell the whole story. According to Chomsky, those who control the media, control the minds of the public. In their work Herman and Chomsky highlight the role that the media has played for decades and continues to play in manipulating public opinion for the benefit of private interests, in essence serving a function we can describe as propagandistic (Mef, 2006). Just 21 companies own all the media outlets in the US, five of which own all the major news networks of the country. These five are News Corp, Comcast, Disney, National Amusements and AT&T. This quasi monopoly allows those who own these companies to feed the nation a twisted version of reality and make people believe whatever they want them to believe (Chomsky, 1988). This creates an environment in which only the news that fits the interest of the individuals who own these private companies, makes it to the public. It should be noted that there is never really any overt coercion, most reporters come from a similar background and have a set belief system, meaning they are never really told what to say but rather they are hired because they believe what they believe. As Chomsky puts it: "*Journalists are not normally kept under control through top-down intervention, but by journalists' internalization of priorities and definitions of news-worthiness that conform to the institution's policy*" (Chomsky, 1988). The key to

producing effective propaganda is to make sure it never looks overt, meaning it should never feel like overt propaganda, rather it should seem like objective news. The corporate domination of the media goes hand and hand with the corporate domination of the government and perpetuates a system where powerful individuals run the show without ever needing to be elected. Chomsky elaborates on this explaining that the elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from concentrated media control, occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively" and on the basis of professional news values (Chomsky, 1988). To simplify, even the journalists who report the news think they are not producing what can be described as propaganda.

There is a common opinion among many Americans that the media is entirely the domain of liberal elites. That is not the case. Conservative media often portrays other media outlets as being controlled by coastal liberals who are trying to paint all conservatives as racist and homophobic. We see rhetoric like this very often, especially from Trump who would constantly label all liberal outlets as fake news, while constantly being present on Fox News and other conservative outlets, who's relation with the truth is dubious at best. But this is simply not the entire picture. The truth remains that the mainstream media is controlled by the same overarching interest groups and is simply trying to appear diverse in its coverage (Chomsky et al., 2006). Supposedly, alternative media like Fox and Voice of America are all parts of a single unified front aimed at manufacturing consent and steering the conversation away from real news and towards pointless aesthetic disagreements. Major networks want to appear to espouse different views but their major shareholders all benefit from the same tax cuts and climate inaction, no matter if they are blue or red in their political leaning. But because they have to maintain a veneer of objectivity, we get news networks that fight over

matters of relatively small significance while quietly agreeing on all the major issues that would negatively affect them. The focus of the major networks is not only to inform the American viewer about the goings on in the world and at home, but additionally to pander to previously established biases while indirectly promoting the financial agendas of specific industries.

The most overt and blatant example of manufactured consent is the US military budget, which is by far the largest in the world and only continues to grow. This extraordinary spending on war has been justified over decades of manufactured consent. The results are lacking social welfare programmes and a military budget so out of bounds it trumps the second largest military by spending nearly three times as much (Sipri, 2020). The US media has created endless stories to justify and simultaneously glorify intervention in foreign countries, often lying outright about certain events. The tiny number of terror attacks on American soil are covered from all angles but the vast and ongoing devastation of places like the Middle East by the military barely get a mention. This also holds true for the many devastating sanctions the US puts on countries like Cuba and Iran. The media does not only avoid mentioning US interventions, it also avoids those of its friends and allies. An example of this is in the 1970s, when Indonesia invaded East Timor and occupied neutral territory, killing thousands of people. The media said nothing because Indonesia was a US ally. Today the ongoing conflict in Yemen has been built as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises and it's been going on for six years with innocent people dying and suffering from atrocious conditions every single day. Yet this conflict is rarely covered from both sides as the plight of the Yemeni people remains unheard. This is because the Saudi army is largely responsible for the ongoing conflict and the United States is their primary ally and weapons supplier. *“As the conflict in Yemen continues, congressional concern over U.S. support for the Saudi led coalition fighting in the region has grown. The objects of these concerns include thousands of*

civilian casualties, a cholera epidemic, and a country on the brink of famine” (Galbraith, 2019). In these cases, corporate interest and the country's bottom line supersede the right to accurate information no matter which way large mainstream news outlets lean; they are all guilty of filtering the information we receive to suit the interest of their owners. The war in Iraq is probably the best example out of all the foreign interventions that the government desperately wanted to justify. Outright lies of Saddam's supposed weapons of mass destruction riled up the American people and in the wake of 9/11 it was easy for networks to construct a narrative that framed the far away dictatorship as a threat. Congress went into high gear and war was quickly imminent. The devastating consequences of these lies are still seen to this day, as recent attempts to humanize George Bush by wheeling him out to give talks, have been met by screaming veterans demanding to know why he lied and where their friends were (Answer Coalition.org). A 2007 article about the Iraq war and manufacturing consent was published after Chomsky spoke at Twenty Years of Propaganda, a conference for the anniversary of his book. The article concluded that *“The war in Iraq offers plenty of evidence showing that the information presented in U.S. media distorts reality and that those distortions have been the basis for the degree of public support of the war which still exists -- even though public support has fallen. These aspects of the critique by Herman and Chomsky therefore remain relevant and important today.”* (2007 PRwatch).

The concentrated nature of American media has not only been able to justify conflict in the eyes of the American public. It has also been used to fight progressive policies and add to the Princeton model we have discussed in the previous chapter. Capitalism has turned information into a commodity and not a right. Commodities have a value which can be turned into profit. It bears repeating that American media is not generally meant to inform, engage and empower the world. Its main purpose is to sell, manipulate and turn a profit for its shareholders (Rotta & Teixeira, 2018). Information is a good that can be sold to the highest

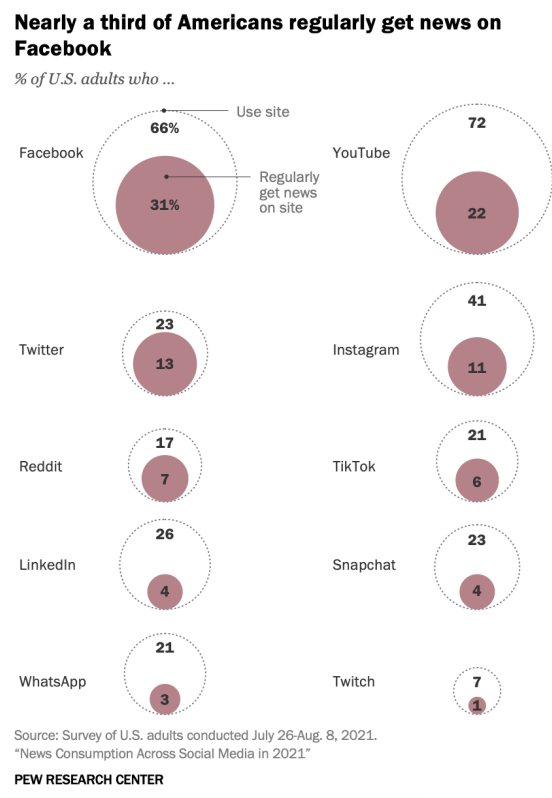
bidder and corporations are willing to pay a lot of money to get their information in front of the eyes of the American public. No matter which side of the political aisle you fall on, there is a network out there which has some information to sell you and it knows exactly how to do that. Polarization in modern media is not necessarily diversity of thought. It is a limited choice that in most cases will serve the status quo or at least not threaten it directly. This is done through tactics like the abuse of people's inherent confirmation biases (Christensen, 2021). Confirmation bias basically entails that people like to hear things that we agree with. The best example of this is the way that panels are constructed to debate topics on air. Human impact on climate change has been established as fact and over 97% of experts agree it is not only real but also a looming threat that needs legislative attention (NASA). So it is strange that every news panel contains as many experts on the matter as irrelevant grifters who do not. The goal of these panels is not to offer unbiased news and give insight into the problem with a discussion on the implementation of climate protective legislation, rather it is intended to muddy the waters so that people continue to doubt established science. The business interests of oil, gas, and animal agriculture make sure that the media gives as much attention to nonsense as it does to fact. Exxon, one of the largest polluters on the planet, was one of the first to conduct extensive studies on the effect of fossil fuel use and their internal documents revealed that they knew just how bad the problem would become. Instead of working with policymakers to find a solution, they buried their findings and launched a decades-long disinformation campaign to keep the public in the dark (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2007).

New Media

The way mainstream media is owned by corporate interests is very clear but in the last twenty or so years we have seen the rise of the internet really start to divert attention away from

traditional sources of news like newspapers and cable tv. Since the beginning of the last decade the internet has really started to come into its own as both our new form of entertainment as well as our news sources (see image below). Traditional media like tv and print sources like newspapers and magazines have seen steady and significant drops in viewership and sales over the last two decades. When we look at the statistics on tv viewership, we can start to see two things very clearly. For one, there is an overall decline in viewership for tv and two, the younger the demographic, the less likely it is they consume traditional media sources. For example, between 2010 and 2016 there was an 11% drop in total viewership for TV and a 42% drop for those aged between 18 and 24 (Thompson, 2016). Even TV staples like sports are starting to lose viewership across their TV platforms (Thompson, 2016). Furthermore, modern numbers are even more extreme. In 2020 and 2021, only around 8 percent of Americans did not get any digital news (Pew Research Center, 2021).

The way people get their news has also changed significantly. According to Pew Research center *“a sizable portion of Americans continue to turn to these sites for news. A little under half (48%) of U.S. adults say they get news from social media “often” or “sometimes” (2021). The two social networks that are most often cited are Facebook and Youtube. Both of these networks are very widely used in general but also as a source of news. There is also no reason to*



believe that these numbers have any chance of decreasing, as even on a global scale all trends point towards a rising number of people using social media. According to the 2022 digital

report “*More than half of the world now uses social media (58.4%) which amounts to 4.62 billion people around the world, 424 million new users have come online within the last 12 months*”(Digital, 2022).

When we zoom into social media to look at news and the connected political aspects, we can see a few phenomena that stand out as being uniquely shaped by our modern media landscape. The first one is the ability for people to use social media to organize and deploy political strategies that were seen as unviable or unlikely before the internet. Communications strategist Victoria Bonney talks about this phenomenon in her Ted Talk about Social Media, when she says “*The internet has made our democracy more diverse and transparent*” (2018). The internet has served as an opposition to manufactured, more traditional media. It has allowed for opinions and candidates to be elected into congress that hold somewhat anti-establishment views, because the internet has removed a lot of the gatekeeping nature of more traditional media sources. While already being an elected official, Bernie Sanders is probably the best example of this. His Presidential run, both in 2016 and 2020, can be seen as a landmark case of how the internet has affected the US electoral system. Bernie Sanders is an independent senator with a voting record that speaks for his views. He was the leader of the opposition against the Iraq war and even labeled the Saudi led intervention in Yemen we mentioned earlier as ‘*the most horrific humanitarian disaster on earth*’ during the presidential primary debates in 2020. These views have always made him different from his colleagues. His interests and goals are not in line with those of corporate elites and it showed, as during his presidential run his campaign was treated very differently than those of his closest competitors (Milonas, 2021). The so-called Bernie Blackout was however not very effective because of the way the internet works. Even though mainstream news was quiet and generally antagonistic in its framing, he was still the runner up to Biden in the Democratic primaries. It is one of the many examples of new media and its undeniable power in

connecting individuals behind a cause and raising awareness (Berntzen et al., 2014). From Occupy Wall Street to the Arab Spring, new media is a powerful form of alternative media with a lot of political power. New media gives a voice to alternative and non conventional politics. It has led to somewhat of a revival for progressive and socialist discourse. This revival of left wing politics is probably most visible in the way the term ‘capitalism’ is viewed in modern US discourse. Recent polling suggests that young adults have a more negative opinion towards the term. This downward trend is across the board in both Democrat and Republican circles and follows a very similar pattern that we discussed earlier when talking about the consumption of TV media. The younger the generation, the less likely it is that they view the term favorably (The Hill, 2021). While not gaining in popularity significantly, the term ‘socialism’ also shows a similar trend gaining and maintaining popularity among the younger generations, once again correlating quite strongly with the groups most likely to use new media. I look at leftwing politics specifically here because it is the pinnacle of anti establishment politics in the US, as the political spectrum of Washington and mainstream media does not go much further then liberal left.

However the effects of social media also manifest themselves in much more sinister ways. Fake news and conspiracies have gone from a minor element of online culture to one of the leading ideologies that shape the conservative movements throughout the US. It is hard to find precise numbers but a recent polling suggests some 15 percent of Americans believe in the QAnon conspiracy, an umbrella term that includes the idea that the elites of the country are satan worshipping pedophiles (Rothchild, 2021). This bizarre idea has gained massive traction in recent years and has ties to things like anti-vaccine protests that have gotten very popular in the US. The culmination of these ideas came to a head on January sixth 2020, when a Trump speech about the election being stolen riled up his supporters to the point where they stormed the nation's Capitol building chanting that they would hang the vice

president. The bizarre imagery we saw on January sixth was a testament to the double edged nature of the effects of the internet on electoral politics.

Overall, the process of manufacturing consent in a time before the internet was very effective. It kept out anti-establishment views and provided great opportunities for more conservative ideals to thrive and influence policy. Traditional media worked as a functional gatekeeper but as the internet came up and forced out traditional media, the political discourse moved to a new platform, one that is uniquely full of information. This, paired with a very loose definition of truth and very little oversight, created a political landscape where a substantial number of Americans seem to have adopted some almost incomprehensive ideas about the world. The internet seems to be a very two faced phenomenon as it both makes democracy more transparent and provides a voice to non-neoliberal or conservative ideologies. Future trends look like they will continue in this regard. But at the same time new media seems to create so many different discourse coalitions that it becomes difficult to stand out or discover the motivations of the involved actors.

CHAPTER 3 NEW MEDIA AND POLITICS

Online political discourse

In order to understand new media's relation to political gridlock we first have to gain a better understanding of online political discourse. I believe the most important factor for our research in this regard is the fact that conservative and right-wing (Republican) media has always been very present in online spaces. Because of the nature of social media platforms and their multiple uses, determining or rather deducing political leanings from them is a very difficult task. But there are some important indicators that indicate a conservative framework. For one, on Youtube (which is the most used site in terms of daily users in the US) it is difficult to find accurate numbers about (political) content before 2019. In January of that year a lot of rules about 'borderline' content were enforced and a lot of channels ended up being removed due to allegations of radicalisation and harmful video recommendations (Stokel-Walker, 2021). Looking at statistics on Socialblade and websites like Transparency Tube, both are special-purpose websites that keep track of channel data like view and subscriber count and they serve as popularity indicators. When we use the interactive maps on the Transparency Tube, we can see that there is a clear advantage on the side of the right. Political figureheads like Ben Shapiro and PragerU (Prager University- a rightwing propaganda channel that produces short videos explaining conservative ideals and politics) are extremely popular and outweigh their political counterparts significantly in both views and engagement (Transparency Tube). The other side of the political spectrum is generally represented in channels that fall under the centrist side of the democratic establishment. This is represented by budget shows with corporate influence that are not nearly as overtly political as those on the right. It is difficult to get a good grip on these exact numbers because most new media networks do not give up private information which makes research difficult.

But it is certainly a fact that there is a large demand for conservative content (Munger & Phillips, 2019). The problem with this overrepresentation of rightwing viewpoints is that it helps Republicans move more to the right and this has caused significant political polarisation. Conservative and Republican content has this advantage because their political interests are more in line with those of corporate donors; it is easier for their affiliates to afford the production of propagandistic content. This content can serve a wide range of purposes because in the new media sphere there are different options for those looking to slow down or disrupt and ultimately redirect discourse.

An example of this discourse control with propaganda is the use of think tanks. These are pseudo-intellectual organizations that exist on both sides of the political aisle, both trying to produce research in order to promote certain policies and ideas. Essentially think tanks are framing devices aimed at certain ideologies or perspectives. The sometimes outright strange nature of these studies are perfectly designed to fit into the infotainment world. Rightwing think tanks may be some of the most effective forms of manufacturing consent on the internet, due to the way they position themselves in online discourse. They set the stage and others respond. Social media works with engagement and a process called rationing, where the interactions count and not necessarily the fact that people actually like the ideas that they are responding to. Think tanks bridge the gap between lobbying groups, PR firms and universities. As I stated before, these think tanks have become a favored tactic by the political right, because they simply have more money to spend and are less afraid to dress up biased research as blatant propaganda. The Hoover Institute, The Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institution are some of the more well known right wing think tanks currently active in the US. Wealthy individuals like Charles Koch and Betsy Devos pump large sums of money in conservative think tanks in order to basically launder their preferred economic policies. The idea behind modern think tanks is in essence backwards research, as

they start by looking for libertarian or conservative policies they like to see implemented and then piece together some research to make the policy seem beneficial (Weaver, 1989). This opposes a more traditional peer reviewed research product from a university or other scientific institution, who start their research by asking certain questions and seeing how these can be answered, without favoring a certain outcome. This is also why many think tanks are considered pseudo-intellectual and highly politicized. Right wing think tanks have been heavily utilized even before the internet to popularize certain political ideas and narratives. While not strictly an American story, a good example of this is the popularization of free market ideas by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) leading to the election of Margareth Thatcher in 1979. As she proceeded to implement many of the policies the IEA had advocated for, this success eventually led to the creation of even more think tanks across the English speaking world. The Heritage Foundation followed in the footsteps of the IEA and started to produce smaller, more manageable policy briefs in order to advocate for neoliberal and conservative policy (Poulsen, 1991). The Heritage Foundation was also a major player that helped to elect Ronald Reagan and even pressured his administration to implement many economic policies in work called the *Mandate for Leadership* (Poulsen, 1991). The overtly political angle of many of these think tanks is technically not allowed, as they are supposed to be a type of education foundation. But with currently over 1200 of these institutions in effect in North America, the effects of these institutions are undeniable (Thunert, 2003). Modern media debates often extract quotes or invite researchers from think tanks in order to add credibility without keeping in mind who funds these types of organizations. This is partly due to ignorance on behalf of journalists as well as the fact that modern think tanks know exactly how the internet functions, as they are easy to reach and have large online presence. In addition, the backwards nature of the research from many of these think tanks also reflects their political influence. As we saw in the previous chapter, the

economic elites are the most powerful group, when it comes to passing legislation. The arguments political figureheads use to for example cut social welfare are all created by think tanks. The idea that overreliance on welfare reduces incentives to work comes from a man called Charles Murray who works with both the American Enterprise Institute as well as the billionaire funded Manhattan Institute. This line of thinking has long been the justification for either political gridlock in the form of Joe Manchin or straight up cuts to social security by more conservative administrations. Conservative think tanks simply provide justifications for policy, while appearing to be academically supported. I will argue that think tanks are very much proponents of America's political gridlock, since they serve to muddy the waters and bring doubt to established science and policy discourse. If there is still any doubt that conservative think tanks are driven by political gains, a 2011 paper on the role of think tanks in policy making concluded that *"The leaders of conservative think tanks were significantly more likely to name and shape public opinion on policy issues as high priorities compared with the leaders of liberal think tanks"* (Rich et al., 2011). And this is where political gridlock comes into play again. This same paper also concluded that think tanks *"confront an important irony: the huge array of organizations attempting to influence policy making in the United States, especially at the national level, mean that it is increasingly difficult for individual policy organizations to have a major impact on specific policy debates."* This is also very much in line with the definition of political gridlock we established in chapter one, which sees the problem as an overabundance of different kinds of framing.

Overall it seems think tanks attempt to justify and manufacture consent among the American public in the crowded online world. While their effects were significant in the late 80s, it seems that modern think tanks are simply trying to occupy the same niche as the irrelevant grifters in climate change debates Americans used to see on TV. Their slick new appearance as pseudo-intellectual institutions seems to provide them with a certain level of

credibility but so far their political influence seems to be outnumbered by conspiracy theories and more traditional fake news on social media platforms.

New Media's Political Impact

As alluded to before, in 2019 Youtube underwent some fairly significant reforms in order to limit the spread of harmful content. Most of this content was political in nature. This was because there were many allegations of political radicalisation attaining Alt-right content. Because of the nature of these claims and their close relation to our research we have to look at the available research on this specific topic. For the part on radicalisation we will specifically look at Youtube, as it is the most universally used social media platform and the nature of the platform also gives the content on its website a deep and wide range of political coverage. The controversial nature of political content on Youtube has long been discussed by both academics and the media. This has led to a certain narrative surrounding a kind of pipeline effect that would serve to pull in unsuspecting, non-politically motivated people and lead them to strings of algorithmically determined content to finally end up in the communities of real right wing radicals. The claim that Youtube's inherent recommendation algorithm would serve to push unsuspecting viewers to more and more extremist content has been studied quite extensively as most of its media coverage is based on anecdotal claims. A recent paper titled *Algorithmic Extremism: Examining YouTube's Rabbit Hole of Radicalization* (Ledwich & Zaitsev, 2019) tested a number of related claims as seen in the table underneath. This study mapped out over 800 political content creators on Youtube and analyzed all the recommendations in order to test their four claims. Yet out of all four of their tested claims only one claim actually found partial data support which was the notion that viewers of radical content would seek out more radical content that would be provided to them by their uniquely shaped algorithm. However, the narrative that Youtube's

recommendation algorithms causes people to become more radicalized as stated in claim C4 was difficult to establish and does not seem to be supported by the researchers.

CLAIMS AND DATA SUPPORT

Claim	Data Support
C1 - Radical Bubbles. Recommendations influence viewers of radical content to watch more similar content than they would otherwise, making it less likely that alternative views are presented.	Partially supported
C2 - Right-Wing Advantage. YouTube's recommendation algorithm prefers right-wing content over other perspectives.	Not supported
C3 - Radicalization Influence. YouTube's algorithm influences users by exposing them to more extreme content than they would otherwise.	Not supported
C4 - Right-Wing Radicalization Pathway. YouTube algorithm influences viewers of mainstream and center-left channels by recommending extreme right-wing content, content that aims to disparage left-wing or centrist narratives.	Not supported

A second study on the same topic also finds similar conclusions.

Ledwich, Zaitsev 2019

This work from the Anti Defamation League by Chen et al. called *Exposure to Alternative and Extremist Content on Youtube* grouped together different Youtube channels in categories that included a selection of radical and more moderately political content creators. The study found that only those who had already been exposed to deemed radical content would be recommended more of it. Chen et al. writes: “*However, exposure to such recommendations is more common during visits to videos from alternative (39.9%) and extremist (43.6%) channels, though recommendations for potentially harmful content rarely enter the top-ranked positions which draw the most attention*” (2021). This is a similar conclusion to the Ledwich and Zaitsev study. They also failed to find any proof that Youtube's recommendation algorithm exposes viewers of moderate content to extreme or alternative content, stating “*The proportion of recommendations to videos from alternative and extremist channels is low (1.1% and 0.1%, respectively), especially at the first recommendation ranking.*” This is also a very similar conclusion to the not supported C3 claim which indicated no proof that Youtube’s algorithm exposes moderate viewers to more extreme content (Ledwich & Zaitsev, 2019).

Furthermore, a 2019 study by Penn state researchers Munger and Phillips concluded that the narrative of radicalisation pipelines on Youtube can be further explained away by

looking at politics on Youtube in a supply and demand style framework. Their paper overlaid numbers of supply and demand for ideological content and found that “*Right around the time viewership of Conservative content started skyrocketing, Conservative content creation also rose dramatically. Conversely, despite the Alt-Lite and Alt-Right stepping up its content creation activity in 2017-2018, viewership of such content has been declining*” (2019). This paper also found it impossible to support the notion that radicalisation through algorithms existed.

However, while all of these publications found similar results, it should be noted that the research methods used cannot go uncriticized. Measuring radicalisation and algorithms on social media is very multidisciplinary and broad and since most of this research is very new, it is still a developing field that perhaps lacks academic representation. One thing that stood out was that the Ledwich and Zaitsev study did not use real people in its experiment. Instead it relied on non-logged in users of the site. While this anonymity of the data sets does give good insight into the way the Youtube algorithm works, in my eyes, it fails to comment on any radicalisation aspects. This is simply because radicalisation is more of a uniquely human behavioral issue which cannot really be approached by measuring non-human activity.

Another problem of these works are the data sets that they use. Only the Penn State work actively used data from before 2019, which was the year that Youtube introduced a lot more regulation relating to fringe political content. Ever since these new regulations, many channels have adapted their content to remain on the site, so data from this newer era cannot address the claims of radicalisation that have been made over many years now. Personally, I know that content creators themselves also partially understand how the Youtube algorithm works and use this knowledge to basically play around many limitations that it creates for those who make fringe political content. For example, collaborations between creators where they physically create content together, exposes both audiences to potentially new content

and bypasses the algorithm these papers are trying to test. Other examples include things like clickbait, where previews of videos use strong imagery or catchy titles to attract people from their recommendations. It should also be noted that people do not need to watch other content creators in order to become radicalized. Sometimes content creators themselves can become more overtly political or even drift into conspiracy territory. As long as those users do not violate the terms of service, their content can remain on the site and their audience will be exposed to it, making the chance of radicalisation statistically more likely. After analyzing the research methods of the three studies I found that none of the studies actually account for any of these issues which, in my eyes, dramatically lowers their academic value in answering our research question. The only functional conclusions we can use, are the facts that Youtube itself is actively trying to suppress fringe political content by modifying their terms of service and that it is trying to use its algorithm to make sure that its users are not exposed to more radical content. The only difficulty we have, is that it is extremely difficult to investigate how effective these attempts actually are. Studying the effects of online political discourse on society is very difficult. There are so many variables to consider and the sheer interdisciplinary nature and scale of such projects make it difficult to do appropriate research in this field as of right now. I believe this current situation leaves the door open for research with lower standards. While the narrative that the algorithm would cause extremism seems to be false, it is not really the right question to ask. A more appropriate question would be: what role does borderline or even disingenuous online content play in the political radicalisation of individuals? This question also fits better in the current domestic situation in the US. Just this month a young man opened fire in a local Buffalo supermarket killing ten people in the name of the Great Replacement Theory which is a right wing conspiracy propagated by many online figureheads and even Fox News's Tucker Carlson. The theory itself is a very obvious conspiracy that seems to be taken straight from the fascist playbook (Eco, 1995). The point

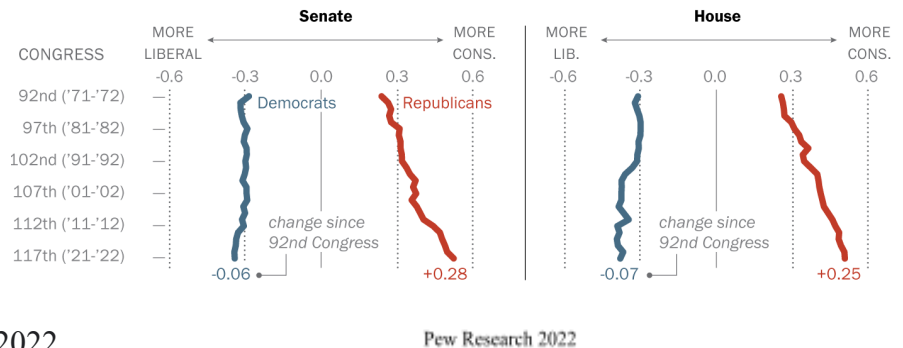
remains that extremist political content so often served on new media platforms has a genuine impact on American Society, as currently around 61 percent of Trump voters agree with the sentiment behind the Great Replacement Theory (Romano, 2022). The moment a large group of political actors lose touch with reality, we can see dangerous results. In the case of the US it culminated in the grim events we saw on January sixth, where a MAGA crowd was so convinced the election was stolen, they attempted a coup d'etat. However due to its failure, we cannot label this an elevation of political gridlock. It is however an event that is indicative of the Republican shift to the right, which is currently causing a modern record high in the partisan divide.

The Partisan Divide

An essential component to political gridlock in the US is its partisan divide. As we discussed previously the two party system in the US is inherently more susceptible to gridlock. This is because there are only two parties. This is not inherently the cause of gridlock but as soon as the partisan divide starts to widen, gridlock occurs as legislators find common ground far less often. This is also supported by the literature on the topic as Baruch College researcher David R. Jones states: *“higher party polarization increases the likelihood of encountering gridlock on a given proposal”* (2001). This helps us contextualize US political gridlock more as polarization and its subsequent partisan divide has steadily increased over the last decade. In 2014 it was already at record breaking levels in the post civil war era. Data from Pew Research suggested that ideologically *“92% of Republicans are to the right of the median Democrat, and 94% of Democrats are to the left of the median Republican.”* (2014) It even goes further, as 36% of Republicans viewed the democratic party as a threat to the nation’s wellbeing (Pew Research, 2014). The widening of the ideological divide is also visible in Capitol Hill itself, as polarization has increased significantly since the previous

administrations. This can be seen in the graph (Pew Research, 2022). This polarization that we see, is caused by the general right wing turn of the republican party that resulted in them “drifting off the spectrum entirely” as Chomsky explained in an interview with Al Jazeera in 2022.

Average ideology of members, by Congress



It is not difficult to see the role new media has played in helping to facilitate partisan animosity. A 2020 article published in the journal *Science* concluded that “*In recent years, social media companies like Facebook and Twitter have played an influential role in political discourse, intensifying political sectarianism*”(Finkel et al., 2020). In August 2021, a different group of academics reviewed sets of empirical evidence in an article in the journal *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. They also came to a similar conclusion as Finkel et al., stating that “*Although social media is unlikely to be the main driver of polarization,*” they concluded, “*we posit that it is often a key facilitator*”(Van Bavel et al., 2021). From this, I also conclude new media's connection to increased polarization directly influences its role in facilitating political gridlock.

CONCLUSION

When a certain administration is struggling substantially to pass any sort of systemic change in order to implement their legislative agenda, we have a political situation we can interpret as gridlocked. This has been the state of modern American politics for some time now and the likelihood of this changing in the future seems low. The biggest reasons for this come down to the structure of American democracy and a general lack of accountability for its politicians that has fostered a political climate susceptible to gridlock. Consequently, the concentrated wealth of the country has made it possible to exploit the gridlocked system in order to make the government immune to public opinion, instead opting to serve the wealthiest ten percent of economic elites (Page & Gillens, 2011). All of this is made possible by a constant flow of system supportive propaganda that carefully constructs certain narratives using capitalist commodification of information in order to promote financial agendas of certain industries and political status quo (Chomsky, 1988). However in the last fifteen years or so, the internet has changed this dynamic, as many people leave traditional media behind in favor of internet based new media (Pew Research, 2022) . This has changed the dynamic of media and political discourse which in turn relates to gridlock. On the one hand it makes political organizing easier. In addition to giving a modicum of power to the American people, it also helps in improving political transparency and gives a voice to lesser known or anti-status quo politics.

However these positive aspects that should improve gridlock are counteracted by multiple phenomena that outweigh and ultimately worsen political gridlock in the US. For one, the largest new media platforms like Youtube lean to the right politically and this allows Republican talking points to dominate the fast paced nature of online political discourse. Secondly, large new media platforms like Facebook and Youtube are complicit in political radicalisation. Even though they may not explicitly radicalize people on purpose, new media

in general has been used to promote dangerous ideas like the Stop the Steal movement and QAnon conspiracies which eventually led up to the events on January sixth. All of these factors culminate in the Republican Party and its voter base moving even further to the right which affects political polarization significantly. In turn, it is this polarization that causes the state of gridlocked American Politics we currently see.

Personal Recommendations for Further Research

While I was writing this thesis, it became clear that analyzing online political discourse is challenging. This has a few reasons. On the one hand, websites like Youtube and Facebook allow for a large level of anonymity. This privacy and anonymity are inherent to the internet but it makes research into certain topics very difficult. This is also why I, a third year bachelor's student, feel that my criticism is very much accurate, when it comes to the studies I referred to, when I talked about online radicalisation claims. The research methods these studies used, are simply ineffective for measuring something as complicated and interdisciplinary as political radicalisation. I also noticed how none of the research on this topic I mentioned adequately addressed how content creators actually contribute to shaping certain ideas in the minds of their followers. These studies make no mention of algorithmic manipulation by content creators themselves. Overall this research seems to be of low quality standards and I feel that this type of research on online radicalisation needs more attention from other researchers. Most people consume online political content privately. The way the ideas they are faced with interact with previously established biases and how much this impacts their actions in the real world, is very difficult to quantify. The relationship behind the reasoning and motivations of individual people and then in turn how this affects society as a whole, is a complicated situation to analyze. Further research should connect these issues and provide solutions for it.

I would also like to mention that further research into online corporate propaganda should be considered. As we established, the internet is double-sided in its political impact but as corporate influence increases some of these effects could change. This is because the potential market cap for internet discourse and its potential audience is still not reached as we saw in the Digital Report. It is inevitable, in a capitalist world, that corporations want to influence online discourse because of the potential profits or/and the danger to the political status quo. The corporate influence on online discourse should be monitored closely and should be analyzed by researchers. New media is what people will use and it will become the new standard. It provides a way to escape corporate media control and active monitoring of the space is required in order to sound the alarm when corporate propaganda is to increase more. I think this is especially necessary in the face of climate change and its dangerous predictions. Corporate propaganda can inhibit and steer discourse away from finding ways to slow down the process of further environmental destruction in the same way it is doing now with more traditional media. I believe the first step to solving complicated problems is research. Therefore further research on corporate propaganda in the growing world of new media is a necessity. If we cannot have functioning discussions on climate change solutions, we might not be able to prevent further devastation of our planet.

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Note: The Pew Research sources feature a special style as stated by their terms of use, therefore I have compiled them here separately.

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2021/09/20/news-consumption-across-social-media-in-2021/>

For analytics on social media:

Socialblade: <https://socialblade.com/>

Transparency tube: <https://transparency.tube/>