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Module 3 Comparative News Analysis

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As a result decades over end of never-ending climate change due to corporate pollution, much of the western seaboard of the United States is being consumed by fires which, so far, have left at least 35 people dead, as reported by the Washington Post, NPR, and the New York Times, as reported on by Paulina Firozi and Andrew Freedman, Laurel Wamsley, and Thomas Fuller and Jack Healy for their respective organizations. As organizations, all three are traditionally rated as left-of-center, with NPR being the closest to center; all three organizations are rated highly for their factuality, with NPR being the most factual of the three – and one of the most factual newspapers in the nation, too.

Both NPR and the Washington Post include the current count of dead in their titles; however, the Washington Post is a little bit more “sensationalized”, as it includes descriptive imagery of how the wildfires “continue to blanket the West in smoke” in the title. The New York Times title, instead of included the dead, talks about how the fires are burning out of control and that the west coast now “faces the unimaginable”. Beyond the differences in titles, however, much of what is contained within these three papers is almost indistinguishable: whilst each writer has their own style, the content that they discuss is the same, each talking about the size of land that has been destroyed. Of these three articles, the New York Times is perhaps the most unique, as it talks a lot about how the fire is now shifting, threatening to destroy the progress firefighters have made in putting out the fires, as well as bringing up how the fires have been getting worse and worse over the years. The Washington Post mentions how Trump threatened to cut California’s relief aid as a political gotcha, and NPR mentions how the governor of Washington called these wildfires “apocalyptic”.

To be fair? They completely are. In California, 24 people are dead; in Oregon, at least ten share that fate alongside an unknown number in Washington. Just like with the damages from COVID, there’s no way to tell just how costly this will be as of yet, and all three articles report the same, harrowing tale: if we do not do anything about climate change, these fires will only get worse. That makes these fires political, but just like wearing a mask to keep people safe, it just makes me wonder why? How did the idea that we should keep our world livable become so controversial and political, especially now that widespread fires are killing people and uprooting so many others? Something that I noticed, especially when looking up the bias of these sources, is that it seems to be political now to say things – even if they’re somewhat emotional – about climate change being real and existing, even in the face of scientists who all agree that it does, even as California, Oregon, and Washington all burn.

Is listening to science really that political?

Firozi, P., & Freedman, A. (2020, September 14). At least 35 dead as wildfires continue to blanket West Coast in smoke. Retrieved September 15, 2020, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/09/14/wildfires-oregon-california-washington/

Fuller, T., & Healy, J. (2020, September 13). As Wildfires Burn Out of Control, the West Coast Faces the Unimaginable. Retrieved September 15, 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/13/us/Wildfires-Oregon-California-Washington.html

Wamsley, L. (2020, September 14). At Least 35 Dead As Wildfires Rampage Along The West Coast. Retrieved September 15, 2020, from https://www.npr.org/2020/09/14/912739721/at-least-35-dead-as-wildfires-rampage-along-the-west-coast