The Impact of Media Supply on Bureaucratic Information Collection

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Julia Christensen[†]

August 28, 2025

Abstract

Bureaucrats rely on news media to navigate a complex information environment and make strategic decisions, yet the volume of news is overwhelming. Agencies, therefore, contract private firms to distill news into daily "clipbooks" of relevant stories. I analyze these clipbooks across U.S. executive agencies and find a systematic skew: conservative news sources appear more often in briefings for conservative agencies like Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The skew does not appear to arise from biased news selection; instead, it mirrors the news supply–conservative outlets generally produce less content about liberal agencies, and vice versa. Because of this supply asymmetry, liberal agencies receive very little news from conservative sources. While the pattern is generally stable across administrations, there is some evidence of biased demand during Trump's second term, representing a clear departure from prior periods. I close by discussing how these disparities in coverage may affect agency decision making and representation.

[†] PhD Candidate, University of California, Berkeley, jbchristensen@berkeley.edu.

1. Introduction

The news media produces a vast amount of politically relevant information every day–far more than any individual could possibly consume. As a result, news exposure depends not only on what the media produces but also on how information is collected and filtered. For political elites, the stakes of news collection are particularly high. Because timely political information can shape decisions, federal agencies invest heavily in monitoring, curating, and disseminating news. Yet these efforts are constrained by limited time and resources, forcing agencies to strategically prioritize the most important and relevant news.

This paper examines these processes within U.S. federal bureaucracies, revealing that agencies have institutionalized systems for producing daily news compilations–typically called daily news briefings, summaries, or "clipbooks." The content of these briefings reflects supply of news as well as the personal, political, and policy goals of agencies and those individuals tasked with overseeing news collection. Despite strong incentives for comprehensive news collection, the very system designed to ensure that officials are well-informed can itself filter, distort, or politicize information. These processes matter: the information that reaches federal decisionmakers determines which actors, issues, and narratives are most visible and shapes beliefs about the larger strategic environment. By tracing how agencies collect and process news, this paper sheds light on an often-overlooked mechanism through which media affects government behavior.

Although scholars have shown that media can shape the behavior of elected officials (e.g. Karpowitz 2009; Sevenans 2017a; Vliegenthart, Walgrave, Wouters, et al. 2016; Vliegenthart, Walgrave, Baumgartner, et al. 2016; Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010), we still know surprisingly little about their actual news exposure,[1] and even less about how unelected bureaucrats consume news media. This paper addresses that gap by examining why federal agencies collect news, revealing how agency news exposure is shaped by the supply of relevant news and how agency politicization affects demand for partisan news content.

To investigate agency news collection, I assemble a unique dataset of more than 2,000 daily news briefings from four executive agencies–the Department of Interior (DOI), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), and Department of Homeland Security (DHS)–along with government manuals, contracts, and internal emails obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and archival research. These materials allow me to analyze how agencies curate media and to compare news collection across sixteen agencies and four presidential administrations.

To understand how and why agencies produce news briefings, I combine insights from existing theory with evidence from internal government records. This analysis builds on work in agenda-setting, mediatization, and governing with the news, which shows that media coverage helps structure the ways elites perceive

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[1]Although see Karpowitz (2009), Willis (2013), and Severin-Nielsen et al. (2025).

the world (Kingdon 1992; Baumgartner and Jones 2015; T. E. Cook 1998; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). In a complex, overwhelming media environment, media monitoring tools like daily news briefings structure the search for information and consequently shape the behavior of elite actors. Consistent with prior research, internal records show that agency media monitoring serves several overlapping purposes. News provides information essential for public communications, supports policymaking, and allows agencies to track the actions of other political actors. These combined motives drive agencies to invest in systems for collecting broad and comprehensive news coverage. Yet the scope and content of these briefings are ultimately constrained by both the supply of relevant news and the preferences of those involved in news collection. One striking example occurred in 2017, when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) dismissed its news-briefing provider for including coverage that portrayed agency leadership too negatively. Such cases highlight the potential for bias in news briefings. To evaluate representativeness, I compare coverage from partisan news sources across agencies and administrations.

I begin by examining whether agencies preferentially select news sources that align with their own ideological tendencies. While agency ideology is correlated with the partisan composition of the briefings, this pattern reflects asymmetries in the supply of news rather than biased selection. Right-leaning outlets produce disproportionately fewer stories about liberal agencies, and left-leaning outlets generate fewer stories about conservative agencies. By matching articles in the briefings to the broader news supply, I show that after taking publication differences into account, there is no evidence of preferential selection. Moreover, this supply-side asymmetry is not confined to the agencies in my briefing sample. Across 165 federal agencies, there is still a sizable asymmetry in the supply of news. These findings are consistent with archival evidence and existing theory suggesting that agencies have strong incentives to pursue accurate and comprehensive monitoring, but they also raise new concerns about the consequences of asymmetric news supply. Even when selection is unbiased, the final product can still be a partial and incomplete picture of public opinion and the larger political environment.

I also examine whether the news briefings change after a new President takes office. In line with comprehensive information-seeking, the distribution of partisan news in the Interior Department briefings was largely stable after Trump took office in 2017. Similarly, the Veterans Affairs briefings show little change after Biden took office in 2020. However, reflecting the recent politicization of government news consumption, the composition of briefings began to change after Trump took office in 2025. Specifically, since March 2025, the briefings show an anomalous increase in conservative news, concentrated at the beginning of the documents.

While agency news collection has always been shaped by the interaction between media monitoring tools and the media supply, the representativeness of news in the briefings is usually limited by the supply

of partisan news rather than preferential selection of ideologically-aligned news outlets. However, in a highly partisan climate where news has been politicized, incentives for unbiased information-seeking can be overwhelmed and lead agencies to prioritize collecting information from likeminded sources.

These disparities in partisan news coverage–whether driven by a skewed supply of news or preferential selection of co-partisan news sources–affect agencies by changing the information available to various decision makers. Research has established that the partisan slant of a news source affects its content (Groeling 2013; Broockman and Kalla 2025; Grossman, Margalit, and Mitts 2022; Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005). Thus, missing coverage from right- or left-leaning articles will affect an agency's information environment, and information has been shown to affect multiple aspects of elite decision making (e.g. Jablonski and Seim 2024; Baumgartner and Jones 2015; Karpowitz 2009). By changing the agency's information environment, news briefings shape agency behavior.

2. Background

Research on US bureaucracies emphasizes the importance of information and specialization within bureaucracies (e.g. Workman 2015; Gailmard and Patty 2012), yet we know surprisingly little about why bureaucrats consume news or how media collection shapes their information environments. News contains valuable information that agencies use to to inform their communications efforts, policy implementation, and other strategic decisions. However, bureaucrats have limited time to search for and consume information (Baumgartner and Jones 2015). This problem has been intensified by the rise of the internet and fragmentation of news (Bawden and Robinson 2009). To solve this tradeoff, US agencies and other elite actors optimize information collection by creating daily news briefings. The content of these briefings depends on the agency's motives for media monitoring, the system for filtering and organizing news, and the underlying supply of news.

2.1. What are daily news briefings?

Like many political elites, federal agencies collect and distribute news. The particular tools used for media monitoring vary depending on exact needs and resources of the user, but all of them involve searching a range of sources for news about specific topics of interest (Sullivan 2012).[2]

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[2]While federal bureaucracies have more resources than many other elites, legislators and interest groups engage in similar topic-based media monitoring. For example, in the early 2010s, Richard Willis (2013) interviewed six congressional staffers about their offices' news collection efforts (Willis 2013). In his sample, all offices collected news about the officeholder, but the sophistication and scope of the collection process differed depending on the features of an officeholder's district, whether the officeholder was in the Senate or House, and the policy expertise of the staffers tasked with collecting clips. There is also evidence of media monitoring by interest groups. For example, a 2020 newsletter from the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) provides step-by-step instructions for setting up Google news alerts, explaining that "[f]or

To better understand the purpose of agency daily news summaries, I submitted Freedom of Information Act Requests (FOIAs) for internal emails, documents, and contracts related to custom daily media monitoring reports. I also reviewed contracts for media monitoring posted on USAspending.gov, examined solicitations for contracts on sam.gov, and searched through online archives where journalists and organizations post FOIA documents. Collectively, these documents reveal how the US government expends considerable resources on news collection and how news is circulated within government agencies.

Historically, news clipping services, government employees, and interns were tasked with identifying relevant news clips (Sullivan 2012). Sometimes, these clips were combined into daily 'clipbooks.' Other times, a written summary of the day's coverage was produced (often called a news summary or briefing).[3] The clipbooks and briefings were usually ordered by topic, with the most important stories appearing first (Sullivan 2012).

Today, most large agencies employ third party vendors to compile a electronic daily news briefing or clipbook that is emailed every morning to a large number of department staff.[4] According to a State department press manual, agencies outsource media monitoring "so [they] can focus on getting information to the press and public" (Sullivan 2012, 20). While government employees consume news outside of these clipbooks and briefings,[5] these documents are circulated widely and are consistently produced across a wide set of agencies and time periods. This consistency and ubiquity allows us to compare government news collection across time and agencies.

The market for custom news reports is dominated by four companies: Bulletin Intelligence/Cision,[6] Barbaricum, TechMIS, and Rendon.[7] Bulletin Intelligence's early employees were former members of the Reagan White House who had been previously tasked with producing Reagan's news summaries. Based on their websites and other government contracts, Barbaricum, TechMIS, and Rendon are veteran-owned military contractors. After Bulletin Intelligence became the producer of the White House news summaries and clipbooks in 2001, it began winning contracts for similar services with various agencies. By the mid-2010s, it was the main provider of agency news reports. Although it has continued to produce the White

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years, agencies and nonprofits trying to track media mentions were stuck with two less-than-ideal options. Big companies such as Cision and Meltwater do extremely thorough monitoring jobs, but at a price that is out of reach for most noncommercial public relations departments... Fortunately, Google Alerts is free and can unearth many more media mentions of your news or organization" (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 2020, 1).

[3]The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) briefings analyzed in this paper are an example of both types of news report. The reports begin with a short summary of each article, but in each summary, there is a link to the full text of the article, which is printed at the end of the document. See also the 2012 contract between the Justice Management Division (JMD) of the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Bulletin Intelligence for a description of each report type (produced under FOIA no. 136110).

[4]For a list of agency media monitoring contracts, see Appendix A.1.1.

[5]While reviewing online archives of documents produced through FOIA requests, I found many examples of other newsletters, Google news alerts, other automated alert systems, and emailed links to news coverage. For examples, see the Document Cloud links listed in Appendix A.2.1.

[6]Bulletin Intelligence was acquired by Cision, Inc in 2017 (Bulletin Intelligence 2025).

[7]See Appendix A.1.1 for a list of media monitoring contracts.

House news reports for every subsequent administration, Bulletin Intelligence began losing agency contracts to Barbaricum, TechMIS, and Rendon in the mid-2010s. Today, all four companies hold lucrative contracts for agency news briefings.

Agency news briefings are the product of a multi-step process.[8] First, the contractor and agency decide on a procedure for identifying potentially relevant articles. Usually, this process involves a mutually-agreed-upon set of keywords. Article collection is structured around a list of topics provided by the agency. Typically, these topics mirror the headings or section titles in the briefing document. The contractor then applies human judgement and an expert understanding of the agency to sort articles into the appropriate section of the briefing, remove irrelevant or redundant information, and produce a short 1-3 sentence summary of each article. Typically, the articles are then aggregated by 'story.' For each story, only one to four article summaries are provided.[9] For stories picked up by many news organizations, additional articles are cited at the bottom of the story but not separately summarized. Each article citation is accompanied by basic metadata about the article. Usually, this includes a link to the full text or video, article authors, publication date, circulation, and tone. Often, contractors are also required to maintain an accessible database of the media content cited in the briefings.

When complete, agency daily news briefings are circulated widely. Briefings are generally targeted at agency leadership and/or communications staff for the purpose of keeping them updated about all 'relevant' news regarding the agency and its mission.[10] The exact list of email recipients depends on the agency, but based on internal emails and news briefing contracts, agency news briefings are often sent to thousands of employees, including agency leadership.[11] According to a 2014 Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) contract, all of its 3,000-4,000 employees receive the news briefings.[12] In 2023, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported that approximately 5,000 of its employees received the daily news briefing.[13] Furthermore, internal emails confirm that the the briefings are of interest to top levels of agency leadership.[14]

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[8]See Appendix A.1.2 for relevant excerpts from media monitoring contracts.

[9]According to the Industry Question and Answer document for the 2018 DHS 'News Clipping Services' Solicitation (posted on sam.gov, notice ID 70RDAD18R00000012), these the article summaries should include information found in the specific article being cited: Q. "Would DHS prefer that the analyst team producing the service carefully weave together the most salient pieces of information from across sources, no matter where in each article that information is found, and even if the key story elements are not near a keyword?" A. Government's Response: DHS would like a simple synopsis taken directly from the article."

[10]The purpose and audience of the briefings is described in the media monitoring contracts. See Appendix A.1.2 for evidence.

[11]See also the TechMIS GSA schedule contract for the period of June 9, 2017 through June 8, 2027. According to this document, by 2017, it served over 50,000 government employees across four agencies and monitored over 50.5k traditional news sources (Mains 2017). In 2017, TechMIS tracked over 16.3k government websites, 40k news sources, 2k broadcast outlets, 8.5k think tanks and interest groups; and 400k social media and blogs (Mains 2017, 5).

[12]See the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) 2014 contract between Bulletin and 2019 contract with Barbaricum. Both contracts were produced in response to FOIA no. FOIA-2025-000404. In 2014, the NRC wrote "The audience is all NRC employees, approximately 4,000 individual readers" (p. 7). In 2019, the NRC wrote that "The audience is all NRC employees (approximately 3,000 individual readers)" (p. 8).

[13]See the 2023 DHS solicitation for News Clipping Service (posted on sam.gov, notice ID 70RDAD23Q00000050). Circulation is reported in a document entitled "Amendment 0004: News Clipping Services (NCS) Questions and Responses."

[14]These emails were produced in response to FOIAs submitted by journalists and political organizations and later posted to Document Cloud. See Appendix A.1.3 for a list of all individuals confirmed to have received DHS, DOI, VA, and USCIS news

In 2017, the Department of Interior (DOI) briefings were sent to the Secretary, Ryan Zinke, as well as other top leadership including his Chief of Staff and Press Secretary. Among other roles, numerous other recipients held positions related to communications, legislative affairs, intergovernmental affairs, and the budget office. In addition to staff who directly receive the full agency news briefing, some individual departments or offices copy a smaller set of relevant clips and send only these to their staff. Internal emails also reveal that employees forward the news clips as a way of starting other policy-relevant conversations.[15]

2.2. What news is collected by agencies?

The content of agency news briefs depends on the news demanded by an agency and the news supplied by news sources. In practice, the content depends on the set of sources being monitored, whether these sources produce news relevant to the agency, and why the agency is monitoring the news. Not all news or news sources are equally valuable to an agency. To explain why agency's engage in media monitoring and their minimum requirements for media monitoring, I examined all available agency contracts for custom media monitoring services.[16]

The contracts themselves say very little about source diversity. All fourteen agencies use broad language to describe which sources need to be monitored. Every agency required news collection from local and national sources, and all but two contracts also required news from broadcast and print sources. Four agencies also clarify that the company must search international sources, and two required Spanish-language sources. Other agencies provide an additional list of required source types (e.g. internet publications, magazines, legal journals, radio, and specialty press/trade journals). Only one contract contains quotas or other provisions for ensuring source diversity, and it only tracks the geographic diversity of local news coverage.[17] None of the contracts require that contractors monitor an ideologically-diverse set of sources.

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briefings.

[15]For example, in an email chain from May 2017, Department of Interior (DOI) employees discuss how to respond to a story about a petition in the Cape Cod (MA) Times. In another instance, in a July 19, 2018 email, Veterans Affairs employee Jake Leinenkugel writes "Please read Clip 5.6 about the Tomah VA. It is very insightful in many aspects as to Mental Health Care and perceptions within VAMC's. It is well written, factual with no editorialization. I think it is very pertinent for Commissioners to read prior to next week." For the DOI email chain, see document entitled "2019 11 Release Set 6 Doc 19 R", which was uploaded to Document Cloud by Lucy Wollman from the Western Values Project on November 25, 2019 (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6559502-2019-11-Release-Set-6-Doc). For the VA email chain, see document entitled "(8-2-19) 18-10575-F Releasable Records.pdf", which was uploaded by Muckrock Staff on August 12, 2019 (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6266324-8-2-19-18-10575-F-Releasable-Records-pdf/).

[16]Appendix A.1.2 contains a table of all 35 media monitoring contracts and government solicitations reviewed for this analysis and contains additional relevant excerpts from these contracts. Only 33 of these contained Statements of Work or other descriptions of the contract requirements. I included all contracts that I received through my own FOIAs as well as one that I found through Document Cloud. To find additional contract documents, I reviewed contract solicitations posted to sam.gov. When the government solicits quotes for new contracts, it often publishes a description of the contract requirements. Note that I did not collect all relevant solicitations. I focused on solicitations related to the documents analyzed in this paper (VA, DOI, DHS, USCIS). In total, I reviewed contract documents for 16 different agencies with a total value of over $25 million. Additional qualitative evidence from the contracts and internal emails can also be found in Appendix A.1.3 and A.1.4.

[17]The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) requires its contractor to collect local news in proportion to the census population of each state.

While the contracts may provide relatively little guidance about sources, we know that contractors have the capacity to monitor a vast number of sources. In a TechMIS document from 2017, the company claims to monitor over 50,500 traditional news sources (Mains 2017). According to the company, it tracked over 16,300 government websites, 40,000 news sources, 2,000 broadcast outlets, 8,500 think tanks and interest groups, and 400,000 social media and blogs (Mains 2017, 5).

Once an outlet is being monitored, agency priorities shape how individual articles are evaluated for relevance and importance. To identify these priorities, I examined agency contracts for explicit statements of purpose and contextualized them within existing research on media and politics. Broadly, agencies use news briefings to track their public communications, inform policy decisions, and guide strategic interactions with other actors. The emphasis an agency places on each of these functions influences how it selects and ranks news content. Reflecting these goals, we can understand news as serving at least three distinct roles within the agency.

First, media serves a public relations or communications-role within agencies. This communication-role has been described by prior work in political science and communications. This research emphasizes that agencies are not passive consumers of news. Rather, they engage in ongoing, strategic relationships with the media (T. E. Cook 1998; Gans 1979; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2017b). Journalists depend on agencies for information, which agencies leverage to shape public narratives. However, the media also exerts considerable influence on government (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Strömbäck 2008). Agencies also rely on the media to communicate not only with the public but also with interest groups and other branches of government.

Public communication is the most common purpose provided in the media monitoring contracts. Many of these contracts go beyond general statements, specifying that media tracking supports public communication efforts, helps identify misinformation, and aids in crisis response. In some instances, agencies explicitly link their communications activities to their core mission. This is evident in contracts from both public-facing agencies like the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and those that primarily interact with other institutions, such as the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).[18] For example, a 2013 VA contract describes communications as critical to informing veterans and their families about available benefits and programs. Similarly, the DEA highlights that its Office of National Media Affairs exists "to promote and amplify the mission and accomplishments of the DEA" and raise public awareness about U.S. drug laws and their consequences.[19]

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[18]See also the 2022 US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) news briefing solicitation (posted on sam.gov, notice ID 70SBUR22Q00000031). In the Statement of Work, USCIS wrote, "An executive news briefing will enhance the agency's effectiveness when communicating laws, regulations, policies, processes and procedures that affect employees and millions of customers. With the briefing, USCIS will be better equipped to strategically position messages to execute agency priorities."

[19]See the 2019 contract between the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Bulletin Intelligence (p. 4-5). Produced in response to FOIA no. 25-00431-F.

Many of the contracts also highlight the importance of tracking public opinion, usually in the context of their communications efforts. Multiple contracts describe a general need to monitor a "larger public conversation."[20] In comparison, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) explicitly cites a management directive requiring the Public Affairs Office to "keep NRC management advised of public interest in proposed policies, programs, and projects so that public affairs actions may be developed and executed effectively, and to inform NRC decision-making."[21]

Prior research can help us understand why bureaucracies use media as an indicator of public sentiment (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006; Wlezien and Soroka 2024). While bureaucrats are not elected, many political appointees are accountable to elected officials, and even career civil servants are attentive to media portrayals of their agency's work (Karlsen et al. 2020). For bureaucrats with limited direct feedback mechanisms, media coverage can serve as an important indicator of public sentiment. Scholars of authoritarian regimes have similarly recognized the value of media as a feedback mechanism, noting that censorship can be costly because it deprives governments of access to critical information (Lorentzen 2014; Distelhorst 2013; King, Pan, and Roberts 2013).

Second, news can provide information relevant to policymaking. Scholars of policy agenda setting have long recognized the importance of elite information environments (see Van Aelst and Walgrave 2017a). As described by Baumgartner and Jones (2015), media and other information sources influence policymaking by shaping how the government detects and defines policy problems. This policy-role appears in several contracts. In a 2020 contract, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) explains that "Emerging hazards identification, remedial strategy analysis, and regulatory development activities are built upon timely receipt, review, and analysis of news clips covering incidents occurring throughout the country...These clips are collected, analyzed for investigation (if appropriate)." In fact, due to the news briefings produced under past contracts, "serious product-related accidents reported by the news media have been brought to the attention of the Commission."[22] The Department of Labor (DOL) contracts also describe an investigative purpose: "The news clips serve as an alert to emerging issues, leads for potential DOL investigations, and information that can be shared internally about ongoing programs or activities...Clips sum up the story of DOL in action, and point to problem areas that DOL agencies may need to address."[23] The value of news

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[20]See the 2016 contract between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Bulletin Intelligence, produced in response to FOIA No. 2025-EPA-01013. See also the 2022 contract between the Small Business Administration (SBA) and Bulletin Intelligence, produced in response to FOIA No. 2025-001843. Similar language can also be found in the 2019 contract between the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Bulletin Intelligence (p. 4-5), produced in response to FOIA no. 25-00431-F.

[21]See the 2014 contract between Bulletin and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and Bulletin Intelligence, produced in response to FOIA No. FOIA-2025-000404.

[22]See the 2020 contract between the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and Barbaricum, p. 4-14. Produced in response to FOIA no. 25-F-00254.

[23]Per the 2020 contract between the Department of Labor (DOL) and TechMIS, p. 5. Produced in response to FOIA no. 2025-F-06163. See also the contract description in the USA Spending database: "the news clips serve as an alert to high visibility emerging issues, leads for potential DOL investigations, and information that can be shared internally about ongoing

has also been recognized outside of the domestic U.S. context. Across the world, news collection has been a key part of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) (Van Puyvelde and Rienzi 2023).

In practice, the line between the media's communications and policy roles can be blurred, especially when communicating with the public is critical to achieving policy outcomes. For example, previous studies as well as the contracts themselves explicitly connect communication to policy outcomes during emergencies (Miller and Goidel 2009; Bonnevie, Sittig, and Smyser 2021; Prue et al. 2003). In emergencies, agencies track media to determine the effectiveness of their communication efforts, to monitor misinformation, to coordinate with other agencies, and to identify the scope, causes, and consequences of the unfolding disaster.[24]

Third, agencies also use news to monitor other political actors. As T. E. Cook (1998) points out, the news provides useful information about the actions and positions of other political elites. While this information may be available through other channels, media coverage is often the most straightforward means of finding out what is going on in politics. In addition to monitoring external actors, agency leadership use news to monitor their agencies and reduce agency loss through "reality testing." As a third-party information source, principals use media to verify information about the performance of their agents (Karpowitz 2009; Burke and Greenstein 1989).

In the media monitoring contracts, agencies describe using the news briefings to monitor other political actors. Some agencies require a 'national news' section in their briefing "suitable to the needs of Department Officials who must be kept aware of important developments affecting the federal government broadly so they can interact with peers in the administration and congress."[25] Other agencies have sections dedicated to other branches of government. For example, Department of Justice (DOJ) news briefings have separate sections for "Judicial Nominees and Appointments" as well as "Administration, Congress, and Supreme Court."[26] Even if they do not have a dedicated section, agencies can also require contractors to search for articles about other government entities.[27] Beyond the federal government, agencies also track news coverage of state and local government. For example, the Department of Education requires that its news digest "must

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programs or activities" (PIID DOLOPS15C0011).

[24]See the 2016 contract between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Bulletin Intelligence, produced in response to FOIA no. 2025-EPA-01013. According to the EPA, news briefings are part of "its efforts to respond to media inquiries, strategically manage agency external public communications, and better enable the dissemination of public information during an emergency response activity." For another example, see the 2022 contract between the Small Business Administration (SBA) and Bulletin Intelligence.

[25]See the 2021 Department of Interior (DOI) solicitation for Customized Media Monitoring and Analysis Service (posted on sam.gov, notice ID DOIDFBO210022). Quote is from document entitled "REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)" (p. 2).

[26]See the 2012 contract between the Justice Management Division (JMD) of the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Bulletin Intelligence, the 2018 contract between the JMD and Rendon, and the 2022 contract between the JMD and Rendon. All contracts produced in response to FOIA no. FOIA 136110.

[27]For example the 2014 contract between Bulletin and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and Bulletin Intelligence requires that "the contractor shall include articles regarding international nuclear matters, articles that involve other government entities such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Energy (DOE), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) whose regulations, policies and/or activities may impact operations at the NRC, stories that involve a topic that impacts all federal employees but does not pertain to nuclear activities (i.e. government shutdown) and articles about security and radiation." Produced in response to FOIA no. FOIA-2025-000404.

provide up-to-date news to include what's being said in state houses, school board rooms, and on the streets around the country, in order to react and determine Department actions best suited to promote educational excellence."[28]

Ultimately, while the specific set of sources can vary, most agencies will be incentivized to collect news from a wide range of sources. For example, Agencies that prioritize learning about public opinion may prioritize collecting media from a diverse selection of widely-consumed sources, focusing on those that either reflect public opinion or have the most potential to shape public opinion. Alternatively, as predicted by T. E. Cook (1998), agencies that are highly dependent on other actors may seek out coverage of those actors, prioritizing outlets with specialized coverage of politics. Agencies with staff throughout the country may prioritize news from areas where their staff are located. In practice, many of these motives produce observationally-equivalent outcomes; however, they should all push agencies to collect news from a wide variety of sources. These goals also explain why agencies structure news collection around particular topics.

Most agencies collect news to satisfy multiple purposes. As discussed previously, the briefings are circulated widely within agencies. The content of the briefing is the result of a complex optimization process that balances the various needs of the agency, the preferences of the bureaucrats tasked with administering the contract, and other considerations. These last two points deserve greater consideration.

While agencies have strong incentives for comprehensive news collection, media monitoring contracts are managed by people within each agency. The individuals tasked with managing media monitoring could shape the content of the briefings in several ways. First, the interests of those managing the contracts may have an outsized effect on news selection. Many media monitoring contracts are coordinated through an agency's communications or public affairs office, but others are managed by other offices like the secretary's office or an office of legislative affairs.[29]

Alternatively, the ideological slant of an agency or its staff could affect the selection of news coverage. Prior studies of the mass public have observed that people gravitate towards co-partisan news sites (Mangold, Schoch, and Stier 2024). Compared to the mass public, elites have different motives for consuming news media. In general, these motives should discourage ideological self-selection of news, but ultimately, as described in the contracts, agency employees have input into the news collection process, and agency employees are human. In addition to producing variation across agencies, the ideological tendencies of key staff could also change during presidential transitions.

In a professional bureaucracy, we might expect the presidential administration to have minimal effects on the composition of sources in the news summaries. However, presidential transitions affect the composition

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[28]See the Statement of Work attached to the Department of Education's (EDU) 2024 solicitation for Daily News Digest (posted on sam.gov, notice ID 9199024Q20078).
[29]Based on descriptions of media monitoring contracts listed in Appendix A.1.1.

of agencies and their leadership. Evidence from internal emails suggests that political appointees have input into contracting decisions and help administer the contracts.[30] Although there is more stability among civil servants, they also tend to become more aligned with the party in power (Geys et al. 2024; Bolton, De Figueiredo, and Lewis 2021)

Two real-world incidents during the first Trump administration raise the possibility of additional concerns. Under certain conditions, these considerations can dominate the general tendency of agencies to adopt comprehensive, wide-ranging approaches to news collection. In 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) first pressured and then fired Bulletin Intelligence during a dispute about the amount of negative coverage in the daily news briefing. In particular, staffers complained about sending negative stories about their leader "everyone" (Leber, Kroll, and Choma 2017; Choma and Leber 2016). Later during the first Trump administration, the Justice Department fired TechMIS for including "a blog post from a white nationalist website that used an anti-Semitic slur" (Barrett 2019).

In both cases, agencies narrowed the scope of their news briefings to control what stories circulated. Since briefings reach a wide and diverse audience, leaders may restrict content to manipulate the agency's information environment for political or personal gain, or to reduce the spread of inaccurate or offensive articles. Either way, these efforts may also affect the partisan slant of news included in the briefings. Most obviously, direct manipulation for political or personal gain could affect the balance of partisan news because partisan news sources cover co-partisans more favorably (Groeling 2013). However, judgements about source accuracy or trustworthiness could also affect source composition by disproportionately affecting conservative news. There are relatively few sizable center-right news sources in the United States,[31] so most conservative news is produced by far-right sources. Restricting or loosening standards for inclusion will therefore affect a greater portion of the market for right-leaning news.

In summary, news collection within agencies is the product of multiple motives and goals. The final product will depend on the supply of relevant news and agency priorities, which vary depending on the needs of the agency and the individuals in charge of news collection. The identity and preferences of those tasked with administering media monitoring contracts could affect the partisan composition of the news briefings producing variation across agencies or presidential administrations. Because the partisan slant of a news source strongly shapes story selection and framing (Broockman and Kalla 2025; Grossman, Margalit, and Mitts 2022; Groeling 2013; Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005), even modest asymmetries in partisan content can significantly influence the information agencies receive.

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[30] See Appendix A.1.3 and A.1.4 for evidence.

[31] See appendix A.4.

3. Methods

Previous attempts to study elite news consumption relied on interviews and surveys (Kingdon 1992; Sevenans 2017a, 2017b; Sevenans, Walgrave, and Joanna Epping 2016). However, surveys and interviews may underestimate the role of news.[32] In general, elite recollection of media consumption may be inadequate when they regularly review large volumes of information from a wide variety of sources. In such contexts, self-reports may fail to capture the scope and nature of news exposure. While internal government records have limitations, they offer a more detailed and verifiable foundation for studying elite communication.

To examine how news briefings affect agency information environments, I break down the news briefings by the partisan slant of their sources and then compare their composition across agencies and time periods. I also examine whether there is evidence of an ideological- or politically-motivated selection process.

3.1. Daily News Briefs

For this paper, I collected custom news briefings produced for US executive agencies by private contractors.[33] To identify contractors, I used USAspending, which is the US government's official database of federal spending information, including information about federal awards such as contracts, grants, and loans ("USAspending" n.d.). I searched USAspending for 'media monitoring' contracts, focusing on contracts for 'custom media monitoring reports.' In total, I identified relevant contracts for 26 federal agencies.[34] On average, each contract is worth approximately $200,000 per year. After identifying contractors, I searched publicly-available databases and submitted FOIAs for briefings produced by each contractor.[35] Based on the number of daily briefings and presence across multiple administrations, I selected four sets of briefings for additional analysis. Collectively, these briefings were produced by three different third-party contractors under four presidential administrations.

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[32]Kingdon (1992) himself points out that his interviews may underestimate the role of media, especially specialized news sources (p. 59-60).

[33]To consistently identify daily news reports and reduce false negatives, FOIA requests and database search queries need to be specific. Reports produced by third parties were relatively easy to identify because third-party contractors use consistent naming conventions across their reports and often include the company name in their reports.

[34]See Appendix A.1.1.

[35]All of the DOI, DHS, USCIS, and VA documents were publicly available. Although I submitted FOIA requests for daily news reports to fifteen agencies, I have received few documents from these FOIA requests. Because I had more success when I requested the contracts themselves, some of the qualitative analysis in this paper relies on documents produced through my FOIA requests. In addition to the briefings analyzed in this paper, I also received or identified around 1,500 more briefings from another 28 agencies, councils, and departments. While these documents were not parsed, cleaned, and included in the quantitative analysis, they informed the qualitative analysis in this paper.

Table 1: Sample of daily news briefings. Number of articles and unique sources listed are totals. Website domains are used to identify unique sources. Because the DOI briefings did not have hyperlinks, domains had to be added by hand. Due to the time required, the URLs for some local, general-interest news sources were not collected. Unique sources in the DOI briefings are an estimate based on the number of unique domains and the number of unique names found in the final cleaned data.

Briefing	Dates	Articles	Avg Articles per Day	Unique Sources	Avg Unique Sources per Day
DOI	213	31,380	147.3	727–1,291[*]	51.0–56.2[*]
VA	233	6,099	26.2	1,664	24.1
USCIS	842	41,737	49.9	1,689	35.0
DHS	543	56,208	103.5	1,265	35.7

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and **US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS)** – The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for policy areas and agencies related to immigration, security, and terrorism (Homeland Security 2025). The US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) is a sub-agency of DHS tasked with administering the US naturalization and immigration system (Citizenship and Service 2025). Webpages for TechMIS-produced USCIS and DHS news briefings are indexed and can be found through a search engine like Google.[36] USCIS news summaries can be downloaded as word documents (`.docx`) and are available from January 2022. DHS news summaries from January 2024 onward can be downloaded as `.html` documents. All of the USCIS and DHS briefings in the sample are produced by TechMIS. In total, I collected USCIS briefings from February 1, 2022 through July 14, 2025 ($n = 815$) and DHS briefings from January 2, 2024 through July 14, 2025 ($n = 503$).[37] In both briefings, the articles were hyperlinked, allowing for matching based on URL host or domain. However, for some video and radio sources, the hyperlink pointed to a hosting service (e.g. "youtube.com", "api.criticalmention.com", etc.). These sources were matched by name using the hyperlink text. A small number of sources were excluded from the analysis because they did not have URLs or identifiable names (e.g. "here", "noon", "5 oclock news"). For more information, including a full list of unidentifiable hosts, domains, and names, see Appendix A.2.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides healthcare and benefits for US military veterans and their families (Veterans Affairs 2025). VA daily news briefings from 2020 and 2021 were produced by Barbaricum and collected by the Veterans Affairs History Office as part of a Covid-19 archive collection.[38] In total, this archive contains VA daily news briefings from June 3, 2020 through February 25, 2021 ($n = 233$). While these documents are PDFs, the hyperlinks are still

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[36]Example link to DHS briefing: https://dhs.techmis.com/epub/2024/Oct/3753706/3/todaysbrief/#page/epubdhs/DHS%20Morning%20Briefing%20(10-3-24).html.

[37]Due to the publishing schedule of the briefings, briefings are not produced every day. USCIS briefings are only produced for weekdays. No DHS or USCIS briefings are produced on national holidays.

[38]The finding guide for the VA Covid-19 archive can be found here: https://department.va.gov/history/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2024/10/VA-History-Office-COVID-19.pdf.

functional, so they could be matched using the same process applied to the DHS and USCIS reports.

Department of the Interior (DOI) – The US Department of Interior (DOI) is responsible for numerous policy areas relating to national parks, wildlife, Native Americans, energy, and US territories (Interior 2025). A large number of DOI news briefings have been posted on documentcloud.org, which is a website where newsrooms and and independent journalists post documents, especially documents produced following FOIA requests. In order to post documents publicly, an account must be verified as belonging to a journalist or other approved organization. Using documentcloud.org, I found daily news reports from the Department of Interior (DOI) from February 19, 2015 to November 13, 2018 ($n = 213$). All of the DOI reports were created by Bulletin Intelligence.

Unlike the other agencies, the DOI sample is not complete, and depends on the FOIAs submitted by journalists and non-profits.[39] Thus, briefings are more likely to be in the sample if they mention topics related to FOIAs from journalists or interest groups. While this could introduce bias, topics become more or less relevant over time. For example, FOIAs prompted by Ryan Zinke's corruption scandal would be limited to time periods where he was suspected of malfeasance. This means that the potential bias is issue-specific and time-bound, rather than systematically skewing the entire dataset. Moreover, if temporary spikes in FOIA-related topics are drive the overall results, the results would vary over time. To test for sampling bias, I verify that my results are consistent across the whole time period covered by the briefings.[40]

Because the hyperlinks were stripped from these pdfs, identifying the DOI sources required a different process.[41] To convert the DOI briefings into structured data, I used the Gemini 2.0 Flash large language model (LLM) to identify any news sources found in the briefings. I instructed the LLM to reproduce the exact text of each source, including any typos. To correct any misclassifications, I manually validated the resulting list of sources and added standardized names. I then split the documents by heading and searched each section for text snippets associated with each source. Helpfully, the briefings use a standardized format to cite news articles. Source names are followed by metadata about the article in parenthesis. Thus, to identify sources cited in the briefings, I searched only text immediately prior to an opening parenthesis ("("). Lastly, I categorized the standardized source names and added website URLs.

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[39]The composition of the DOI briefing sample depends on the documents uploaded to Document Cloud and the FOIAs that produced them. In total, I identified sixty six relevant uploads. See Appendix A.2.1 for a list of the documents, links, and relevant metadata. Based on the document titles, tags, and other metadata, some of the FOIAs concerned Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, but other FOIAs sought information relevant to other topics like Ryan Zinke's corruption scandal in 2018. Many of the documents were uploaded by environmental nonprofits. Out of 213 briefings, 87 mention 'bears ears' at least once and 95 mention 'bears ears' or 'grand staircase.' About half of the briefings are from 2017 (122). Only about a quarter of the briefings are from 2015 to 2016 (43).

[40]See Appendix A.3 and A.4.

[41]See Appendix A.2 for a full description of this process.

3.2. Categorizing Sources

Parsing the briefings by source reveals that government-produced news briefings expose bureaucrats to a far broader and more diverse range of news sources than is typically consumed by the general public. The content of these briefings reflects a mix of general interest, local, specialized, and partisan media, which is structured around agency priorities.

Source scope - To characterize the content of agency news summaries, I first categorized the scope and medium of each news source. I started by matching the briefings to a list of US news sources from ABYZ News Links (ABYZ Links), which is a directory of links to online news sources.[42] ABYZ Links identifies news sources by name and website, and it categorizes news sources by location, geographic scope, media type, media focus, and language.[43] When sources could not be matched to ABYZ Links, I filled in the missing information based on my own review of the news source. When possible, I matched news sources to the briefings by website host or domain.[44]

Notably, the briefings are not limited to widely consumed, national news sources.[45] On an average day, the briefings contain 24 to 51 unique sources and 26 to 147 articles (Table 1). They contain large amounts of specialized news outlets (15-30% of articles). All of the briefings contain large amounts of news from government-oriented news outlets (e.g. The Hill) and business-focused outlets (e.g. Forbes), but other sources reflect the policy-domain of the agency. For example, immigration-related agencies contain news from sources like the Border Report, and the DOI has significant amounts of coverage from energy- or environment-focused publications. The news briefs also contain a diverse and sizable set of local news sources. Op-Eds are well-represented and typically have a dedicated section of the news briefs (approx. 6.1% of all articles).

Partisan slant - Evidence of large differences in the partisan slant of briefing sources across agencies or presidential administrations could indicate an ideological or politically-motivated selection process. Alternatively, variation could be caused by an underlying disparity in the supply of news. Either way, the partisan slant of the sources in an agency's briefings shape its information environment.

To compare news exposure across agencies and presidential administrations, I match the sources in the briefings to partisan bias scores, which measure the liberal or conservative slant of a sources. In this paper, I show the results using scores from the website Media Bias Fact Check (MBFC).[46] However, I also replicated

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[42]ABYZ News Links can be found at the following website: abyzlinks.com. ABYZ News Links has been used in other research including Lutscher (2023) and Matter and Widmer (2021), and has been used by Media Cloud to identify news sources (Media Cloud Blog 2020).

[43]For more details about categorization of sources, see Appendix A.2.5.

[44]For more details about the merging process, see Appendix A.2.4.

[45]See Appendix A.3.3 for a detailed breakdown of the briefings according to source type.

[46]For more information about MBFC and the partisan slant scores, see Appendix A.4.1. See A.5.2. for more details about dropped news sources and articles.

the main results with slightly less comprehensive sets of scores from Guess (2021) and Allsides.

When analyzing partisan bias, I excluded three types of sources: local general interest news sources (24.1%), government websites (0.2%), and sources with no identifiable URLs or names (0.1%).[47] Local general interest sources are defined by their geographic scope, prioritizing news and stories that directly impact the residents of the community they serve. These stories can include national politics, but they more often cover topics like local and state politics, local sports, and entertainment. General interest local sources were dropped because the MBFC scores were less complete for local news sources, and there was less agreement between the MBFC and Allsides scores for local general interest sources.[48] News outlets that focus exclusively on local or state politics (e.g. the Oregon Capital Chronicle) are included.

The news briefings tend to contain more center or liberal-leaning news, although there is variation across agencies and briefings. After excluding government and general interest local news, 5.4% of the articles in the briefings could not be matched to MBFC scores.[49] The amount of right-leaning news varies considerably across the briefings. The VA and DOI briefings contain relatively little right-leaning news (8.8% and 18.5% respectively) while the DHS and USCIS briefings contain relatively more right-leaning news (27.1% and 33.5% respectively).

3.3. Agencies

Due to the structure of the DOI and DHS news briefings, the four sets of briefings can be used to study news collection for 16 separate agencies.[50] Both the DHS and DOI are large cabinet agencies that oversee many smaller agencies, bureaus, and offices. Their briefings are broken into sections, and some of these sections are dedicated to specific subagencies (see Table 2). Thus, the DOI and DHS briefings can be used to estimate the news collection for 15 different agencies. Estimates of DHS and DOI news collection use the whole briefing, including sections that do not correspond to a specific subagency (e.g. "top news," "water rights," "cybersecurity," etc.). Estimates for their subagencies use only the section of the briefing corresponding to

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[47]For more details about dropped news sources and articles, see A.5.2. Government websites were identified as those with .mil or .gov domains. Several additional government websites were identified during the hand-coding process. These include other military websites like "dvidshub.net" and "usni.org" as well as some local government websites like "countynewscenter.com," "lincolncityhomepage.com," and "genesee.ny.us."

[48]See Appendix A.4.1 and A.4.2.

[49]Of these, most briefings are missing partisan scores for less than 6% of articles; however, the VA briefing is missing scores for 29.3% of articles. The VA briefing has more missing scores because it contains relatively more news from smaller, specialized news outlets.

[50]See Appendix A.2.6 for more details about briefing sections and agencies. The VA and USCIS briefings do not have any headings that correspond to sub-agencies. The DOI news briefings has section headings for the following sub-agencies: US Geological Service (GS), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), National Parks Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). Because the DOI headings changes partway through 2017, a heading called BIA is only available for 2017-2018. The BOR section is not included in every briefing and does not appear in any of the available briefings from 2015. Headings for all other DOI sub-agencies are available for the whole time period from 2015-2018. The DHS news briefing has sections for the following sub-agencies: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (USICE), Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Customs and Border protection (USCBP), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Coast Guard (CG), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and Secret Service (SS).

the subagency. Because USCIS has its own dedicated section of the DHS news summary, the USCIS results are estimated twice. The first estimate is based on the separate USCIS news briefing. The second is based on the USCIS section of the DHS news briefing.

To test for ideologically-biased selection of news, I then matched these agencies to agency ideology scores from Richardson, Clinton, and Lewis (2018). These ideology scores are based on a 2014 survey of 1,500 political appointees and career bureaucrats with policy-making authority. Respondents were asked to characterize the long-term policy views of government agencies as liberal, conservative, or neither, and their responses were used to construct ideology scores for 165 different agencies.[51] The resulting ideology scores range from -1.94 to 1.93. The sixteen agencies in the briefing dataset range from -1.59 to 1.79.

Table 2: Agency samples after removing local general interest sources and government websites.

Briefing	Agency	Name	Part of Briefing	Years	Total Articles	Total Dates
DOI	DOI	Department of Interior	Whole Briefing	2015-2018	26,196	213
DOI	BLM	Bureau of Land Management	Section	2015-2018	527	174
DOI	FWS	Fish and Wildlife Service	Section	2015-2018	988	197
DOI	GS	US Geological Survey	Section	2015-2018	308	130
DOI	NPS	National Park Service	Section	2015-2018	1,406	205
DOI	BOR	Bureau of Reclamation	Section	2016-2018	95	58
DOI	BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs	Section	2017-2018	219	98
VA	VA	Department of Veterans Affairs	Whole Briefing	2020-2021	2,391	230
USCIS	USCIS	US Citizenship and Immigration Service	Whole Briefing	2022-2025	25,222	842
DHS	DHS	Department of Homeland Security	Whole Briefing	2024-2025	48,575	543
DHS	CG	Coast Guard	Section	2024-2025	1,634	462
DHS	FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency	Section	2024-2025	4,713	531
DHS	SS	Secret Service	Section	2024-2025	1,646	430
DHS	TSA	Transportation Security Agency	Section	2024-2025	893	344
DHS	USCBP	Customs and Border Protection	Section	2024-2025	3,164	532
DHS	USCIS	US Citizenship and Immigration Service	Section	2024-2025	1,712	465
DHS	USICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement	Section	2024-2025	4,256	491

3.4. Media Cloud

To determine whether patterns in the news briefings can be explained by the supply of news, I needed to identify the supply of potentially relevant news for each agency. Based on contracts and other records,[52]

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[51]Richardson, Clinton, and Lewis (2018) calculated these scores using the 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service (SFGS), a survey of US-based political appointees, career members of the Senior Executive Service, and other high-level career managers with policy-making authority across the executive establishment. Respondents were asked the following question: "Some agencies have policy views due to law, practice, culture, or tradition that can be characterized across Democratic and Republican administrations as liberal or conservative. This can be an important feature of the environment of public management in these agencies (which is why we ask about it). If you are willing, we would benefit from your assessment of the policy leanings of the following agencies to characterize this aspect of their management environment. As with other questions, you are free not to answer. In your opinion, do the policy views of the following agencies tend to slant liberal, slant conservative, or neither consistently in both Democratic and Republican administrations? [Respondents were also provided a "Don't know" option.]" (p. 304).

[52]See Appendix A.1.2 for details about how the briefings are created.

the news briefings are created through a multi-step process. First, the contractor accesses a large set of news coverage. Next, the contractor constructs complex Boolean search phrases to identify a set of possibly relevant articles. Lastly, the contractor applies a method to determine which of these articles should be included, the appropriate section of the news summary, and whether they can be grouped into the same 'story' as other news articles on the same subject.

While I was not able to identify all keywords used to define the set of potentially relevant articles, the agency name is almost certainly one of these keywords.[53] Thus, to compare the supply of news to the briefings, I queried Media Cloud, an open source collection of online news, for articles from US news sources that mention each agency name (Roberts et al. 2021).[54] I then dropped any sources that never appear in the news briefings.[55] Due to ongoing maintenance, Media Cloud data was unavailable before 2020 when I collected the sample. Thus, I was not able to collect data during the period covered by the DOI news briefings.[56]

I collected two different sets of data from Media Cloud. First, I collected coverage for all agencies categorized in Richardson, Clinton, and Lewis (2018) ($n = 165$) during 45 randomly sampled weeks from January 2020 through May 2025.[57] Second, I collected all of the media motioning the agencies in the briefings during the periods covered by the briefings. For this second set of Media Cloud data, I then matched the results to the briefings using the article URLs. Rather than rely on an exact match, I matched based on two parts of the url: website domain and the longest segment of the path (see Appendix A.5 for details).

4. Results

In this paper, I examine whether the characteristics of an agency or presidential administration is associated with agency news collection. Specifically, I explore whether the ideology of an agency or administration affects the partisan slant of sources in agency news briefings. I first explore whether variation across agencies is better explained by ideologically-motivated news selection or by the supply of news. Second, I assess the over-time composition of the news briefings and look for politically-motivated manipulation after a

[53]For evidence, see the contract excerpts in Appendix A.1.2. For example, the Industry Question and Answer document for the 2018 DHS 'News Clipping Services' Solicitation (posted on sam.gov, notice ID: 70RDAD18R00000012). A potential contractor asks "Do you have a list of keywords to share?" The DHS replies "Government's Response: We suggest including all component names and their jurisdiction as keywords to start" (p. 8).

[54]For a full list of the keyword phrases used in this analysis, see Appendix A.5. As a robustness check, I also replicated this analysis using another large opens source collection of news: the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT). See Appendix A.6.

[55]For more details, see Appendix A.5.

[56]Even if the data were available, without the original article URLs, matching the DOI briefs to the Media Cloud results would be difficult and error-prone.

[57]I queried Media Cloud multiple times over May and June 2025. In the first round, I randomly selected 1 week every 6 months from January 2020 through May 15, 2025. In the next round, I randomly selected another set of weeks using the same criteria, and I added randomly selected a week from April (the week starting April 20, 2025). Removing the added week in April does not affect the results.

presidential transition.

4.1. Differences across agencies

In this section, I explore why the partisan composition of the agency news collection varies considerably.[58] Some agencies like the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) have almost no right-leaning news (4%) while right-wing news makes up 36% of articles for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (USICE).[59] Even when comparing sections within the same briefing document, the amount of news from right-leaning sources can vary substantially. Looking just at the DHS briefing, sections for some agencies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have very little right-leaning news (12%); in other sections, over one third of cited articles are from right-leaning sources.

Does agency ideology explain the partisan slant of news briefings?

I first consider whether this variation is consistent with preferential selection of co-partisan news outlets. As an initial test, I calculate the number of articles from left-leaning, center, right-leaning, and not categorized sources. In Figure 1, I plot the proportion of news in each bias category by agency ideology scores from Richardson, Clinton, and Lewis (2018). If agencies are preferentially-selecting news sources based on a shared ideology, we should see a strong relationship between agency ideology and the partisan composition of the news briefings.

Figure 1 shows a surprisingly strong relationship between the ideology of an agency and the partisan slant of its news sources.[60] Reassuringly, Figure 1 also shows that the number of sources that could not be matched to the MBFC data ("not categorized" sources) is relatively consistent and low for all of the agencies.[61] The other three subplots reveal that conservative agencies collect more news from right-leaning sources and less news from center and left-leaning news sources, relative to more liberal agencies. In particular, Figure 1 shows a strong relationship between the amount of news from right-leaning sources and an agency's ideology. The structure of the US media market could explain why the results are particularly clear for right-leaning news sources. Because there are relatively few large center-right news sources in the United States, the dividing

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[58]See Appendix A.4.1.

[59]Percentages exclude general interest local sources and government websites. Articles from sources that could not be matched to MBFC sources are included in the denominator. Excluding articles missing partisan slant categorization, the amount of news from right-leaning sources is slightly higher: BIA (5%), USICE (38%), and FEMA (13%).

[60]The pattern in Figure 1 replicates when MBFC scores are replaces with partisan slant scores from Allsides and Guess (2021). See Appendix A.6.

[61]Note that the proportion of the articles missing partisan slant scores is higher for Veterans Affairs (VA), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and Customs and Border Protection (USCBP). In each case, a single specialized source is responsible. The VA briefings have 164 articles from connectingvets.radio.com. USCBP has 433 from borderreport.com. BOR only has 7 articles from Capital Press, an agricultural newspaper from Oregon, but it also has relatively few articles. The BOR section is not included on every daily news summary. It is only available for 83 of the 213 total DOI briefings. After removing government and general interest local news, only a small number of articles are available ($n = 95$).

Figure 1: Association between agency ideology and the partisan-slant of sources in agency news briefings. Each point represents the proportion of articles from sources in a particular partisan-slant category (Center, Left-leaning, Right-leaning, or Not Categorized sources). Each partisan-slant category is plotted seperately and the labels are printed at the top of each subplot. Agency ideology from Richardson et al (2018) are plotted on the x-axis. More conservative agencies have higher, positive ideology values. Articles from general interest local news sources and government websites are excluded.

line between center and right-leaning sources is usually clear (Guess 2021; Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018). In comparison, the line between a center and center-left sources is harder to determine, raising the possibility that the left-leaning and center categories are more prone to measurement error.

As shown in the right-leaning subplot of Figure 1, the estimated slope of the best-fit line is $\beta = 0.05$.[62] This effect is substantively large: moving from the most liberal to the most conservative agency is associated with an approximately 20 percentage point increase in right-leaning coverage. In practice, this disparity

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[62]See Appendix A.4.11 for the regression results. The agency ideology scores are scaled from -2 to 2. Thus, I multiplied the coefficient by 4 to get the total estimated effect of moving from the most liberal to most conservative agency. Appendix A.4.11 also contains robustness checks. The strong positive relationship between right-leaning sources and agency ideology is present after varying the media slant specification and substituting scores from Allsides and Guess (2021). When the data is disaggregated, the slope is slightly smaller.

may be most consequential for liberal agencies, some of which collect almost no content from right-leaning sources.

While Figure 1 is consistent with an ideologically-biased selection process, there are other possible explanations. In fact, there are multiple reasons to be skeptical of preferential selection. First, as previously discussed, agencies face strong incentives to collect a comprehensive set of news. Second, most of the agency estimates in Figure 1 are based on the section of the main agency's news summary. If a biased selection process did explain these results, each individual sub-agency would need to exert independent pressure on the news briefing contractor to modify the content of its subsection, separate from the rest of the agency news briefing. In internal emails, I do find some evidence that subagencies have input into their section of the news summary.[63] However, the contractor is ultimately accountable to staff at the contracting agency, not its subagencies.

Is there an asymmetric supply of news?

The relationship between media slant and agency ideology could be the result of a biased selection process, but they could also be produced by the supply of news. For supply to explain the results in Figure 1, partisan news sources would need to publish more articles relevant to agencies with similar ideological slants. To test whether an asymmetric supply of news could explain the results in Figure 1, I collect news relevant to different government agencies and compare how much of the coverage is from right-leaning sources.

Ideally, I could compare the news in the briefings to the universe of relevant news available at the time that each news briefing was generated. More specifically, I would need the set of articles considered potentially relevant to the briefing. Recall that the briefings result from a multi-step filtering process. While we do not know the exact set of outlets monitored by each vendor and keywords used to filter for relevant articles, we can make some reasonable assumptions. First, if an article is mentioned at least once in a briefing, that source is probably being monitored by the vendor. Second, the keywords used to initially filter articles include the name of the agency. Given these assumptions, Media Cloud's database of scraped news can be used to estimate the universe of relevant news available at a given time period.[64]

Examining the relationship between the supply of news and agency ideology does not require agency

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[63]On February 6, 2018, an employee from the DOI's Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) emailed two directors, writing, "I submit insular areas articles to Bulletin Intelligence on a regular basis because I often find that they don't include anything for our areas if I don't propose actual clippings. I do however credit them for finding this Washington Post article for OIA. They will be changing the title from Insular Areas to Insular and International Affairs. If you would like, feel free to send me articles that are important to your mission and you think should be highlighted here." See document titled "OS-2019-00338-Dec2019-Interim-Release," which was uploaded to Document Cloud by Muckrock Staff on December 20, 2019 (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6590263-OS-2019-00338-Dec2019-Interim-Release/). From 2015-2017, DOI briefings had a subsection called "Insular Affairs." Starting 2018, this section was sometimes replaced by a section called "Insular and International Affairs."

[64]I first queried Media Cloud for articles that mention an agency name (see Appendix A.5 for the agency name queries). I then excluded all domains that were not included at least once in the news briefing.

briefings, so I extended the Media Cloud queries to include all 165 agencies with ideology scores from Richardson, Clinton, and Lewis (2018) and a longer time series. I randomly sampled 45 weeks from 2020-2025[65] and collected coverage mentioning any of the 165 agencies scored by Richardson, Clinton, and Lewis (2018). I limited the Media Cloud search to sources that were included at least once in briefings and dropped international sources.[66]

For each agency, I calculate the proportion of articles in the Media Cloud sample from right-leaning sources. Figure 2 shows the relationship between agency ideology and the proportion of news from right leaning sources.[67] To test the robustness of the Media Cloud results, I replicated the results using 17 randomly sampled weeks (2017-2023) from a second publicly available media database, GDELT (Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone).[68] I also verified that the results are robust to other media slant measures from Guess (2021) and Allsides.[69]

To calculate the regression results and best fit line shown in Figure 2, I clustered the standard errors by agency, news source, and article URL. Each agency only has one ideology score, so the independent variable is assigned at the agency-level. Partisan slant is determined by the slant of the news source, so dependent variable is assigned at the source-level. Clustering by article URL addresses the non-independence of observations arising when a single article mentions multiple agencies. The Media Cloud query results are stacked such that an article can appear in the dataset multiple times – once for each agency name in the article. After restricting the data to domestic news sources cited at least once in the briefings and dropping observations missing media slant, the final dataset comprised 585,783 article-agency pairs, 434,602 unique URLs, 165 agencies, and 308 sources.

Figure 2 reveals that the supply of news could produce the relationship between partisan media and agency ideology in the news briefings.[70] The best fit line in Figure 2 shows the relationship between agency ideology and the relative amount of coverage an agency receives from right-leaning news outlets. If the conservative sources preferentially cover conservative agencies or center/liberal sources preferentially cover

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[65]I sampled 2 weeks every 6 months from January 1, 2020 to May 15, 2025 and one additional week in May 2025.

[66]In total, I included only domains cited at least once in the briefings and excluded all general interest local sources, government websites, and international sources. Other countries have their own agencies, and some of these agencies have the same name as US agencies. As a result, the Media Cloud queries produced a large number of articles from international sources that were not relevant to US agencies and were not included in the briefings. I classified a source as international if it was based outside the US or primarily covered other countries. I counted the major wire services (AP, Reuters, UPI) as national sources. In total, my Media Cloud sample contains 532 unique domains (out of the 1,107 possible domains found in the news briefings).

[67]For results broken down by all source categories (center, left-leaning, right-leaning, and not categorized sources), see Appendix A.5.

[68]See Appendix A.6.3. Stratified random sample of weeks. Selected one week every six months from January 1, 2017 through May 15, 2025. To verify that the relationship in 2 was present before 2020, I also replicated the figure using only GDELT data from 2017-2019.

[69]See Appendix A.6.2.

[70]To improve the legibility of the scatter plot in Figure 2, I limited the range of the y-axis, cutting off the point for National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities (NFAH). NFAH was only mentioned in two articles and both came from conservative news sources. See Appendix A.5.3 for a version of the plot with an unadjusted y-axis.

liberal agencies, we will see a positive coefficient. Consistent with a supply-sided explanation, the plot shows a statistically-significant, positive relationship between an agency's ideology and the amount coverage it receives from right-leaning news sources. Compared to the most liberal agencies, the most conservative agencies receive approximately 8 percentage points more news from right-leaning media sources ($\beta = 0.020$, $se = 0.004$, $n = 585,783$).[71]
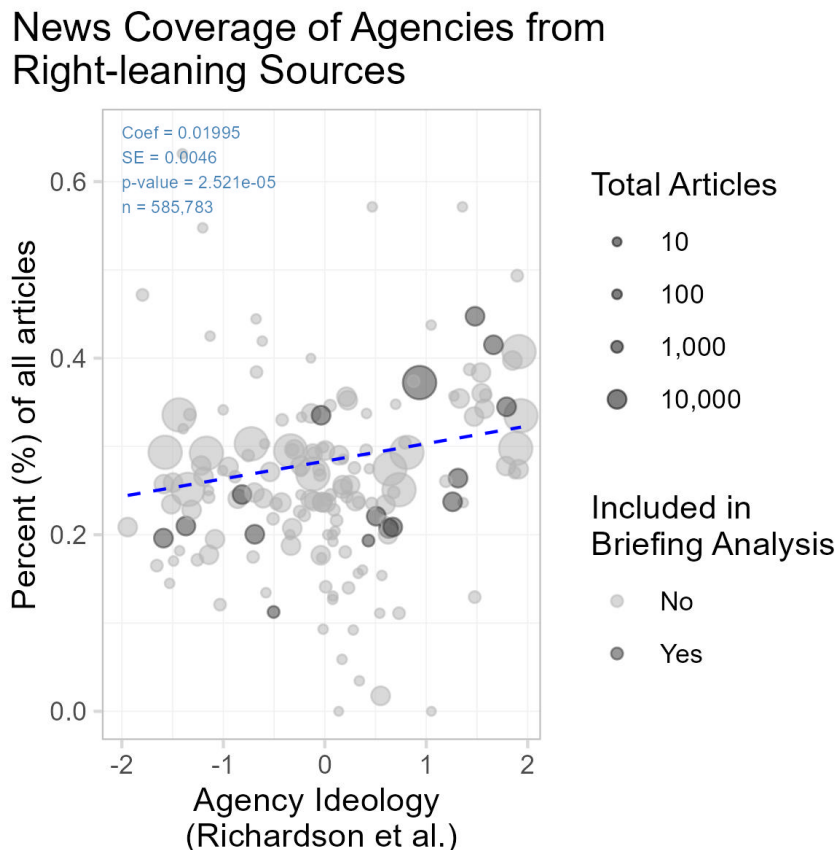

Figure 2: Association between agency ideology and the partisan-slant of sources identified using Media Cloud queries. Points are the proportion of articles mentioning an agency that come from right-leaning news sources. Articles mentioning agency name were identified by querying Media Cloud for each agency's name over 45 randomly sampled weeks from January 2020 through May 15, 2025. The outcome variable is 1 when an article comes from a right-leaning soruce and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable is a agency ideology from Richardson et al (2017). More conservative agencies have higher, positive ideology values. Limited to sources cited at least once in the news briefings. Dropped international sources. Articles from general interest local news sources and government websites are excluded. Partisan media scores from Media Bias Fact Check (MBFC). Dropped sources that could not be matched to MBFC categories ('Not Categorized' souces). Standard errors calculated using hetroskedasticity-robust standard errors and clustering by Agency, News Source, and article URL. Agencies included in the news briefing analysis are shaded darker. The y-axis is truncated, cutting off the data point for the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities.

In the appendix, I assess the robustness of this result by examining whether the supply-side asymmetry exists for individual news outlets. Because of compositional differences between the Media Cloud sample and

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[71]The coefficient is consistent across specifications. See Appendix A.5 for alternate regression specifications.

the briefings, a supply-driven explanation is more plausible if liberal and conservative outlets each display asymmetric coverage of agencies. The intercept and slope of the best-fit line in Figure 2 reflect both the composition of outlets in the Media Cloud sample and each outlet's editorial allocation of limited reporting resources. Given a fixed publishing capacity in any time period, differences in coverage of specific agencies arise from editorial decisions. By estimating the allocation of coverage within each news outlet, I can also be more confident that the supply asymmetry in Figure 2 is the result of publication decision.

To test for heterogeneous effects, I conduct two robustness checks (Appendix A.5.7). First, I estimate a mixed-effects model allowing both slopes and intercepts to vary by outlet. Using the *lme4* package in R, I extract the conditional (posterior mode) coefficients for agency ideology, which provide outlet-specific estimates of the effect of agency ideology on coverage allocation. Nearly all right-leaning outlets have positive coefficients, indicating greater coverage of conservative agencies relative to liberal ones. Conversely, almost all coefficients for left-leaning sources are negative, indicating that they publish more articles about liberal agencies. Coefficients for centrist and uncategorized outlets cluster near zero. These results suggest that the observed asymmetry is produced by both liberal and conservative outlets. Second, to ensure the pattern is not driven by high-frequency publishers, I estimate separate OLS regressions for each news outlet. The distribution of these outlet-level coefficients are consistent with the mixed-effects results, indicating that the findings are not artifacts of a few dominant sources.

Without making additional assumptions, it is difficult to determine whether the supply asymmetry Figure 2 can explain all of the variation in Figure 1. The method and sample differ enough to make comparison difficult. First, the time period, sources, and search terms used to construct each sample are different. Not every article included in the briefings mentions the agency name. Second, the agencies are different. If we limit the analysis in Figure 2 to only the sixteen agencies included in Figure 1 (the dark grey points), the slope becomes larger. Third, the method differs slightly. Figure 2 drops observations missing media slant, and because the aggregation level is different, the regression specifications differ. To create more comparable estimates, I recalculated the results after reconciling as many of these differences as possible. I first recalculate the analysis in Figure 2 using the same method and agencies as Figure 1,[72] and I recalculate the Figure 1 results using only the news outlets included in the Media Cloud sample. The resulting coefficients are closer to each other. After modifying both analyses, we would expect that the most conservative agency would have 23.9 percentage points more conservative news in its briefings, relative to the most liberal agencies ($\beta = .071$). In comparison, we would expect the supply of news to become 19.2 percentage points more

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[72]To reconcile the results from Figure 1 and Figure 2, I recalculated the results in Figure 1 using only the news outlets included in Figure 2. I then recalculated the results in Figure 2 after (a) adding the articles with missing slant–in other words, I count missing slant as a fourth category 'Not Categorized'–(b) limiting the analysis to only the 16 agencies included in Figure 1, and (c) aggregating the results to the agency-level. For robustness, I also recalculate the results using the method from Figure 2. See Appendix A.5.8.

right-leaning ($\beta = .057$).

Is there evidence of preferential selection after controlling for the supply of news?

While the results in Figure 2 suggest that a supply asymmetry could explain the relationship in Figure 1, the analysis is not conclusive. To formally test whether there is any evidence of selection bias conditional on an article being published, I directly compared the briefings to the universe of articles published during the same period. In the previous analysis, I did not focus on the time periods covered by the news briefings. Instead, I collected a representative sample of news from 2020 through the beginning of 2025.

To collect the supply of news for each briefing, I run a second set of Media Cloud queries, limiting the search to agencies in the briefing dataset and the time periods covered by the briefings. Because Media Cloud was not available before 2020 and the DOI news briefings did not contain URLs, I could not include the DOI data in this analysis, which severely limits the variation of agency ideology. However, the positive relationship between agency ideology and media slant in Figure 1 is not dependent on the DOI agencies. The same relationship exists when the analysis is limited to the 10 agencies included in the DHS, USCIS, and VA briefings (see Appendix A.5.5).

I then match the articles from Media Cloud to the DHS, USCIS, and VA news briefings using the URLs of the articles.[73] I drop sources if they have never been included in briefings.[74] I also drop international sources.[75] The resulting 'matched sample' contains all published articles that mention each agency name and an outcome variable that is 1 if the article is matched to the briefings and 0 otherwise.

Because I do not know all of the keywords used to identify relevant articles, the matched sample does not include all of the articles in the briefings.[76] Thus, I first check that the results in Figure 1 replicate when the sample is limited to articles mentioning agencies by name.[77] For all but one agency (USCIS), the results of this test suggest that the matched sample is representative. Given the small size and unrepresentativeness of the USCIS sample, the inconsistent results should arguably be dropped.[78] However, for transparency, I have

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[73]When matching to the briefing, I consider the whole briefing, not just the appropriate section. Thus, if an article mentioning US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (USICE) is placed in the "Top News" section, I count it as being included in the briefing. When determining which Media Cloud sources to include, I include any source used in the entire briefing, not just the section relevant to an agency. For more details about the URL matching process, see Appendix A.5.4.

[74]The results are similar if all Media Cloud sources are included in the regression.

[75]Other countries have their own agencies, and some of these agencies have the same name as US agencies. As a result, the Media Cloud queries produced a large number of articles from international sources that were not relevant to US agencies and were not included in the briefings. I classified a source as international if it was based outside the US or primarily covered other countries. I counted the major wire services (AP, Reuters, UPI) as national sources.

[76]The set of articles from the briefings matched to Media Cloud will not be all of the articles in the briefings. The matched sample would only include articles from the briefings that mention an agency by name.

[77]See Appendix A.5.5. Because I do not have the full text of the articles cited in the briefings, I cannot do a keyword search of the full article text. Thus, to identify the briefing articles that mention each agency, I use the overlap between the matched sample and the briefings. If an article from the briefings can be matched to the media cloud query results, it must include the agency name.

[78]Even when considering the whole USCIS briefing period from January 2022 through June 2025, Media Cloud identified fewer than 200 articles that mention the agency by name. The USCIS subsample also includes fewer sources. For example, in

Table 3: Effect of agency ideology and media slant on the probability of an article being included in an agency news briefing

	DV: 1 if article is included in briefing, 0 otherwise						
	All	All	All	Drop NA Slant	Drop USCIS	Drop Wire	Drop Nevermatched
Slant Right-Leaning	0.018	0.042	0.032	0.042	0.033	0.055	0.050
	(0.063)	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.043)
Slant not Categorized	-0.123*	-0.102	-0.113+		-0.106	-0.090	-0.003
	(0.047)	(0.069)	(0.051)		(0.074)	(0.063)	(0.085)
Slant Center	-0.005	0.061		0.061	0.062	0.084	0.034
	(0.058)	(0.097)		(0.097)	(0.100)	(0.091)	(0.091)
Agency Ideology	-0.040*	-0.026	-0.036	-0.026	-0.027	-0.025	-0.038
	(0.017)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.032)
Slant Right-leaning:Agency Ideology		-0.020	-0.010	-0.020	-0.013	-0.021	-0.013
		(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.043)
Slant not Categorized:Agency Ideology		-0.017	-0.007		-0.014	-0.018	-0.099
		(0.051)	(0.042)		(0.054)	(0.047)	(0.074)
Slant Center:Agency Ideology		-0.057		-0.057	-0.058	-0.063	-0.050
		(0.060)		(0.060)	(0.062)	(0.057)	(0.057)
Num.Obs.	102,987	102,987	102,987	100,313	102,723	100,332	83,996
R²	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.003	0.006	0.007	0.006
Adj. R²	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.003	0.006	0.007	0.006
Std.Errors	by: Agency & Source & URL	by: Agency & Source & URL	by: Agency & Source & URL	by: Agency & Source & URL	by: Agency & Source & URL	by: Agency & Source & URL	by: Agency & Source & URL
Agencies	9	9	9	9	8	9	9
Sources	265	265	265	177	265	263	146
URLs	87,108	87,108	87,108	84,731	87,013	84,916	71,043

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Notes: Models use OLS with robust standard errors and clustered standard errors. Slant scores are based on Media Bias Fact Check (MBFC) categories. The following articles were dropped from all models: articles without urls, local general interest sources, government websites, and international news sources. The last column modifies the first regression by dropping all sources that were never successfully matched to an article in the briefing.

included the USCIS results in Table 3 and Figure 3. Including the USCIS articles does not substantively affect the results.

To determine whether there is an interaction between agency ideology and media slant, I run several regressions (see Table 3). I first stack the output from the Media Cloud queries after adding variables for agency and briefing. Thus, if an article contains the name of multiple agencies and was returned by multiple Media Cloud queries, it will be included multiple times. Similarly, USCIS articles are included twice. The set of USCIS Media Cloud results from 2022-2025 are matched to the USCIS briefing, and the set of USCIS Media Cloud results from 2024-2025 are matched to the USCIS portion of the DHS briefing. Due to this structure, I cluster by article URL in my analysis. For each article, i, the binary outcome variable ($Incl_i$') is 1 if the article is included in anywhere in the news briefing and 0 otherwise.[79] Because media slant is assigned at the source-level and agency ideology is assigned at the agency-level, I also cluster for source and agency.

Formally, to test whether the slant of an outlet still affects its inclusion after accounting for supply, I use the following model: $Incl_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 S_i + \beta_2 I_i + \beta_3 S_i \times I_i + \epsilon$. For each article i, $Incl_i$ is 1 if the article is included in the briefing, S_i is the slant of the news outlet, and I_i is the ideology of the agency

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the matched sample, more than 60% of the right-leaning news comes from Newsweek. For all of the other agencies, the matched sample includes thousands of articles and more than twice as many sources (see Figure 3).

[79]Note that the outcome variable ('included') can be 1 even if the article is not cited in the subsection devoted to an agency. On days where an agency is highly salient (e.g. Trump's near assassination in 2024), most of the articles mentioning an agency (e.g. Secret Service) will be included in the top news section of the briefing.

mentioned in the article. If agencies are preferentially selecting articles based on source ideology and their own ideological tendencies, we should see a the coefficients for right-leaning slant (a binary indicator of whether an articles comes from a right-leaning source) become larger and more positive for agencies with larger, more conservative agency ideology scores. In other words, the interaction between agency ideology and right-leaning slant (β_3) should be positive and significant.

Table 3 shows multiple versions of this regression. In the first column, I show the results without any interactions. While not relevant to testing the interaction, these results do show that center and right-leaning sources are not more likely to be included in the briefings than left-leaning sources.[80] The other columns include interactions. The second column shows the primary specification, which is the one used to produce Figure 3. Each of the following columns shows one possible modification of the regression in column 2. The third column shows how changing the reference category for media slant affects the results. The fourth column drops articles from not categorized sources, and the fifth column drops all USCIS articles. The sixth column treats the major wire services (AP, UPI, and Reuters) as international sources and drops them. The last column drops sources that are not successfully matched to the briefing at least once. This last specification under-counts sources that are rarely included, but it also removes sources that could not be matched due to problems with the matching process.

Regardless of the specifications, the results in Table 3 are fairly consistent. While the point estimates vary slightly, the direction and significance of the results do not change. In each case, interacting agency ideology and right-leaning slant produces a small, negative estimate. More importantly, the coefficient is insignificant.

In Figure 3, I separately plot the regression results for each agency and arrange the agencies by ideology. Figure 3 shows that, conditional on an article being published, there is no clear positive relationship between preferentially selecting articles from right-leaning sources and agency ideology. The 95% confidence intervals in Figure 3 represent the probability that a published article is included in the news summary given that it is from a right-leaning. If the relationship in Figure 3 was produced by preferential selection, we would expect the point estimates to be higher for more conservative agencies. While plotting each agency separately further reduces the statistical leverage and power of the analysis, Figure 3 clearly shows how the direction of the results for each agency is not consistent with biased selection. While the reduced sample of agencies limits the conclusiveness of this test, it supports the conclusion that the supply of news could explain the relationship in Figure 1.

Collectively, the results yield three key findings. First, there is a strong association between an agency's

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[80]In column 1 of Table 3, 'Not Categorized' is significant. Note that there are very few articles in this category. Only 2.8% of the matched sample is not categorized and only 0.4% of not categorized articles were matched to the briefings. See Appendix A.5.4.

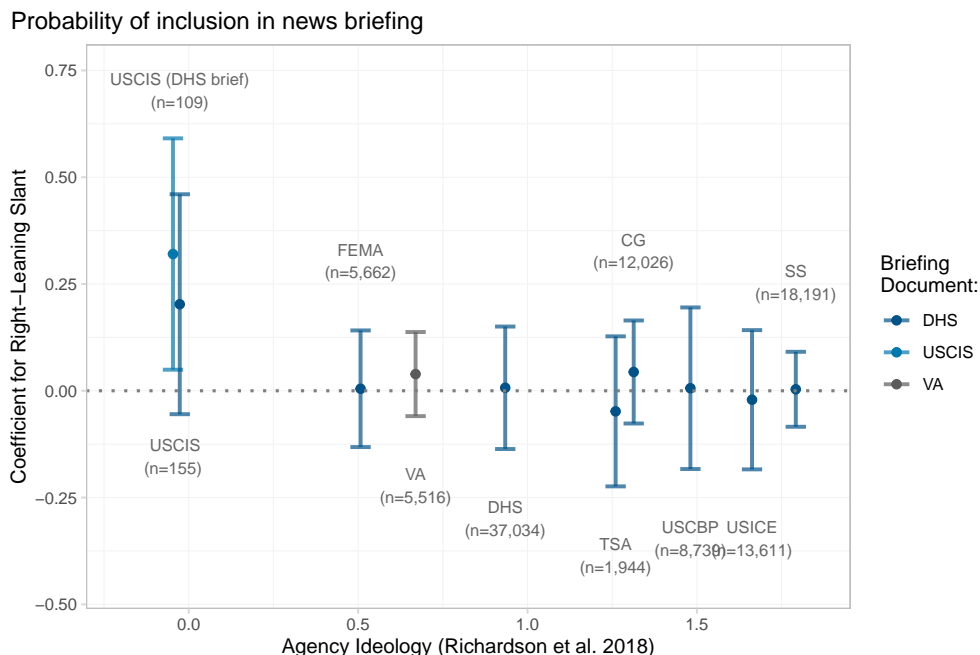Probability of inclusion in news briefing

Figure 3: Estimated effect of source partisan slant on the probability that an article is included in the news summary. Left-leaning sources are the reference category for media slant. 95% confidence intervals. Models use OLS with robust standard errors clustered by news source. Outcome variable is binary indicator (1 if article included in news summary, 0 otherwise). Independent variables are binary indicators for right-leaning sources, center sources, and not categorized sources. Slant scores are based on MBFC categories. Briefing articles matched to Media Cloud queries based on URL. Dropped Media Cloud sources if they have never been cited in the relevant briefing. Agency ideology from Richardson et al (2018) are plotted on the x-axis. More conservative agencies have higher, positive ideology values. Articles from general interest local news sources, international sources, and government websites are excluded.

ideology and the extent to which it cites partisan news sources. Second, this pattern is explained by an asymmetric supply of relevant news coverage. Third, the supply asymmetry extends beyond the specific agencies and time periods included in the briefings data.

4.2. Differences across administrations

As discussed previously, ideological motives for selecting partisan sources could manifest in multiple ways. In the previous section, I argued that variation across agencies is more consistent with a supply-sided explanation, but Richardson, Clinton, and Lewis's (2018) agency ideology scores characterize the long-term policy views of government agencies. Thus, the scores do not capture variation across administrations. There could still be politically-motivated and biased selection of news under some conditions. In particular, the party of the President could affect news selection, particularly in the highly-partisan climate of current US politics. In fact, the EPA case involving Scott Pruitt suggests that agency leaders have multiple political, practical, and personal motives for modifying agency news briefings (Leber, Kroll, and Choma 2017).

Evidence of changes across presidential administrations is mixed. The proportion of conservative coverage
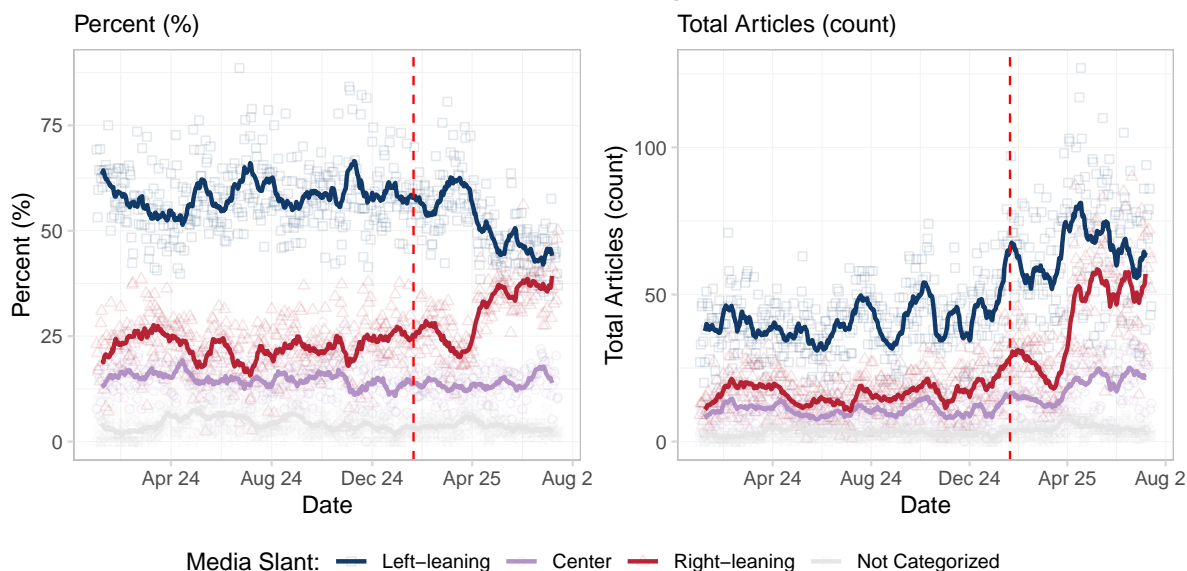
Figure 4: Over-time coverage from partisan sources in the DHS news briefings. Articles from general interest local news sources and government websites are excluded. Partisan media scores from Media Bias Fact Check (MBFC). Dotted line at Trump's 2025 inaguration. Lines are 2-week rolling averages.

in the DOI briefings remains relatively stable from 2015 through 2018, including during the transition from Obama to Trump in 2017 (see appendix A.4). The VA briefings also show little change, but the VA time series ends about a month after Biden's inauguration, which might be too early for any change to occur.

However, Figure 4 shows a dramatic increase in conservative news in the DHS briefings after Trump took office in January 2025.[81] In late March 2025, the amount of right-leaning news in the DHS news briefs increases dramatically. In addition, the conservative coverage becomes concentrated at the beginning of the news briefing, which is where the most important stories are generally placed (Sullivan 2012). Before March 2025, the DHS news briefings did not cite sources like Breitbart, Newsmax, the Blaze, the Daily Wire, the Daily Caller, and the Daily Signal. Since April, all of these sources have been featured prominently.[82] In April and May 2025, Breitbart was the 6th most cited source in the DHS briefings.

Because these extreme right-leaning news sources were never included prior to March 2025, their recent inclusion is likely the result of preferential selection rather than a change in the supply of news. Ideally, I could use the matched sample to rule out a supply-side explanation. However, while the matched sample is

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[81] There is also some evidence that a similar increase in conservative sources occurred in the USCIS briefings, but it happened later. See Appendix A.4.

[82] See Appendix A.4.7. Articles from Breitbart have seen the largest increase. In April and May 2025, Breitbart contributed seven articles per day to the DHS news summaries. Half of these articles were included in the 'Top News' section of the briefing. On average, the number of articles from Newsmax, the Blaze, the Daily Wire, the Daily Caller, and the Daily Signal also increased to between 0.9 and 4.7 articles per day. Approximately half of these articles were also included in the 'Top News' section. Of these, only two – Breitbart (no. 32) and Newsmax (no. 40) – are in the top 50 news websites visited in the US (Press Gazette 2025).

representative of partisan news coverage across agencies, it is not representative of the over-time fluctuations seen in Figure 4.[83] Additionally, limiting the matched sample to only the DHS briefing further reduces the variation and power of the matched sample. Thus, I cannot completely rule out a supply-sided explanation for the DHS changes, but a supply-sided explanation seems unlikely. In order for supply to explain the number of newly added conservative sources, sources like Breitbart would need to have produced zero relevant news before March 2025, and all of the the newly added conservative sources existed before Trump's inauguration.[84]

Interestingly, despite being housed under DHS, the balance of partisan coverage in the USCIS briefings follows a different pattern. In fact, the amount of liberal news in the USCIS briefing increased dramatically around the time of Trump's inauguration and stayed elevated until May 2025. Afterwards, the proportion of right- and left-leaning news returned to pre-inauguration levels. It is possible that staff at the USCIS pressured TechMIS to select more liberal news during and after Trump's inauguration, but it seems more likely that Trump's actions in early 2025 increased the salience of topics relevant to USCIS like immigration and visas, leading to a greater supply of left-leaning and center news. The salience of immigration could have disproportionately affected the supply of liberal news for several reasons. First, conservative outlets could have reacted differently to Trump's early actions by allocating resources towards other topics. They could have also had less excess capacity to devote to immigration, especially if they were already dedicating more of their news staff to immigration previously. Alternatively, the structure of conservative-news sources may have limited their output. News outlets with the capacity to produce large volumes of news coverage tend to be center or liberal-leaning. If the AP decided to dedicate a fraction more resources to immigration, it could produce far more news than a website like Breitbart.

While the total amount of right-leaning news in the USCIS briefings has not been abnormally high, coverage from extreme right-leaning sources did begin to increase around the same time that we see a large change in the DHS briefing. Starting in April 2025, the briefings increasingly cited Breitbart, Newsmax, the Daily Wire, and the Daily Signal. Interestingly, while some of these sources were occasionally cited during the Biden administration, they were rare, and citations to Breitbart articles ended in 2023.[85] Thus, there has been an increase in coverage from far-right sources in the USCIS briefing, but the increase has a smaller effect on the overall composition of the briefings. Additionally, these new right-leaning sources are not being disproportionately placed at the beginning of the news briefing.[86]

To visualize how the composition of the DHS and USCIS briefings changed in early 2025, I identified

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[83]See Appendix A.5.6.

[84]In the DHS briefings, 25 right-leaning sources are added for the first time after April 1, 2025. Of these, Media Cloud identified one or more articles mentioning DHS for 18 of these sources in 2024. The 7 remaining sources are not available through Media Cloud, but using their websites, I verified that they published news before 2025.

[85]see Appendix A.4.9.

[86]see Appendix A.4.5.

Partisan Extremity of New Sources Added to Briefings Each Month

DHS Briefings (2024–2025)

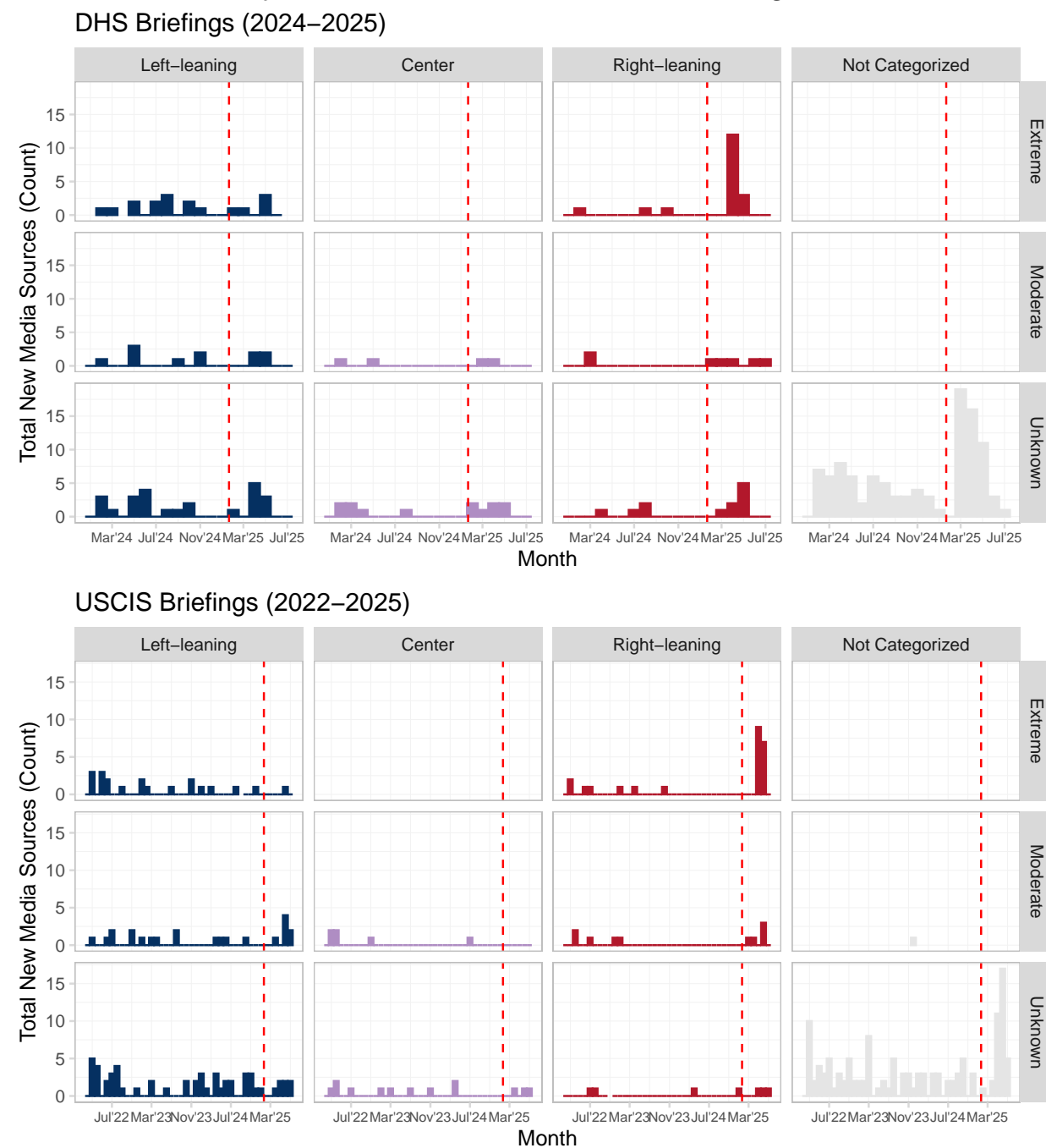## USCIS Briefings (2022–2025)

Figure 5: Number of new sources added to USCIS and DHS news briefings by month. Articles from general interest local news sources and government websites are excluded. Partisan media scores from Media Bias Fact Check (MBFC). Calculated source extremity using a continuous measure of source slant from MBFC. Sources considered extreme if they are above 5 or below -5. Dotted line at Trump's 2025 inaguration. Continuous MBFC scores are available for fewer news sources. Source extremity labeled as 'Unknown' if no continous score is available.

sources that Media Bias/Fact Check considered extreme. To do this, I used a continuous version of the

MBFC score.[87] Continuous scores are only available for 49.3% of the sources in the briefings, which is why I use the categorical version elsewhere. The continuous scores range from -10 (most left-leaning) and 10 (most right-leaning). I labeled scores as extreme if they were above 5 or below -5. If the source did not have a continuous score, I labeled it as 'unknown.' In Figure 5, I plot the number of new sources appearing in the briefings by month. Sources are only counted if they have never been included in the briefing previously. I break down sources by their MBFC categorical score and extremity.

Figure 5 shows that an abnormally large number of extreme right-leaning sources were added to the DHS and USCIS briefings around April 2025. Even though the overall composition of the USCIS briefings was less affected, Figure 5 reveals how far-right sources were added to both briefings. The plot also illustrates how this influx of partisan sources deviates from prior time periods. When I produce similar plots for the DOI or VA briefings, the pattern of added sources is stable across presidential transitions (see Appendix A.4.10). In the Appendix, I also explore the spike in new 'not categorized' sources after Trump's inauguration. Because each of these sources contributes a small number of articles to the briefings, they represent a small change to the composition of both briefings.

In summary, leadership may only affects the partisan content of the news summaries under some circumstances. Those circumstances were not present at DOI in 2017 but are present in 2025 at DHS. Additional conservative news sources have also been appearing in the USCIS briefings, but unlike at DHS, these changes have not affected the overall composition of the USCIS briefings.

5. Discussion

As revealed by the existence and ubiquity of large-scale, centralized news briefings, bureaucrats have professional and policy goals that incentivize them to invest in media monitoring tools. Analysis of these news briefings reveals distinctive patterns of news exposure. This pattern is produced by an interaction between media monitoring tools and the supply of news. Media monitoring tools define and filter the supply of news, producing a different result for each agency.

Even when the news selection process is unbiased, agency news briefings are not a complete picture of public opinion and the larger political environment. To fully unpack the consequences of asymmetric coverage, additional research will be needed on its origins and consequences. However, the analysis in this paper and existing research provide confidence that the asymmetric supply observed in Figures 1 and 2 has consequences for politics and policymaking. Examining this research also provides guidance about the

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[87]After dropping local general interest source, government websites, and sources not found in any briefing, the continuous values range from -9.6 to 9.8. The mean is -0.47 and the median is -1.77. The standard deviation is 4.8.

direction of future research and provides insight into the normative implications of an asymmetric information supply.

As discussed above, media monitoring contracts identify multiple ways in which agencies use the information contained in news briefings. The contracts describe how news briefings inform agency's communications efforts, policy-making decisions, and strategic interactions with other actors. Integrating this evidence with existing theory reveals how an asymmetric supply of information can influence each of these functions.

Generally, information about the existence of policy problems and demand for policy change has been shown to affect policy decisions and elite strategy. In *The Politics of Information*, Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones argue that process of information acquisition within government plays a central role in policymaking (2015). Search processes that incorporate more viewpoints lead to more intensive and expansive policymaking. Their theory contributes to a broader body of research on the media's role in agenda setting (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). In addition to affecting the agenda, information has been shown to affect elite decision making and responsiveness to public opinion (Jablonski and Seim 2024; Liaqat 2019). In some cases, information provision has been shown to directly affect policy provision (Jablonski and Seim 2024; Seim, Jablonski, and Ahlbäck 2020; Liaqat 2019). Jablonski and Seim (2024) show that providing information about school need, foreign aid, and voting patterns led politicians to allocation more money to neglected schools. Based on this research, differences in content produced by an asymmetric supply of partisan news will affect policymaking when they affect judgement about public opinion or the existence, severity, and solutions to policy problems.

Karpowitz (2009) provides additional insight into how information from daily news summaries affected the behavior of Richard Nixon, highlighting the importance of information about government activity. He establishes the effect of the summaries by categorizing Nixon's handwritten notes in the margins of the news summaries and connecting Nixon's notes to memorandum and other activity within the White House. Using this method, Karpowitz reveals how information in daily news briefings affected Nixon's communications efforts, policy-making activity, personnel management, and emotional state. He finds that the news summaries were a means of reality testing and provided key information about activity elsewhere in the US government (see also T. E. Cook 1998) and public sentiment. When liberal or conservative outlets systematically produce less coverage relevant to an agency, it could reduce the agency's information about key actors. This could increase the chances that the agency makes a strategic error, but it could also affect agency behavior in less visible ways, like forcing an agency to expend more resources on other types of information collection efforts.

Thus, when partisan news coverage conveys different kinds of information, unbalanced news exposure can affect important judgement about public opinion (Broockman and Skovron 2018; Furnas and LaPira 2024), the existence of policy problems (Baumgartner and Jones 2015), the importance of policy problems (Van

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Aelst and Walgrave 2016; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006), the best solutions to policy problems (Jablonski and Seim 2024), and the activities of other political actors (Karpowitz 2009; F. L. Cook et al. 1983). Prior research has provided some evidence that prior expertise and a professional mindset can attenuate the effects of partisan motivated reasoning (Beattie and Snider 2019; Kahan 2016), but experts still learn from the existence and content of coverage. In addition to the factual content of an article, the existence or presentation of a story in a highly partisan outlet may be a signal in and of itself. When published in some partisan-aligned news sources, the presentation of a story can convey information about the strategy of party elites. The presentation can also be used to predict the effect on public opinion.

Turning to prior research on partisan media bias, existing research has already established that left- and right-leaning sources produce different information. A large body of existing research has established that the partisan slant of a source shapes the information content of news by affecting story selection and presentation (Broockman and Kalla 2025; Grossman, Margalit, and Mitts 2022; Groeling 2013; Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005; Hosseinmardi et al. 2025; Shultziner and Stukalin 2021; Puglisi and Snyder Jr 2011; Puglisi 2011; Larcinese, Puglisi, and Snyder Jr 2011). This evidence is further bolstered by the results of this paper. The findings of this paper reinforce that conclusion. The asymmetric supply of news shown in Figure 2 illustrates how right-leaning news sources produce more coverage of conservative agencies and less coverage of liberal agencies. Future research should explore how these partisan differences affect different kinds of information relevant to agency decisionmaking. For example, the partisanship of a news source or journalist may affect their access to key sources and stories (Niblock and Machin 2014; Gans 1979). Research has shown that the sources cited in news outlets vary by substantially (Kim, Lelkes, and McCrain 2022), which could translate to differences in information quality. If political actors grant or restrict access according to the partisan slant of a news outlet, liberal agencies may receive lower-quality information about conservative political actors.

Compared to the dangers of asymmetric supply, more attention has been paid to the dangers of preferential news selection (e.g. Broockman and Kalla 2025). Nevertheless, an asymmetric supply of news also raises concerns, particularly in the context of elite news consumption. If bureaucrats believe that the briefing collection process is unbiased, they may be less likely to recognize supply-driven limitations to their information environment. Being aware of bias has been shown to mitigate the effects of bias (Lee 2017). Future research should investigate whether agency personnel are aware of the deficiencies in their news supply.

The size of the asymmetry is also a concern. Some agencies collect almost no coverage from conservative sources. Unless they explicitly seek out conservative voices from sources that are not currently being collected through the news briefings, liberal agencies will have less information about the thoughts and opinions of conservatives elsewhere in government and in the wider public.

While the supply of news can explain long-term differences in partisan news collection across agencies,

recent changes to the DHS and USCIS briefings suggest that political-pressures can influence the content of news briefings under some conditions. Under Kristi Noem's leadership of Homeland Security, coverage from far-right news sources has been increasing in volume and prominence. Importantly, the news briefings alone do not explain why this change has occurred. However, the evidence from the briefings and media coverage of other incidents point towards several possible explanations for when and why source selection varies across administrations.

First, while many–sometimes competing—motives could affect the partisan composition of the briefings, a few are more likely to vary systematically across administrations. These possibilities can be sorted into two categories. The first set of explanations are rooted in personal or political motives. Most obviously, agency leadership may see these briefings as an opportunity to advance a political agenda by shaping the information environment of other leadership and staff. Pressure to implement an administration's objectives could also increase the value of information from some constituencies and vary by policy area. In addition to these political motives, agency leadership is also subject to more personal incentives. For example, internal EPA emails reveal that staff objected to sending negative headlines about their leader–Scott Pruitt–to 'everyone,' pressured Bulletin Intelligence to change the contents of its briefings, and fired Bulletin after observing insufficient change (Leber, Kroll, and Choma 2017; Choma and Leber 2016).[88] At the time, about 500 EPA employees received the news clips.[89]

Alternatively, a second set of motives could produce variation across and within administrations while remaining consistent with comprehensive and unbiased news selection. While agencies have incentives to collect a wide range of sources, not all sources are created equally. In order to create a quickly digestible and representative picture of the news, agencies might choose to prioritize information based on factors like source popularity, influence, or accuracy. Relatedly, desire to avoid scandal could lead agencies to remove some inaccurate and offensive material from the main agency briefing. For example, an antisemitic blog cited in the Department of Justice news briefing led to outcry from agency personnel and pushed the agency to fire TechMIS during the first Trump administration (Barrett 2019). To explain why the EPA and DOI officials acted differently during Trump's first term, we need to look for value judgements that vary across agencies.

Rather than an intentional effort to manipulate an agency's information environment, the partisan affiliation and personal attributes of agency leadership could affect the briefing by influencing judgements

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[88]See also document entitled "Definers Excerpts", which was uploaded to Document Cloud by Rebecca Leber on November 10, 2020 (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5674678-Definers-Excerpts/).

[89]Circulation of EPA briefing is based on a June 8, 2017 email from George Hull to Jahan Wilcox p. ED_001518K_00000199-00001). See document entitled "8 23 18 Release in Full Part1", which was uploaded to Document Cloud by Nick Schwellenbach from the Project on Government Oversight on February 8, 2019 (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5732461-8-23-18-Release-in-Full-Part1.pdf).

about source accuracy.[90] Prior work has proven that partisanship strongly predicts trust in news media and perceptions of source accuracy (Bhuiyan et al. 2020; Ladd and Podkul 2018). However, the size of this effect varies across individuals. Some leaders or political appointees may be more likely to adopt positions consistent with their partisan affiliation, producing variation within an administration. Without more cases, it is difficult to know what combination of traits are relevant.[91] Both Kristi Noem and Scott Pruitt are known for being Trump loyalists who attack his critics, aggressively push his agenda, and have a highly visible and combative relationship with the news media (Slaton 2018; Woodruff Swan and Ward 2024). At first glance, Ryan Zinke, the Secretary of the Interior during Trump's first term, shared some of these traits. While some liberals initially expected him to moderate Trump's plans for the Interior department, he adopted an unexpectedly aggressive approach to implementing Trump's policy agenda (Fears, Eilperin, and Dawsey 2018; Lefebvre and Juliano 2018). However, the press also reported that Zinke was "not ideologically driven like Scott Pruitt" (McLaughlin 2017).

While the volume and prominence of right-leaning news in the DHS briefings is most consistent with pressure from agency leadership, it is possible that the change was an anticipated reaction by TechMIS. Due to the risk of being fired, contractors like TechMIS may self-censor content that could be deemed too extreme or inaccurate by the current administration. Because there are relatively few sizable center-right news sources in the United States,[92] increasing or relaxing standards for extreme content could have a larger effect on conservative news. Because partisan extremity is also correlated with third-party factual accuracy assessments, removing inaccurate sources would also disproportionately affect conservative coverage (Grinberg et al. 2019; Greene 2024).

To illustrate how these motives could work in practice, consider the different results for DHS and USCIS. In both of these briefings, the amount of news from fairly extreme, lower-quality right-leaning news has increased. However, the overall effect on the briefings is different. In the case of DHS, the proportion of material from right-leaning sources has increases dramatically and been concentrated in the most important section of the document. It is possible that these specific changes were dictated by the leadership of each agency; however, changes demanded by the DHS could have inadvertently affected the USCIS briefing because they share the same vendor, TechMIS. For example, TechMIS may have proactively changed the

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[90]According to internal emails, the accuracy of sources was discussed by EPA staffers as a reason to fire Bulletin Intelligence in 2017. In a February 2, 2017 email exchange between David Kreutzer (an EPA Senior Advisor) and former state senator Don Benton (an EPA Senior White House Advisor), David Kreutzer forwarded the Bulletin-produced news clips, writing, "We don't need to continue disseminating this junk." Don Benton replied saying "FYI- my scientist here indicates that they disseminate a lot of false/fake news stories here at EPA." See document entitled "Definers Excerpts", which was uploaded to Document Cloud by Rebecca Leber on November 10, 2020 (https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5674678-Definers-Excerpts/).

[91]Compounding the limited sample of cases, the USCIS director, Joseph B. Edlow, receives relatively little media attention. Based on his statements and work history, he has been working in immigration politics since before Trump came to power, has held positions in multiple us agencies and in Congress, and advocates for more conservative immigration policy (USCIS 2025; Anderson 2025; Kreighbaum 2025).

[92]See appendix A.4.

USCIS briefings if it believed that USCIS leadership would also want more material from right-leaning sources. Alternatively, if TechMIS uses the same pipeline to process articles for DHS and USCIS, changing the DHS briefings could have an unintentional effect on the USCIS briefings.

While there are legitimate reasons for restricting or expanding collection of extreme or low-quality news, the changes in the DHS briefing raise concerns. Whatever the reason for excluding many extreme conservative sources under the Biden administration, including more conservative coverage could benefit the agency by increase the information value of the briefings.[93] However, concentrating news from highly-partisan news outlets known for disseminating inaccurate information in the 'top news' section of the briefings suggests that current DHS leadership is not simply seeking more diverse sources of information. In comparison, the Biden administration did not similarly highlight coverage from comparable left-wing sources. At a critical time in US immigration policy, the prominence of relatively extreme conservative news sources may both reflect and reinforce the administrations priorities.

Recent changes to news briefings reflect a broader pattern of politicizing information and manipulating access to media coverage. For decades, the government's extensive efforts to collect, curate, and distribute news drew little outside notice. That changed when these once-routine practices came under heightened political scrutiny. In the early months of his second administration, President Donald J. Trump and his team devoted significant attention to government news consumption and payments for news services, going so far as to cancel widely used services from Politico and other news service providers.[94] This paper underscores the consequences of these actions, which were not merely symbolic; they actively obstructed and politicized the supply of information flowing to government agencies.

6. Conclusion

This paper offers the first systematic empirical analysis of internal government news briefings from multiple US executive agencies. I reveal how federal agencies gather and structure media content and examine the ways in which agency information environments are distorted. Because the incentives for collecting news are common to many types of political elites, the findings in this paper help us to understand elite news consumption broadly, not just within large federal bureaucracies.

The findings offer several key contributions. First, within US bureaucracies, news collection is systematic

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[93]Arguably, the briefings during Biden administration had too little coverage from far-right sources. Without briefings from the beginning of the Biden administration, I cannot verify that the composition of the briefings changed, but by 2024, very little far-right coverage was included in the USCIS or DHS briefing.

[94]In addition to targeting Politico, Trump's administration has also explored cancelling other center- and left-leaning news subscriptions (Basu and Caputo 2025; Guardian Staff 2025; Sheffey 2025). His administration has also instructed the State Department and General Services Agency to cancel media subscriptions. Staff at the Social Security agency also raised concerns after being told that they would be prevented from accessing news sites on government computers, inhibiting their ability to do their jobs.

and highly valued. News collection is a regular part of agency information collection efforts and the result of multiple, competing motives, most of which encourage agencies to prioritize a widespread and intensive news collection and organization. Yet despite these motives, the representativeness of news briefings is limited by supply-side dynamics, search strategies, and selection criteria.

In addition to their theoretical importance, these results also highlight the benefits of studying elite news consumption. This paper reveals how elite differs markedly from mass news consumption The tools, processes, and motivation of elite news consumption are distinct. By understanding the implications of this distinctiveness, we can better predict where and when media might affect policymaking. Even obscure stories can shape decision-making if they reach the right eyes. In short, the state does not merely react to media – it systematically collects, filters, and internalizes it. Understanding how and why it does so is essential to understanding the role of media in government.

Better understanding elite news consumption is critical to understanding media effects and disparities in who benefits from news media. First and foremost, we study sources that make the biggest impact on elite actors. These may not always be the most widely consumed sources. In fact, it may be easier to find evidence of media effects by focusing on longer-term reporting in relatively obscure or specialized sources.

In addition, we may be overlooking how changes in the market for news media have affected elite actors. For example, we may underestimate the consequences of declining local news by failing to consider how much the national government depends on local news as an information source. As shown by Hayes and Lawless (2021) and others, the hollowing out of local news has local consequences. However, my analysis of the federal news summaries suggests that federal agencies also depend on local news. Given asymmetrical rates of decline (Usher 2021; Stonbely 2023), some communities may be systematically less likely to have their local concerns raised at the national level. Also, we might underestimate the effect of technological advances (e.g. searchable databases of local news clips, automatic transcription, automated translation, etc.). Over time, technology differentially affects access to different forms of media.[95] Lastly, we risk misinterpreting the consequences of media fragmentation by overlooking the importance of new, specialized, low-cost media. While the internet has negatively impacted certain types of news, the internet has also made it possible for specialized, small, low-overhead news sources to reach political elites. In order to fully account for how the internet has changed the representativeness of news media (Gans 2011), we need to consider what kinds of stories are reaching political elites and how they can affect the representativeness of politics and policy.

While this paper looks at government agencies, future research should consider other elites, including

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[95]For example, print was far easier to share over the early internet than video or audio news. Advancements in transcription has also made television and audio news easier to keyword search, lowering the cost of searching for relevant news across a wide set of sources. While there have been large advancements, technological barriers are likely responsible for several notable absences in the news summaries.

interest groups. Unless we look beyond the biggest news stories, we are likely to miss important ways that news affects politics. For example, news can act as an important tool for policy diffusion (see Gabrielson 2016). It can also act as an information subsidy for interest groups. There are numerous cases where media coverage has helped interest groups find legal test cases or formed the basis for class action lawsuits that force the government to change its policy.[96]

Future research should also look at additional dimensions of bias. For example, in 2001, Republicans were blindsided by tribal opposition to their plans for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.[97] Is it a coincidence that Department of Interior briefings contain 9.5 times as many stories from petroleum industry publications than from Native American news sources?

Going forward, political science should use rapidly developing tools for text parsing and analysis to take advantage of archived documents and records of internal government activity. As part of those larger efforts, we should continue to study elite media consumption across all levels of government as well as consumption by elite actors outside of government. While there is good reason to believe that systematic news collection is widespread among political elites (Willis 2013; Karpowitz 2009), the scope and quality of news collection may vary substantially.

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[96] For example, the New York Times series 'Broken Homes' prompted lawsuits that eventually reshaped mental health housing policy in New York. For links to the coverage in this series, see https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/nyregion/BROKEN_HOMES.html?mcubz=0.

[97] According to an editorial published on a Native American news website, "When the Bush administration in November 2001 proposed creating a new agency to handle Indian trust assets, tribal leaders rushed to keep the Bureau of Indian Affairs from certain death. Without the BIA, they argued, there was no trust responsibility…The spirited defense befuddled the Republicans, who thought they were doing Indians a favor. 'To my great surprise, the tribes are very strongly attached to the Bureau of Indian Affairs,' Secretary of Interior Gale Norton would later tell a House committee." (Indianz.Com 2003)

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