

Media Bias and Democratic Backsliding

Evidence from U.S. Media Bias and Presidential Interventions

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Motivation

President Trump calling out cities for high crime rates and deploying national guard to those cities to combat crime.

Discrepancy

However, the actual crime rate tells a different story.

Literature Review

It is already established that media bias exists:

- ▶ Strong consensus on bias in “hard news” and politicized issues
- ▶ Older research: less severe in “soft news” and objective topics
- ▶ Partisan consumption patterns persist across all news types

Literature Review (cont.)

- ▶ **Question:** But how exactly do political leaders generate biased narratives to enable democratic backsliding?
- ▶ Better socioeconomic performance indeed provides more stable regimes,
- ▶ But evidence that lack of such performance causes democratic backsliding remains limited.
- ▶ Backsliding leaders win elections when voters embrace the promise of disruptive changes

Main Argument

Political leaders social media posts -> biased media coverage -> perceived performance -> support for drastic changes -> democratic backsliding

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Political leaders' strategic communications increase the gap between actual and perceived performance.

Hypothesis 2: Media bias that distorts reality, creating more support for disruptive changes, enables democratic backsliding.

Test 1

- ▶ **Unit of analysis:** State-time
- ▶ **Dependent variable:** Media bias: the difference between the actual crime rate and media coverage of the same crime type in a period of time
- ▶ **Intervention:** Trump Truth Social posts
- ▶ **Model:** Difference-in-differences with first treatment group dummy, relative time from the intervention, and state and temporal fixed effects.
- ▶ **Expected outcome:** Political leaders incite biased media coverage to achieve their own goals

Test 2

- ▶ **Unit of analysis:** Country-time
- ▶ **DV:** Democratic Backsliding
- ▶ **IV:** Media Bias, from HuggingFace and UnBIAS Classification Bert
- ▶ **Model:** Linear regression model
- ▶ **Expected outcome:** Media bias distorting reality reduces support for democracy

Data Sources

- ▶ **Crime Rate:** FBI Crime Data Explorer
- ▶ **Media Coverage:** CNN and Fox News API
- ▶ **Media Bias:** Generated from HuggingFace and UnBIAS Classification Bert
- ▶ **Democratic Backsliding:** V-Dem indices

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