

# **Political Coverage in the United States v. the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

Political polarization is rising and media trust is declining around the world, and many questions have emerged surrounding what role, if any, political news plays in impacting the public's view of the media and their country's political climate. The United States and the United Kingdom, two large Western democracies, have different political landscapes, with the U.S. having higher polarization and lower trust in the media than the U.K. Comparing both of these country's political media can provide potential insight as to where problem spots in coverage exist, offer areas for improvement, and start working toward better news environments. This study examines how political coverage in the U.S. and the U.K. differs across 3 variables: visuals used, fact-checking techniques employed, and the tonality shown toward political candidates. A content analysis of 203 news articles from 3 U.S. publications and 3 U.K. publications was conducted to identify these differences. Results indicate that the types of visuals used differed significantly between the U.S. and the U.K., U.S. articles were more likely to include fact-checking in their coverage, and American news outlets had wider gaps in the levels of negative, positive, and neutral tonality exhibited toward political candidates than British outlets. These findings contribute to political communication, international journalism, and comparative journalism research by directly contrasting news coverage between the U.S. and the U.K., where research is more scant. The findings also can provide potential insight for future studies of how differences in media coverage affects the electorate.

**Political Coverage in the United States v. the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis**

2024 saw two major elections be held between two large Western democracies: the 2024 United Kingdom general election on July 4th, and the 2024 United States presidential elections on November 5th. The U.K.'s election was to elect 650 members of Parliament to the House of Commons, which is one of two "houses" in the greater U.K. Parliament, the governing body of the country. The Labour Party, one of the two dominant political parties in the U.K., won a majority in Parliament, defeating the other main party, the Conservative Party, in a landslide victory (Cracknell et al., 2024). The Labour Party won 411 seats, while the Conservatives won 121 seats, making Labour's leader, Keir Starmer, the prime minister of the U.K. over the Conservative Party's Rishi Sunak. The U.S.'s presidential election saw President Donald Trump, a member of the Republican Party, get elected over the Democratic Party's candidate, Kamala Harris, marking his second term in office. Trump and the Republican Party won 312 of the 538 electoral votes in the election and just under half of the popular vote ("2024: The American Presidency Project," 2024). With these elections, and recent ones preceding them, have come significant questions over the role the media plays in shaping citizen's trust in the news and their view of the surrounding political landscape. Globally, political polarization has increased in many countries (McCoy et al., 2022) and trust in the media is low and in some cases, continuing to decline (Newman et al., 2024).

It can be difficult to place what the media's role is when it comes to influencing polarization and trust among the populace. However, almost three-quarters of adults in the U.S., one of the most sharply polarized countries, say they feel like the news media contributes to rising political polarization (Klepper, 2023). Despite this, some research points to the media being able to reduce polarization among the general population through several methods, like

“strategy news coverage,” which is reporting that centers a politician’s strategic motivations and campaign performance (Zoizner et al., 2021), or including a content warning in the article stating that reading content about political divisions can further exacerbate it (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2024). With trust in the media low in countries across the globe and polarization continuing to increase worldwide, comparing the reporting of two countries with different polarization and trust outcomes can provide potential insight into what role the media plays in affecting the electorate.

The purpose of this research is to compare political news coverage between popular newspapers in the U.S. and the U.K. The variables in this study being examined include the type of visuals that are common in domestic and foreign political coverage, the prevalence and type of fact-checking used, and the type of tone journalists use when speaking about politicians. While trust in the media is struggling in both countries, some studies suggest that the U.K. has fared slightly better in regards to media trust and polarization than the U.S (Boxell et al., 2020; McCoy & Press, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2024). This study’s look at how the news media in both of these countries covers politics could potentially provide valuable insight as to how journalism contributes to varying levels of trust and polarization among the general populace.

Political polarization is a broad term that scholars commonly delineate as ideological polarization and affective polarization (Heltzel & Laurin, 2020). Generally, political polarization refers to the division between groups in a political system that is typically marked as movement away from the center of the political spectrum and toward the extreme ends. Ideological polarization refers to citizen’s increasingly divided opinions about political ideologies and policies, while affective polarization is defined as citizen’s feelings of distrust toward political

parties that are different from their own (Boxell et al., 2020). Polarization can have wide-reaching effects on a society, including democratic erosion, the reduction of the likelihood of legislative compromise, and political violence (McCoy & Press, 2022).

Existing literature has found several differences and similarities between news coverage in the U.S. and the U.K. For example, both countries used similar sources, like government agencies and departments, when fact-checking things like political claims or misinformation campaigns (Juarez Miro & Anderson, 2024; Soo et al., 2023). Research also found weaknesses in the media's fact-checking for both the U.S. and U.K. In the U.K., reporters were much more likely to correct foreign politician's claims than political figures from their own country (Hughes et al., 2023), and in the U.S., there were notable differences in the level of severity professional fact-checking organizations would assign to false claims made (Markowitz et al., 2023). U.K. reporters were also more likely to link to the sources they used in their stories than U.S. reporters, which allows for fact verification and increases transparency between the journalist and the reader (Humphrecht & Esser, 2016). Other research suggests that U.K. news outlets focus their attention on providing entertainment in their political news coverage and using a more playful tone (van Dalen et al., 2012), which is corroborated by a separate study that states that two major U.K. publications, BuzzFeed News and Vice News, use techniques like visual humor, quizzes, cursing, and sarcasm when reporting (Dennis & Sampaio-Dias, 2021). All of these findings in current literature show specific areas in U.S. and U.K. reporting that potentially differ from one another. These differences and similarities can provide potential insight and context for what specific aspects of reporting can affect citizens and their view of the media and the political landscape in their respective countries. This study will examine these areas to build on existing journalism literature and inform future research.

For this study, artifacts were collected from two news databases: U.S. Newsstream for U.S. articles, and International Newsstream for U.K. articles. All of the artifacts collected from each newspaper were published three days before the start of each country's respective election. From there, each artifact was analyzed for the type of visuals used, fact-checking within the article, and the type of tone employed when speaking about a political figure.

This study will build on previous political communication and comparative journalism research conducted in the past and provide a comprehensive look at various aspects of news coverage. Many studies tend to examine only one or two aspects of political coverage in certain countries, like tone and the type of role a journalist takes on when reporting in their respective country (Dennis & Sampaio-Dias, 2021; van Dalen et al., 2012), and fact-checking (Hughes et al., 2023; Markowitz et al., 2023; Soo et al., 2023). This research analyzes multiple aspects and seeks to provide a comparative look at news in the U.S. and the U.K. With this study, it will be able to add to the current conversation surrounding political communication across different countries by looking at multiple variables together, rather than separately.

The following thesis will provide an in-depth look at existing literature in the field, an introduction to the methodology used to conduct this research, the results, and a discussion of what insight about foreign and domestic reporting can be derived from this study. As the news industry becomes an increasingly tumultuous place, this research will closely analyze fact-checking, visuals, and tone among British and American media and aim to provide potential insight as to how the news impacts polarization and citizen trust in the media. These kinds of results are critical in order to begin to take steps to improve the relationship between the news and the audience, as well as the relationship between citizens, and avoid the erosion of democracy.

### **Literature Review**

Some studies have found that there is a potential connection between the news media and how it affects and shapes public opinion and behavior (Happer & Philo, 2013; Wlezien & Soroka, 2023). When it comes to specifically political news, one American survey found that a large number of adults believe the media contributes to increasing political polarization, and that they have little trust in news outlets to report fairly and accurately (Klepper, 2023). However, existing research has not sufficiently examined how differences in media reporting styles across these countries affect public trust and engagement. This study aims to address this gap by comparing the use of visuals, fact-checking, and tone toward political candidates in news coverage in the United States and United Kingdom, seeking to understand how these variations may influence audience perceptions and the broader media environment. This literature review will first provide context behind the current media and political landscape in the U.S. and the U.K. and how various metrics, like citizen trust in the news and political polarization, differ between both countries. Then, this review will analyze literature surrounding how political news is covered in the U.S. and the U.K. across three main areas: the types of visuals used and their prevalence, fact-checking systems, and tone toward political candidates. While previous studies have explored media trust and polarization independently in the U.S. and U.K., there is a lack of comparative research that examines these themes across both countries' political news coverage. This study addresses this gap by directly comparing political news coverage in the two nations, offering a dual perspective that has been largely absent in the current literature.

### **Citizen's Opinions of Their Home Country's Media**

In order to compare political journalism between the U.S. and the U.K., it is important to look at the media context that exists within the two countries and how citizens view news

coverage in their respective nations. Establishing this foundation can provide valuable insight into the difference between the countries' populations in regards to media trust and help set up potential reasonings as to why these gaps exist.

Media trust has long been a heavily-discussed topic in the journalism field, as it is critical in ensuring a healthy and well-educated democracy. However, citizen trust in the media is low among citizens in both the U.S. and the U.K (Newman et al., 2024). Only 36% of U.K. citizens said they trusted the media “most of the time,” up 3% from last year. The U.S. ranked slightly lower, at 32%, with no increase or decrease from the previous year. This is corroborated by polling conducted by the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, which revealed that U.S. citizens also expressed concerns over how politics would be reported during the 2024 Presidential Election (Bauder, 2024). Fifty-three percent of Americans said they were concerned that journalists would report misinformation or inaccuracies surrounding the election. Forty-two percent also expressed worry that “news outlets will use generative artificial intelligence to create stories.” Doubts about news outlets being able to report on political issues fairly and accurately is another common theme when analyzing U.S. and U.K. citizen opinion data.

While existing research shows that the majority of publics want politically unbiased news coverage, some citizens do not think the media is delivering on this principle (Mitchell et al., 2018). The U.S. and the U.K. have similar metrics in this regard, however, British news outlets are slightly more well-received in every measure than American ones. For example, 47% of American citizens think their news media reports on political issues fairly, in comparison to 52% of British citizens. In addition, 61% of U.S. citizens think the media does well when reporting on the most important news events, compared to 74% of U.K. citizens. When considering individual

political parties' opinions on whether their country reports on political issues fairly, the U.S. has a 34% gap between their political parties, a sharp contrast between the U.K.'s 12% difference.

These findings of American and British trust in the media and citizen's general opinion of how their news outlets cover political topics reveal both small and large gaps between perceptions about political journalism in both countries. These statistics are essential to this study because they provide context behind the news industry in both countries, and can help justify the importance of a comparative study. This research turns to the specific components of scholarship on political news coverage. This section will present gaps in prior works before arguing how understanding these gaps may contribute to understanding ways political news coverage may associate with citizen's media trust.

### **Political Polarization**

Another important contextual item in this study is the political polarization of the electorate and its potential ties to news coverage. Analyzing how American and British publics are polarized can also provide context into the current state of the media in both countries and how it potentially contributes to this polarization. It can also, similar to the findings about media trust and public opinion, highlight how the media impacts this and what country's outlets can do to potentially reduce polarization.

Political polarization is the ideological distance between groups in a political system that is often marked by the radicalization of both parties (Heltzel & Laurin, 2020). It is another issue that is becoming more important in political and journalism spheres, and it can have wide-reaching effects on a country, like "democratic erosion," (McCoy & Press, 2022). Multiple research studies show that ideological gaps are prevalent in many countries, including in the U.S. and the U.K., although British polarization appears to be slightly weaker than American

polarization. Eighty-eight percent of Americans say political tensions are either “strong” or “very strong” in the country, while 65% of Brits say the same (Silver, 2022). In line with these findings about the U.S., Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. are “farther apart ideologically today than at any time in the past 50 years,” (DeSilver, 2022). Also in agreement with this research is a study about affective polarization, a type of political polarization where citizens are distrustful and harbor negative emotions toward a political party that is not their own, (Boxell et al., 2020). This study found that the U.S. had the highest increase in affective polarization since the 1980s among all countries analyzed. Meanwhile, affective polarization fell in the U.K. during the same period, which can be deemed a contradiction to Silver’s study, as it states that perceived notions of political tensions in the U.K. have increased since 2021. Although, it was noted that the U.K.’s decrease in affective polarization was not a statistically significant decrease in comparison to other countries.

Some research has shown that news outlets can intervene in various ways to reduce affective polarization among political parties. One example is employing “strategy news coverage,” which “emphasizes politicians’ strategic motivations, their political maneuvers to increase public support, and their campaign performance” (Zoizner et al., 2021). According to this study, citizens being exposed to strategy news coverage is associated with less hostility toward other parties. In another study, journalists can intervene and help potentially reduce affective polarization indirectly when reporting on these divides by providing a content warning that reading content about political division can further exacerbate it (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2024). However, the study did note that providing this type of a warning only indirectly reduced affective polarization, but it did directly impact ideological polarization, which was defined as how polarized a citizen thinks their own society is. However, despite this research about the

media being able to impact polarization, studies are mixed in their views. One study found that partisan media does not increase polarization among citizens, and that, of the news sites that people visited, news made up less than 2% of them (Wojcieszak et al., 2021).

However, one key gap in research about political polarization in regards to this literature review and associated study is the fact that little research exists about how polarization can be reduced in the U.K. While political and affective polarization appears to be a bigger issue in the U.S., which could be used to justify why research is more abundant, it is still a large part of U.K. society, as noted in Silver's study, and creates a large gap in this area of the literature.

### **Comparing U.S. and U.K. Political Coverage**

With both citizen trust and opinion in the news and political polarization of the electorate discussed, the remainder of this literature review will analyze research surrounding how the U.S. and U.K. report on politics and how they compare to each other. The main comparison points that repeatedly appeared in existing literature were visuals used in the news article, how outlets fact-checked, and the type of tone employed.

#### ***Visuals***

Visuals have long been a major part of journalism in both the U.S. and the U.K. American media saw its first photograph published in a newspaper in 1880, and these visuals became a common part of U.S. news in 1919 with the start of New York's Illustrated Daily News ("Portfolio 2: Pictorial Journalism," n.d.). While an "age of photojournalism" began in the 1920s, the U.K. newspaper, "The Banbury Guardian," published its first front-page color photograph in 1962, about 30 years before colored visuals became the norm (Sands, 2023).

In recent decades, the media has seen a large shift toward visualization, due in part to both aesthetic purposes and technological advancements (Boomgaarden et al., 2016). In political

communication more specifically, visual symbols have become increasingly important with the rise of television news, despite the visual component of the media being one of the least-studied aspects of the field (Schill, 2012).

Despite the absence of research revolving around visuals in political journalism, there are some slight differences between the kind and prevalence used in U.S. and U.K. media (Humphrecht & Esser, 2016). For example, Great Britain provided more background information in the form of information graphics than American outlets did, with a difference of 2.5% to 1.8%. The U.S. however, included more animations (6.5% to 5%), graphs (3.9% to 3.2%), and maps (5% to 4.3%) than U.K. news outlets did.

This subject area marks a major gap in literature revolving around the comparison between U.S. and U.K. political journalism. Since visuals in the media are not heavily studied, little is known about the type of visuals used in news articles, their overall prevalence, and how they differ between American and British outlets. This study seeks to examine how prevalent visuals are in both country's news media, the different types of visuals that are used in U.S. and U.K. political articles, and what differences exist between the two. Identifying these differences can provide insight into how gaps in the prevalence and types of visuals used in news media can, if they do, contribute to political polarization and media trust in both countries.

The following research question will be used to guide this study in this area:

**RQ1:** To what extent do U.S. and U.K. publications vary in their use of visuals in political reporting?

### ***Fact-Checking***

Fact-checking is becoming an increasingly important part of political communication, so much so that it is deemed a main foundational practice for journalism and politics (Markowitz et

al., 2023). As misinformation spreads, especially around political elections, it is imperative to recognize how outlets fact-check, and how news organizations in different countries might differ. Research has found that both similarities and differences in fact-checking among American and British outlets exist.

Firstly, U.S. and U.K. media used similar sources when fact-checking politicians or political claims. According to one study, the U.K. media, when fact-checking claims related to things like manifestos, Brexit, and health, relied on politicians, political parties, the U.K. government and other non-ministerial departments, (Soo et al., 2023). Per a separate study, the U.S. media, when fact-checking claims related to popular misinformation campaigns like Pizzagate and the 2020 election being stolen, used governmental organizations, the FBI, police, and other firsthand accounts (Juarez Miro & Anderson, 2024). Both of these studies show that American and British outlets employed similar sources to back up their corrections of political claims, which is an important aspect of how the media fact-checks various issues.

When looking at the actual fact-checking journalists did, BBC reporters showcased disparities and were far more likely to correct a statement or claim a U.S. politician made than a U.K. politician (Hughes et al., 2023). BBC journalists were also the source of over half of all corrective actions made towards Former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden, but less than 30% of corrective actions made towards Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Member of Parliament Jeremy Corbyn. In general, the research found that U.K. reporters were more likely to perform more fact-checks on foreign politicians because the closer they are to issues that are of national importance to them, (for example, if they report in the country they reside in) the more likely they are to subvert professional journalistic values. In the same vein of disparities in fact-checking among news outlets, two prominent fact-checking organizations in

the U.S., The Washington Post's Fact Checker and PolitiFact, were found to have general agreement on what needed fact-checking, but there were bigger differences in the severity level that each outlet gave a certain topic (Markowitz et al., 2023). These disparities, while different between each country, showed weaknesses in fact-checking in both countries.

Additionally, attribution and fact-checking are closely tied to transparency of sources and the verification of facts (Humphrecht & Esser, 2016). A major way U.S. and U.K. media outlets can improve transparency among their audience and aid in their ability to verify facts themselves is by hyperlinking to the sources that were used during a journalist's reporting. That way, readers are able to easily find sources that were used to inform the information presented to them. One major takeaway is that British news outlets linked to other news sites to increase transparency far more often than United States outlets did (27.1% to 15.4%) British news outlets also linked to their document or source used in 8.2% of stories, compared to 3.9% of U.S. stories.

Closely tied to transparency is the journalistic value of objectivity, which is reporting that is free from bias. In one analysis, research found that U.S. journalists showed more support of objectivity in journalism than British reporters (Esser & Umbricht, 2013). This relates back to Mitchell's study, where research found American citizens were slightly more likely to believe it is sometimes acceptable for news organizations to favor one political party over the other than British citizens (20% to 15%).

Due to the essential role that fact-checking plays in political journalism, it is a crucial metric to study when comparing news coverage in the U.S. and U.K. However, a few gaps in the literature exist. One such gap is the fact that little literature exists revolving around specific publications and their fact-checking standards, other than outlets like the BBC and the Washington Post. Also, many studies about fact-checking do not compare or research other

aspects of the news, and instead focus on just the fact-check component. This research will address these gaps by not only analyzing multiple publications from both the U.S. and the U.K., but also include other comparison metrics to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the differences between both countries.

The following research question will be used to guide this study in this area:

**RQ2:** To what extent do U.S. and U.K. publications vary in their fact-checking in political reporting?

### ***Tone***

Another key comparison point between U.S. and U.K. journalism outlets is tone, due to its general importance of aiding audience understanding of a particular topic and conveying various messages. Research exists surrounding tone use in political journalism in both the U.S. and the U.K., but little is available when directly comparing the two.

One piece of literature analyzed BuzzFeed News and Vice News, two media outlets in the United Kingdom, and what methods and techniques they employed to appeal to a younger audience (Dennis & Sampaio-Dias, 2021). The article found that BuzzFeed uses techniques like lists, quizzes, and visual humor in their election-related coverage, and Vice uses sarcasm, cursing, and various pop culture references. This more relaxed tone that these two British outlets employ is supported by another study that asserts that U.K. news organizations focus a lot of their attention on providing entertainment in their news coverage (van Dalen et al., 2012).

Tone in journalism can also include the emotions associated with the reporting. One study found that the tone U.S. and U.K. news outlets used when reporting on foreign leaders in Western democracies has become increasingly negative since the 1990s (Balmas, 2017). More specific to the U.S., another study found that a prominent news outlet in the country, The New

York Times, also had a negative tone when reporting on Former President Donald Trump (Ji & Zhao, 2023). The research noted that this tone was only slightly negative and, in general, The New York Times overall was mostly neutral when reporting.

The main gap that exists in current literature is the fact that little research directly compares the tone used in political journalism between both U.S. and U.K. news outlets. Instead, a majority of literature focuses on one country or one news outlet. This study will address this gap and compare three news publications from both the U.S. and the U.K. and directly analyze the differences in tone that the outlets had toward various politicians.

The following research question will be used to guide this study in this area:

**RQ3:** To what extent do U.S. and U.K. publications vary in their tonality toward political candidates in political reporting?

### **Summary**

The U.S. and the U.K. have been found to both struggle with political polarization among their populations, as well as low trust in the media. Both of these things can lead to the destruction of democracy, and research is mixed on whether the media can work to reduce the likelihood of this happening through intervention methods targeted at polarization. Learning more about each country's media systems and reporting styles can help hone in on problem spots that need improvement, which can potentially, as some research suggests, help the current media situation in both countries. It can also potentially identify how, if at all, political news coverage contributes to polarization and public trust in the media, which is an important first step to potentially improving these environments in both the U.S. and the U.K.

## **Methods**

This study examined election coverage from six different news publications from the United States and United Kingdom in order to discover potential differences in reporting between the two countries. The overall goal of this research was to understand the differences in reporting practices in the U.S. and the U.K., which can provide insights into one element that might be contributing to polarization and media distrust. The overarching research question for this study was: “In what ways does political reporting in the United States and the United Kingdom differ from each other?”

A content analysis methodology was selected for this study because the research questions called for an examination of the actual articles that were sampled. The research itself was focusing on the manifest differences between political reporting in the U.S. and the U.K., which does not require a human survey or experiment. A content analysis also aligns with previous literature in this field of study, as the majority of current research focuses on examining existing content. The specific variables for this study are discussed in detail below and can also be found in the codebook and corresponding codesheet in Appendix A.

### **Sampling Strategy**

The artifacts analyzed in this study were political news articles published in one of six publications, three being based in the U.S. and three being based in the U.K. To create the corpus of artifacts, two databases were used: U.S. Newsstream for the U.S. publications and International Newsstream for the U.K. publications. The three publications from each country were chosen based on their popularity in their host country and how many available artifacts were able to be pulled from the database after entering the corresponding search parameters. The three U.S. publications sampled were USA Today, The New York Times, and The Washington

Post. The three U.K. publications sampled were The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, and The Independent. While some publications, like the Daily Mail in the U.K., are technically more read than the newspapers sampled, this study wanted to exclude tabloids during the data collection process and focus on traditional publications.

Using these databases, search terms revolving around each country's respective 2024 election and the main political candidates of both elections were used in order to pull the most relevant results for the study. The search terms used for the U.S. publications were as follows: "U.S."; OR "United States"; AND "election"; AND "Donald Trump"; OR "Kamala Harris". The search terms used for the U.K. publications were as follows: "U.K."; OR "United Kingdom"; AND "election"; AND "Keir Starmer"; OR "Rishi Sunak". Without the politician search terms added, the databases came back with hundreds more results, so the two main candidates for each election were added to the search parameters to reduce the number of applicable artifacts and ensure the most relevant articles were found.

To continue to narrow down the amount of articles that the databases pulled, several filters were applied. When determining the time frame of when the news articles were published, the initial proposal was to include all of the artifacts that were published one month before each country's election. However, the amount of artifacts coming back for each publication were in the hundreds. One week before each country's election also resulted in large sample pools. All articles published within three days before the election were decided upon as a search term due to the database coming back with enough artifacts to examine for each of the six news publications. As described below, the U.S. database pulled more than double the amount of relevant artifacts than the U.K. database. Instead of adjusting only the U.K. database to include more days to pull more articles, this study wanted both time frames to be consistent. For the U.S.

Newsstream, the time frame was from November 2, 2024 to November 4, 2024. For the International Newsstream, the time frame was from July 1, 2024, to July 3, 2024.

For both databases, the “Source type” was limited to only “Newspapers.” This was to ensure that the most relevant news articles published in daily newspapers were pulled. To further narrow down the types of artifacts that came back, the “Document type” was limited to only “Article” and “News” for both the U.S. and U.K. databases. “English” was the only included language for this study. Articles that came back that were not published within the time constraints or did not follow the search parameters, such as not including any of the names of the candidates, were not analyzed. Duplicate articles, transcript articles, and otherwise inaccessible artifacts were removed from the sample. One-off, more in-depth articles were the focus of this study, so artifacts that were composed of live updates throughout the day or shorter news briefings were also removed from the sample.

With these search parameters, USA Today came back with 74 articles, The New York Times pulled 29, and The Washington Post had 30. Under the parameters for the U.K. publications, The Daily Telegraph pulled 47 artifacts, The Guardian came back with 18, and The Independent had 5. In total, the U.S. database pulled 133 relevant articles, and the U.K. database came back with 70, meaning the total number of artifacts analyzed for this study and added to the corpus was 203 (N=203).

The complete breakdown of the search terms, inclusions, exclusions, and the artifacts pulled by the databases can be found in Appendix A.

### **Coding and Coding Procedures**

For the content analysis of these artifacts, a codebook and corresponding codesheet were created to outline the variables used to code the articles and log the results for each artifact. The

codebook and codesheet can be found in Appendix A. Each coding category and subsequent variable is also described below.

For each artifact, the entire text was analyzed. This study analyzed both latent and manifest variables. The three coding categories for this study were as follows: visuals, fact-checking, and tone. Visuals and fact-checking were manifest variables in this study due to them being observable factors in U.S. and U.K. political reporting. The tone of the artifact was considered a latent variable due to the fact that tone is a much more interpretive aspect of journalism that is not as apparent from a first impression.

### ***Visuals***

The first overall category used to analyze the artifacts was visuals. In the context of this research study, visuals can be broadly defined as a picture, video, graphic, chart, map, or any other display used to accompany reporting in an article. The artifacts were first analyzed by whether they contained any type of visual. If a visual was present, six additional variables were considered to capture elements of the visual. If the article contained multiple different types of visuals, all of them would be separately coded within the corresponding variables outlined below.

**Photo of Political Figure.** The artifacts were analyzed by whether the visual was of a political figure. This political figure could have been either a political candidate that was up for office in one of the general elections in either country, like Kamala Harris or Rishi Sunak, or it could have been any politician. For example, if a visual present in the article was of a politician or had a politician in it, this variable would be coded as “1.” If no visuals in the article were of a politician, it would be coded as “0.”

**Video.** The artifacts were analyzed by whether a video as a type of visual was present. This variable would be coded if the video itself was embedded or included in the artifact. If a

video was included in another way, like along with a Tweet from the social media platform X for example, it would be coded in the “Other Visual” variable.

**Voting Map.** The artifacts were analyzed for if at least one of the visuals present in the article was a map that showed voting data, like an electoral college map. If the visual was of a map that showed other kinds of data, this would be coded under “Other Visual.”

**Data Charts or Graphs.** The artifacts were analyzed by if a data chart or data graph was present in the article. This is separate from a voting map, and includes visuals like a bar or line graph, or a pie chart. Data tables, a less visual component, would be coded under “Other Visuals.”

**Other Visuals.** The artifacts were analyzed by whether another type of visual not previously coded for was present. This includes things like a photo of something other than a political candidate, like a polling location, an embedded social media post, an illustration, a photo gallery, or an in-article poll that readers can take.

### ***Fact-Checking***

The second category used to analyze artifacts was fact-checking. Fact-checking can be broadly defined as the process of verifying whether the facts in an article are true or false. While this often takes the shape of directly correcting claims politicians make, one previous study discussed how attribution and hyperlinking to sources journalists used to inform their reporting are key ways to improve transparency among readers due to the fact that they can easily access and verify facts themselves (Humprecht & Esser, 2016). For this reason, fact verification techniques, like attributing and hyperlinking to sources, falls under this category.

First, the artifacts were analyzed for whether fact-checking was present in the article. This would include things like directly checking and correcting a political claim, hyperlinking to

another source that checks the claim, or attributing to a source the journalist used so the audience can verify the fact themselves. From there, four more variables were used to analyze the artifact.

**Directly Checking a Politician's Claim.** The artifact was examined for whether it directly discusses a political claim that was made and checks it, or corrects it if it was false. For example, a quote from an examined USA Today article says, ““On January 20, the Trump White House will advise all U.S. water systems to remove fluoride from public water,”” Kennedy said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. He claimed without proof that fluoride in U.S. water is linked to a variety of medical conditions, despite studies providing evidence to the contrary. Local communities have added fluoride to their public drinking water since 1945. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention described these public water fluoridation efforts as among the top 10 public health achievements of the 20th Century.” This example would fall under this variable, since the journalist directly noted a claim a politician made and checked it.

In some cases, the journalist might fact-check a claim that was not made by a politician. For example, in one analyzed USA Today article, the journalist fact-checked a false claim made by a social media user and used this justification: “The image in the Instagram post doesn't show Trump and his wife casting their ballots in the 2024 general election. Rather, it dates back to Nov. 8, 2016, Election Day in the presidential race between Trump and Hillary Clinton. CNN shared an animated version of the image on Twitter, now X, that Election Day, with the caption, ‘Donald Trump peeked at Melania's ballot, and Twitter had some jokes. Big league.’” Since the claim did not originate from a politician, but the journalist was still fact-checking it, this example would not fall under this specific category of directly checking a politician's claim.

**Contains Hyperlinks to Other Information Sources.** The artifact was analyzed for whether it contained any hyperlink that linked to a separate source of information, like a different

article, report, or poll results. A hyperlink is a link that takes the user to another page on the same website or another website entirely. For example, per an article from The Telegraph: “The boat carries the name HMS Toolmaker – a reference to Sir Keir’s frequently repeated line that his father worked as a toolmaker.” In this artifact, the words “worked as a toolmaker” hyperlinked to another article about Keir Starmer, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Hyperlinks can also be to general background pages on the same website. For example, The Guardian said in one article, “However, Royal Mail sources said on Tuesday that he had not yet raised his concerns.” In this sentence, “Royal Mail” hyperlinked to a general page on The Guardian’s website that included every article concerning Royal Mail in the United Kingdom.

Hyperlinks are also used to link to sources found on different webpages. For example, one article from The Washington Post hyperlinks to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center.

**Hyperlink Used for Fact-Checking Purposes.** The artifact was analyzed for whether a hyperlink, if one was present, in the article was used in order to help fact-check a claim. For example, if the journalist fact-checked a claim made by a politician and hyperlinked to a report, survey, separate article, or any other information source, that would fall under this category. If a journalist hyperlinked to a related or background article that was not used to fact-check information, that would not fall under this variable.

**Attribution of Sources Without Hyperlinking.** The artifact was analyzed for whether the journalist attributed the sources they used to inform their writing in a way other than hyperlinking. For example, if a reporter discusses results from a research survey they mentioned in the article, a social media post, or a poll but does not hyperlink to it, that would fall under this category. Interviews or statements from sources do not fall under this category, as that is not something that can normally be hyperlinked to. For example, the sentences, “One poll has Vice

President Kamala Harris ahead in Georgia by four points, and another has former President Donald J. Trump leading by six. A couple more have the candidates effectively tied,” from an article in The New York Times, would fall under this category and would be coded accordingly, since the artifact mentions polling data, but does not provide a hyperlink to them.

### ***Tone Toward Political Candidates***

The third and final category that the artifacts were analyzed under was the tone the journalist had toward the primary political candidates of each country’s election. For the U.S. articles, the tonality toward Donald Trump and Kamala Harris was examined. For the U.K. articles, the tone exhibited toward Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer was examined. For this study, the tone used toward each of the four candidates could have been positive, negative, or neutral. To compensate for the fact that multiple tones toward one specific candidate can be present in an article, each individual variable was worded to only target either positive, negative, or neutral tonality toward one candidate. For example, one variable is worded as, “Does the artifact demonstrate a positive tone toward candidate Kamala Harris?”, and another is worded as “Does the artifact demonstrate a neutral tone toward candidate Rishi Sunak?”

Only the mention of Kamala Harris or Donald Trump was required in the search terms for the United States artifacts, and only the mention of Keir Starmer or Rishi Sunak was required for the United Kingdom artifacts. However, some articles mentioned one of the political candidates listed in the other country’s publication. For example, one article from The Independent mentioned Donald Trump, so the tone exhibited toward him was also analyzed. If one of the four political candidates was not mentioned in the U.S. or U.K. article being examined, like if Kamala Harris was not mentioned in an article from a U.K. publication, this variable would be left blank

in the codesheet. More information about this coding protocol can be found in the codebook in Appendix A.

**Positive Tone.** The artifacts were analyzed for whether the journalist’s writing exhibited a positive tone toward any of the four primary political candidates up for election in the U.S. and the U.K. Examples of an article showing positive tone include evidence of positive words used to describe the candidate or their actions, or highlighting the good in a situation surrounding the candidate. For example, the phrase “The latest Labour attacks on the Conservatives are a sign the party under Sir Keir is happy to take on the government on defence policy,” seen in an analyzed article from The Independent, is a sign of a positive tone toward Keir Starmer.

**Negative Tone.** The artifacts were examined to see if the journalist used a negative tone toward Kamala Harris, Donald Trump, Keir Starmer, and Rishi Sunak. Examples of negative tone being exhibited in an article include negative words describing the candidate or criticism toward the candidate and their actions. For example, the phrase “Applications to university from within the UK show no sign of decline, and – despite the best efforts of Rishi Sunak and the rightwing press – there remains a considerable cultural and economic premium attached to a university degree,” from an examined article in The Guardian, is a sign of a negative tone toward Rishi Sunak.

**Neutral Tone.** Finally, the artifacts were analyzed for whether a neutral tone was used toward Kamala Harris, Donald Trump, Keir Starmer, and Rishi Sunak. If there were no clear signs or pieces of evidence that the article showed a distinct positive or negative tone, such as avoiding strong wording that could evoke emotions, then the artifact was coded as having a neutral tone.

### **Coding Limitation**

Due to the time constraints for this study, only one coder could perform all of the coding for the artifacts, which eliminated the opportunity for intercoder reliability checks. However, a codebook containing the guidelines for coding the data was created before coding began and was examined and approved by the research advisor. The codebook and codesheet with the data was also shared with the advisor, and check-ins about the coding and research findings were regularly performed to ensure there was a second opinion and that the research questions were being properly addressed.

### **Summary of Methods**

This study was a content analysis of political news articles from six different U.S. and U.K. publications that examined three different categories: visuals, fact-checking, and the tone exhibited toward political candidates. Each category had various variables that each artifact was analyzed for. All of the coding guidelines, categories, variables, and definitions were described in a codebook, and all artifact analyses were logged in a corresponding codesheet. The codebook can be found in Appendix A.

### **Results**

This study's primary purpose is to explore potential differences between political reporting in the U.S. and the U.K. across three variables: visuals, fact-checking, and tonality. From there, these differences can potentially inform future research about how these gaps affect the general population, their trust in the media, and political polarization. But, in order to identify these effects, it is critical to understand the content of the media being consumed. Some literature points to news coverage being able to affect public opinion and behavior, including regarding polarization and trust in media (Happer & Philo, 2013; Klepper, 2023; Kubin & von Sikorski, 2024; Wlezien & Soroka, 2023; Zoizner et al., 2021). Knowing what, if any, differences exist

within these three variables can provide potential insight as to how political reporting affects citizens and their view of the media and their country's political landscape.

Each of the three research questions will be addressed in its own subsection, starting with visuals, then fact-checking, and, thirdly, tonality toward political candidates.

### **RQ1: Differences in Visuals**

RQ1 examined what kinds of visuals in U.S. and U.K. publications used in their articles, including photos of politicians, videos, voting maps, data graphs and charts, and any other visual not listed. Visuals were present in 100% of artifacts analyzed for the U.S. (n = 133) and the U.K. (n = 70).

Photos of politicians, data graphs and charts, and voting maps were present in a larger proportion of U.K. artifacts compared to U.S. ones. Photos of politicians appeared in 45% (n = 60) of U.S. artifacts analyzed and 63% (n = 44) of U.K. articles. The gap in prevalence of data graphs and charts in U.S. and U.K. articles was large, with them being present in 5% (n = 7) of U.S. artifacts and 31% of U.K. articles (n = 22). For both countries however, the presence of voting maps were closer proportion-wise and were rarely seen, only appearing in less than 1% of U.S. articles (n = 1) and 3% of U.K. ones (n = 2).

Meanwhile, videos and other visuals that were not previously listed, like an embedded social media post or a reader poll, were more prevalent in U.S. artifacts. Videos were much more common in American news outlets, with 59% (n = 79) of U.S. articles analyzed having one and 16% of U.K. ones (n = 11) having one. Other kinds of visuals were present in 85% (n = 113) of U.S. articles and 61% (n = 43) of U.K. ones.

RQ1 shows that U.S. and U.K. news outlets have several differences for their visuals. Photos of politicians and data graphs and charts were much more likely to appear in U.K.

artifacts, while U.S. articles were significantly more likely to contain videos or any other kind of visual not previously listed, like a photo that is not of a politician.

Table 1. *Types of Visuals in U.S. and U.K. Publications*

Visuals	Total	Country	
		U.S.	U.K.
<b>Photos of Politicians</b>	104 (51.2%)	60 (45.1%)	44 (62.9%)
<b>Videos</b>	90 (44.3%)	79 (59.4%)	11 (15.7%)
<b>Voting Maps</b>	3 (1.5%)	1 (0.8%)	2 (2.9%)
<b>Data Graphs or Charts</b>	29 (14.3%)	7 (5.3%)	22 (31.4%)
<b>Different Visual</b>	156 (76.8%)	113 (85%)	43 (61.4%)

## RQ2: Differences in Fact-Checking

RQ2 explored if and how U.S. and U.K. publications fact-check claims made in political articles. Examples of fact-checking from the examined sample include directly checking a claim, hyperlinking to a separate source that checks the claim, or attributing to a source the reporter used so the audience can verify the facts for themselves.

Of the 203 total artifacts analyzed across both the U.S. and the U.K. publications, 18.2% (n = 37) showed evidence of fact-checking. Out of the 133 U.S. artifacts, 22% (n = 29) contained fact-checking, and of the 70 U.K. articles, 11% (n = 8) showed evidence of fact-checking.

U.S.-based news outlets tended to directly check a politician's claim more than U.K. ones, with 17% percent (n = 22) of U.S. artifacts directly checking a politician's claim compared

to 10% (n = 7) of U.K. articles. More U.S. artifacts also contained a hyperlink that was used to fact-check a claim, with 18% (n = 24) of U.S. articles doing this. Meanwhile, 0% (n = 0) of U.K. articles hyperlinked to outside sources to fact-check. In the same vein, a smaller proportion of U.S. articles, when attributing to an outside source, did not hyperlink to it in comparison to the U.K. Thirty-eight percent (n = 50) of U.S. articles attributed to an outside source without hyperlinking to it, compared to 61% (n = 43) of U.K. ones.

However, the vast majority of both U.S. and U.K. news articles contained at least one hyperlink to another source, with 99% (n = 131) of U.S. artifacts and 99% (n = 69) of U.K. artifacts doing so.

Results for RQ2 reveal gaps in the level of fact-checking U.S. and U.K. news outlets perform in their political coverage. The U.S. was ahead of the U.K. in terms of directly checking a politician's claim, using hyperlinks to check claims, and American publications were more likely to attribute to outside sources and hyperlink to them so readers could access them.

Table 2. *Fact-Checking in U.S. and U.K. Publications*

Fact-Checking	Total	Country	
		U.S.	U.K.
<b>Evidence of Fact-Checking</b>	37 (18.2%)	29 (21.8%)	8 (11.4%)
<b>Directly Checking a Politician's Claim</b>	29 (14.3%)	22 (16.5%)	7 (10%)
<b>Hyperlink to Other Source</b>	200 (98.5%)	131 (98.5%)	69 (98.6%)
<b>Hyperlink Used to Fact-Check</b>	24 (11.8%)	24 (18%)	0 (0%)
<b>Attributing Sources without Hyperlink</b>	93 (45.8%)	50 (37.6%)	43 (61.4%)

**RQ3: Differences in Tone Toward Political Candidates**

RQ3 analyzed the tone exhibited toward the two major candidates for each country's election: Kamala Harris and Donald Trump for the U.S., and Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak for the U.K. Artifacts were analyzed for either positive, negative, or neutral tone, and, if applicable, multiple tones could be present toward a political candidate in a single article, meaning some percentage counts may equal more than 100%.

Examples of a positive tone include the phrase "The latest Labour attacks on the Conservatives are a sign the party under Sir Keir is happy to take on the government on defence policy," from an analyzed article in *The Independent*. The artifact has a more optimistic take on the actions of Starmer's party and his leadership, so this article was coded as having a positive tone toward Starmer. On the contrary, an article from *The Guardian* has the phrase, "Applications to university from within the UK show no sign of decline, and – despite the best efforts of Rishi Sunak and the rightwing press – there remains a considerable cultural and economic premium attached to a university degree," which shows a more negative view of Sunak's actions and efforts in office. This artifact was coded as having a negative tone toward Sunak. Artifacts were coded as having a neutral tone if there was no solid evidence, phrasing, or strong wording that could point to the journalist exhibiting a positive or negative tone toward a politician.

Out of all 203 artifacts across both the U.S. and U.K., 57% (n = 116) mentioned Harris, 70% (n = 142) mentioned Trump, 30% (n = 60) mentioned Starmer, and 23% (n = 46) mentioned Sunak. In the U.S., Harris was mentioned in 87% (n = 116) of the artifacts and in 0% (n = 0) of U.K. articles. Out of the 116 articles Harris was mentioned in, 16% (n = 18) of U.S. artifacts exhibited a positive tone towards her, 5% (n = 6) exhibited a negative tone, and 87% (n = 101)

exhibited a neutral tone. Trump was mentioned in 98% (n = 131) of U.S. artifacts and 16% (n = 11) of U.K. ones. 2% (n = 2) of U.S. artifacts Trump was mentioned in exhibited a positive tone toward him, 48% (n = 63) exhibited a negative tone, and 71% (n = 93) exhibited a neutral tone. In the U.K. artifacts Trump was mentioned in, 9% (n = 1) exhibited a positive tone toward Trump, 27% (n = 3) exhibited a negative tone, and 64% (n = 7) exhibited a neutral tone. Starmer was mentioned in 2% (n = 2) of U.S. artifacts and 83% (n = 58) of U.K. ones. 50% (n = 1) of the U.S. artifacts that Starmer was mentioned in exhibited a negative tone toward him, and 100% (n = 2) exhibited a neutral tone. No U.S. artifacts Starmer was mentioned in exhibited a positive tone. Of the U.K. artifacts Starmer was mentioned in, 10% (n = 6) exhibited a positive tone, 43% (n = 25) exhibited a negative tone, and 51% (n = 30) exhibited a neutral tone. In the U.K., Sunak was mentioned in 66% (n = 46) of the artifacts and in 0% (n = 0) of U.S. articles. Of the U.K. artifacts Sunak was mentioned in, 15% (n = 7) exhibited a positive tone toward him, 41% (n = 19) exhibited a negative tone, and 48% (n = 22) exhibited a neutral tone.

Results for RQ3 show major differences in the tonality directed at politicians in U.S. and U.K. media coverage. U.S. publications were much more likely to exhibit a negative tone toward Trump compared to Harris, with 48% of artifacts showcasing a more negative tone toward Trump and only 5% doing the same for Harris. There was also a large gap in the level of neutrality given to both American candidates — 87% of artifacts were neutral toward Harris and 71% were neutral toward Trump. There was also a large gap in the level of positive tone exhibited toward each candidate, with 16% of U.S. articles showing positive tone toward Harris and only 2% exhibiting positive tone toward Trump.

The U.K. however, was much more even in their tonalities exhibited toward candidates. For negative tone, 43% percent of U.K. artifacts were negative toward Starmer, similar to 41%

for Sunak. British news also showed similar levels of neutrality toward U.K. candidates, with 51% of articles being neutral toward Starmer and 48% showing neutrality to Sunak. Positive tonality was also more even, with 10% of U.K. artifacts exhibited positive tone toward Starmer and 15% showing positive tone toward Sunak.

Table 3. *Tonality Toward Political Candidates in U.S. and U.K. Publications*

<b>Tonality</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>By Country</b>	
		<i>U.S.</i>	<i>U.K.</i>
<b>Harris Mentioned</b>	116 (57.1%)	116 (87.2%)	0 (0%)
<b>Harris Positive Tone</b>	18 (8.9%)	18 (13.5%)	0 (0%)
<b>Harris Negative Tone</b>	6 (3%)	6 (4.5%)	0 (0%)
<b>Harris Neutral Tone</b>	101 (49.8%)	101 (75.9%)	0 (0%)
<b>Trump Mentioned</b>	142 (70%)	131 (98.5%)	11 (15.7%)
<b>Trump Positive Tone</b>	3 (1.5%)	2 (1.5%)	1 (1.4%)
<b>Trump Negative Tone</b>	66 (32.5%)	63 (47.4%)	3 (4.3%)
<b>Trump Neutral Tone</b>	100 (49.3%)	93 (69.9%)	7 (10%)
<b>Starmer Mentioned</b>	60 (29.6%)	2 (1.5%)	58 (82.9%)
<b>Starmer Positive Tone</b>	6 (3%)	0 (0%)	6 (8.6%)
<b>Starmer Negative Tone</b>	26 (12.8%)	1 (0.75%)	25 (35.7%)
<b>Starmer Neutral Tone</b>	32 (15.8%)	2 (1.5%)	30 (42.9%)
<b>Sunak Mentioned</b>	46 (22.7%)	0 (0%)	46 (65.7%)
<b>Sunak Positive Tone</b>	7 (3.4%)	0 (0%)	7 (10%)
<b>Sunak Negative Tone</b>	19 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	19 (27.1%)
<b>Sunak Neutral Tone</b>	22 (10.8%)	0 (0%)	22 (31.4%)

*Note.* The percentage results in the “Total” column were divided by 203, for the total number of articles. The percentage results in the U.S. column were divided by 133, and the results in the U.K. column were divided by 70 for the number of articles analyzed for each country.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study address how political reporting in the U.S. and the U.K. differs across three variables: visuals present, fact-checking, and tonality. The data found from this study shows that there are numerous differences between the variables examined and highlights gaps in the way U.S. and U.K. news outlets report on elections. These findings expand on previous studies within political communication and comparative journalism literature and fill in gaps in previous comparative analyses in this research field. Specifically, this study expands upon Humprecht and Esser's (2016) work about visuals and fact-checking techniques, as their study found that graphs and maps were more common in U.S. political articles, along with their finding that British news outlets were more likely to hyperlink to other news sites and sources than American ones. This study contradicts the visual component of Humprecht and Esser's (2016) work, but potentially confirms their findings on hyperlinking. This analysis also expands upon Ji and Zhao's (2023) research about the negative tonality The New York Times exhibits toward political candidates. However, the findings from this study primarily serve to fill in gaps in existing literature, as many previous studies do not directly compare American and British political coverage across the three variables from this research.

This discussion will be structured by way of presenting three major findings, followed by limitations and the potential for future research.

### **Differences in the Presence of Visuals**

This study found that there are significant differences in the types of visuals presented in U.S. and U.K. news articles. Specifically, U.K. artifacts were more likely to feature photos of politicians, data graphs and charts, and voting maps, while videos and other visuals were more common in U.S. articles. This ties back to RQ1, which sought to find out what, if any,

differences exist in the visuals presented in U.S. and U.K. publications. These findings from RQ1 directly contradict prior research (Humprecht & Esser, 2016), which found that graphs and maps were more common in U.S. political articles.

The main importance of these findings is the fact that visual components of news media are one of the least-studied parts of the field in communications research (Schill, 2012). There are very few studies that examine the prevalence of visuals in news articles, and even fewer compare these findings with reporting in other countries (Humprecht & Esser, 2016). This study and RQ1's findings surrounding the presence of visuals builds upon current research that exists and provides a more recent perspective, while also filling in gaps in literature that do not compare the prevalence and variance of visuals between the U.S. and the U.K. Since visuals used in the news are one of the least-studied components in the field, it is imperative to dedicate more research toward it to understand the effects it can have. Having this comparison between visuals provided by this study can contribute to future research surrounding the effects that political news coverage can have on the general populace, such as media trust and political polarization. By finding differences and gaps in the types of visuals presented in American and British publications, future studies can potentially examine whether these differences have any effect on citizens and their view of the political landscape.

### **Differences in Fact-Checking Techniques**

RQ2's purpose was to discover if there are any differences in fact-checking techniques between U.S. and U.K. political reporting. Fact-checking can take on many forms, including directly checking and correcting a claim made by a politician or using hyperlinks to increase transparency of sources for the reader. The main takeaway from RQ2 was that American articles were more likely to directly fact-check politician's claims, use hyperlinks to check claims, and

were less likely to not hyperlink to a source that they reference than British ones. This suggests that the process and act of checking and correcting false claims is a larger part of the journalism industry in the U.S., compared to the U.K. The findings from this part of the study potentially confirms previous research (Humprecht & Esser, 2016), which suggested that British news outlets were more likely to hyperlink to other news sites and sources than American ones. This part of the study also points to a potential confirmation of a previous study (Esser & Umbricht, 2013) that asserted that American journalists were more likely to support objectivity in journalism than British journalists. Fact-checking and transparency of sources go hand in hand with objectivity and reporting that is free from bias, so RQ2's findings in this study provide a potential tie to Esser and Umbricht's research.

Similar to RQ1's findings about visuals in political reporting, RQ2's findings are able to fill in gaps in existing literature surrounding fact-checking in news publications. Many of the previous studies that exist only focus on one news publication, or they do not provide a comparison between fact-checking in both the U.S. and the U.K. The takeaways from this part of this study are critical to understanding differences in how American and British journalists and news outlets fact-check, which can lead to potential discoveries as to how said differences impact each country's respective electorate. Since fact-checking is now considered a central part of political communication, including journalism (Markowitz et al., 2023), recognizing these differences can open the door for future research to find potential correlations between fact-checking techniques and citizen's trust in the news and political polarization trends.

### **Differences in Tonality Toward Politicians**

This section of the study found that the U.S. and the U.K. had major differences in the tonality they would exhibit toward politicians. RQ3's results suggest that American news

publications had large gaps in negative, positive, and neutral tones exhibited toward Harris and Trump. In the U.K. however, news outlets treated Starmer and Sunak more equally in terms of the type of tonalities exhibited toward them. Existing literature comparing tonality in media across countries is more lacking, but RQ3's findings extend upon a previous study (Ji & Zhao, 2023), which asserted that The New York Times exhibited a negative tone when reporting on Trump. This part of this study's findings can confirm and extend upon these findings, as American news outlets were much more critical of Trump than fellow U.S. politician Harris. RQ3's findings also tie in with Esser and Umbricht's (2013) research that suggests that American journalists support objectivity in their reporting more than British journalists. The main takeaway from this section seems to confirm Esser and Umbricht's findings, as U.S. reporting, while having bigger gaps in the amount of negative tonality exhibited toward Harris and Trump in comparison to the tone shown toward Starmer and Sunak, was more likely to be neutral toward Harris and Trump than U.K. outlets were to Starmer and Sunak.

As both RQ1 and RQ2 are able to do, RQ3 and this study's findings regarding the tonality shown toward politicians are able to fill in crucial gaps in existing research. Little current literature directly compares U.S. and U.K. media outlets surrounding the type of tone used, and this study is able to highlight the important gaps that exist. The type of tone shown toward a politician is closely intertwined with objectivity and bias, and previous research shows that publics across many countries want political unbiased coverage (Mitchell et al., 2018). Seeing what kind of tone each country's news outlets show toward politicians and what differences exist is important when establishing potential connections between tonality in reporting and its effect on the general public.

The findings from RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 all help fill gaps in existing literature, which can help create a more complete picture of American and British political reporting landscapes. This study is able to highlight the major differences in visuals, fact-checking, and tonality exhibited toward politicians, which can potentially contribute to future research about how the media affects the public, especially in terms of trust and polarization. This research can help serve as a baseline for future contributions to this field of study and potentially assist in honing in on areas that need improvement, which can help the media situation in both the U.S. and the U.K.

### **Limitations**

The biggest limitation of the study was the small sample size of U.K. artifacts. All artifacts were found through U.S. Newsstream for U.S. publications and International Newsstream for U.K. publications, and the U.S. database pulled significantly more artifacts ( $n = 133$ ) than the U.K. database ( $n = 70$ ). More specifically, after sifting through pulled artifacts that did not meet the criteria (e.g. not falling under the correct date window), a very small number of articles ( $n = 5$ ) were able to be analyzed for The Independent. The smaller number of artifacts from the U.K. that were able to be examined could skew the study's findings and was not able to capture as broad a range of reporting as the analyzed artifacts from the U.S. Another key limitation was the fact that there was only one coder used in this study, which eliminated the possibility of inter-coder reliability.

### **Future Research**

Future research should focus on analyzing a larger number of articles from the U.K. to capture a better and more equal picture of the journalism landscape compared to the U.S. Further studies can also dig deeper and examine how this study's three variables compare between each individual country's publications, like comparing The New York Times, The Washington Post,

and USA Today specifically, and not just a broad, overarching look at the differences between each country's news outlets. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, future research can study what the effects of these differences in the variables are on the general population and how, if at all, said differences affect citizen trust in the media and political polarization.

Overall, this study highlights and analyzes differences in visuals, fact-checking techniques, and tonality exhibited in U.S. and U.K. news outlets. These differences can provide potential insight into how citizens are affected by political reporting, and can help shape future communications research that can aim to improve the media situations in both the U.S. and U.K. The implications of these findings will be further discussed in the conclusion.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to analyze articles from various U.S. and U.K. publications for differences in visuals, fact-checking techniques, and tonality, and provide potential insight into how political journalism and the differences associated with it can affect the general public. The major findings from this study include how U.K. and U.S. articles featured different types of visuals more often, U.S. journalists were more likely to employ various fact-checking techniques in their reporting, and U.S. publications had wider gaps in the amount of negative and neutral tone they exhibited toward politicians than U.K. ones.

These findings both confirm and contradict previous research in the field regarding the different variables examined in this study. However, these findings primarily serve as a way to fill in gaps in existing research, as there is limited comparative literature available for this topic. Previous studies did not directly compare U.S. and U.K. publications for variables like visuals, fact-checking, and tone, so this research was able to provide new insight and direct comparisons

between American and British media outlets. This opens the door for new research in the future to examine what, if any, affects these differences have on the general public.

This study's findings not only highlight major differences in the way U.S. and U.K. publications report on political news, but also provide potential insight into how these differences affect various aspects of society, like media trust and political polarization. Some previous research suggests that the news affects public trust in the media and political polarization (Klepper, 2023; Kubin & von Sikorski, 2024; Zoizner et al., 2021), and understanding the differences in U.S. and U.K. political reporting is an important first step to potentially improving the media environment in both countries.

As democracies across the globe become increasingly polarized and citizen trust in the media remains low, comparing different country's media systems is an important way to highlight areas that potentially contribute to these growing problems. The differences in political coverage in the U.S. and the U.K. that this research found are critical to understanding the content being consumed by the general public and can contribute to future research to study how said differences affect, if they do, the populace.

## Appendices

### Appendix A - Content Analysis Codebook

The purpose of this study is to analyze how United States and United Kingdom news outlets differ in their political reporting. Key metrics that will be studied include what types of visuals are present in their reporting, what fact-checking techniques are employed, and what type of tone is exhibited toward politicians in the article. Articles from three publications from each country were analyzed. All articles analyzed were published within three days of the United States' or the United Kingdom's most recent general election. U.S. Newsstream was used for gathering articles from the United States, and International Newsstream was used for gathering articles from the United Kingdom.

#### Source and Parameters for Artifacts

##### *Source*

Content for the United States newspapers will be gathered from the database U.S. Newsstream since they have a large collection of U.S. newspapers to choose from. The U.S. newspapers being analyzed are The New York Times, The Washington Post, and the USA Today due to them being some of the most-read publications in the country that have wide-reaching influence. Content for the United Kingdom newspapers will be gathered from the database International Newsstream for similar reasons. The U.K. publications being analyzed are the Guardian, the Daily Telegraph, and the Independent because of their large readerbase and similar influence in the country.

##### *Parameters*

When using the databases, the search parameters are as follows:

**For the U.S. Newsstream database:**

- Go to “**Advanced Search**” and use these terms:

Search terms	(U.S. or United States) AND election AND Donald Trump OR Kamala Harris
Publication Date	Specific date range: November 2, 2024 to November 4, 2024
Company/Organization	("The Washington Post" OR "New York Times" OR "USA Today")  Coders can also edit the newspapers included and narrow down the search on the results screen.
Source Type	Newspapers
Document Type	Article, News
Language	English

**For the International Newsstream database:**

- Go to “**Advanced Search**” and use these terms:

Search terms	(U.K. or United Kingdom) AND election AND Keir Starmer OR Rishi Sunak
Publication Date	Specific date range: July 1, 2024 to July 3, 2024
Company/Organization	("Telegraph.co.uk" OR "The Guardian" OR "The Independent")

	Coders can also edit the newspapers included and narrow down the search on the results screen.
Source Type	Newspapers
Document Type	Article, News
Language	English

**Coding Procedures and Instructions**

Coders will analyze the artifacts found from the search terms in the databases. Coders will first mark the title of the artifact, as well as the date published, the publication it was published in, and what country the publication is based in. Then, the coder will do a scan of the entire artifact and look for whether visuals are present. Then, the coding gets more specific, and the coder has to skim the article and analyze what kind of visual is present in the artifact, such as an electoral map, photos of the candidates, other charts or graphs, or another kind of visual. Finally, the coder will read through the article and look for the existence of fact-checking techniques and what kind of tone is present.

**Each variable is coded as follows:**

<b>Under Visuals:</b> Are visuals present?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Visuals:</b>	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0

Are the visuals photos of candidates or another political figure?	
<b>Under Visuals:</b> Are the visuals videos?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Visuals:</b> Are the visuals voting maps?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Visuals:</b> Are the visuals other data charts or graphs that are not voting maps?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Visuals:</b> Are the visuals something else that hasn't already been described?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Fact-Checking:</b> Is there evidence of fact-checking?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Fact-Checking:</b> Does the artifact directly correct or check a political claim?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Fact-Checking:</b> Is there a hyperlink in the artifact?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Fact-Checking:</b> Is the hyperlink used for fact-checking purposes?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0
<b>Under Fact-Checking:</b>	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0

<p>Does the artifact attribute to a source, but does not hyperlink to it?</p>	
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Is Kamala Harris mentioned in the artifact?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a positive tone toward candidate Kamala Harris?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a negative tone toward candidate Kamala Harris?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a neutral tone toward candidate Kamala Harris?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Is Donald Trump mentioned in the artifact?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a positive tone toward candidate Donald Trump?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a negative tone toward candidate Donald Trump?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>

<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a neutral tone toward candidate Donald Trump?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Is Keir Starmer mentioned in the artifact?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a positive tone toward candidate Keir Starmer?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a negative tone toward candidate Keir Starmer?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a neutral tone toward candidate Keir Starmer?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Is Rishi Sunak mentioned in the artifact?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a positive tone toward candidate Rishi Sunak?</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK</p>
<p><b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a negative</p>	<p>IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0</p>

tone toward candidate Rishi Sunak?	IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK
<b>Under Tone:</b> Does the artifact demonstrate a neutral tone toward candidate Rishi Sunak?	IF YES: 1 IF NO: 0 IF SUBJECT IS NOT INCLUDED IN ARTICLE: LEAVE BLANK

There are three general categories in this research: visuals, fact-checking, and tone. Visuals has six variables:

1. Whether or not a visual is present in the artifact at all.
2. Whether the visual is of a political figure.
3. Whether the visual is a video.
4. Whether the visual is a voting map.
5. Whether the visual is a data chart or graph that is not a voting map.
6. Whether the visual is something else that has not already been described.

**Definitions and Examples:**

<b>Visuals</b>	A picture, video, graphic, chart, map, or any other display used to accompany reporting in an article.
<b>Political Figure</b>	A person who is running for office in a country’s election, has held office before, or currently holds some form of political office. For example, <a href="#">this article</a> contains a photo of Keir Starmer, the Prime Minister of the U.K.
<b>Voting Map</b>	A type of visual that denotes how areas of a country voted in an election, like an electoral college map.

	For example, <a href="#">this article</a> contains an electoral college map.
<b>Data Chart or Graph</b>	<p>A type of visual that uses data in the form of a bar chart, pie chart, line graph, etc., to convey political information. These can include voter turnout graphs, polling percentage graphs, etc.</p> <p>For example, <a href="#">this article</a> uses multiple types of data charts to convey polling information, like how male and females vote.</p>
<b>Different Visual</b>	<p>Any other visual not previously described, like a photograph that is not of a political figure. Examples include a photo of a polling location or an in-article poll.</p> <p>For example, <a href="#">this article</a> contains a picture of voters at a polling location, which would count as a “different visual.”</p>

Fact-checking has five variables:

1. Whether there is evidence of fact-checking.
2. Whether the artifact directly fact-checks a political claim.
3. Whether the artifact contains hyperlinks to other sources of information.
4. Whether the hyperlink is used for fact-checking purposes.
5. Whether the artifact cites its sources in a way other than hyperlinking.

**Definitions and Examples:**

<b>Fact-Checking</b>	The process of verifying whether the facts in an article are true or false, either through directly addressing claims or attributing to the sources journalists used to allow for quick verification of information.
<b>Hyperlinking</b>	A link that takes the user to another page on the same website or another website entirely. Hyperlinking can be a form of fact-checking or a way for the audience to verify

	<p>facts for themselves, but it is not the only kind of fact-checking that reporters use.</p> <p>For example, <a href="#">this article</a> hyperlinks to <a href="#">the latest PBS News/NPR/Marist poll</a> in the first paragraph, which would take an audience member to that website if they clicked on the link.</p>
<b>Other Citations</b>	<p>Other citations can include referencing another news article with no hyperlink, referencing a report, referencing a study, referencing statistics, etc.</p> <p>For example, <a href="#">this article</a>, the same one used in the “Hyperlinking” definition, says “according to the University of Florida Election Lab” when citing one of their facts, but they do not hyperlink to the data. This is an example of “other citation” because they do attribute the fact to its source, but they do not directly link to it.</p>

Tone has sixteen variables:

1. Whether Kamala Harris is mentioned in the artifact.
2. Whether the artifact’s tone is positive toward Kamala Harris.
3. Whether the artifact’s tone is negative toward Kamala Harris.
4. Whether the artifact’s tone is neutral toward Kamala Harris.
5. Whether Donald Trump is mentioned in the artifact.
6. Whether the artifact’s tone is positive toward Donald Trump.
7. Whether the artifact’s tone is negative toward Donald Trump.
8. Whether the artifact’s tone is neutral toward Donald Trump.
9. Whether Keir Starmer is mentioned in the artifact.
10. Whether the artifact’s tone is positive toward Keir Starmer.
11. Whether the artifact’s tone is negative toward Keir Starmer.

12. Whether the artifact's tone is neutral toward Keir Starmer.
13. Whether Rishi Sunak is mentioned in the artifact.
14. Whether the artifact's tone is positive toward Rishi Sunak.
15. Whether the artifact's tone is negative toward Rishi Sunak.
16. Whether the artifact's tone is neutral toward Rishi Sunak.

### Definitions and Examples:

<b>Tone</b>	The attitude the journalist has toward the subject or topic they are reporting on. Tone can be either positive, negative, or neutral. An artifact can have multiple tones.
<b>Positive Tone</b>	An attitude the journalist or their writing has toward the subject or topic they are reporting on that is deemed more favorable in nature. For example, <a href="#">this article</a> seems to exhibit a positive tone because it focuses on how most of Kamala Harris' policies are more well-received and popular than Trump's.
<b>Negative Tone</b>	An attitude the journalist or their writing has toward the subject or topic they are reporting on that is deemed more unfavorable in nature. For example, <a href="#">this article</a> seems to exhibit a negative tone because of its word use and harsh judgment of both candidates.
<b>Neutral Tone</b>	An attitude the journalist or their writing has toward the subject or topic they are reporting on that is deemed neither positive or negative, but more impartial. For example, <a href="#">this article</a> seems to exhibit a neutral tone, as it is an explainer of polling data.

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