

Issue 3

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The Institute for Youth in Policy

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Dear Esteemed Reader,

We welcome you to this edition of The Journal of Policy Analysis, a cradle of unique and ground-breaking research in nonpartisan, multidisciplinary policy. In our pages, you will discover a trove of scholarly rigor that utilizes varied methodologies, infusing precision with the power to stir thought.

As an integral facet of the Institute for Youth in Policy (YIP), we are guided by the motto "Policy over party," fostering an environment that propels individuals into significant, practical experiences. Our aim? To nurture the civic leaders of tomorrow. YIP, a nonpartisan and nonprofit entity, takes pride in empowering our youth with a strong foundation in policy education. Our influence stretches across thousands of high schools, colleges, and graduate institutions, all while attracting millions of website visitors.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the diligent staff on this issue. Your tireless efforts in upholding the standards of our work do not go unnoticed. Equally, our appreciation extends to you, our readership; your engagement is the lifeblood of our impact.

Your voice matters to us, and we encourage you to engage with our content. For submissions, kindly refer to our form at [Link](#). We also welcome your insightful responses to the papers published in this edition. Through your critical reflections, invoking fresh or established research to support or challenge our authors' conclusions, we continue enriching our field's dialogues.

Warm Regards,

Michael Yang

Editor-in-Chief

michael@yipinstitute.org

Letter from the Chief Executive Officer:

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the third edition of the Journal of Policy Analysis, brimming with fresh voices and bold ideas. This publication stands as a testament to the dynamic policy initiatives at the Institute for Youth in Policy (YIP), showcasing the intellectual fire of young minds shaping the future.

Since 2020, YIP has navigated the intricate tapestry of policies and perspectives, weaving a vibrant community of young thinkers as diverse as their dreams. This journal represents the heart of that endeavor, a lighthouse illuminating the path toward progress.

This journal isn't just a platform for research, it's a blueprint for action. As we build the world's largest network of young changemakers, these pages spark connections, share tools, and amplify voices. Partnering with leading institutions strengthens our foundation, ensuring diverse perspectives guide our path. In every article, we see the seeds of collaboration and impact take root.

As we step into the third chapter of our journey, the need for thoughtful discourse and constructive engagement shines brighter than ever. Divisive rhetoric persists, but we embrace this challenge as an opportunity to build bridges, not walls.

Within these pages, you'll encounter a vibrant chorus of young analysts pushing the boundaries of conventional wisdom. Their meticulously researched and passionately penned articles delve into unexplored landscapes of policy, inviting you to join the conversation, not merely observe.

As Chief Executive Officer, I am humbled to witness this transformative work firsthand. The dedication of our team, partners, reviewers, and contributors fuels this publication. I invite you to dive into this edition, its pages pulsating with the energy of young minds on the precipice of change. May it ignite your own passion for policy discourse, reminding us that together, we can weave a brighter future, thread by thread, through the power of ideas.


Thank you for joining us on this journey. The road ahead promises vibrant discussion, transformative dialogue, and discoveries waiting to be unveiled. Onward, together!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Kramer', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Paul Kramer

Chief Executive Officer & Chairman, Institute for Youth in Policy

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Club Spotlight

Stanford



Data and Mapping for Society

Data and Mapping for Society is Stanford's student data science group. The group consists of over 100 undergraduates and graduate students passionate about making an impact with understandable and useful data analysis and visualizations. We run internal workshops to increase knowledge of fundamental skills and abilities, and partner with external companies to help meet their data needs. We enjoy collaborating on impactful projects that span various domains, including social and political change, leveraging data science skills to drive positive impact.

The Polarization Predicament & Media's Influence on Partisanship

Raiaa Bhalla

The Shri Ram School, Moulsari

Abstract:

This paper delves into the polarising effect of media's influence on the current political landscape. It comprehensively analyses media from an empirical and political approach, such as cable news and social media. The primary objective is to emphasize the criticality of media literacy and the need for vigilance regarding the selective exposure that media can offer.

It will provide important insights into the future of political media communication and its role in shaping public opinion and whether that opinion can inform democratic outcomes such as the election results of a candidate or party. This paper works with the hypothesis that there is a direct correlation between media consumption and the alignment of public opinion with the political views that people are most exposed to online. Specifically, it postulates that the individuals who are exposed to biased or one-sided media coverage are more likely to develop opinions that align with those perspectives, whereas those with diverse media exposure are more likely to form varied opinions.

(On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.)

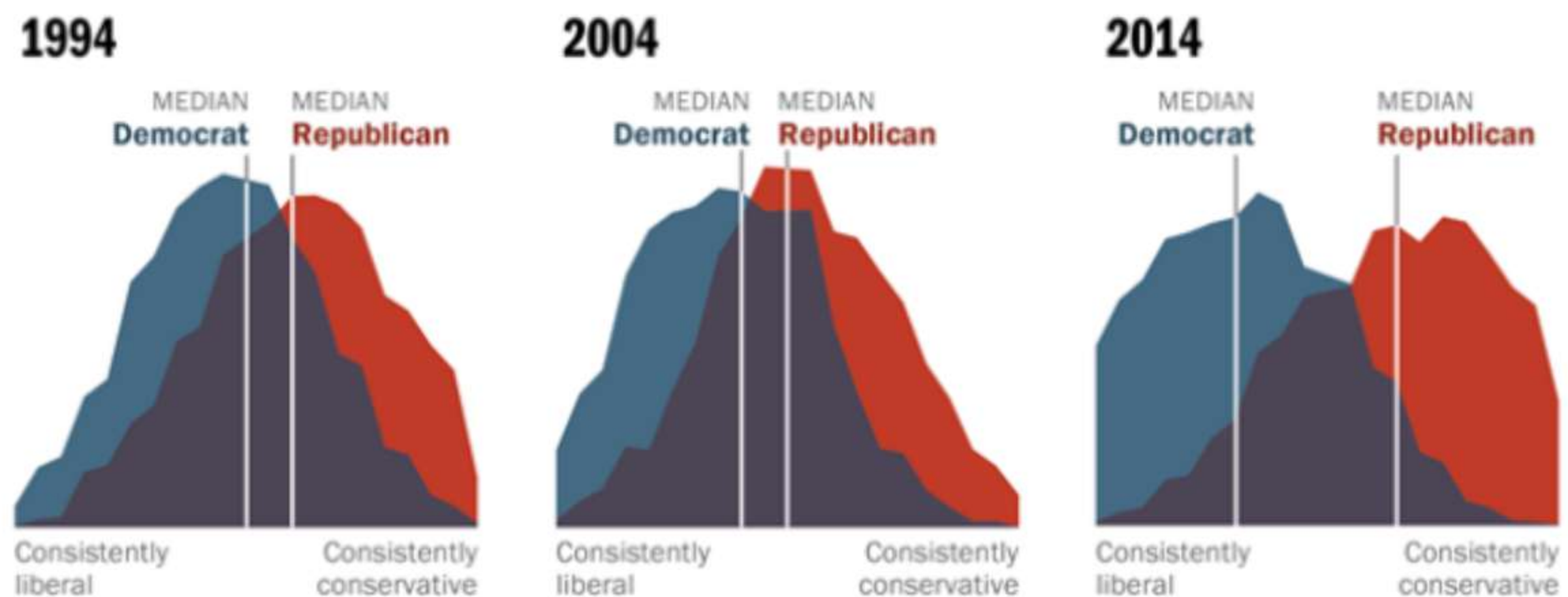
Keywords— Media, Polarisation, News, Social Media, Partisanship, Information, Divide, Echo Chambers, Discourse, Influence

I. Introduction

Research shows that over the previous decade, political polarisation, the divergence of political attitudes towards ideological extremes, has been increasing significantly. Media, among others, is a particularly outlying cause for this partisan polarisation as it is responsible for creating echo chambers that insulate people from opposing views on current events. In the case of the United States, according to a Harvard study, the direct cause of this is the rise of 24-hour private-partisan cable news over the past four decades. (Cable news refers to nothing more than the umbrella term for various television news broadcasts). The authors of the study noted comparatively that in the countries where political polarisation had fallen in the last four decades, public broadcasting received mostly public funding as opposed to private funding, thus proving the direct impact of private news on the formation of partisan views. Similarly, in India, changes in media ownership likely has played a role in this transformation, as more and more Indian media outlets have been acquired by corporate conglomerates generally run by prominent Indian families with individual political loyalties.

Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

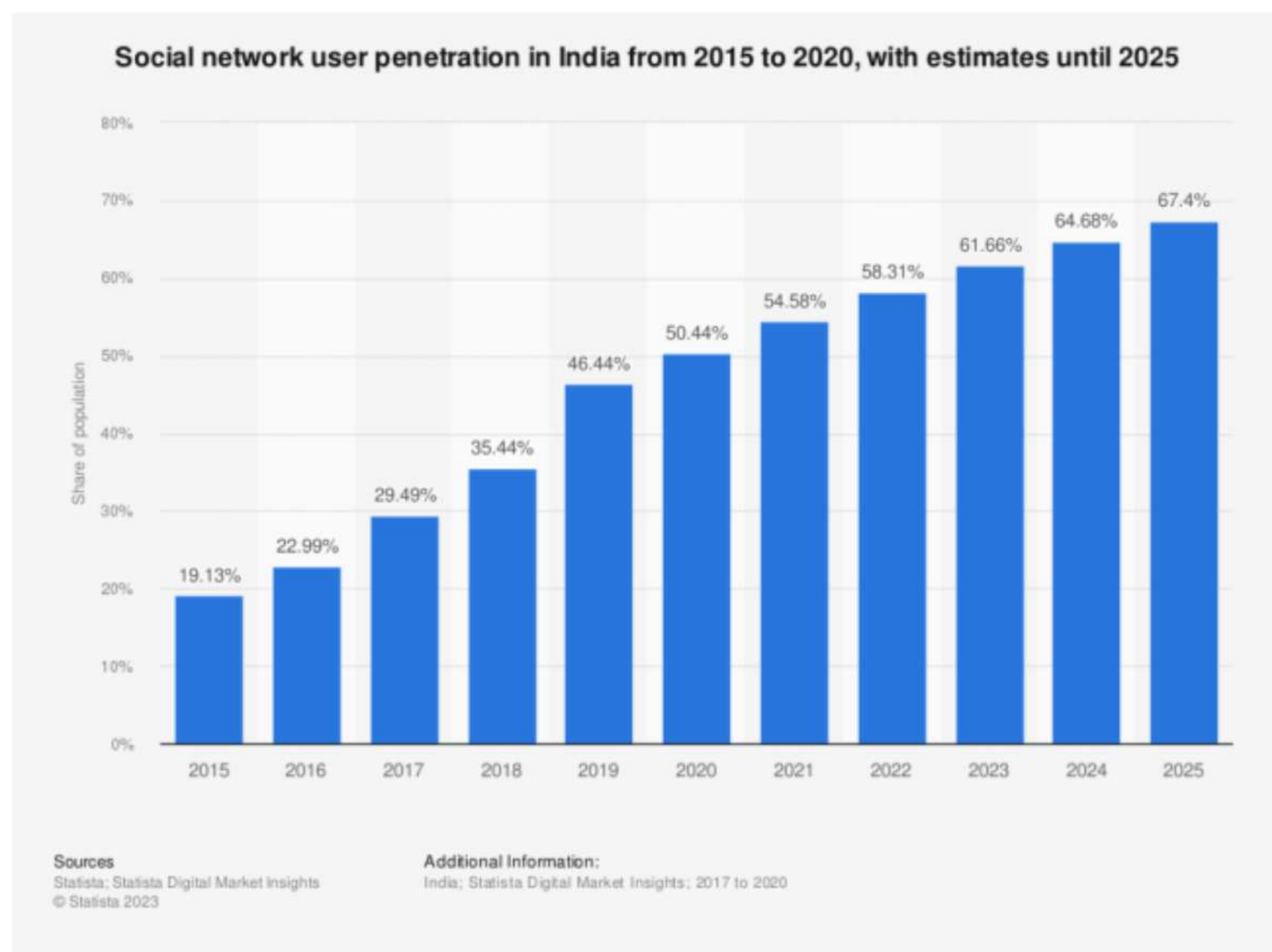
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In India, a country where the central axis for political homophily is religion and caste, social media platforms have also played an incredibly prominent role in creating major information dissemination inconsistencies.

These platforms are distinguished by their rapid communication of content and ultimately, news.

The sheer volume of politically motivated content an Indian citizen is exposed to on average is immense: a 2019 CSDS-Lokniti and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung survey determined that one in every three Indian citizens on social media consumes some form of political content daily or regularly. Major social media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook claim more than 500 million users in the country, a significant amount of media penetration in urban and increasingly in rural areas as well. Political misinformation and propaganda are rampant on these platforms due to a lack of effective safeguards, with parties with specific political agendas relying on the fundamental reality that a voter bank will believe whatever they are most exposed to.

According to the 2017 CSDS-Lokniti survey, one-sixth of India's WhatsApp users were part of a



WhatsApp group either managed by a political party or its leader. A question of ethics arises here, of whether such platforms should bear ethical responsibility for such content, which will be discussed later on in the paper. The impact of each of these three platforms will also be discussed individually later on.

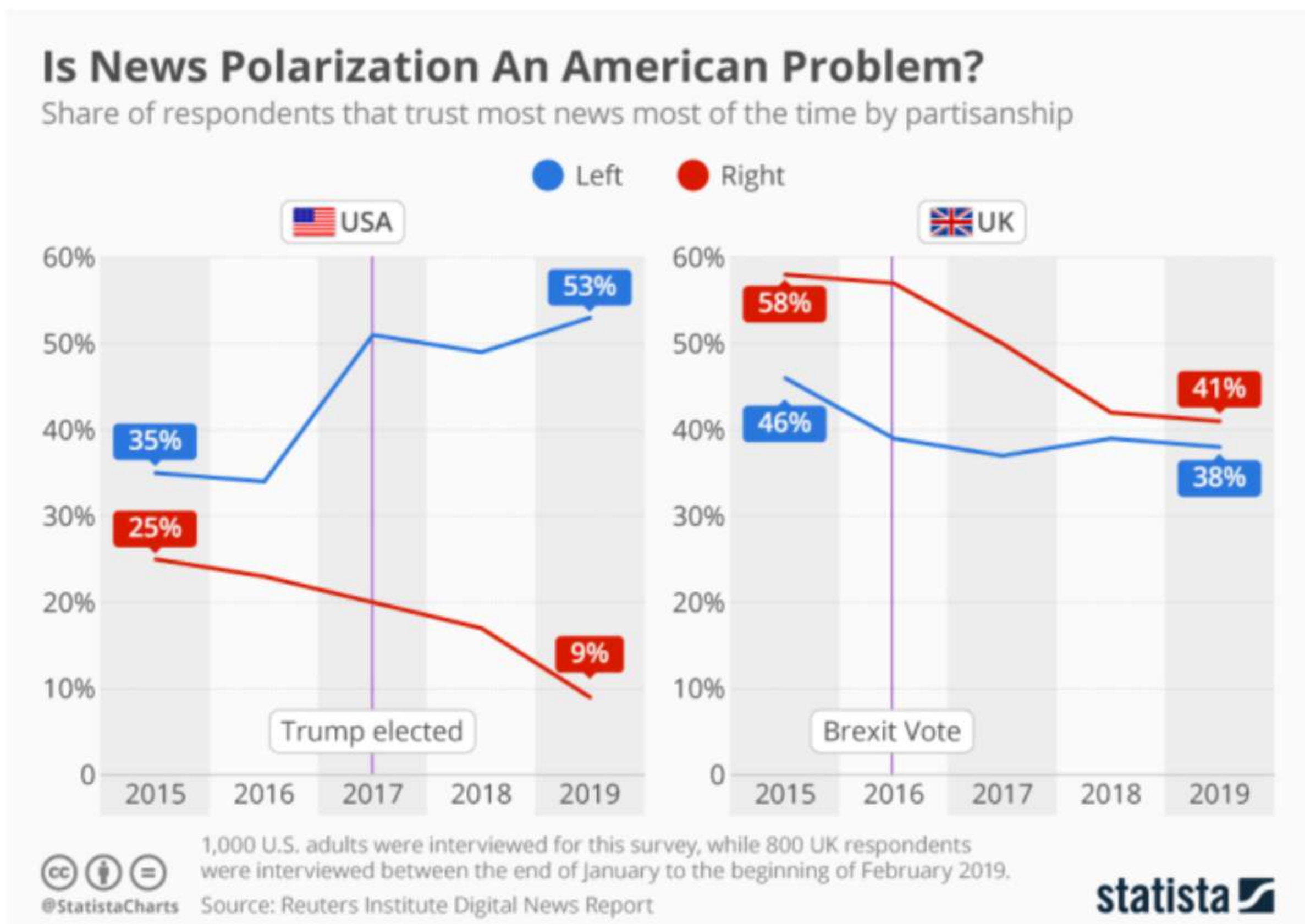
Other forms of journalism, such as radio, exert a very similar impact on political division in India. However, due to the introduction of digital media, their impact has become far less significant. Therefore, for the purposes of this project, the primary focus will center on cable news and social media platforms due to their wider dissemination and pronounced influence on public discourse and the formation of partisan opinions. A December 2021 report — titled ‘The Future of the News in India’ — noted that "a digital-first landscape is emerging for news." These platforms have witnessed a surge in adoption and engagement in recent years. The immediacy and extensive reach of cable news and social media render them particularly potent in shaping political narratives and exacerbating polarization. We begin by analyzing each of these forms of media individually.

II. Cable News

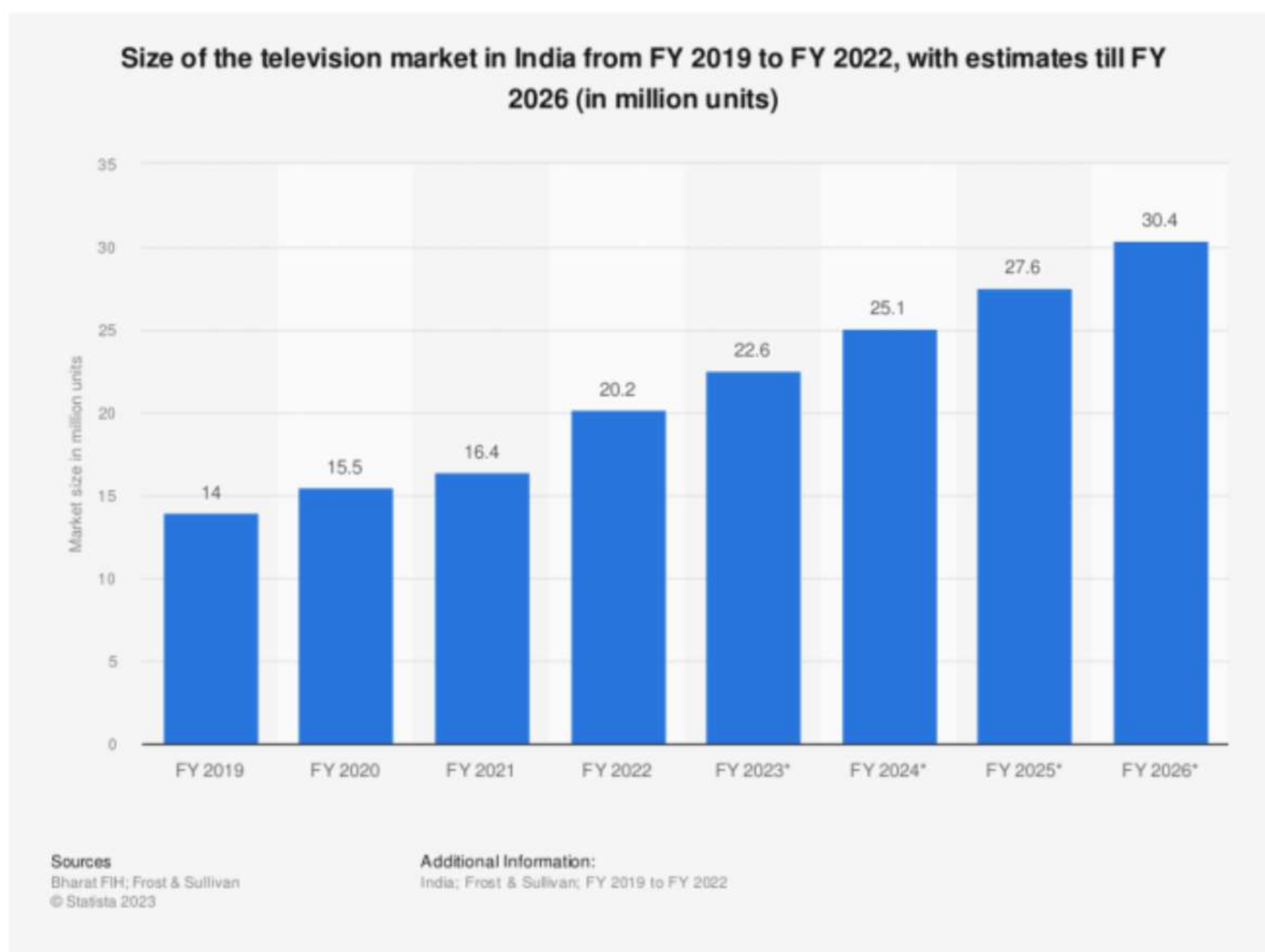
Cable and network television news remain the primary sources of political information for people over the age of thirty. This paper posits that consuming news with a particular slant towards one political agenda alters the consumer’s political behavior, and the existence of slanted news could lead to a divisive feedback loop: an "echo chamber" where partisans can reinforce and strengthen their initial biases. The central new results in a Stanford paper show that in the United States, the right-wing news channel Fox News’ effect in presidential elections grew from 2000 to 2008 because of an increasing viewership as well as an increasingly conservative slant on Fox News and that the cable news channels can explain an increase in political polarisation of similar size to that observed in the US population over this period. In the case of Fox News, one may argue that it caters specifically to an already right-wing electorate rather than informing the public with a right-wing slant. However, the results of this paper estimate that removing Fox News from cable television during the 2000 election cycle would have reduced the overall Republican presidential vote share by 0.46 percentage points, which could mean the difference between winning or losing a Presidential election. From this, we can infer that its reach extended

beyond its already right-wing viewers and succeeded in altering public opinion to an extent. Furthermore, this research estimated that cable news could increase polarization and explain about two-thirds of the increase among the public in the United States, and we can conclude that this increase depends on both the persuasive effect of cable news and, of course, the existence of tastes for like-minded news.

These findings could have large effects not only on vote shares, but can also raise or decrease an individual's response to political content not in line with their preconceived ideologies, affecting their level of political information and engagement with politics, and hence their inclination to even turn out in elections. The graph below shows this increasing divide in the United States as compared to the United Kingdom.



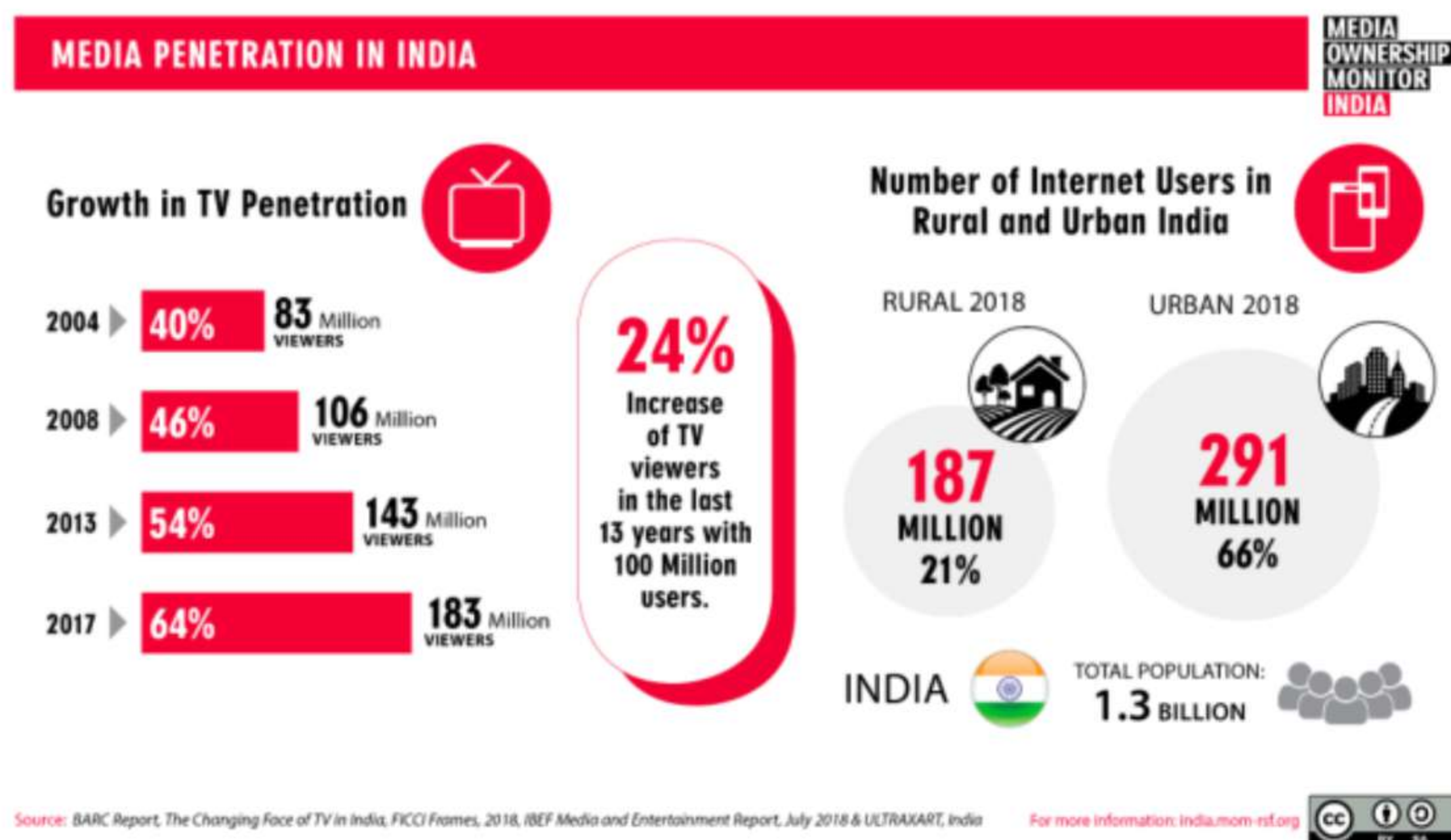
In India, electorates are more exposed to media than ever before, with NES data corroborating that the media's penetration into Indian society has increased significantly in recent years due to the proliferation of smartphones and cheap data, creating an upward trend in news/information/entertainment consumption. The percentage of voters who watch news daily went up from 19% in 1996 to 46% in 2014. The number of TV news channels increased to 393 in 2014 from 241 in 2009. According to Census of India figures, TV ownership increased from 32% in 2011 to 47%.



Given that there is statistical evidence of an increase in TV ownership, the burden of proof now falls on this paper to prove the correlation between this increase in cable news exposure and political polarisation in India. We use the following evidence to characterize the degree of division that one can attribute to slanted cable news consumption, to measure the effects of cable news on elections, and to assess the positioning strategies of the cable news

channels: With this increase in access to television, there has been a simultaneous and directly proportional increase in polarised viewpoints as evidenced both in and after the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections (characterized and distinguished from previous elections by being referred to as the first ‘media’ elections), where the electorate was largely divided into two groups: the right-wing, conservative BJP or the left-wing Congress, and were targeted by dozens of national and regional television news channels to the extent that the country witnessed a ‘media blitzkrieg.’ The BJP alone bought 2000 prominent spots a day across Hindi, English, and regional news, general entertainment, and sports channels. As mentioned previously, most of the leading media companies are owned by large conglomerates that are still controlled by the founding families and that invest in a vast array of industries other than media. Both Republic TV and ZEE News, for instance, were previously/are still controlled by Rajya Sabha MPs: it is evident that personal ideology affects news, resulting in propaganda and disinformation for personal power or profit.

Another evidence of this phenomenon is the intense political rhetoric and instances of riots and clashes, such as the Muzaffarnagar riots in 2013 and the violence in Delhi in 2020, which highlight the divided fault lines in the country, to which news coverage and social media was a significant contributor.



Comparatively, in the United States, A Pew study interestingly quantifies this disparity between consistent right-wing conservatives and left-wing liberals as follows:

Those with consistent conservative views:

1. Are tightly clustered around a single news source, far more than any other group in the survey, with 47% citing a conservative news source (Fox News) as their main source for news about government and politics.

2. Express greater distrust than trust of 24 of the 36 news sources measured in the survey. At the same time, 88% of consistent conservatives trust Fox News.

3. Are more likely to have friends who share their own political views. Two-thirds (66%) say most of their close friends share their views on government and politics.

By contrast, those with consistently liberal views:

1. Are less unified in their media loyalty; they rely on a greater range of news outlets, including some – like NPR and the New York Times– that others use far less.

2. Express more trust than distrust of 28 of the 36 news outlets in the survey. NPR, PBS, and the BBC are the most trusted news sources for consistent liberals.

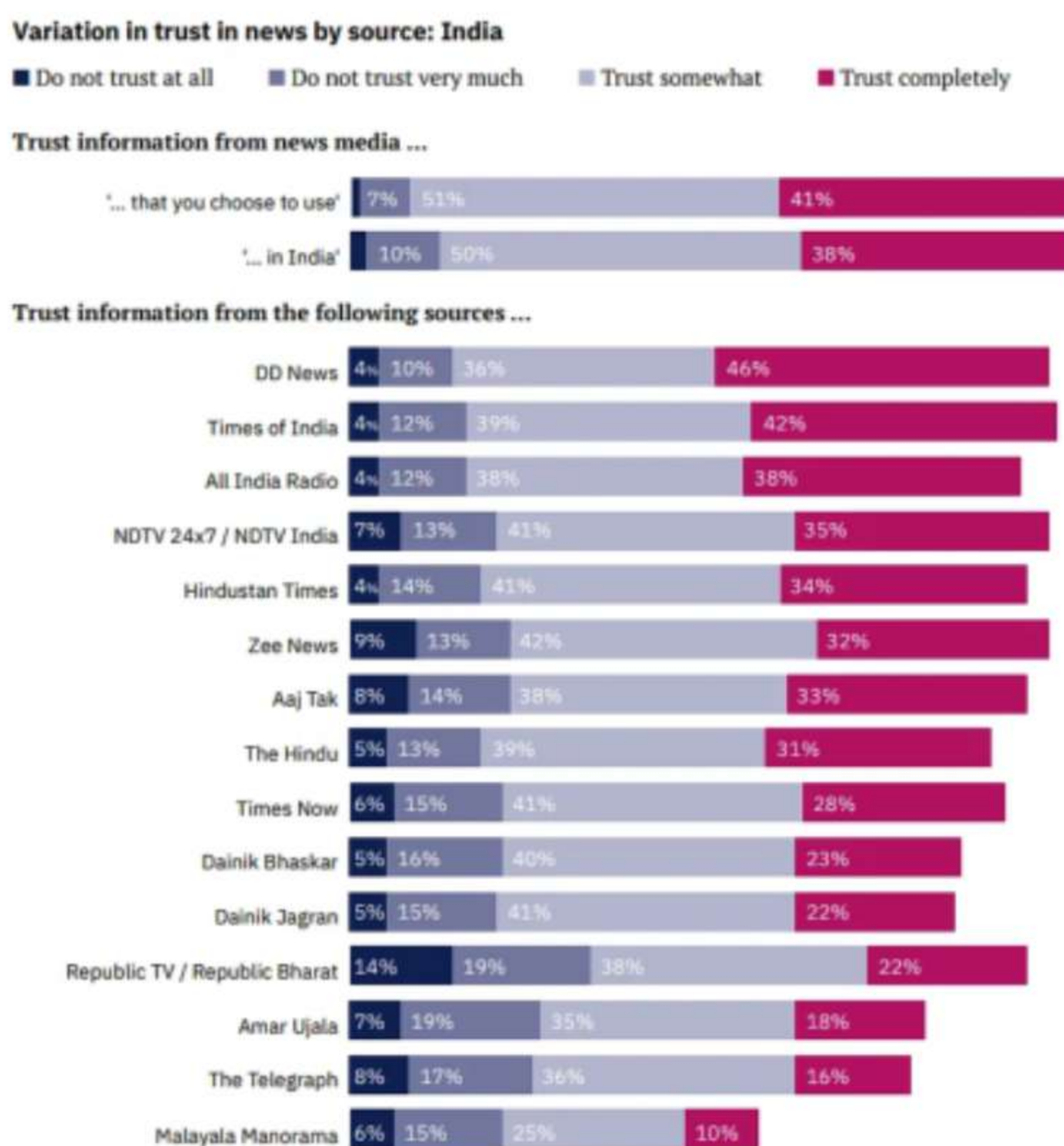
3. Are more likely than those in other ideological groups to block or "unfriend" someone on a social network – as well as to end a personal friendship – because of politics.

Thus, the data highlights the influence of cable news on selective exposure, confirmation bias, and the formation of echo chambers among individuals with consistent conservative and liberal views. The findings demonstrate that those with consistently conservative views tend to be 'tightly clustered around a single news source' and express distrust for the 'other side.' This concentration of viewership reinforces their ideological perspectives and may perpetuate conservative narratives.

Moreover, conservatives tend to convey greater levels of distrust toward most of the news sources surveyed. This heightened skepticism toward other news outlets reinforces their reliance on a single outlet, further solidifying their echo chamber. Interestingly, consistent liberals express

greater trust than distrust toward a wider majority of the news outlets surveyed, including NPR, PBS, and the BBC, which are the most trusted sources among this group. This suggests that consistent liberals may be more open to varied perspectives from a broader spectrum of news sources. However, the data also reveals that consistent liberals display a lack of eagerness to engage. They are more likely to take actions such as blocking or "unfriending" someone on social media due to political differences and even ending personal friendships over politics, indicating a higher degree of ideological intolerance and a higher preference to surround themselves with like-minded individuals. Overall, the findings of this PEW study underscore how cable news can contribute to selective exposure, confirmation bias, and the formation of silos, particularly among those with consistently conservative views or consistently liberal views.

In India, there are similar consistencies in cable news consumption, as shown below:



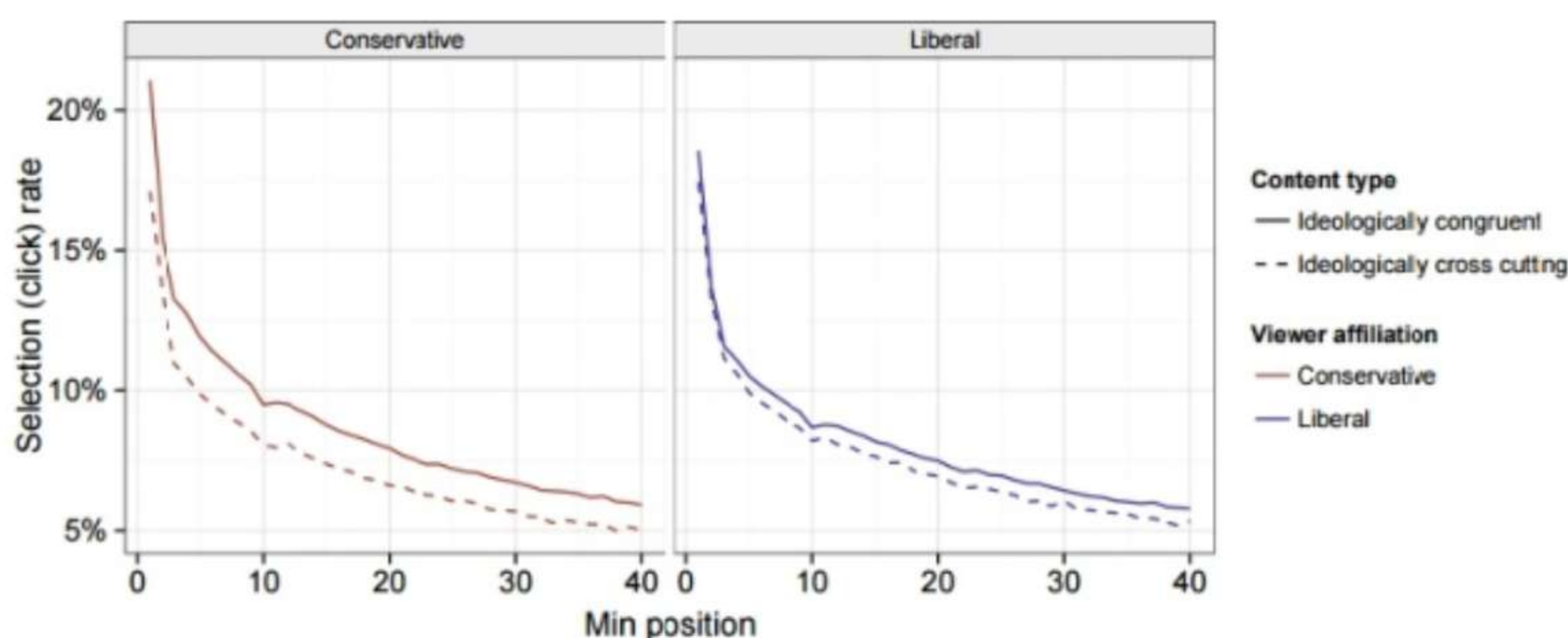
Scholars are increasingly concerned about the negative impact of ideological rhetoric expressed on the Internet through various platforms. Among online media outlets, social media, in particular, has attracted considerable attention in regards to its potential for not only spreading disinformation and rhetoric, but also for contributing to increasing sectarianism of views on the Internet as it creates networks among those sharing similar beliefs. The ideological fragmentation of these outlets contributes to the division of public opinion. Social and digital media usership has increased by 606% from 142 million to 862.08 million from 2015 to 2023 and given that these platforms foster networks among people with similar beliefs, such partisanship is an evident byproduct. It is crucial to undertake an in-depth examination of individual media platforms and their unique impact on shaping ideological divisions and biases. By delving into an individual granular analysis, we can better comprehend how these platforms contribute to the propagation and reinforcement of polarised viewpoints among different segments of society.

1. Facebook:

Historically, Facebook's impact on political discourse has been significant, both in India and the United States. According to a PEW study consistent conservatives on Facebook are twice as likely as the average user to see politically aligned opinions that reinforce their own views (47% vs. 23%), highlighting the presence of echo chambers. Research published in the journal *Science* confirms the influential role of social media platforms like Facebook in intensifying "political sectarianism." Another study in the journal *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* in August 2021 suggests that social media often acts as a key facilitator to polarization as incendiary posts tend to receive more interaction. A paper based on a study of over 17,000 Americans found that Facebook's content-ranking algorithm limits users' exposure to news outlets with contrasting viewpoints. Internal Facebook documents, as reported by *The Wall Street Journal*, reveal that the company's management has rejected all proposed reforms despite recognizing the harmful effects of its platform. The algorithm was modified in 2018 with the intention of addressing these issues. However, it inadvertently increased divisiveness on the platform even further. Furthermore, a Facebook study indicates that polarisation extends to the social network itself. On average, a

Facebook user has approximately five politically like-minded friends for every friend with differing views.

An internal Facebook report reported the experience of a test user in India who created a new account to see what it was like to experience Facebook as an Indian living in Kerala, India. For the next three weeks, the account operated by a simple rule: it followed all the recommendations generated by Facebook's algorithms to join groups, watch videos, and explore new pages on the site. The resulting content was an inundation of hate speech, misinformation, and celebrations of violence. This test user symbolizes the experience of over 340 million users in the country. In July 2020, the Delhi Minorities Commission released a report on how hate speech on social media, and specifically Facebook, fuelled the religious.



Violence in North East Delhi during that year. India represents Facebook's largest market, amplifying the challenges the company faces in understanding and addressing its political impact, which it recognizes as its responsibility, with Facebook's Public Policy Director, Shivanth Thukral, explaining that if it is clear that certain content violates the platform's community guidelines, it is taken down immediately. In case of user complaints, they are mandated to acknowledge within 24 hours and have to respond within 14 days.

2. Whatsapp:

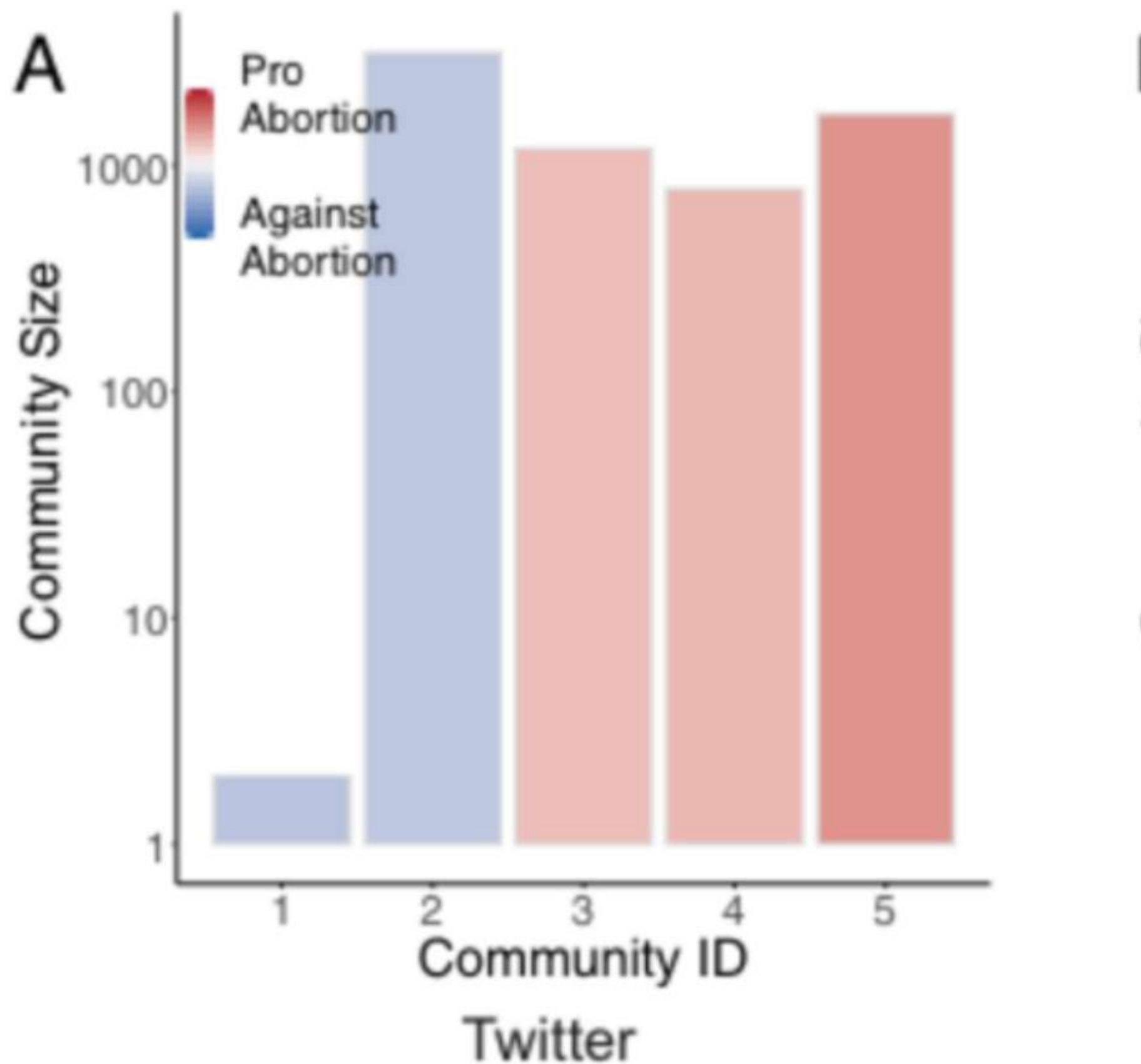
WhatsApp is India's most downloaded application. With more than 200 million active users—more than the combined population of France, Germany, Austria, and Poland—Whatsapp has emerged as a powerful political tool. In recent years, political parties in India have focused on increasingly leveraging WhatsApp to reach various constituencies. In such an environment, it is essential to study the quality of information circulating on these platforms to voters as they exercise their franchise. An Oxford study collected and analyzed data from a total of 116 public WhatsApp groups across different parties.

The results proved that the proportion of polarising political news and information in circulation over social media in India is worse than all of the other country case studies that the researchers had analyzed, except the US Presidential election in 2016. As mentioned previously, an important example of this is the spread of disinformation and fake news that became a trigger for the Muzaffarnagar riots in Uttar Pradesh just eight months ahead of the federal elections. In many ways, WhatsApp is an ideal medium for spreading fake news and rumors due to its technological features, such as free usage, end-to-end encryption (which makes it difficult to trace the origin of a message), its support for multimedia content, ease of use and forming groups for communication. Since the content shared by individuals or in groups comes from someone known, there is a strong tendency to trust the source. The other factors that contribute to its position are the usage pattern, especially in India. Given that a large number of users from urban areas are first-time Internet users and thus not cognizant of fake news or practiced in media literacy, they become easily convinced that any news on the application is true, particularly with the case of the 'forwarding' technology and since there are limited mechanisms to verify or regulate the content being shared. One of the strengths of the application is the use of less reliance on the literary strength of a user. A user could communicate in any media (text, audio, video, or pictures). This has also caused its popularity among large sections of Indian society, which do not have good literacy rates and access to/information about other media and sources to verify the news. Later in the paper, Professor Rahul Verma of Ashoka University explains the exact proliferation process of media, beginning with the upper echelons of society and trickling down to the masses.

3. Twitter:

Among all the social media, Twitter is the most pivotal online platform that is extensively used for political debate. 69% of the top 10% of most prolific tweeters on the platform say they have tweeted about politics, and one-third of all tweets from US adults are political. “Twitter has emerged as a key platform on which anyone with a smartphone can engage in political discourse,” observed Michelle Nguyen in her article *Twitter’s Role in Politics* in *The Northwestern Business Review*. She noted that economic access is a large cause: while a TV ad can cost millions of dollars, a single tweet can reach the same number of people just as quickly for a negligible fraction of the cost. Given the ease of widespread communication with the click of a button and the app’s worldwide popularity, most Indian politicians, parties, and organizations now have Twitter handles and use them to disseminate sensationalized and provocative news. An Indian study showed a clear tendency of homophily was observed in the retweet networks on Twitter. Same-party mentions, which reflect support and agreement, were significantly higher than cross-party mentions, which reflect disagreement.

In another study titled “*The echo Chamber effect on social media*,” published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, the researchers analyzed more than 100 million posts collected between 2010 and 2018 about controversial topics such as abortion, gun control, and vaccination. They found that compared with Reddit users, Twitter users were more likely to interact with information disseminated by users with similar viewpoints. The results showed that the aggregation of users in homophilic clusters dominates online interactions on Twitter. In particular, the topic of abortion on Twitter shows a strong correlation between the leaning of a user and the average leaning of their nearest neighbors.



Thus, in both the United States and India, Twitter breeds political homophily through algorithmic means, which are conducive to the formation of echo chambers through selective sharing and amplification, anonymity, campaigns, media manipulation, and disinformation.

4. Case studies in other Social Media:

In a video essay on Youtube, which has gained significant traction on the media platform, social science and media commentator Olivia "Liv" Sun recounts her own experience with indoctrination into the far-right, a polarization that was created due to the selective media exposure she received on Youtube. Sun's narrative sheds light on the influential role of selective media exposure encountered on YouTube, contributing to her political homophily. Her account underscores the significance of algorithms and recommendation systems that prioritize

engagement, as Sun found herself unwittingly trapped in an echo chamber where the content she consumed predominantly reinforced her existing views with reactionary and incendiary videos of far-right commentators. The persuasive nature of YouTube's recommendation system serves as a potent catalyst for ideological divisions and echo chamber creation. Sun explains that this constant barrage of recommended videos and the ideology-reinforcing comments on these videos affected her political opinions to the extent that her political views completely pivoted from left-leaning and liberal to far-right and conservative. This aligns with research in media studies, emphasizing the interplay of selective exposure and confirmation bias in shaping individuals' media consumption habits and deepening political polarisation. Sun's experience is not unique. It is a typical example of the alt-right pipeline, also referred to as the alt-right rabbit hole. This conceptual framework explains the phenomenon of internet radicalization towards the alt-right movement. It elucidates a process wherein individuals progressively become exposed to alt-right or similar far-right ideologies due to consuming provocative right-wing political content. This model suggests that this exposure occurs due to the interconnected nature of political commentators and online communities, enabling individuals to come across more extreme groups. The most well-documented manifestation of this process is observed on YouTube (like Sun recounted), where it is facilitated through an "Alternative Influence Network," in which various right-wing scholars, pundits, and internet personalities interact with one another to boost the performance of their content. These algorithms recommend content similar to what users engage with, inadvertently leading them down rabbit holes of similar content.

Furthermore, the alt-right pipeline has been linked to tragic incidents such as the Christchurch mosque shootings, wherein a far-right extremist cited the internet as instrumental in shaping his beliefs. The informal nature of radicalization within this pipeline allows individuals to lead seemingly everyday lives offline while harboring extreme ideologies. Additionally, harassment campaigns against perceived opponents of the alt-right movement are another common consequence of radicalization.

In an Op-Ed in the *Washingtonian* titled 'What Happened After My 13-Year-Old Son Joined the Alt-Right,' an anonymous author's recollection highlights the power of selective exposure to online content on Reddit in shaping her son's ideological transformation at a tender age. The allure of anonymity and a sense of belonging within alt-right communities created an

environment conducive to his radicalization, with online spaces such as Reddit forums serving as information bubbles that reinforced extremist beliefs and limited exposure to contrasting viewpoints. The author's son warns others to be skeptical of such exclusionary online communities. He blames big tech, media companies, and their algorithms for contributing to the problem of radicalization.

Therefore, social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and others have had a significant impact on political polarization. While these platforms do provide opportunities for information sharing, community building, and public discourse, they also possess characteristics that can exacerbate division in society. The algorithms employed by these platforms and personalized recommendations contribute to chambers where individuals are primarily exposed to content they already agree with. This limited exposure to diverse viewpoints hampers the exchange of ideas and fosters an environment where people are less likely to engage in civil discourse. The selective sharing and amplification of social media content reinforces pre-existing biases and contributes to the spread of biased or misleading information. This phenomenon is particularly concerning when it comes to sharing false or manipulative information during political campaigns, as discussed above, as it can distort public perceptions and deepen polarization. The anonymity and impersonal nature of interactions on social media platforms can also lead to more aggressive behavior and the propagation of extreme viewpoints. Hostile discussions, trolling, and harassment have become more prevalent, making it increasingly difficult for individuals with differing opinions to find common ground and engage in constructive dialogue.

Moreover, the viral nature of hashtags, trends, and campaigns on these platforms can contribute to the formation of opposing camps, where individuals with different political perspectives engage in heated debates that further entrench their positions. This phenomenon intensifies political polarisation and creates an atmosphere of "us versus them," creating false dichotomies and hindering the potential for finding common solutions to societal challenges. While it is important to acknowledge that social media platforms alone do not create political polarisation, they serve as powerful amplifiers and catalysts of existing divisions. The

responsibility lies not only with the platforms themselves but also with users to foster a more balanced and constructive online discourse.

III. Conclusion

A majority of respondents to a survey conducted alongside this paper mentioned socialization in the form of mindshare, conversations with their peers, friends, family, or teachers, and general opinion as their source of political information prior to the media explosion in Indian politics. Other common responses included traditional and modern media forms like newspapers and television. Post-2014, media has become the main platform for such socialization, resulting in 100% of respondents agreeing to the statement that they receive political information through it in some form.

After conducting both independent research and collecting primary data via interviews with professionals and surveys, the project focused on examining the effect of both modern media platforms (such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter) and traditional media on political polarisation. The findings and analysis indicate the following significant conclusions:

1. Traditional Media's Influence on Political Polarisation:

The research highlighted the impact of traditional media outlets on political polarization. While the dominance of modern platforms is apparent, traditional media in the form of journalism, newspapers, and some forms of cable news still hold influence and contribute to polarization. Biases in reporting, selective coverage, the creation of 'news deserts', and sensationalism can shape public opinion and reinforce partisan divisions. Additionally, the project identified a correlation between media consumption habits and political polarisation, with individuals gravitating towards media outlets that align with their ideological leanings through statistics as well as through survey results and the opinions of media professionals.

2. Modern Media Platforms and Political Polarisation:

The project revealed that modern media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and the ideology-rampant YouTube, play a crucial role in shaping political polarization, as 100% of survey respondents revealed that they view political information on these platforms. These platforms offer individuals the ability to express their opinions, share information, and connect with like-minded individuals. However, this unrestricted, algorithmic communication creates echo chambers of opinion. This phenomenon intensifies polarisation by reinforcing existing views and reducing exposure to diverse perspectives.

3. Social Media Amplification of Extreme Views:

The project revealed that social media platforms have a tendency to amplify extreme views, thereby intensifying political polarisation. Due to the algorithmic design of these platforms, content that evokes strong emotions or controversy tends to receive higher engagement and visibility. This amplification effect can lead to misinformation and the dissemination of extreme content, further dividing individuals along ideological lines. The project emphasized the need to address this amplification bias within social media algorithms such as Facebook and Twitter to mitigate the impact on political polarisation and promote more balanced discourse.

4. Bias and Filter Bubbles:

The paper explored the tendency of individuals to seek out and accept information that confirms their existing beliefs while dismissing or discrediting opposing viewpoints. This bias is amplified by the algorithms used by modern media platforms, which prioritize content based on user preferences, creating filter bubbles that further limit exposure to diverse perspectives.

5. Distrust in Media:

The project found that trust in media institutions influences the level of political polarisation. The erosion of trust in the 'other side' fueled by perceptions of bias and misinformation is synonymous with the rise of media sources that cater to specific ideological

viewpoints. This fragmentation of trust exacerbates sectarianism as individuals gravitate towards sources that reinforce their preconceived notions, further isolating them from alternative viewpoints.

IV. Recommendations for Mitigating Polarisation

Based on the paper's findings, several recommendations can be made to mitigate political polarisation:

1. Promoting Media Literacy:

Journalist Anubha Bhonsl recommended that enhancing media literacy and mindfulness can equip individuals with the skills to critically evaluate information, identify bias, and recognize the dangers of echo chambers. This empowers individuals to consume media more discerningly and seek out diverse and alternative viewpoints.

2. Algorithmic Transparency and Regulation:

Encouraging transparency in algorithms used by social media platforms can help users understand and mitigate the impact of filter bubbles. Additionally, implementing responsible regulations to combat the spread of misinformation and reduce algorithmic bias can be instrumental in promoting a more balanced media ecosystem.

3. Diverse and Inclusive Media Representation:

Promoting diversity and inclusivity in media representation can help counter polarisation by providing a broader range of perspectives and fostering empathy and understanding across ideological divides. Professor Rahul Verma recommended the encouragement of more discourse across the aisle and across different political spectrums. Promoting online and offline civil discourse can foster respectful engagement and constructive dialogue among individuals with differing opinions. Platforms and communities can play an active role in encouraging productive conversations and discouraging inflammatory rhetoric.

In conclusion, the project's research indicates that both modern and traditional media platforms contribute to political polarisation. The findings highlight the role of bias, distrust in media, echo chambers, and the absence of media literacy. By implementing the recommendations outlined above, there is potential to mitigate polarisation and foster a more informed and inclusive public discourse.

V. Glossary

Political Polarisation: Political polarisation is the divergence of political attitudes from the center towards ideological extremes.

1. **Partisan:** prejudiced in favor of a particular cause or political ideology.
2. **Selective Exposure:** Selective exposure occurs when individuals search for information and show systematic preferences towards ideas that are consistent, rather than inconsistent, with their beliefs.
3. **Echo Chamber:** Defined as a bounded, enclosed media space that has the potential to both magnify the messages delivered within it and insulate them from rebuttal.
4. **Media Literacy:** The ability to critically analyze stories presented in the mass media and to determine their accuracy or credibility.
5. **Slant:** Slant in the news refers to the bias towards a particular side or ideology. If information or a system is slanted, it is made to show favor toward a particular group or opinion.
6. **Homophily:** the tendency for people to seek out or be attracted to those who are similar to themselves. Homophilic clusters refer to groups of these people.

7. Sectarianism: Sectarianism is the division and hostility based on differences in religion, ethnicity, or politics within a society. It often leads to conflicts and discrimination between different groups.

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An Analysis of the ‘Hidden Victims’ of Mass Incarceration

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I. Introduction

Over half of all inmates within prisons and jails in the United States are parents to minors, leaving an estimated 2.7 million children alone in the most formative years of their lives. That is 1 in every 28 children – essentially one student out of every class at a school. About 19 percent of these children are 4 years of age or less, forced into a life of struggle before entering kindergarten. There are countless systemic barriers separating parents from their children – whether that is legislation preventing reunification after their release or the obstacles present in simply arranging for an in-person visit. The scale of this issue is only worsening; since the 1980s, the rate of children with incarcerated mothers has doubled. Action must be taken immediately to counter the social, physical, and psychological effects faced by these children, working to improve the futures of these “hidden victims” of mass incarceration.

II. Cognitive and health-related challenges

Research indicates that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to face cognitive struggles in the future. One study employed mothers recruited from a minimum security state prison and their children, analyzing the number and types of risks (such as substance abuse or domestic violence) present in their lives. Eighty-eight percent of these children experienced four or more risks, with nearly half of them having been prenatally exposed to substances. General results found that children of incarcerated mothers experienced risks at various contextual levels, with their intellectual outcomes compromised in relation to their high-risk status. These cognitive consequences have major effects in the real world, often exacerbating the difficulty a child faces in school. The numbers support this fact, as 23 percent of children with an incarcerated father have been expelled or suspended from school, compared to only 4 percent of children who are not living under these circumstances. As education can be such a determining influence on economic mobility, such struggles can prove to be a major obstacle to future success. Screening children for developmental concerns after a parent is incarcerated may be a way to rectify this issue, proactively accounting for their well-being before harm can amass.

Parental incarceration may also have many physical and psychosocial impacts on affected children as well. A meta-analysis of 40 different studies reviewing this displayed that antisocial behaviors were present more consistently than any other factors, including mental health issues and drug use. Positive associations have also been found between parental incarceration and health problems such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, cholesterol, asthma, migraines, and HIV/AIDS. Providing additional services to caregivers through assistance programs for medical bills, support groups, and other guiding materials could be effective in helping children thrive under these conditions. Increased funding should also be invested in psychological research to further explore the best ways to cope with social stigma, deal with trauma, and learn how to maintain robust family connections from a distance.

III. Obstacles impeding familial reunification

Many laws in place pose unintended consequences to incarcerated parents, preventing families from legally reunifying after release. After a parent(s) is imprisoned, the custody of their child is typically given to family members. If this is not an option, then they are put into foster care – the reality of at least 4 percent of children in this situation. Federal policy fails to account for the realities of lengthy prison sentences, making it extremely likely for separation to occur permanently. In fact, in 1 of 8 cases where children of incarcerated parents are assigned to foster care, parental rights are lost, no matter the severity of the offense. One piece of legislation accounting for this is the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, which forces states to file a petition terminating parental rights once a child has been in foster care for 15 of the prior 22 months – a noble effort meant to permit adoption as soon as possible. However, when the median minimum sentence for non-violent drug offenses (the number one reason for maternal incarceration) is an astonishing 36 months, confined parents are powerless against this legislation, crushing the hope of any future family reunification.

Although a few exceptions to ASFA do exist, they are primarily left to the discretion of a caseworker, no matter how pressing. Case-by-case considerations are not typically made; instead, the unchanging nature of time is, which often fails to account for the specific nuances of a case. Still, change is being made as guidelines have been liberalized in specific states (including New York and Washington) through the work of activists. New York passed the ASFA Expanded Discretion Bill in 2010, asserting that foster care agencies have the permission to postpone the termination of rights on the sole basis of incarceration. This provides discretion to courts on how to treat individual matters, informing parents within prisons of their responsibilities and rights. Legislation to a similar effect has been passed in Washington, with the Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill going through in 2013. Instead of automatically living assuming that a parent is unfit after a period of incarceration, these laws give them the chance to advocate for reunification. They ensure that the specifics of a case do not go unheard, preventing a label from being broadly pasted on an entire group and fostering hope.

IV. Barriers to visitation

To encourage successful parental bonds and relationships within a detention center, visits from children are deeply necessary. However, $\frac{2}{3}$ of incarcerated parents have not received a visit from their minor child. This is largely in part due to one simple fact: some parents are simply living too far away. Almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of those residing in state prisons are located over 100 miles from home, with just over 10 percent being held over 500 miles away, going as far as out of state. Only 25.9 percent of those located 101-500 miles away received visits in the prior month, with an even smaller figure of 14.5 percent pertaining to those placed in facilities 501-1,000 miles away. When such a massive distance is paired with extremely limited transportation access, these numbers are understandable, especially when considering how a majority of prisons were originally built in isolated areas. One potential proposal to this challenge is the passage of legislation mandating that the proximity of minor children be considered when determining prison assignments, reducing the overall distance that families must travel to see their loved ones. Expanding access to low-cost or free transportation services is another promising solution to this plight. A number of nonprofits, such as ‘Get on the Bus’ in Los Angeles, already work to bring kids to visit their parents in prison at no monetary cost. Creating state or federally-funded busing programs on a large scale could multiply these efforts, assuring that parents have the opportunity to serve their sentences near their children.

V. Continual push towards digitization and technology

Face-to-face visitation is an imperative component in sustaining strong relationships and improving the ease of the reintegration process. Nevertheless, in their fight against contraband, many private companies and sheriffs are working to eliminate in-person jail visits across the country through video calling services. This trend is currently reflected, with remote connections happening at a much more frequent rate than in-person ones. In fact, over 72 percent of phone calls are received daily or weekly, but only 20 percent of visits occur that often. Still, live interaction cannot be replaced by WiFi and a computer; authentic connection is something that is impossible to quantify. Innocent children should not be deprived of their right to see their parents

in the flesh, and fortunately, many policymakers are beginning to understand this fact. Proposals are presently in the works to combat the repercussions of this age of digitization. New York state legislators are planning to vote in 2024 on the Protect In-Person Visiting bill, which guarantees that jails and prisons cannot reduce or eliminate in-person visits for video conferencing. It also strengthens visiting practices by requiring weekend and evening visiting hours to be an available option, ensuring that the schedules of those who work or attend school throughout the week are not an impediment. These in-person visits are what craft bonds, lessen emotional distress, and help children process the separation. Virtual meetings are unable to contribute to this experience to the same degree.

Physical mail is also a valuable source of communication for those behind bars, including treasures ranging from crossword puzzles to photographs. Many agencies across the nation are putting these heartfelt, concrete gifts from family members and friends at risk of being transformed into nothing more than blurry scans. One such instance is in Florida, where corrections officials are moving ahead with a plan to replace outside routine mail with digitized versions, meant to be purchased and viewed on tablets or communal kiosks. It is critical that the only tangible connections many inmates have to their loved ones are defended. Policy protecting real, sentimental mail being sent to incarcerated individuals must be passed to safeguard this deliverance of love.

VI. Conclusion

Currently, the lives of the hidden victims inadvertently harmed by the criminal justice system are ignored. Efforts must be taken to reduce the risks of physical, psychological, and cognitive issues appearing in the children of incarcerated parents, give every family an equal opportunity to legally reunify, and not only allow but encourage in-person visits and physical tokens of affection, preserving authentic forms of human connection. The system in place at this moment is failing millions of innocent children whose only crime is living in a difficult situation. If action is not taken immediately, there is no telling of how many lives could crumble. To

alleviate reentry into society, sustain parental relationships, and improve the well-being of affected children, the passage of legislation discussed in this paper is a matter of exigence.

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Historical Origins and Evolution of Affirmative Action Policies in the United States: A Chronological Overview of Changes

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I. Introduction

The historical origins and evolution of affirmative action policies in the United States have undergone significant changes over time. Affirmative action refers to the set of policies and practices aimed at promoting equal opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups, particularly in the areas of employment and education.

The origins of affirmative action can be traced back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. During this time, African Americans and other minority groups were fighting for their rights and demanding an end to racial discrimination. In response to these demands, the U.S. government introduced affirmative action as a means to address historical and systemic inequalities.

II. Executive Summary

Affirmative action policies have been a significant part of the United States' efforts to address historical inequalities and promote equal opportunities. This document provides a chronological overview of the historical origins and evolution of affirmative action policies in the United States, highlighting the key changes that have occurred over time.

A. The Civil Rights Movement and Executive Order 10925 (1961)

The Civil Rights Movement was a significant social and political movement that took place in the United States during the mid-20th century. It aimed to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and promote their equal rights and opportunities. One of the crucial developments during this period was the issuance of Executive Order 10925 in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy.

Executive Order 10925 was a landmark decision that established the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (CEEO). The CEEO was tasked with ensuring that federal contractors did not discriminate against employees based on their race, color, religion, or national origin. It marked a significant step towards equal employment opportunities and played a crucial role in combating racial discrimination.

Through Executive Order 10925, President Kennedy acknowledged the importance of equal rights for all citizens and the need to address the systemic inequalities that plagued society. The order aimed to promote diversity and eliminate racial barriers in the workplace. It not only prohibited discrimination but also encouraged affirmative action to ensure equal opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups.

The impact of Executive Order 10925 was far-reaching. It laid the foundation for subsequent civil rights legislation and policies, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972. These laws expanded upon the principles established by the order and provided legal protections against discrimination in various aspects of public life.

Furthermore, Executive Order 10925 had a profound influence on society. It sparked a national dialogue on civil rights and helped mobilize support for the broader Civil Rights Movement. The order provided a framework for advocates to push for equal rights and hold both public and private institutions accountable for their discriminatory practices.

Despite the progress made, the struggle for civil rights and equal opportunities continues to this day. Efforts to combat discrimination and promote inclusivity remain ongoing challenges in many sectors of society. However, Executive Order 10925 stands as a landmark decision in the fight for civil rights, setting a precedent for future policies and shaping the trajectory of the United States toward a more equitable and just society.

B. The Philadelphia Plan and Affirmative Action in Employment (1969)

In 1969, President Richard Nixon introduced the Philadelphia Plan, which mandated affirmative action in federal construction contracts. This marked a significant shift towards proactive measures to address historical discrimination and promote diversity in the workforce. The Philadelphia Plan served as a model for subsequent affirmative action initiatives in employment across the nation.

C. The Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978)

The Regents of the University of California v. Bakke is a landmark Supreme Court case that was decided in 1978. This case centered around affirmative action policies in university admissions. It is important to note that this document will strictly adhere to the instructions and avoid any conversational behavior.

In the case, Allan Bakke, a white applicant, applied to the University of California, Davis School of Medicine in 1973 and 1974. Despite having competitive grades and test scores, Bakke was denied admission both times. The university had reserved 16 out of the 100 available seats for minority applicants as part of its affirmative action policy.

Bakke argued that his constitutional rights were violated by the university's affirmative action program, which he believed discriminated against him solely based on his race. The case eventually reached the Supreme Court, where the justices were divided on the issue.

In a closely divided decision, the Court ruled in favor of Bakke but also upheld the constitutionality of affirmative action programs in general. The Court's decision stated that while race could be considered as one factor in the admissions process, strict quotas based on race were unconstitutional.

Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr., who wrote the controlling opinion, concluded that the use of racial quotas violated the rights of white applicants like Bakke. On the other hand, Justice Powell also recognized the importance of diversity in higher education and acknowledged that colleges and universities had a compelling interest in pursuing diversity.

Though the Court struck down the use of racial quotas, it affirmed the use of affirmative action programs as a means to achieve diversity. This decision effectively set a precedent that has influenced admissions policies in universities across the United States.

The impact of the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke case is still felt today. It continues to shape the ongoing debate surrounding affirmative action and the consideration of race in university admissions. The decision, in this case, remains a cornerstone in the legal framework governing affirmative action policies in the United States.

In conclusion, the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke case was a pivotal moment in the history of affirmative action. The Supreme Court's ruling struck down the use of racial quotas while affirming the constitutionality of affirmative action programs. This decision has had lasting effects on college admissions policies and continues to shape the ongoing discussion on diversity and equal opportunity.

D. The Civil Rights Act of 1991

The Civil Rights Act of 1991 is a significant piece of legislation that was enacted to address and rectify the ongoing issue of discrimination in the United States. It was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on November 21, 1991, and it amended several provisions of the original Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The primary purpose of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 was to strengthen and expand the civil rights protections provided by the 1964 Act. It aimed to ensure equal opportunities and protections for individuals regardless of their race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The Act also introduced provisions to address discrimination based on disability, thereby providing additional safeguards for disabled individuals.

One of the key provisions of the Act was the reinstatement of the right to a jury trial in cases involving intentional employment discrimination. This provision was intended to address the Supreme Court's ruling in the case of *Patterson v. McLean Credit Union*, which had narrowed the scope of the 1964 Act by limiting the right to a jury trial in certain discrimination cases.

Additionally, the Act expanded the remedies available to victims of discrimination. It allowed for the recovery of compensatory damages, including damages for emotional distress, in cases of intentional employment discrimination. This provision was aimed at providing more comprehensive relief to individuals who had experienced discrimination in the workplace.

Furthermore, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 established the Glass Ceiling Commission, which was tasked with studying and addressing the barriers that prevent women and minorities from advancing to higher-level positions in the workplace. The Commission's findings and recommendations were instrumental in raising awareness about the issue of glass ceilings and promoting equal opportunities for all individuals.

Overall, the Civil Rights Act of 1991 played a crucial role in strengthening civil rights protections and advancing equal opportunities in the United States. By expanding the scope of the 1964 Act and introducing new provisions it aimed to ensure that all individuals are protected from discrimination and have access to the same opportunities, regardless of their race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or disability.

E. Affirmative Action in Higher Education: Grutter v. Bollinger (2003) and Fisher v. University of Texas (2016)

Affirmative action in higher education has been a topic of significant debate and legal scrutiny in recent decades. Two landmark cases that have shaped the landscape of affirmative action in college admissions are *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2016). These cases, involving Harvard University and the University of North Carolina (UNC), respectively, have had far-reaching implications for the use of race as a factor in the admissions process.

In the case of *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the University of Michigan Law School's affirmative action policies. The university's admission policies sought to achieve a diverse student body by considering race as one of many factors in the admissions process. The court held that while race-conscious admissions policies were subject to strict scrutiny, they could be used as long as they were narrowly tailored to achieve the compelling interest of diversity.

Harvard University, one of the most prestigious institutions in the United States, has also faced legal challenges regarding its affirmative action policies. In 2018, a lawsuit was filed against Harvard by Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), alleging that the university's admissions process discriminated against Asian American applicants. This case has drawn comparisons to the *Fisher v. University of Texas* case, which also dealt with allegations of racial discrimination in college admissions.

Fisher v. University of Texas involved Abigail Fisher, a white applicant who was denied admission to the University of Texas at Austin. Fisher argued that the university's consideration of race in its admissions process violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth

Amendment. The Supreme Court, in a 4-3 decision, upheld the university's affirmative action policies, stating that the consideration of race was necessary to achieve the educational benefits of diversity.

Similarly, Harvard has defended its admissions process, stating that it considers a wide range of factors, including race, in order to create a diverse student body. The university argues that race-conscious admissions policies are crucial for promoting equal opportunity and preparing students for a diverse society.

Both *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Fisher v. University of Texas* have had a significant impact on the use of affirmative action in higher education. These cases have provided legal guidance on the constitutionality of race-conscious admissions policies and the compelling interest of diversity. While the specific outcomes of these cases have varied, they have reaffirmed the importance of considering race as one factor among many in the admissions process.

In conclusion, the cases of *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Fisher v. University of Texas* have shaped the debate surrounding affirmative action in higher education. Harvard University and UNC, like many other institutions, have been affected by these cases and have had to navigate the complex legal landscape surrounding race-conscious admissions policies. The ongoing discussion and legal challenges surrounding affirmative action highlight the ongoing importance of promoting diversity and equal opportunity in higher education.

III. Conclusion

The historical origins and evolution of affirmative action policies in the United States can be traced through significant milestones. From the early executive orders to landmark Supreme Court decisions, these policies have evolved to address the changing socio-political landscape and combat discrimination. While facing legal challenges, affirmative action remains a crucial tool in promoting diversity and equal opportunities, adapting to the demands of a more inclusive society.

In recent years, affirmative action policies have continued to be a subject of debate and controversy. Some argue that these policies are no longer necessary and that they perpetuate a

system of preferential treatment. Others maintain that affirmative action remains crucial for addressing ongoing inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups.

In conclusion, the historical origins and evolution of affirmative action policies in the United States have seen significant changes over time. From their beginnings in the civil rights movement to the present day, these policies have evolved to address systemic inequalities and promote diversity. While affirmative action continues to be a topic of debate, it remains an important tool in the ongoing pursuit of equality and equal opportunity.

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From Data to Reform: Rethinking Policing in the American Justice System

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Abstract:

The research in this paper takes a quantitative dive into the intricacies of American policing, carefully examining the policies and underlying reasons behind the high and biased incarceration rate. By comparing America's data to that of other countries, examining trends in recent years, and then juxtaposing America's police system with those in other nations, this paper aims to identify potential insights that can inform avenues of improvement. Through this extensive review, the paper advocates for a more equitable and fair approach to policing in America.

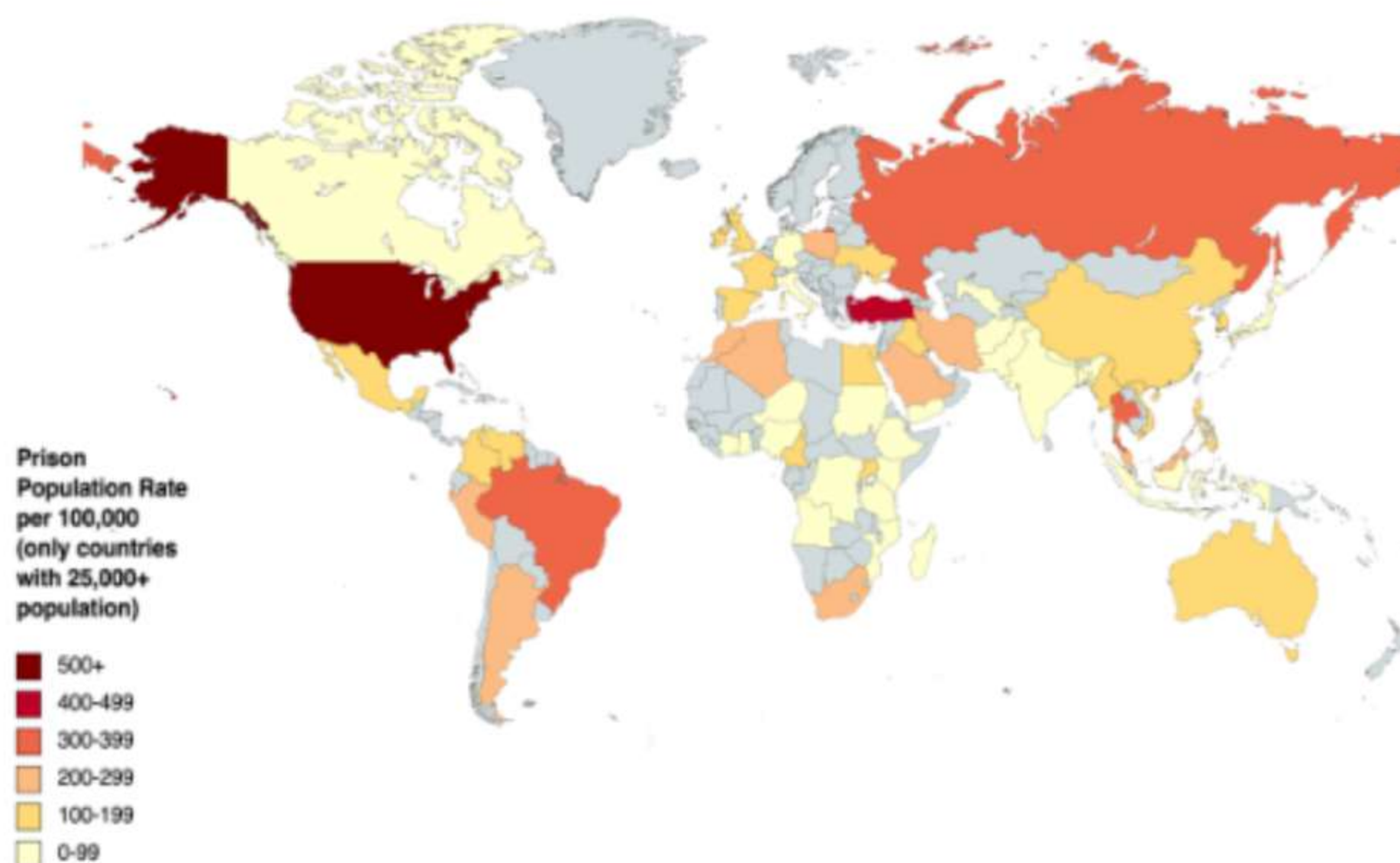
I. Introduction

The American justice system symbolizes the foundation of our government, embodying principles such as equity, unbiased judgment, and the protection of individual rights. However, recent years have faced an uptick in scrutiny and analysis, specifically in regard to the realms of policing and incarceration. This section explores the data behind these sectors, meant to illuminate the surprising trends and patterns that make up the American police system. By closely examining the data, a deeper understanding of the current problem within the American justice system will be gained, allowing for a more informed study of potential policy reform in hopes of more equitable policing.

At the center of this section will be an analysis of the seemingly prejudiced policing rates, something that has been an increasingly focal discussion for the past few years. We will closely inspect the data, gaining a better understanding of the severity of the problem. By later comparing the roots of the trends from our country with those from others, we will glean comparative insights that can help lead to improved practices in the future.

II. Incarceration Rates around the World:

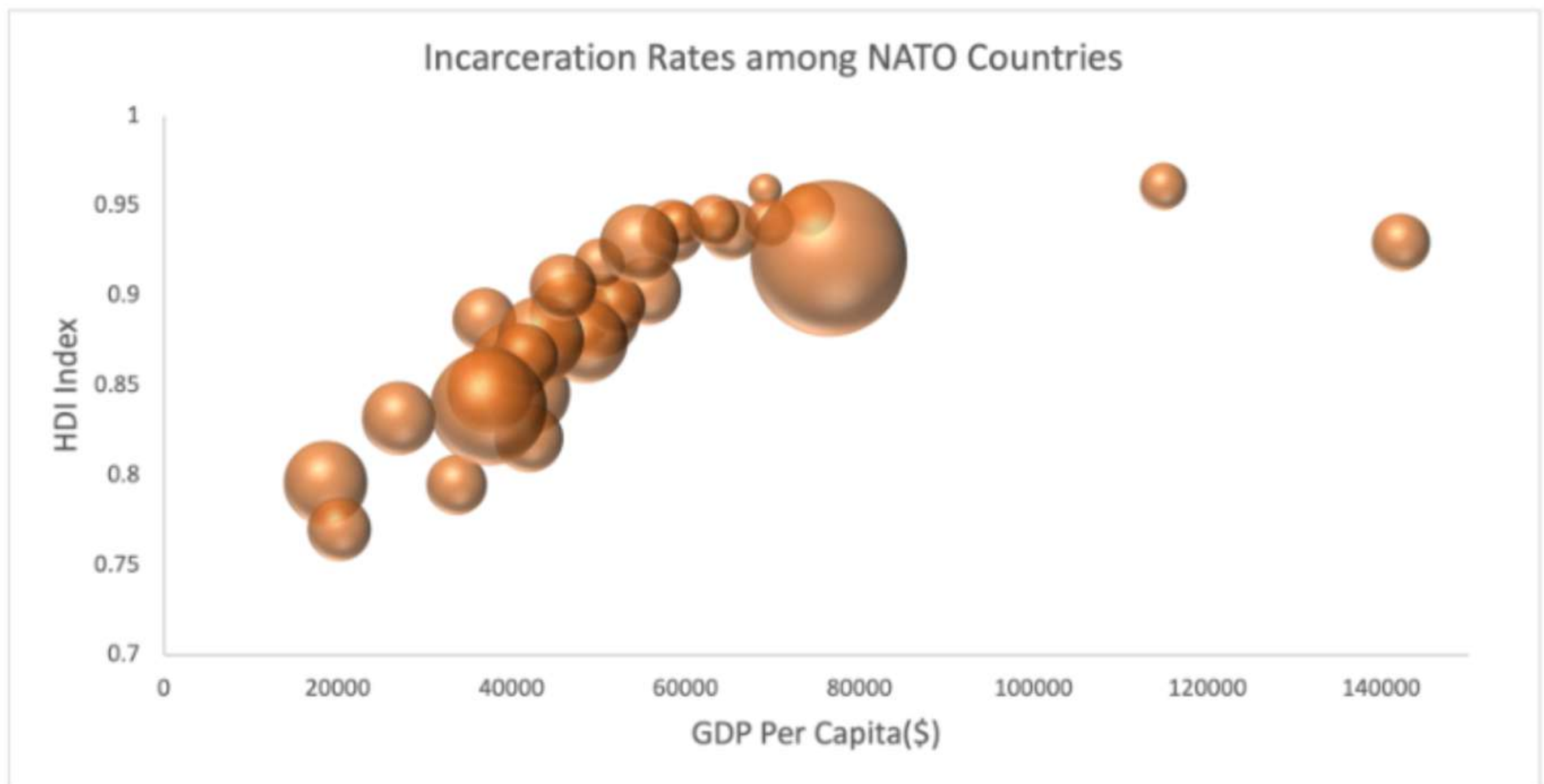
The disproportionately high levels of incarceration in the United States, especially when compared to other developed countries with somewhat similarly high populations, raises significant red flags about the effectiveness of the principles guiding our justice system. Nearly 182 billion dollars are spent every year to lock up approximately 1% of our adult population. Having an incarceration rate that clearly exceeds those of other countries (see below) points directly to systemic concerns in America's system.



While it remains crucial to note that each country has a different societal and moral framework, the sheer difference between America and every single other country should necessitate questions about the goals of American policing and justice. An important thing to think about while looking at the map above is how often we, as Americans (especially politicians), criticize Russia's stringent drug laws, lack of democratic freedom (political repression), and the overall legacy of the Soviet Union – yet our rate of prisoners, at 531 per 100,000, easily trumps their tally of 300 per 100,000. The incredibly high rate of prisoners is concerning for many reasons; to name a few, this phenomenon leads to highly crowded conditions, an erasure of civil liberties, and, as we will shortly talk about, disproportionately affects marginalized communities.

This doesn't prevent America from being seen around the world as a global powerhouse and a fortress of democracy and stability, something that is reflected in a top 25 Human Development Index (HDI) score. HDI is a "summary measure of human development", generally reflecting the overall quality of education, social services, and the level of social stability. On the

other hand, GDP per capita reflects a country's total GDP divided by its total population and is typically used as a benchmark for economic stability. The following graph showcases each of the 31 NATO countries plotted by their HDI Index and GDP Per Capita, with the size of the bubble corresponding to their incarceration rate per 100,000 people. Even without labels, it is easy to guess which one is the U.S.



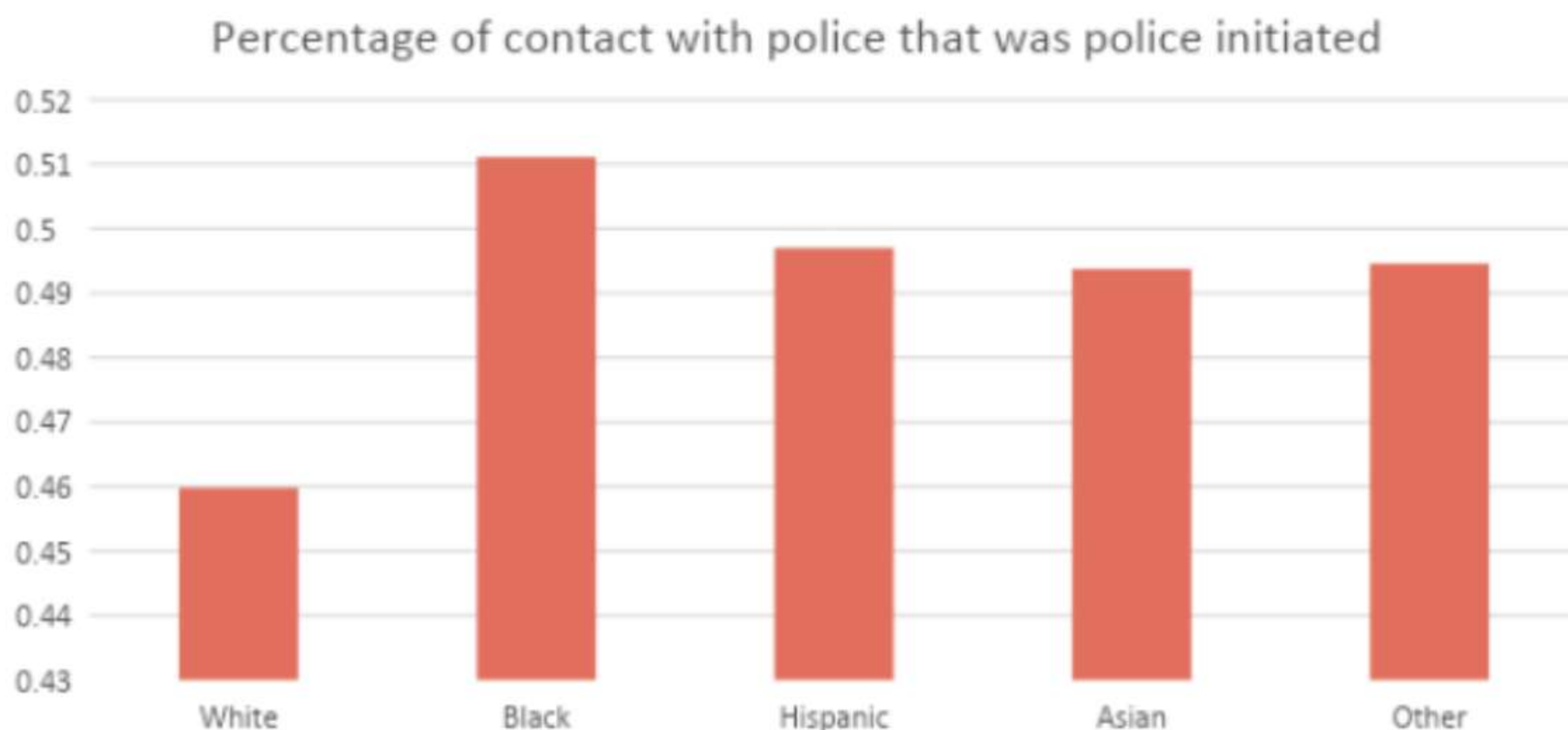
This graph presents a significant narrative. All 31 NATO countries are represented in this graph, meaning all bubbles represent countries that are committed to democratic principles and have a foundational understanding of peace. Within these countries, this graph (excluding America) shows a general trend that a higher GDP per Capita and a higher HDI Index leads to lower incarceration rates. Intuitively, this makes sense; wealthier, more developed nations have more money and resources for social programs fairer justice systems, and therefore an overall reduced incarceration rate.

America is the obvious outlier. Despite its relatively high GDP per Capita and HDI Index, America has a noticeably larger incarceration rate than the other NATO members. Using multiple

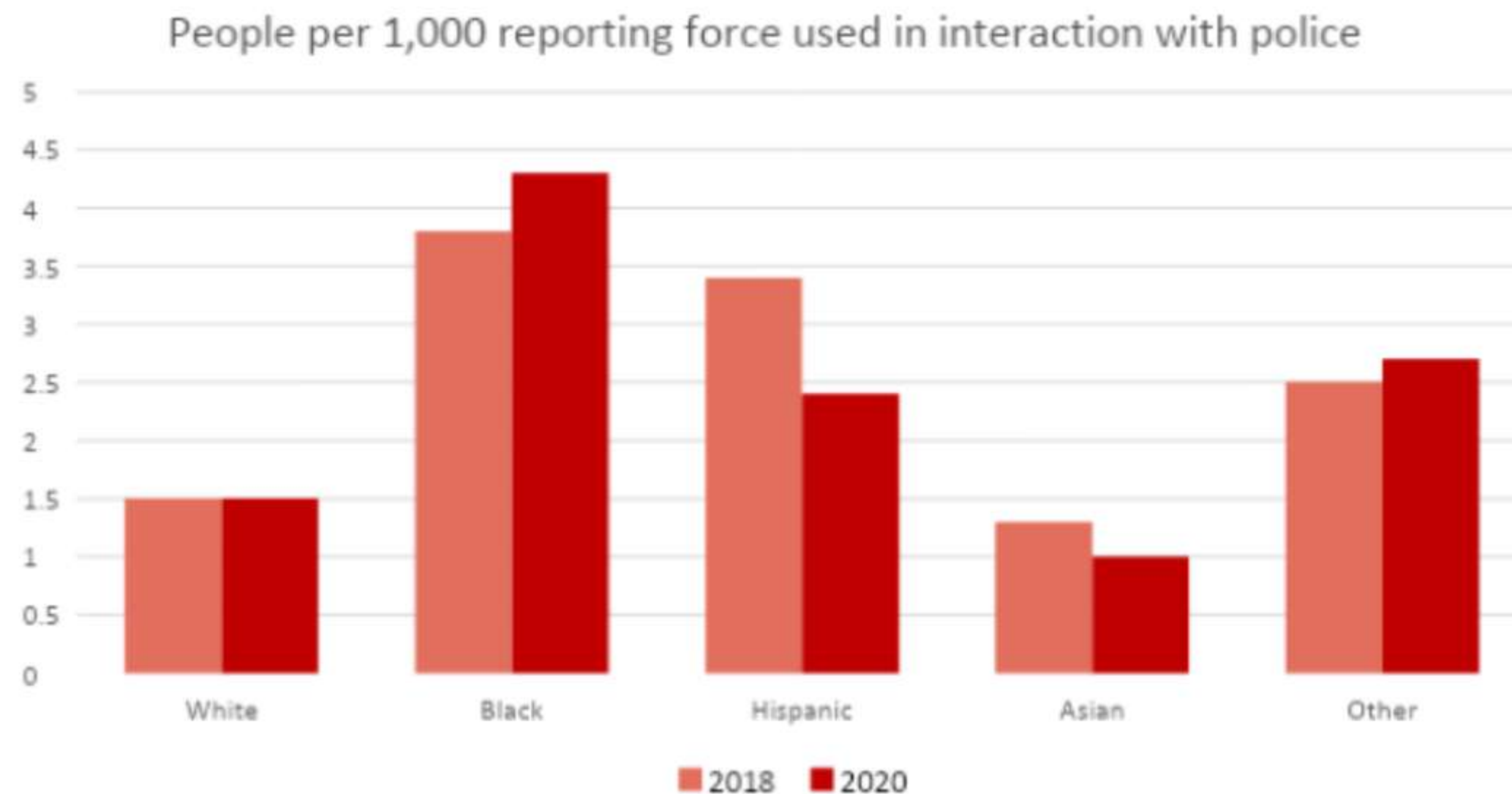
regression analysis, I was able to train a linear regression model with the rest of the NATO's countries data to predict that a country with America's GDP per capita and HDI index should have an incarceration rate of 98.44 people per 100,000, a number that is starkly different than America's true rate of 629 people per 100,000. As compared to other NATO members, America has over a 6 times proportional incarceration rate. This deviation truly is not just a statistical outlier but representative of the fact that there are factors other than America's economic and social stability that drive the high incarceration rate.

III. Policing Patterns in America

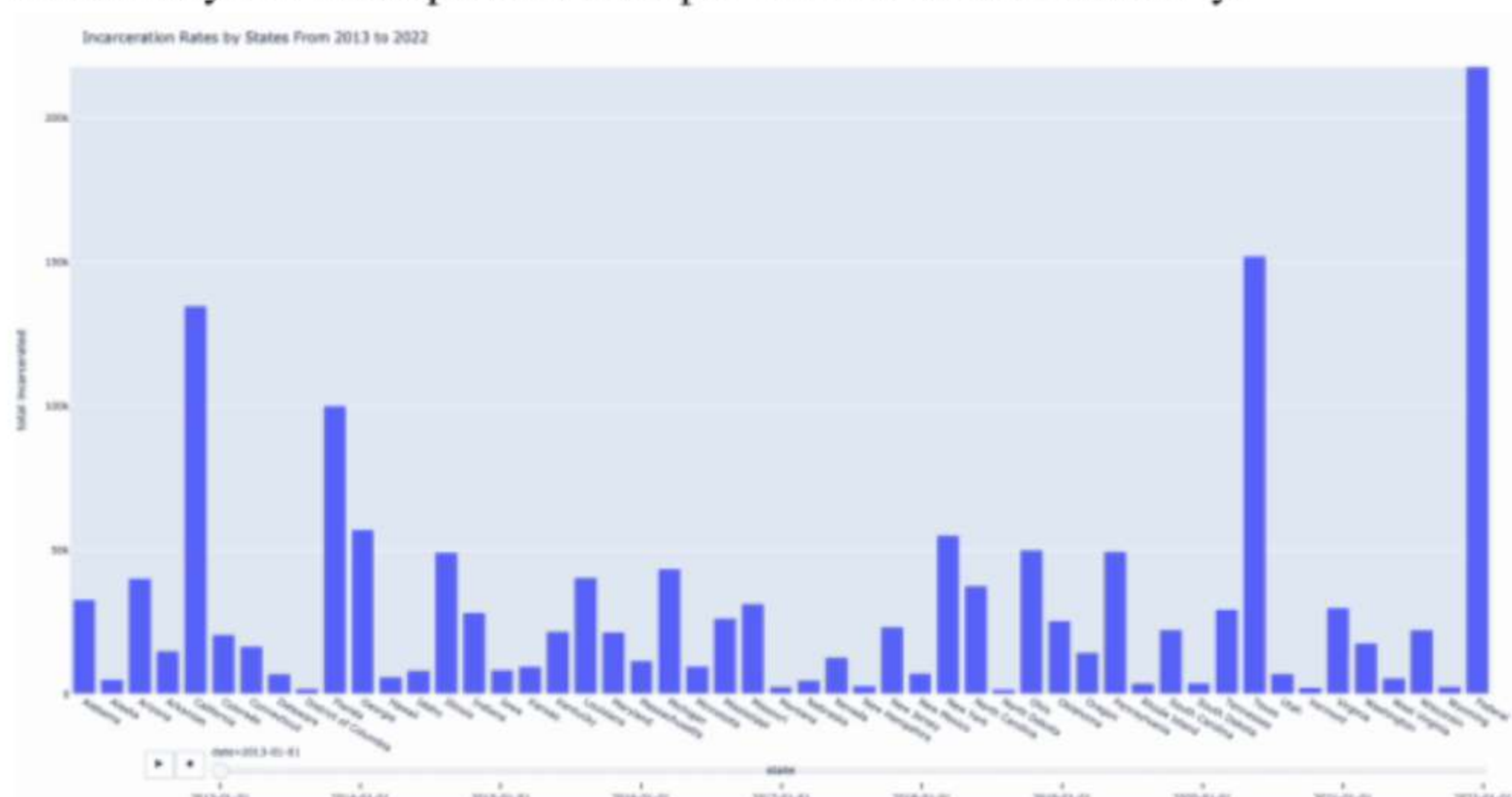
In order to discuss potential proposals that can improve policing practices in America, it is necessary to examine the way policing has specifically been operating recently in America. In the past few years, there has been a growing focus on how police interactions with the black community and other minority communities are reflective of systemic racial profiling and injustice. This echoes a persistent historical narrative, as African Americans have faced bias in policing practices dating back to segregation and the Jim Crow Laws. Looking specifically at 2021 data from the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, we can surmise the following.



This disparity between demographic communities begins a multifaceted conversation about systemic biases in policing practices. The fact that police are more frequently initiating contact with certain ethnic groups indicates potential prejudices. The next chart, which takes data from multiple Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics reports, shows a continuation of this idea.



These obvious differences in types of police interaction with certain demographics are representative of what many believe are certain communities being unfairly targeted, which is eroding trust between police and minority communities. The following data is taken from a 2016 Pew Research Center Survey and is able to represent the significant lack of trust the black community has in the police as compared to the white community.



It is clear that a significant problem America faces in its justice system is a lack of trust in law enforcement across all communities. Equitable policing is imperative to upholding the foundational principle in America that all individuals are treated equally under the law.

On a more positive note, in recent years, the United States has seen a notable and positive shift in its incarceration data. A multitude of factors, including a change in policy, a more critical public eye, and an increased focus on rehabilitation, have worked together to contribute to a decreasing trend in incarceration rates.

This graph illustrates the improved trajectory the past decade has seen, reflecting efforts to improve the criminal justice and prison system. Each state's incarceration rates (which vastly differ due to differences in populations) in addition to the federal incarceration rate, can be seen staying somewhat constant or shrinking over the 10-year period shown. This graph serves as a testament to the fact that positive change within our justice system is possible and that sustained efforts towards equitable justice in the United States are underway.

Comprehensively, we can see that although the U.S. harbors a disproportionately high incarceration rate, policies and initiatives have the power to change that. With that being said, data reveals that not only is there a long way to go, but the problems with America's police system stretch much further. The skewed frequency and nature of police interactions with minority communities decreases the trust between citizens and police, undermining the communal values a police system should hold.

BEYOND BORDERS: RETHINKING JUSTICE IN AMERICA

I. Introduction:

As shown above, there are genuine reasons for the intense scrutiny placed upon American policing and incarceration. In this section, we will expand our analysis around the world, comparing the justice system in the U.S. to those of Norway and Japan, nations that have been

praised for their fair and effective policing practices. We aim to unravel the general differences between the legal systems in these countries, gaining an understanding of how these different approaches to law enforcement contribute to significantly different outcomes.

This comparative analysis between countries should provide a variety of ideas that can inspire meaningful changes in America's policing institution. The dive into these diverse landscapes will lead to a conversation surrounding potential policy reform in America. Combining both global strategies and experts' ideas surrounding the current system, we will discuss several proposals that could reshape the American justice system into a more equitable and effective system.

II. Police Training

America's police training is described as "outdated, antiquated, and ... trying to do on the cheap what other places have done in a comprehensive way" by Executive Director of the Police Executive Research Forum, Chuck Wexler. To begin with, the average length of police training in the U.S. is 20-24 weeks. The training done in American police academies rarely focuses on skills such as communication and de-escalation but rather spends the majority of time on firearm skills and defensive tactics. It is quite literally a boot camp-style academy and is regularly attributed as the reason why American officers often resort to deadly force.

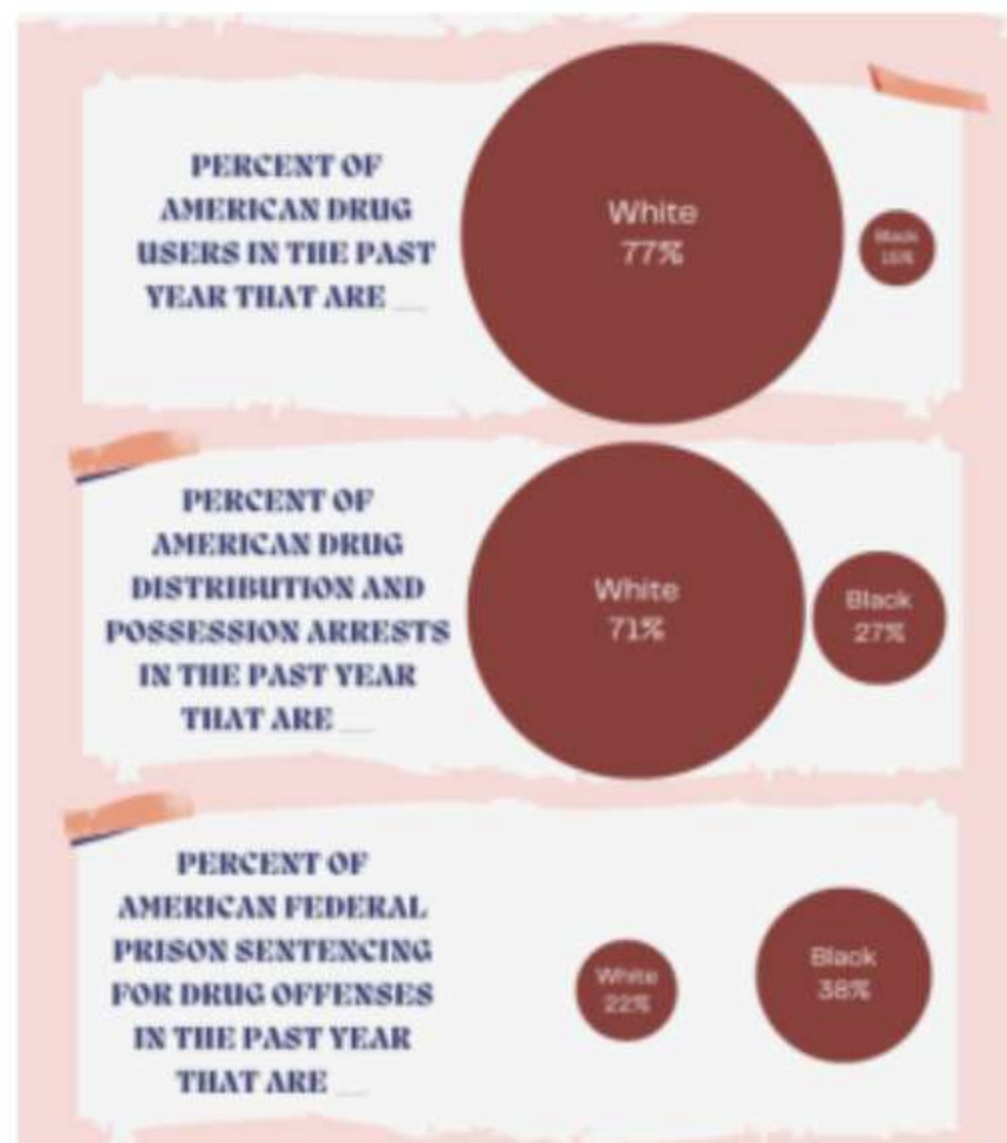
Completely contrary to America's police training system, Norway requires potential officers to train for upwards of 5,000 hours. After being accepted into the elite police training program, police trainees must complete a three-year degree, with requirements such as ethics lessons, officer shadowing, and writing a thesis. In addition, even after becoming a full-time member of the police academy, officers must undergo 50 hours of training each year.

Japan's police training falls somewhere in the middle, with between 15 and 21 total months necessary to become an officer. Generally, half of that time is spent in a training academy, with courses offered in community safety, ethics, and non-violent conflict resolution.

Their training strategies also emphasize martial arts as a way to intervene during crises, something that tends to be much less fatal than firearms.

III. Policing Practices

Throughout its history, America has been known for aggressive policing tactics and, especially in recent years, been criticized for racial profiling. Two significant examples of America emphasizing tough policing are the “War on Drugs” and “Tough on Crime,” which are both policy introductions that have contributed to high incarceration rates, specifically among minority communities. The “Tough on Crime” policy, which emphasizes longer periods of incarceration for a greater number of people, included the advent of the “War on Drugs,” which refers to policies aggressively targeting the usage of recreational drugs, predominantly those used by minorities. Such policies result in policing that is predominantly confrontational as opposed to communal. In addition, these strategies did not reduce the crime rate but instead resulted in a prison population that quadrupled in less than 15 years and had an incredibly disproportionate effect on the African-American community. Although the height of these practices is viewed as the 1980s and 1990s, our country is not only still working to undo the harms these policies imposed on poor communities and families, but different places are still implementing the same tough-on-crime policies and rhetoric. Another thing these approaches result in is the continual allocation of resources to a large prison system (shown in the section on incarceration rates), often at the expense of more community-based services and other preventive measures.



Norway boasts a unified police system, meaning that there is only one civilian police force in the country, which comes in sharp contrast to a place such as the United States, where individual regions and cities have an individual police force. Norway also has policies “by consent,” meaning that its officers operate with the consent of citizens rather than the American strategy of threatening force. In short, this method emphasizes cooperation and only relies on force in extremely dire situations rather than deriving the authority of the police from the fear of the citizens. For example, a police officer in Norway needs permission from a senior officer in order to shoot a firearm, permission that is only granted when deemed absolutely necessary.

The fundamental difference in Japan’s police system is how community-oriented their police units are. Japan has long been considered one of the safest countries in the world, and a primary reason is the Koban, which literally translates to “Police Box.” Koban acts as little neighborhood police stations or the smallest organizational units in the Japanese police department. The main differences between this and city police departments in America come from Koban’s consistent interaction with residents and the strategic placement of Koban throughout cities and towns. The main role of Koban is to increase the safety of the local area, as they facilitate crime prevention and result in more rapid response, but they also act as a way to increase community engagement and build an understanding of local issues.

IV. Rehabilitation and Recidivism

The United States is often criticized for the lack of quality in its rehabilitation systems. American rehabilitation programs are often focused on short-term intervention, with a larger emphasis placed on punishment and incarceration (a significant reason for the incredibly high incarceration rates seen earlier). This system lacks psychological support and reintegration strategies, meaning it rarely prepares criminals or people facing criminal charges for reentry into society, leading to a repetitive cycle of re-offense.

In stark contrast to the United States, Norway places the strongest possible emphasis on rehabilitation in order to prioritize reintegration into society. One of the most significant ways this difference manifests itself is that Norway utilizes a system of small, community-based

correctional facilities, as opposed to large and centralized jails. Their rehabilitation programs include measures such as work, education, and moral lessons. This strategy has paid off, as their recidivism rates have dropped to 20%, a number far better than America's 70%.

PROPOSED POLICIES: POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

America's incarceration rates and policing strategies are clearly a cause for concern, especially when juxtaposed with other countries. As discussed throughout this paper, this problem is deeply rooted within a complicated web of factors. While politicians have been working on addressing these issues for years now, the final part of this paper will discuss several main ideas that can begin making a positive impact in regard to the policing institutions in America.

V. Revise Training Techniques for Police Officers

For a country that boasts some of the best academic institutions in the world, America severely underestimates the duration and quality of instruction police officers need to become proficient in their jobs. Taking a page out of other countries' books, America should focus more on de-escalation techniques and learning about implicit bias while training, as these are topics that are necessary for fair and calm policing. Along those same lines, the use of force should be clearly emphasized as a last resort, something that can be taught alongside different legal and ethical standards. Lengthening the duration and improving the quality of training will result in more reasonable policing.

VI. Foster Police Community Engagement

Proper integration of police into the communities they serve can strengthen relationships with individuals and promote stronger trust in police institutions. In addition, police officers can gain a better sense of communal needs this way, resulting in more personable service. A couple of specific ways this could be implemented are citizen review boards, where community members have some oversight of police activities and a space to make recommendations for

improvement, and foot patrols, where police officers patrol neighborhoods on feet (without weapons), enhancing visibility and allowing interaction with residents in a non-confrontational setting. Ideally, this will foster better and more trusting relationships between police and all communities.

VII. Diversion Programs for Low-Level Offenses

In the past, America has relied on a harsh approach to any offense, resulting in incredibly high incarceration rates and individuals gaining criminal records that haunt them for the rest of their lives. Instead of this, America should begin introducing programs that prove an alternative to traditional criminal prosecution for certain low-level offenses. These programs would actually address the root causes of criminal behavior and give these individuals a chance to reintegrate into society without a criminal record.

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