

Supplementary Materials

Are Experts (News)Worthy? Balance, Conflict, and Mass Media Coverage of Expert Consensus

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Appendix A – Areas of expert agreement

Climate Change (Favour): the climate is warming, it is being primarily driven by human production of greenhouse gases, it will have severe economic and environmental consequences, and it needs to be addressed by public policy. Climate change is the most widely recognized example of expert consensus. Over 97 percent of published articles on climate change endorse the main elements of the consensus identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – that it is happening, man-made, and a serious threat (Anderegg et al., 2010). Surveys indicate that anywhere from 80 to 95 percent of scientists agree with this perspective (Bray & von Storch 2008; Dornan & Zimmerman, 2009).

Immigration (Favour): immigration is economically beneficial because it expands the tax and consumer base, and fills gaps in the labour market at the high and low skilled positions. Displacement effects on low-skilled workers are minimal. Surveys of economists have shown that only 16% believe immigration levels in the U.S. are too high (Whaples, 2006). 94% of IGM panelists agreed with the statement that expanding U.S. immigration to hire those with more advanced degrees would increase per capita income.¹ In the European variant of the IGM panel, 99% of respondents believed the free movement of people in the European Union made the average Western European citizen better off. Only 24% believed free movement negatively affected low-skilled workers compared to the 55% that rejected that notion.

Road Pricing (Favour): tolls are net beneficial for citizens. They can provide revenue for transportation infrastructure like highways and public transit, and it can help control congestion. 98% of the IGM panel agreed with a statement that using congestion pricing to lower taxes would make Americans better off.

¹ The IGM Panel is a long-running survey of a panel of economists run by the Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago. Its aim is to facilitate greater awareness of areas where economists are in agreement or otherwise. The complete set of questions posed to the panelists can be found here: <http://www.igmchicago.org/igm-economic-experts-panel>.

Federal Reserve Independence (Favour): Federal Reserve independence is necessary to prevent electorally-motivated distortions in monetary policy, which could lead to inflation and prevent actions to maintain economic growth. 90% of IGM panel respondents disagreed with a bill that would have forced the Federal Reserve to submit a monetary policy rule to Congress that would be enforced by Congress. 80% disagreed with a Senate bill to subject Federal Reserve decisions to an audit, while no panelist agreed with either proposition outright.

Nuclear Power (Favour): nuclear power is a safe source of power – if not the safest compared to its competitors. Meta analyses have shown no link between thyroid cancer incidents and the proximity of nuclear reactors (Kim et al., 2016), and recent research has estimated that nuclear power has saved over 1 million lives by displacing fossil fuel production, which is orders of magnitudes more harmful (Kharecha & Hansen, 2013).

GMOs (Favour): GMOs are as safe as conventional alternatives and have a number of beneficial traits that can improve food security and reduce the environmental costs of agriculture. An exhaustive meta-analysis of 1,700 research papers on GMO safety since 2002 found no meaningful hazards connected with the use of GMOs (Nicoli et al., 2014), and a consensus document by the National Academy of Sciences (2016) could find no evidence that the risk of GMOs outweighed those of conventional alternatives, but recommended continued study on the matter.

Rent Control: (Oppose): rent control leads to a net loss of wealth for Americans by pushing up rental prices in the long-run due to deteriorating housing stocks and increased rates of abandonment. 95% of the IGM panel disagreed with a statement that local ordinances that limited rent increases for some rental units had a positive impact on the quality and amount of affordable rental housing.

Free Trade (Favour), Protectionism (Oppose): free trade is net beneficial for Americans and reversion to economic protectionism could be economically damaging for everyone. It lowers the price of goods and services (thereby improving purchasing power), improves productivity and innovation. Displacement effects on low-skilled native workers are minimal. Moves towards protectionism may spark trade wars that are punishing for consumers. Surveys of economists have shown over 90% reject the use of tariffs in trade policy (Fuller & Geide-Stevenson, 2003; Whaples,

2006, 2009). No economist surveyed on the IGM panel disagreed with statements indicating that past trade deals benefitted most Americans; that NAFTA has been beneficial on balance for citizens; that freer trade improves productive efficiency and consumer choice that provide long-run gains that exceed any employment costs; and, most notably, that trade with China makes most Americans better off.

Vaccines (Favour): childhood vaccines are safe and effective at stopping the spread of preventable diseases like the measles, mumps, rubella, and whooping cough. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics both endorse the safety of childhood vaccinations, and a wide range of literature has debunked supposed associations between vaccinations or its recommended schedule and autism or other neurological problems.²

Farm Support (Oppose): Farm support programs are bad for taxpayers, consumers, and farmers. Subsidies incentivize poor farm practices, are costly to taxpayers, and tend to flow to the wealthy. Supply controls punish consumers by propping up prices and prevent competition from imports. They also cost taxpayers when governments buy surplus crop. Surveys of economists have shown that upwards of 83% of economists favour the complete elimination of farm subsidies (Whaples, 2006).

² More information can be found on the CDC's website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/research/index.html>

Appendix B – Source selection

Lexis and LexisNexis keywords and subject tags

Climate Change

global warming OR climate change; Subject: global warming OR climate change

Immigration

immigrant OR immigration OR immigrate; Subject: immigration AND (law OR policy)

Road Pricing

toll road OR road toll OR highway toll OR toll highway OR road pricing; Subject: toll road

Federal Reserve

Federal Reserve AND (audit OR congressional oversight); Subject: central bank

Nuclear Power

nuclear power OR nuclear energy OR nuclear plants; Subject: nuclear power OR nuclear energy, NOT arms control OR nuclear weapons

GMOs

GM food OR genetically modified food OR GMO OR genetically modified organism OR genetically modified crop; Subject: genetic engineering OR genetically modified food OR genetically modified organism OR agriculture, NOT pharmaceutical OR vaccine

Rent Control

rent control; Subject: rent control

Trade Protectionism

trade pact OR trade agreement OR free trade OR protectionism OR protectionist OR origin label OR trade barrier OR tariff OR quota OR export subsidy OR export subsidies OR WTO OR NAFTA OR CAFTA OR TPP OR World Trade Organization OR Trans Pacific Partnership OR trade authority OR trade negotiation OR bilateral w/5 trade OR buy American w/10 label; Subject: international trade OR tariff OR protectionism OR free trade OR import

Childhood Vaccinations

vaccination schedule OR vaccine schedule OR childhood immunization OR childhood vaccine OR childhood vaccination OR MMR OR M.M.R. OR measles OR mumps OR rubella OR DTaP OR diphtheria OR pertussis OR tetanus OR hepatitis B OR varicella OR chickenpox OR polio OR rotavirus OR haemophilus OR pneumococcal OR hepatitis A OR meningococcal OR meningitis OR HPV OR papillomavirus; Subject: vaccine OR vaccination OR immunization

Farm Support

agricultural subsidies OR agricultural subsidy OR agriculture subsidies OR agriculture subsidy OR farm subsidies OR farm subsidy; Subject: agricultural subsidies

		Start	Climate Change	Immigration	Trade	Nuclear Power	Road Pricing	Childhood Vaccines	GMOs	Federal Reserve	Farm Support	Rent Control
Print	New York Times	1980	13782	15431	15585	7256	1181	1851	431	131	1332	1252
	Washington Post	1980	11968	12945	10614	3566	2221	1684	235	133	987	657
	USA Today	1989	3058	3631	2596	935	203	717	68	27	245	26
	Dallas Morning News	1992	1507	9017	4190	971	2748	877	44	50	229	8
	Houston Chronicle	1991	2741	8989	4295	1415	1903	1105	85	46	299	17
	San Diego Union-Tribune	1983	2637	12788	4732	2208	685	921	177	16	244	556
Cable	CNN	1990	1149	5024	2382	812	35	527	26	15	150	8
	MSNBC	1999	230	946	95	58	1	29	6	0	9	1
	FOX	1997	823	2728	203	177	11	34	5	6	25	4
TV	ABC	1980	735	1000	262	509	37	272	36	3	68	4
	CBS	1990	514	1342	813	391	48	397	59	3	84	4
	NBC	1997	612	895	141	284	25	240	11	2	9	0
Wire	Associated Press	1980	9168	25297	27764	12122	693	3237	521	168	2499	298
Total	286334		48924	100033	73672	30704	9791	11891	1704	600	6180	2835

Table B1. Corpus composition

Appendix C – Supervised machine learning coding criteria

The purpose of the coding for this stage is to subset our sample of articles such that we only use articles in further analyses that contain news or editorial content that has content relevant to the expert consensus used in this paper. For the most part, this means there will be discussion by the writer or by sources on the perceived advantages or disadvantages of the topic at hand. Articles that contain relevant information were coded as “1” and articles without such information were coded as “0”. More detail is provided below on how these coding criteria were implemented for the issues used in this paper.

Climate Change

Articles should be coded as “1” if there is discussion of the science of climate change or climate change impacts, and “0” if otherwise.

Immigration

Articles should be coded as “1” if there is discussion of the economic benefits or costs of foreign immigration to the United States, and “0” if otherwise.

Protectionism

Articles should be coded “1” if there is discussion of the economic benefits or costs of liberalized trade or protectionism, “0” if otherwise. This would include free trade’s imperfect operationalization through FTAs such as GATT, the WTO, NAFTA, CAFTA, and the TPP.

Exclusion criteria: only contains discussion of extraneous elements of FTAs, such as the inclusion of labour, environment, and intellectual property rights.

Nuclear Power

Articles will be coded as “1” if there is discussion related to the safety of nuclear reactors, and “0” if otherwise.

Note: there is no such consensus on the economic viability of nuclear power, but this is not the focus here. Articles that only focus on the economics of nuclear power should be coded as “0”.

Road Pricing

Articles will be coded “1” if there is discussion of the advantages or disadvantages of pricing or tolls, and “0” if otherwise.

Note: There will be some coverage on the debate on the development of specific tollways. This is true in the Texas newspapers, where focus is on the development of new highways rather than in managing congestion on existing highways. Articles should only be coded as “1” if there is discussion on the merits or disadvantages of pricing *independent* of the merits or disadvantages of the new road itself.

Childhood Vaccination

Articles should be coded as “1” if there is discussion of the perceived benefits or risks of vaccinations given to children and adolescents, such as MMR (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella), DTaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis), Chickenpox (Varicella), Hepatitis A and B, and IPV (Polio).

Exclusion criteria: influenza immunization, adult vaccinations, vaccination campaigns in developing countries.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

Articles should be coded as “1” if there is discussion on the advantages or disadvantages of GMOs or the safety of GMOs, and “0” if otherwise.

Exclusion criteria: other applications of genetic engineering such as cloning, normative arguments for GMO labelling such as having a “right to know”.

Federal Reserve Independence

Articles should be coded “1” if there is discussion on the merits or disadvantages of Federal Reserve independence. In practice, this will mean coverage of congressional efforts to impose audits of the Federal Reserve, or to dictate monetary policy, such as by the legislation of a monetary rule. Articles will be coded “0” otherwise.

Farm Supports

Articles should be coded “1” if there is discussion of the benefits or costs of agriculture subsidies or other farm supports, and “0” if otherwise.

Exclusion criteria: Agriculture export subsidies that encourage dumping in developing countries.

Rent Control

Articles will be coded as “1” if there is discussion on the perceived benefits or costs of rent control or rent stabilization regulation. They will be coded “0” otherwise.

Issue	N	Coding criteria	% Relevant
Climate change	48,924	Coded '1' if... discussion of climate science or climate change impacts	27
Immigration economics	100,033	Coded '1' if... discussion of the economic benefits/costs of immigration	2
Trade protectionism	73,672	Coded '1' if... discussion of the economic benefits/costs of liberalized trade or protectionism	37
Nuclear power	30,704	Coded '1' if... discussion related to the safety of nuclear reactors	20
Road pricing	9,791	Coded '1' if... discussion of the advantages/disadvantages of road pricing/tolls	11
Childhood vaccines	11,891	Coded '1' if... discussion of benefits/costs of vaccines and vaccine safety	28
GMOs	1,703	Coded '1' if... discussion of benefits/costs of GMOs and GMO safety	58
Federal Reserve independence	600	Coded '1' if... discussion of merits/drawbacks of Federal Reserve independence	23
Farm support	6,180	Coded '1' if... discussion of benefits/costs of subsidies/farm supports	17
Rent control	2,835	Coded '1' if... discussion of benefits/costs of rent control	30

Table C1. Topic relevance manual coding criteria and share of stories that are topic relevant.

Note: Computer memory constraints limited my ability to use the other algorithms. Algorithms were trained on a random sample of articles from the newswire and newspaper sources. Random Forest was removed from the ensemble on road pricing, farm support, rent control, and the Federal Reserve. A consensus for these issues is the agreement of relevance between 2 of the 3 algorithms.

Appendix D – Diagnostics for supervised machine learning

Issue	Accuracy	Precision
Climate Change	82%	0.90
Immigration	91%	0.83
Trade Protectionism	80%	0.80
Nuclear Power	85%	0.86
Road Pricing	89%	1.00
Childhood Vaccination	91%	0.98
GMOs	90%	0.90
Federal Reserve	92%	0.80
Farm Support	92%	1.00
Rent Control	83%	0.89

Table D1. Reliability scores for machine learning algorithms

Appendix E – Expert dictionaries

Generic

scholar, scholars, researcher*, research associate*, specialist*, expert, experts, analyst*, professor*, postdoctoral, doctoral candidate*, doctoral student*, phd*, senior fellow*, instructor*, lecturer*

Economics

economist*, economics, department of economics, economics department, school of economics, political scientist*, political science*, department of politics, politics department, department of political science, political science department, department of government, school of policy, policy school, school of public policy, public policy school, school of government

Climate Change

scientist*, doctor*, dr., climatologist*, meteorologist*, geologist*, physicist*, chemist*, ecologist*, biologist*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Geophysical Union, American Meteorological Society, American Physical Society, Geological Society of America, National Academy of Science*, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Nuclear Power

scientist*, doctor*, dr., physicist*, department of physics, physics department

Childhood Vaccinations

scientist*, American Academy of Pediatrics, Centres for Disease Control, Centers for Disease Control, Center for Disease Control, CDC, pediatrician*, World Health Organization, physician*, Academic Pediatric Association, American Pediatric Society

GMOs

scientist*, doctor*, dr., biologist*, agronomist*, botanist*, geneticist*, ecologist*, pathologist*, World Health Organization, Food and Drug Administration, Food and Agriculture Organization, American Medical Association, National Academy of Science*, American Association for the Advancement of Science

*Note: Case insensitive; * = wildcard*

Appendix F – Human coding criteria

The purpose of coding for this stage is to provide detailed information on how experts are treated in news coverage on topics that are relevant to areas of widespread agreement. Of particular interest is the degree to which there is “balance” in coverage, what political actors are providing that balance, and whether the media provides context to properly evaluate the information provided by experts, such as consensus cues. These guidelines will provide a general overview of the coding criteria used at this stage, followed by subject specific guidelines.

Is the expert position (for or against) reflected in the news story? (Y/N)

If Y: Is this position attributed to experts? (Y/N)

If Y: Is there indication of agreement among experts of this position? (Y /N/U)

If Y: Was there indication of “hard” consensus (i.e. there is a consensus or widespread agreement among experts) (Y/N)

If Y: Did any political actors support the expert position? (Y/N)

If Y: What actors?

- ➔ Party elites (P)
- ➔ Advocacy group (A)
- ➔ Interest group or corporation (I)
- ➔ Other

Is the expert position criticized or opposed in the article? (Y/N)

If Y: By whom?

- ➔ Another Expert (E)
- ➔ Party elites (P)
- ➔ Advocacy group (A)
- ➔ Interest group or corporation (I)
- ➔ Other (specify)

If E: Does the journalist present information to indicate its status as a minority opinion?
(Y/N)

If E: Does the journalist present information regarding the credibility of the expert or his or her findings (i.e. conflict of interest)

If you were to give a score of the balance in favour or against the expert stance on the topic, ranging from -1 to 1 with 0 being perfectly balanced, what would you give it?

-1: The article is entirely slanted against the expert position, if there is engagement with arguments aligned with the expert position it is only to discredit such arguments. This is common in Op-Eds.

-0.5: On balance, the article is slanted against the expert position, though there is some degree of engagement with arguments and sources aligned with the expert position even if they are not experts themselves.

0: Article provides a balance between perspectives aligned with the expert community and those that stand opposed to expert opinion. There is roughly parity in the number of arguments and sources used on either side of the debate, and the journalist does not take a side.

0.5: On balance, the article is slanted in favour of the expert position, though there is some degree of engagement with arguments and sources opposed to the expert position.

1: The article is entirely slanted in favour of the expert position, if there is engagement with arguments opposed to the expert position it is only to discredit such arguments. This is common in Op-Eds.

Appendix G – Manual coding validation

Topic Relevance	Score	SE	Pr.	Cum. Pr.	Benchmark		Rating
% Agreement	0.90	0.02	1.00	1.00	0.80	1.00	Very Good
Gwet's AC	0.83	0.04	0.23	1.00	0.60	0.80	Good
Krippendorfs Alpha	0.79	0.05	0.60	1.00	0.60	0.80	Good
Expert Messages	Score	SE	Pr.	Cum. Pr.	Benchmark		Rating
% Agreement	0.92	0.01	1.00	1.00	0.80	1.00	Very Good
Gwet's AC	0.81	0.03	0.39	1.00	0.60	0.80	Good
Krippendorfs Alpha	0.67	0.04	0.93	0.93	0.60	0.80	Good
Balance	Score	SE	Pr.	Cum. Pr.	Benchmark		Rating
% Agreement	0.93	0.01	1.00	1.00	0.80	1.00	Very Good
Gwet's AC	0.78	0.03	0.69	1.00	0.60	0.80	Good
Krippendorfs Alpha	0.73	0.04	0.95	1.00	0.60	0.80	Good
Polarizing Opponent	Score	SE	Pr.	Cum. Pr.	Benchmark		Rating
% Agreement	0.84	0.02	0.94	0.94	0.80	1.00	Very Good
Gwet's AC	0.69	0.05	0.95	0.96	0.60	0.80	Good
Krippendorfs Alpha	0.67	0.05	0.90	0.90	0.60	0.80	Good
False Balance	Score	SE	Pr.	Cum. Pr.	Benchmark		Rating
% Agreement	0.85	0.02	0.98	0.98	0.80	1.00	Very good
Gwet's AC	0.76	0.04	0.80	1.00	0.60	0.80	Good
Krippendorfs Alpha	0.60	0.07	0.52	1.00	0.40	0.60	Moderate

Table G1. Manual coding validation. Note: Ratings based on Altman (1991) reliability benchmarks, where 0.8-1 is classified as “Very good”, 0.6 to 0.8 = “Good”, 0.4 to 0.6 = “Moderate”, 0.2 to 0.4 = “Fair”, and 0 to 0.2 = “Poor”. Rating is assigned based on whether the cumulative probability of being in that category or higher is greater than 0.9, which depends on both the scores and the standard errors. Percentage agreement is the most liberal metric, while Krippendorfs alpha is the most conservative and is particularly punishing in the case of imbalanced classes. Gwet’s AC makes an adjustment for imbalanced classes, so is also included. Balance (-1 to 1) and Expert messages (0=none, 1=message, 2=agreement, 3=consensus) are treated as ordinal measures.

Appendix H – Additional results

		81-90	91-00	01-10	11-15
Climate Change	Citation	85%	79%	68%	69%
	Message	73%	65%	57%	53%
	Agreement	44%	39%	35%	39%
	Consensus	8%	7%	13%	15%
Immigration	Citation	24%	42%	35%	35%
	Message	5%	13%	16%	18%
	Agreement	1%	4%	2%	4%
	Consensus	1%	2%	1%	2%
Trade	Citation	25%	33%	33%	34%
	Message	10%	16%	14%	14%
	Agreement	4%	6%	5%	9%
	Consensus	2%	2%	1%	2%
Nuclear	Citation	21%	33%	30%	47%
	Message	5%	12%	10%	13%
	Agreement	2%	3%	2%	6%
	Consensus	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Tolls	Citation	26%	27%	21%	15%
	Message	13%	10%	9%	4%
	Agreement	5%	5%	4%	2%
	Consensus	0.0%	1.0%	0.4%	0.0%
Vaccines	Citation	85%	87%	87%	88%
	Message	53%	63%	59%	65%
	Agreement	9%	16%	18%	23%
	Consensus	0%	6%	6%	9%
GMOs	Citation		72%	68%	71%
	Message		35%	33%	36%
	Agreement		10%	10%	21%
	Consensus		3%	2%	8%
Federal Reserve	Citation			47%	57%
	Message			13%	16%
	Agreement			13%	0%
	Consensus			4%	0%
Farm Support	Citation	25%	30%	30%	16%
	Message	6%	8%	12%	6%
	Agreement	2%	5%	5%	1%
	Consensus	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
Rent Control	Citation	22%	21%	28%	
	Message	9%	7%	7%	
	Agreement	4%	0.5%	2%	
	Consensus	1%	0%	0%	

Table H1. Expert messages across issues and over time. Note: there was little to no news coverage of GMOs in the 1980s, Federal Reserve independence before 2001, and rent control after 2010, so these categories were dropped.

		81-90	91-00	01-10	11-15
Climate Change	Balance	0.76	0.78	0.64	0.67
	False Balance	27.8%	23.7%	20.0%	10.3%
	Polarizing Opponent	27.8%	10.5%	17.7%	26.4%
Immigration	Balance	-0.06	-0.11	0.30	0.34
	False Balance	12.5%	53.8%	33.3%	14.3%
	Polarizing Opponent	25.0%	53.8%	45.3%	42.8%
Trade	Balance	0.14	0.34	0.13	0.15
	False Balance	12.9%	11.7%	12.5%	16.7%
	Polarizing Opponent	71.0%	59.4%	64.6%	33.3%
Nuclear	Balance	-0.21	-0.14	0.00	-0.23
	False Balance	50.0%	40.0%	25.0%	26.9%
	Polarizing Opponent	19.4%	32.0%	75.0%	19.2%
Tolls	Balance	0.40	0.69	0.46	0.09
	False Balance	0.0%	8.3%	9.3%	12.5%
	Polarizing Opponent	12.5%	33.3%	44.2%	37.5%
Vaccines	Balance	0.87	0.82	0.74	0.84
	False Balance	5.1%	15.4%	14.3%	10.6%
	Polarizing Opponent	2.6%	11.0%	12.4%	6.1%
GMOs	Balance		0.19	0.20	0.35
	False Balance		46.0%	38.0%	40.0%
	Polarizing Opponent		56.0%	38.0%	48.6%
Federal Reserve	Balance			0.35	0.16
	False Balance			0.0%	50.0%
	Polarizing Opponent			33.3%	66.7%
Farm Support	Balance	0.24	0.05	0.19	0.61
	False Balance	7.1%	26.7%	10.0%	16.7%
	Polarizing Opponent	50.0%	80.0%	75.0%	50.0%
Rent Control	Balance	0.37	0.34	0.09	
	False Balance	15.6%	15.4%	0.0%	
	Polarizing Opponent	31.2%	30.8%	50.0%	

Table H2. Balance and conflict across issues and over time. Note: there was little to no news coverage of GMOs in the 1980s, Federal Reserve independence before 2001, and rent control after 2010, so these categories were dropped.

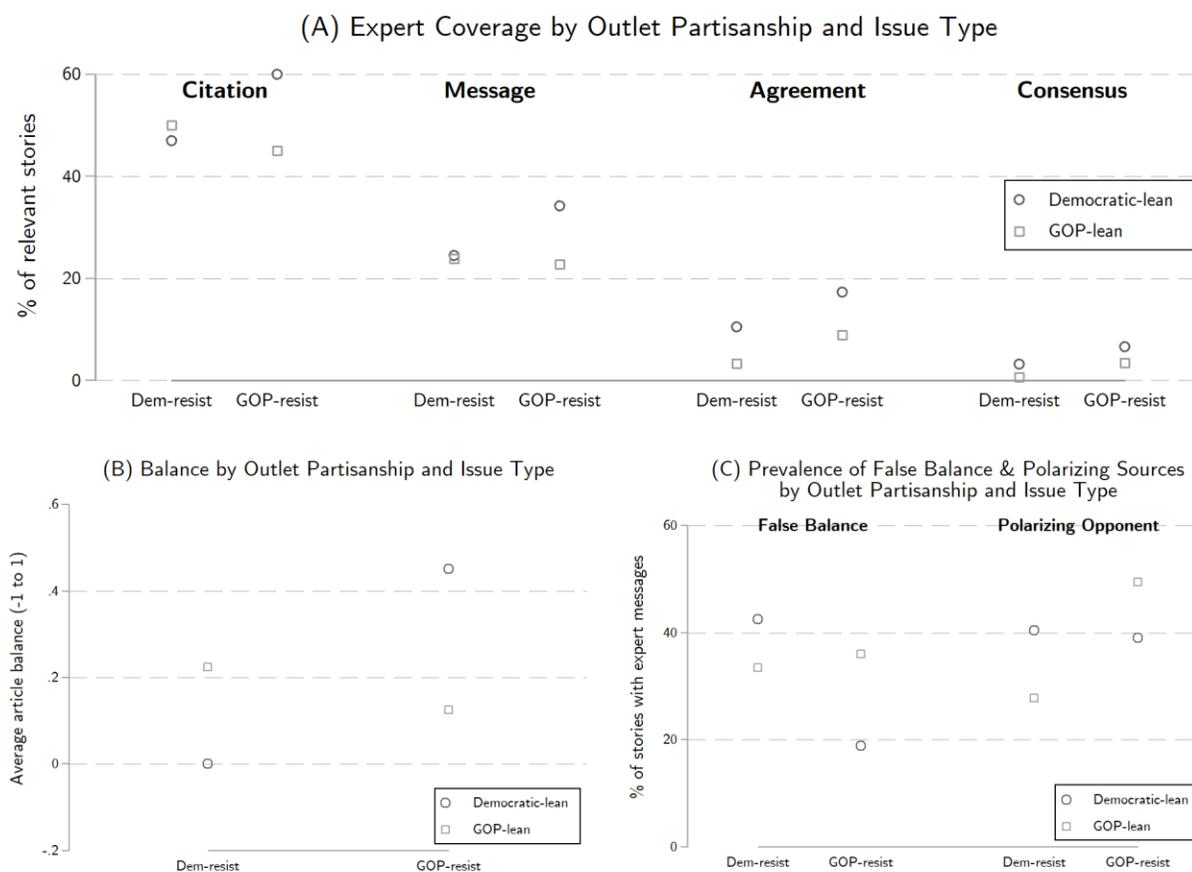


Figure H1. Partisan and ideological bias in news coverage of expert consensus. A) Share of relevant coverage with expert messages and cues in Democratic and Republican-resist issues for Democratic and Republican-leaning news outlets. B) Balance by Democratic and Republican-resist issues for Democratic and Republican-leaning news outlets. C) False balance and polarizing sources by Democratic and Republican-resist issues for Democratic and Republican-leaning news outlets. Note: Democratic-resist issues include nuclear power, GMOs, and rent control. Republican-resist issues include climate change, immigration economics, Federal Reserve independence, and road pricing. Democratic-leaning outlets include the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *CNN*, and *MSNBC*. Republican-leaning outlets include the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, and *Fox News*.

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