2022-2023 Research Package
Topic 2: THW impose an impartiality agreement on news platforms

Background:
Research has shown that media outlets often exhibit bias in the United States, Canada, and around the world. Bias can take many forms, including selective coverage of events, the use of loaded language, and the omission of important facts. Impartiality agreements are sometimes used in broadcasting, and have been proposed as a way to address media bias. Critics may argue that impartiality agreements are an infringement on press freedom, and that news organizations should be free to report the news as they see fit, without government interference, while proponents argue that impartiality agreements are necessary in order to ensure that news outlets are providing accurate, unbiased information to the public to maintain or establish trust in the media and democracy.

Questions to think about:
The following questions are meant to help you approach the topic and to guide your research. Keep in mind how your answers might differ on proposition vs opposition.

What is the definition of impartiality in news reporting, and is it even possible to achieve?
The definition of impartiality in news reporting is an important consideration for both the proposition and opposition in this debate, because it will determine the criteria by which news organizations are judged to be in compliance with the impartiality agreement. It will also determine what types of bias will be targeted and regulated by the agreement, and whether or not the agreement is feasible.

How can this agreement be designed to ensure that it is fair and impartial to all sides?
Ensuring that the impartiality agreement is fair and impartial to all sides will prevent the agreement from being perceived as being biased in favor of one particular point of view. For example, if the agreement is seen as being biased in favor of one political party or ideology, it will not be seen as a fair solution to the problem of media bias by those who do not share that particular point of view. For a topic as complex as impartiality, it can be quite challenging to have an agreement that suits everyone's view. It is also important to consider the impact of the agreement on the most marginalized groups in society, and make sure the agreement does not further silence them.

What are the potential negative consequences of imposing an impartiality agreement on news platforms?
Imposing an impartiality agreement on news platforms may be seen as an infringement on the freedom of the press, as it limits the ability of news organizations to report on the news as they see fit. The agreement may have a chilling effect on free speech, as it

may cause journalists and news organizations to self-censor their reporting in order to avoid being found in violation of the agreement. Additionally, impartiality agreements may restrict the ability of news organizations to cover human rights issues in a way that may not appear impartial and can lead to under-representation of voices and issues that may not be aligned with the majority. Impartiality agreements may also be more easily followed by bigger news organizations that can afford to hire compliance officers, but for smaller news organizations, the cost of compliance may be prohibitive and lead to their disappearance. These agreements may stifle the diversity of voices in the media, as news organizations may be incentivized to feature a narrow range of viewpoints in order to avoid being found in violation of the agreement.

How is public trust in the media impacted on both sides of this debate?
Public trust in the media is essential for a functional democracy, as it allows citizens to make informed decisions based on accurate and unbiased information. However, media bias can erode trust in the media, leading to a situation in which citizens are unable to make informed decisions. Imposing an impartiality agreement on news platforms can have an impact on public trust in the media in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, if the agreement is seen as fair and impartial, and if it is effective in addressing media bias, it may lead to an increase in public trust in the media. As citizens are exposed to a wider range of perspectives and more accurate and unbiased information, they may be more likely to trust the media. On the other hand, if citizens feel that the news is being censored or controlled by the government, they may be less likely to trust the media. It is also important to consider how the imposition of the impartiality agreement can affect the diversity of voices and perspectives in the media and how that may impact the public trust. If the news only offers a narrow range of viewpoints, it may lead to a situation in which citizens do not trust the media because they do not see their own perspectives represented.

Links:
https://www.allsides.com/blog/political-bias-most-searched-media-outlets-state-2022-year

https://www.mcgill-toolen.org/ourpages/users/tenhunm/ap_us_gov/Chapter%2012%20The%20Media/Types%20of%20media%20bias.pdf

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