

INTRODUCTION

In the 2020 election and the months, and even years leading up to it, citizens of America watched as their society became deeply divided into two groups, blue and red, liberal and conservative, “snowflakes” and “deplorables”, and Democrats and Republicans.

The goal of this research and data is to find links between news topics, forms, and sources with polarization. To find which causes more and which causes less in order to find what divides the nation, and use that data and knowledge to bring the nation back together.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The research performed was both pure and applied, and the data was purely quantitative.

To measure the polarization caused by news topics and sources, a survey was sent to nearly one hundred participants across the country of varying ages, genders, and income levels.

The survey prompted each participant with a total of fifteen articles. Using four widely covered topics, and one less-covered topic as control, there were three articles per topic; one left leaning, one neutral, and one right leaning.

Participants were then asked to answer three questions using a scale for each article. The questions asked them how accurate they felt the article was, what political position they felt it was, and how aligned they felt it was with their own political party’s ideals. The scale was numerically weighted for data presentation purposes. With 1 and 7 being the extreme numbers on the scale and 4 being the neutral number.

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

Although it may seem that Democrats and Republicans most frequently shared the same viewpoint, this isn’t the case, within those, there were subdivisions, in which those of the same political party with the same most frequently used type of media outlet shared the most similar opinions.

The most extreme responses within these subgroups came from;

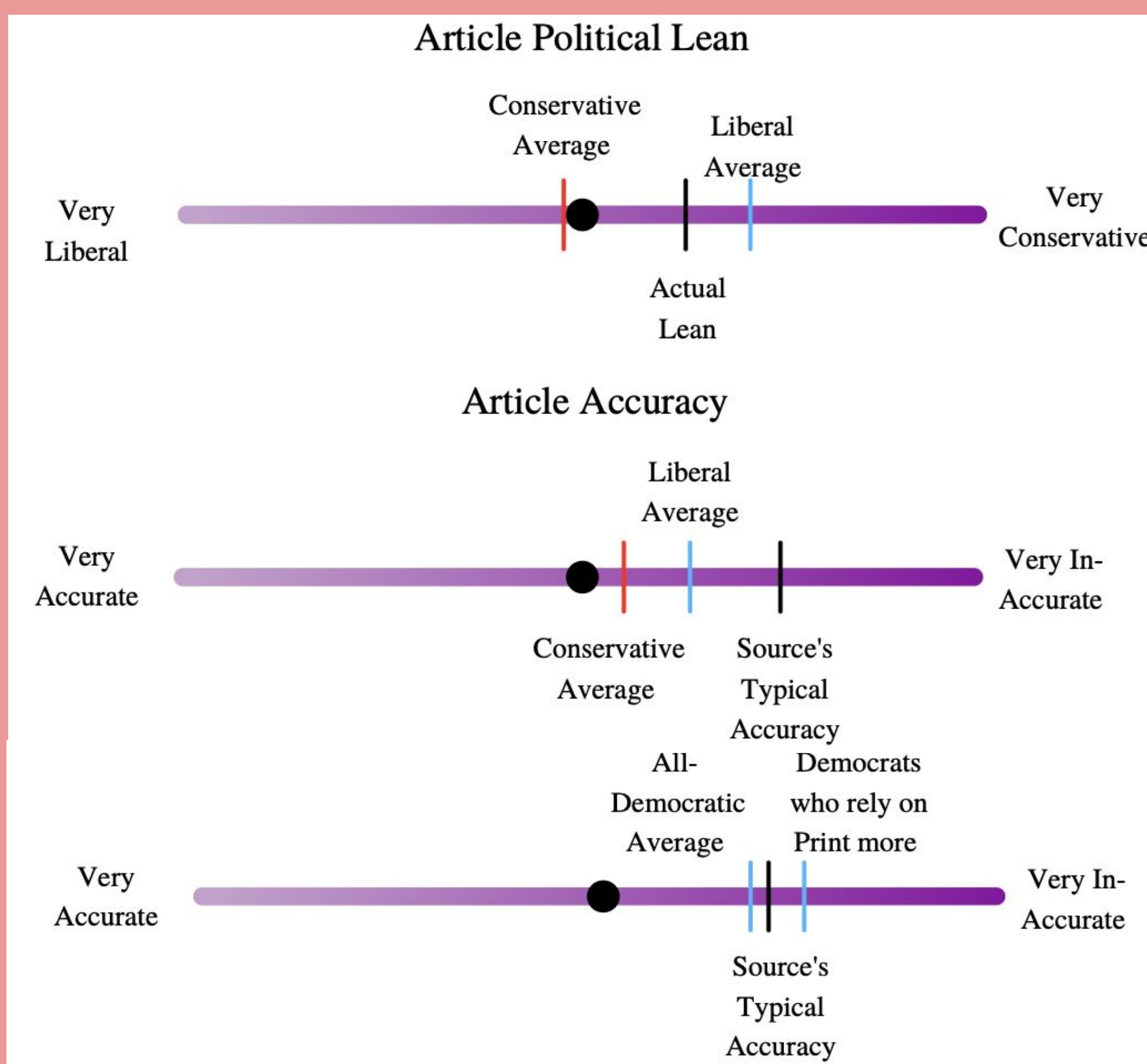
- Democrats reading print, although television watchers were close behind. Generally, demographics varied amongst these respondents
- Republicans listening to radio, all respondents had similar responses to each question, despite coming from very different income brackets, ages, and residential areas.

It is also important to note varying views within a political party, as the most obvious trend appeared when respondents were sorted into groups titled; very liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, and very conservative.

Also noting age groupings, those 45+ often had the more extreme responses. Noting article seven, which was written by AP News, a known neutral and extremely accurate source, the article on Kyle Rittenhouse was given extremely low scores on accuracy and given the “liberal” rating by those 60+.

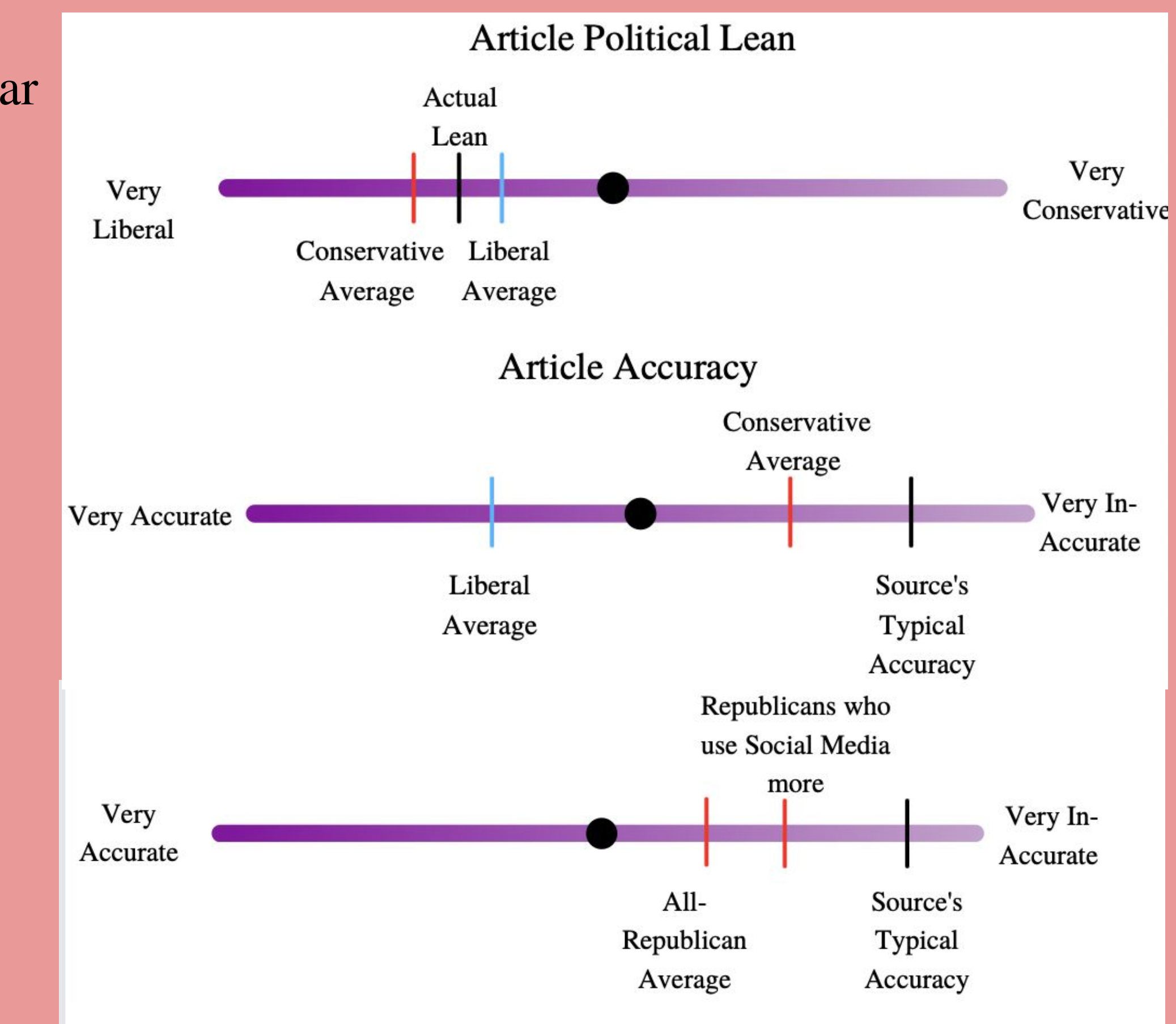
DATA AND FINDINGS

Article Deemed Least Aligned With Democratic Party, by Democrats



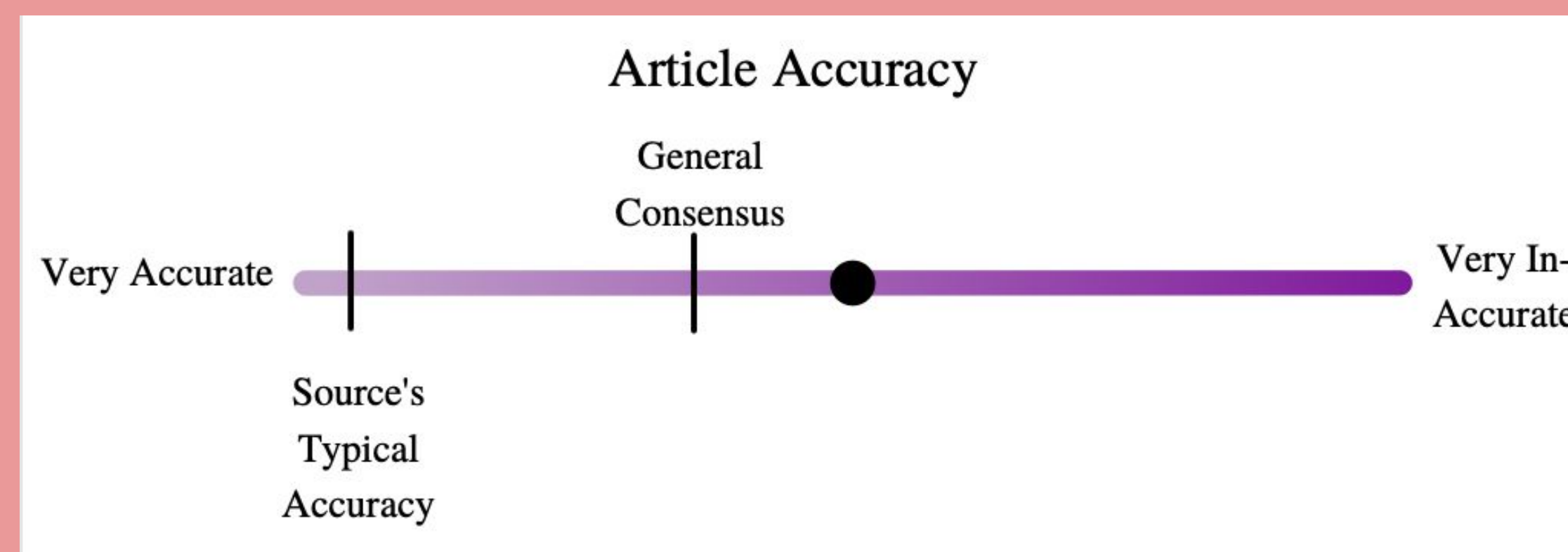
- Written by Real Clear Politics: covered a now false claim that immigrants would receive \$450,000 each for emotional trauma.

Article Deemed Least Aligned With Republican Party, by Republicans



- Written by MSNBC: outlined the possible effects of the Kyle Rittenhouse verdict on protesters and protests

Article Most Agreed With By Both Parties



- Written by Reuters, updated on a debt limit proposal moving to the Senate
- **This article that had closer scores between political parties, meaning that the political parties felt the most similar about this article**

How to Interpret the Data:
Data mirrors that of a ph scale - responses were averaged on a scale of 1-7, with 4 being the absolute neutral. Responses could go either way, hence the comparison to a ph scale. Key:
• Black Dot represents the exact center, a completely neutral response

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

The most polarizing subjects are gun control and immigration, with bill passing causing the least. Social media was most popular among respondents with a political view under the “very” category. Podcasts were most popular among conservatives, and online news dominated the liberal category.

Ultimately, a deep analyzation of the data implies that people are more likely to believe an article in line with their political beliefs is more accurate and are less likely to therefore spot bias-or sense less of it. The same goes the other way, if an article contradicts the beliefs of one’s political party, they find it to be less accurate than it may actually be.

Notably, no averages reached to most extreme numbers possible, 1 or 7, and for the most part, very few reached 6 or 2. Another piece of data to pay attention to is that not all Republicans or Democrats shared the same side of opinion when responding to the questions, in fact, it was rare that all members of parties responding were on the same side of an argument. The lesson is evident: not everyone in a political party shares the same beliefs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

***Special thanks to Mr. Hardesty, Mr. Shen and all survey participants for helping make this project possible.

***Works Cited:

Campante, Filipe R., and Daniel Hojman. “Media and Polarization.” *Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard*

Politics really is ruining Thanksgiving, according to data from 10 million cellphones.” *The Washington Post*

Jurkowitz, Mark, et al. “U.S. Media Polarization and the 2020 Election: A Nation Divided.” *Pew Research Center*

Osmundsen, Mathias, et al. “How Partisan Polarization Drives the Spread of Fake News.” (Yu and Ash) *Brookings Institute*

Severenchuk, Serge. “Polarization and Partisan Bias.” *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Dissertations*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2019, p. 104.

Yu, Tinghua, and Elliot Ash. “Polarization and Political Selection.” *Birkbeck University of London Eprints*