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**A POLARIZÁCIÓ MEGNYILVÁNULÁSA A EGYESÜLT ÁLLAMOK HÍR- ÉS
MÉDIAKERETEZÉSÉBEN A CHARLIE KIRK MERÉNYLETTEL KAPCSOLATBAN**

**HOW POLARISATION IS REFLECTED IN THE U.S. NEWS AND
MEDIA FRAMING OF THE CHARLIE KIRK ASSASSINATION**

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding processes of political polarisation and media influence is crucial for analysing how ideological divisions are reproduced through communication. Entman's (1993) model of framing theory provides a useful framework for this purpose, as it explains how media select and emphasise certain aspects of reality to promote specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations. When politically charged incidents occur, the ways in which they are framed can reveal underlying partisan dynamics and moral boundaries. In the case of the assassination of Charlie Kirk, a prominent and polarizing conservative figure — the framing of the event offers an opportunity to examine how ideological polarisation is manifested in both mainstream and social media discourse. By applying Entman's framing model alongside tone and discourse analysis, this study investigates whether and how U.S. media coverage reflects broader patterns of polarisation.

Polarisation in the U.S.

Political polarisation is the movement of views, ideas and actions away from the center towards the opposite ends of left and right political ideologies (Stoddard & Hess, Social Education 88, 2024, p. 1). In the United States this means the Democratic party and Republican party. Historically these parties used to have more similar agendas with diverse opinions in the parties, a broader spectrum of moderate views, but now over the course of the past 30 years both of the parties have moved towards their respective ends (Pew Research Center, 2014). Typically the left is associated with agendas that promote redistributive economic policies, expanded government services, and social equality initiatives, whereas the right is known for agendas promoting limited government intervention, free markets, and traditional social values. The gap between these policies is growing and more people are aligning themselves more with party policies than before, modifying their views to match that of their party, rather than independent reasoning (Layman et al., 2006, p.83-110).

Between 1994 and 2017, the overlap of values between Democrats and Republicans declined, while the amount of Americans sharing ideologically consistent values increased (Pew Research Center, 2017). In other words, differences are amplified when people change their political beliefs to match the party's position.

"Deeply negative views of the opposing party are far more widespread than in the past. About six-in ten Republicans (62%) and more than half of Democrats (54%) have a *very* unfavorable view of the other party." (Pew Research Center, 2022). The same study found out that Americans tend to think of themselves and their "in-group" in a more positive light more than

before and the “out-group” in a more negative light. This phenomenon is known as affective polarisation (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015 p. 691).

While the exact causes of polarisation are still under scholarly debate, certain aspects could be identified that cause it. From a psychological perspective, the previously mentioned in-group bias plays a role: the bias encourages individuals to favor members of their political “tribe” and interpret information in ways that reinforce group identity. Social identity theory suggests that partisanship has become a core aspect of self-concept, as people identify more with their group and values and compare themselves to the “other”. This leads to favouritism towards the group they identify with and negative perceptions towards the out-group.

Political leaders and figures can use hostile rhetoric (framing) to not only paint the opposition as it is, but to make them seem like enemies rather than fellow citizens with differing views. This can create an “us vs. them” kind of thinking, which instead of solving a problem together, uses blame and moral condemnation.

The media plays a part in both directions, acting as mirrors of society's division and as amplifiers of it. Mass media play a role in causing or reinforcing polarisation, people tend to consume media content that reflect their views, instead of consuming content of opposing views (Garrett, 2009).

Herman and Chomsky’s (1988, p. 2) propaganda model provides that corporate and advertising pressures form the news agenda to be under the control of the elite. Little later, scientists saw that the emergence of the digital and 24-hour channels actually facilitated these some effects, as the media race was to the benefit of grabbing the viewers time with the catching conflict (McChesney, 2013, p. 47; Prior, 2013, p. 102; Sunstein, 2017, p. 68).

Social media algorithms may lead members to more ideologically extreme content, as opposed to moderate information sources, leading to further division of people. They may adopt these views and they become the new norm for people (Di Martino et al., 2025). The algorithmic personalisation method further embeds these patterns. Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic (2015, p. 1130) illustrate that social media algorithms favor engagement rather than diversity by promoting extreme or partisan content. As Napoli (2019, p. 85) describes, in the "attention economy" outrage becomes a commodity itself: scandal and moral shock guarantee clicks, shares, and loyalty.

Despite abundant literature on political polarisation in the United States, fewer studies have examined how news framing reproduces ideological division through language. This study fills that gap by comparing the framing of the Charlie Kirk assassination across left- and right-leaning media.

Understanding these processes of political polarisation and media influence is crucial for analysing how ideological divisions are reproduced through communication. Entman's (1993) model of framing theory provides a useful framework for this purpose, as it explains how media select and emphasise certain aspects of reality to promote specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations. When politically charged incidents occur, the ways in which they are framed can reveal underlying partisan dynamics and moral boundaries. In the case of the assassination of Charlie Kirk, a prominent and polarising conservative figure. The framing of the event offers an opportunity to examine how ideological polarisation is manifested in both mainstream and social media discourse. By applying Entman's framing model alongside tone and discourse analysis, this study investigates whether and how U.S. media coverage reflects broader patterns of polarisation. This leads us to our research questions:

RQ1: Is polarisation reflected in U.S. news and media framing of the Charlie Kirk assassination?

We developed supporting questions to further study the phenomenon and frames and to understand how social media discourse differs from the mainstream media:

RQ2: What dominant frames were used by mainstream media when reporting on the assassination of Charlie Kirk?

RQ3: How did social media discourse differ from mainstream coverage in framing the event?

The initial step to seeking answers to these questions is to recognise the way that the media employs its frames to build their own meanings. Therefore, in the next segment, we will discuss the main concepts of framing theory and their application in the field of political and media polarisation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing theory and its relevance to political and media polarisation

Framing in the context of political polarisation, acts as a communicative mechanism that converts ideology into discourse. Furthermore, to understand different media perspectives, and how audiences interpret them, a discussion of framing theory is needed. How frames are communicated by the sender of the message and how it is decoded in the mind of the receiver is explored. Discussing theories of framing gives the ability to recognise how meaning and understanding is constructed through language and presentation of events and topics. Cognitive scientist George Lakoff argues in his book *The Political Mind* that our minds work through frames and pathways are created in our brains that help us navigate the world and determine how we decide to act in it, and this process is largely unconscious (2008, p.14). Erving Goffman, whose analysis on framing theory still continues to remain relevant, argued that individuals frame their experiences to understand the world. “The human mind, furnished with these frameworks, structures experience and renders what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the world into something that can be understood and acted upon.” (Goffman, 1974, p. 27-28).

So what exactly are frames in the context of communication? Like in a shot of a movie or a picture, certain aspects are highlighted and brought to focus to display only things that are wanted to be shown. In texts, communicators either consciously or unconsciously say or type certain words or leave out words to reflect their thinking and organise their beliefs through framing (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stockphrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements. The frames that guide the receiver’s thinking and conclusion may or may not reflect the frames in the text and the framing intention of the communicator (ibid., p. 52-53).

In other words, frames have four different functions in one’s mind: defining problems, identifying causes, making judgements and suggesting treatments for problems. So frames help interpret our realities, shape how we see the world, are constructed through experiences in life and influence our decisions and guide our actions. Deducing from Entman’s work, framing operates as a process of inclusion and exclusion: it emphasises particular elements and obscures others, thereby guiding how audiences interpret realities. Just as our minds work in frames, messages we send to others and the world can be framed. Here is an example from

psychologists Kahneman and Tversky: “Asian disease problem”. It is an imaginary scenario where a disease spreads to the U.S. and 600 people will be affected. Two solutions for the problem are provided: Solution A: 200 people will be certainly saved. Solution B: one-third probability that 600 people will be saved and two-thirds probability that no one will be saved. Provided these options most people chose solution A that is certain instead of gambling on chances. The same scenario was provided again but the message was framed differently. Solution A: 400 people will die. Solution B: one-third probability that nobody dies and two-thirds probability that 600 people die. Unlike in the first options most people preferred the gamble instead of a certain outcome, even when the problems are identical upon inspection (Kahneman, 2011, p. 419-420). The situation was the following:

The problems were framed as “lives saved” and “lives lost”. This experiment shows that people are sensitive to how the message is constructed and what information is presented; which words are used and what kind of feelings they provoke in individuals’ minds.

Political and media actors can use frames to influence public debate and align sentiment with ideological objectives. The understanding of media in this way, as cognitive and communicative things, is the basis for the transformation of political events into ideological narratives by media. Thus, to understand how polarisation can manifest discursively, we dig deeper to framing theory.

In a political context, for example attitudes and outcomes of votes could be different depending on if the message is framed as “protecting national security” or “restricting civil liberties”. Another example of framing in the field of politics: politicians may switch from using words like “tax cuts” to “tax reliefs”, it highlights the burdensome nature of taxes but ignores the benefits of taxing, meanwhile it becomes easier for the public to accept tax cuts.

In news media and social media this means the choice of words and choosing which words to use and which ones not to use, the same can also be applied to images and sources. Media framing has an effect on audience perceptions and interpretations by activating existing frames with certain words and presented information. Different outlets reporting of the same event or topic is not going to be identical, there are differences in narratives, words and even agendas, depending on the outlet’s affiliation with any political parties or organisations. For example a politician might be framed as a villain or a hero, depending on the outlet. This can have a great effect on audience opinion as it triggers an emotional response, affecting people’s judgements. Media framing has the power to construct and create social realities and enforce agendas and

narratives. While media framing is not always intentional, the author's cultural and institutional background plays a role in the choices they make regarding their wording of the text and tone. Past studies have used the methods of comparative framing in regard to the politically disputed events. For instance, Kwak, An and Ahn (2020) utilised more than 1.5 million New York Times articles to identify the long-term shifts of frames; Ziems and Yang (2021) juxtaposed the liberal and conservative reports on the U.S. police use of violence and located the blatant ideological framing distinctions; Jaber (2025) confronted The Guardian with USA Today in addressing the university protests and pinpointed the different dominant frames; and Tóth et al. (2024) examined the global protest coverage to illustrate how anti-elitism cues permeate certain media systems. These studies, in the aggregate, provide the example of framing analysis as the means to uncover ideologies in media coverage reinforcing the present study's approach of using a comparative method on the U.S. outlets.

Following this line of reasoning, different researchers have rightly pointed out that framing does not merely structure data but also provides moral judgments that keep social boundaries. (Chong and Druckman, 2007, pp. 104–107; Matthes and Kohring, 2008, p. 263). Moreover, Waisbord (2020, p. 5) expresses a similar opinion: modern journalism is carried out in "media ecosystems of polarisation," in which news narratives become signs of ideological identity rather than impartial information.

Within the United States, comparative studies of party newsrooms have repeatedly demonstrated the existence of substantial imbalances between the representations of political actors and events. According to Coe and Schmidt (2022, p. 901), right-oriented media mainly employ conflict and morality frames while narrating liberal figures and to a great extent left-wing media adopt responsibility and human-interest frames when dealing with conservative actors. Similarly, Strömbäck and Esser (2014, p. 244) affirm that national media systems characterized by high political parallelism, like that of the United States, institutionalize ideological selectivity through routine news production.

Of course, this particular case would be the news framing as a medium of key method by which political polarisation is exposed in mediated communication. The identical factual occurrence, like an assassination, protest, or policy failure, can be turned into conflicting moral narratives via different lexical choices, a selection of sources, and evaluative tone (Entman, 2007, p. 164). Again, the audience's previous beliefs and mental predispositions play a significant role in how the media is interpreted. Further, as a means of illuminating this process, the next part of the text looks to the cognitive mechanisms that have a hand in how people read and react to media frames.

It's worth mentioning several cognitive biases because the primary function of framing is casting in the communicative and structuring sphere, while the audience's interpretation of the respective frames is conditioned by cognitive mechanisms. Our perceptions of reality are filtered through a great number of cognitive biases, which is the umbrella category for all kinds of errors in thinking that occur when people are processing and interpreting information in the world around them.

Confirmation bias is a relatively well-known and acknowledged bias by the public of the United States, as it's not uncommon to find members of each dominant political party accusing members of the other of confirmation bias. The tendency of people to interpret and search for information that confirms their already-held beliefs and values is what confirmation bias is referring to. (Nickerson, 1998)

The mediated world, especially in an online environment, takes advantage of the basic human tendencies that stem from our cognitive biases that lead us to stick with our group, reinforce our prior beliefs, ignore or reject conflicting information, and to be influenced by emotion over reason or logic. This bias is undoubtedly the most well known and most closely associated with news consumption.

The audience is not only the recipient of news which is neutral, but they also filter the news items according to their own previous attitudes, the social identities they hold and the emotional predispositions they have (Kunda, 1990; Nickerson, 1998, p. 188). Therefore, audiences on both sides of the political spectrum could consume the same news coverage and yet reach different conclusions owing to their contrary notions. It stands beneath many of the activities that contribute to ideological echo chambers and as well as partisan news environments.

The second concept relates closely to motivated reasoning, a process that is typically people's cognitive resources being channelled not to make objective evaluations but to defend their old habits and identities (Kunda, 1990; Taber and Lodge, 2006). Instead of asking the question "Is this true?", people who are motivated reasoners would prefer to ask: "Can I believe this?" or "Must I believe this?" the answers to which depend on whether the information is on their side or challenges it. Taber and Lodge (2006, p. 756-767) discovered that getting earful of the opposite side's arguments many a time strengthens, instead of diminishing, the persistence of the partisan view because the individuals engage themselves more in the refutation of the divergent proof. This is a psychological defence where the possibility of the individual changing ideology becomes a rare event even in front of the reality of clear evidence.

The selective exposure hypothesis makes us see these lessons apply to media as both platforms and broadcasting channels. There are media consumers who like only the information that is in line with their views and therefore avoid the outlet that has opposing or contrary articles in particular (Stroud, 2010, p. 557-570). There is a documented observation showing that those partisans on both ends of the political spectrum consume more than their share of media that they regard as ideologically compatible, particularly in environments of fragmented digital (Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic, 2015, p. 1130-1132). The adoption of those self-selection procedures, which have a minus effect on exposure to a range of views, results in the lower quality of the public debate.

Another key mechanism that stands out is the hostile media effect, which states that partisans even consider balanced coverage as biased against their position (Vallone, Ross, and Lepper, 1985, p. 577-586). In other words, when both sides are presented to the news such as the same news item, both liberals and conservatives relate tone and framing negatively. One of the effects of this false perception is the loss of trust in the mainstream media and bolstering the arguments of institutional bias. The hostile media effect is meaningful especially in the case of contentious issues like political violence or protests where there is a high emotional stake and objectivity hard to come by. The way political events are showcased and understood through language is influenced by prevailing frames, while audiences are not just passive viewers of these frames.

These cognitive biases are a blending source of perception and behavior in round self-reinforcing cycles. People only want media that are similar to their opinions (selective exposure), interpret the news narratives in a defensive way (motivated reasoning), and regard the contrary presents as being hostile (the hostile media effect). This is the situation when a psychological architecture of polarisation ensues in which individual people live in totally different cognitive spaces. Bakshy, Messing and Adamic (2015p. 1130-1132), point out that as a result of the shortech algorithmic personalisation on social platforms the situation is getting worse due to the feed curation of very friendly content, which piles up the window to the differentiated voices.

Audience reactions to politically charged happenings are the best evidence for this. For instance, while mainstream liberal outlets might be seen by conservative audiences as condescending or politicising with the coverage of Charlie Kirk's assassination, right-wing audiences on the contrary might regard it as sensational or inflammatory. The contrasting

interpretations could be informed by the prior cognitive states and they are not just simply a result of the different journalistic practices at play. For this reason the cognitive bias is very effective in causing not only reading but also their undertaking to structure the same media reality for the polarised public. These interrelated psychological and communicative parameters can clarify how political polarization get set in through the incorporation of media into day-to-day life. Following this theoretical framework, the present section provides a brief overview of the methods used to analyze how the assassination of Kirk was portrayed in the media of the United States.

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study, in accordance with the theoretical framework, makes use of a qualitative framing analysis to investigate the representation of conservative commentator Charlie Kirk's assassination by the mainstream U.S. news media. While agenda-setting and priming theories explain how the mass media affect the prioritisation of societal issues and public assessment of these, the central focus of this study is on the narrative creation of meaning in the news articles. Discourse analysis, which emphasises on the framers' decisions and effects of language, is a suitable method for tackling this issue whereby language and narrative are shown to highlight some features of an event while silencing others (Entman, 1993). The primary goal is neither to evaluate the public opinion nor media effects, but rather to analyse linguistic patterns, thematic choices, and emotional tone as means of political division manifestation. In accordance with Entman's four-part model, instances of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation are identified in each article. These categories establish a comparative approach for viewing how media that are different in their ideology, such as left-leaning and right-leaning portray the same political event in dissimilar ways. According to a framing perspective expressed in terms of critical discourse and tone analysis; the blending of the two facilitates an inquiry into the extent to which news discourse mirrors and sustains political polarisation in the current US media ecosystem.

Data Selection and Sampling

The empirical material for this study is a purposive sample of five articles published by mainstream U.S. media, namely Fox News and MSNBC in the first two days after the assassination of Charlie Kirk in September 2025. The sample was created in such a way as to achieve a broad range of ideological perspectives while still being focused on well-known, widely accessible media outlets. It consists of three articles from a left-leaning source (MSNBC), two from a right-leaning source (Fox News). The articles were retrieved from the official pages of the respective outlets using keyword combinations: (“Charlie Kirk”, “assassination”, “Utah Valley University”), respectively, which guaranteed thematic coherence and immediacy. By limiting the dataset to just the first two days after the event, the analysis can focus intently on the initial framing; which is fundamentally important in defining public sense in the early stage of the media coverage (Entman, 2004). The first media reports often benefit from or are characterised by rapid meaning construction and are less constrained by

later realities, therefore they are often more transparent in their framing process. On the level of analysis, each article was regarded as a single unit. Basic information (like publishing date, the headline, subheading and author) was recorded for reference. The textual data were subsequently coded and analysed according to the framing categories discussed below, with further emphasis put on the linguistic, tonal, and contextual elements that can be considered signals of ideological orientation or evaluative bias.

Analytical Framework

The analytical design is interpretative qualitative and it combines three interdisciplinary strategies: framing analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and tone analysis. These techniques allow developing the deep insight of how news language builds meaning, ideology, and emotion. Means to identify frames were the repeated lexical patterns, thematic emphasis, quotation models, and contextual pointers. Quantification of frames was not the main goal but rather, it was to find out how the specific outlet's linguistic and structural choices lead to contrasting interpretations of the same event. CDA makes it possible to investigate the way in which power dynamics and belief system assumptions are characterised in language.

Tone analysis was to show the affectivity of the reporting. This included finding evaluative and emotional markers: such as adjectives, adverbs, or figurative expressions, that conveyed sympathy, condemnation, neutrality, or sensationalism. The tone was viewed as an indicator of interpretation instead of a variable for quantification; thus making it possible to compare the way each outlet uses emotion and evaluative judgment for the overall framing.

Analytical Procedure

The coding was carried out inductively, which means that the analysis was not influenced by any preconceived ideas or categories, but rather, themes and interpretive categories emerged from the data itself (Flick, 2014, p. 420; Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

The first step was a detailed close reading of each article which resulted in a set of descriptive notes recording important terms, repeated metaphors, and patterns of actor representation. These expressions of concern were categorized and summarized under the respective framing and discourse categories.

To ensure consistency in the analysis, the authors cross-checked recurrent findings between left- and right- outlets which in turn exposed the similarities and differences in terms of framing and tone. With the help of this triangulated framework : framing analysis, CDA, and tone

analysing - the mapping of linguistic as well as structural choices is reflected and reproduced in dividing mainstream media in the US through political polarisation in the discourse.

Who was Charlie Kirk?

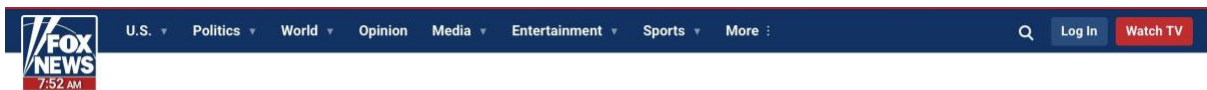
Charlie Kirk (October 14, 1993 - September 10, 2025) was an American conservative activist and media personality. He was and is known for his debates on college campuses in the US and hosting his podcast "The Charlie Kirk Show". He also co-founded a conservative student organisation called Turning Point. He was one of the most influential voices for supporting the MAGA movement within the Republican party and a key ally to the U.S. president Donald Trump.

He represented conservative, traditional family values with conservative Christian takes. His views included being opposed to abortion, the LGBTQ+ movement, gun control and DEI programs (Wertheimer&Pomeroy, September 2025).

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Analysis on the Fox News coverage

As an exploratory study, this paper includes two articles from Fox News to understand the conservative view of the event — the outlet is notably right-wing leaning and framing things from the conservative point of view, focusing on topics such as freedom of expression and conservative values and talking points, as illustrated in figure 1. Figure 2 illustrates the average party and ideological self-placement of U.S. adults for each news source. From this figure, it is notable that the average Fox News content consumer is Republican and leaning to the right.



About

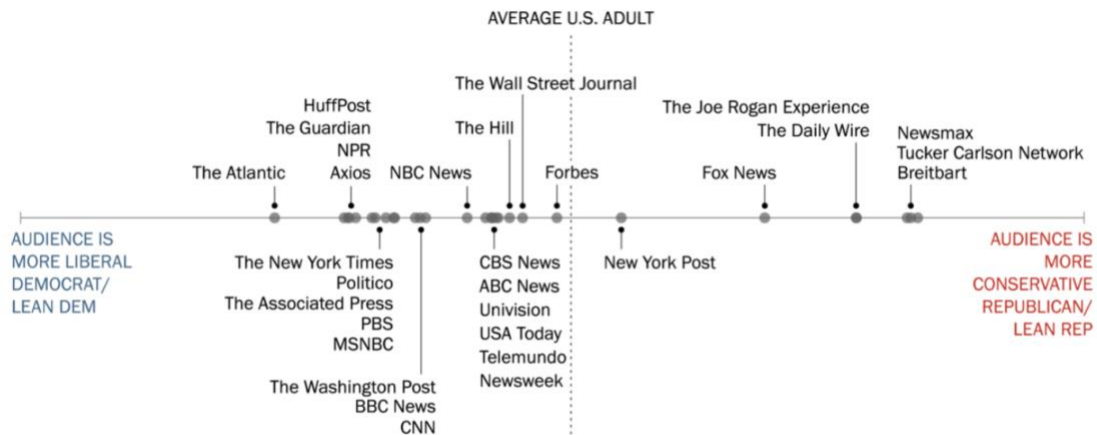
FOX News Media offers its audiences in-depth news reporting, along with opinion and analysis encompassing the principles of free people, free markets and diversity of thought, as an alternative to the left-of-center offerings of the news marketplace. FOX News Media is anchored by the FOX News Channel, the number one network in all of cable and the most watched news channel for more than 20

Figure 1: Fox News About page

Source is included in the list of references, whenever is not indicated with other figures, the source can always be found in the list of references. Screen capture by author

Where regular users of 30 news sources place themselves by party, ideology

Average party and ideological self-placement of U.S. adults who regularly get news from each source



Note: This study analyzes the audience of each source, but not its content. Lists labeling multiple points are ordered from sources with more liberal Democratic/Democratic-leaning audiences on top to those with more conservative Republican/Republican-leaning audiences on the bottom. Order of sources does not necessarily indicate statistically significant differences. Refer to the methodology for details.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 10-16, 2025.
"The Political Gap in Americans' News Sources"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2: News source by party, ideology

The focus is especially on the choice of words and tone, and who is given a platform to speak, and the framing.

Overview

The first article is called “Charlie Kirk, Turning Point USA founder, dead at 31 after Utah campus shooting” written by Sarah Rumpf-Whitten a couple of hours later after the death of Kirk.

The article starts by announcing the death of Kirk and framing him as a “conservative activist”, family man “father of two” and remarking his position as the founder of Turning Point USA. Directly after, the first citation is from president Donald Trump describing Kirk as a great and even legendary man who understood the youth of America like no other, and a person who was admired by all, especially by the president himself. As Kirk was one of president Trump’s biggest supporters and advocates, it makes sense to include the president’s statement, but to have it right at the beginning can set a praised and biased image of Kirk’s persona, ignoring the side of him which he was criticised for. As by the description Fox News themselves provide, most likely the readership is leaning to the right and conservative values are part of their belief system, describing Kirk in the aforementioned ways appeals to the readership on an emotional level. This way Kirk becomes familiar to the older generations and readership, even though he was most active on social media and the internet. The article moves on to describe statements from the FBI and Utah Valley University statements, which use objective words and tones for example referring to the suspect as “subject”, to Kirk as “speaker” and “individual”. Students were informed that police officers were escorting them off campus and that classes were cancelled.

Causal interpretations and moral judgements

The piece highlights an already deleted post on social media by Kirk announcing his American Comeback Tour, which he was supposed to do during autumn of 2025. The beginning of the tour is highlighted and quoted: "a nationwide campus tour aimed at equipping students with the tools to push back against leftwing indoctrination in academia and reclaim their right to free speech.", to clarify, there is no source provided by the author, making it vague, while reinforcing conservative views by implying that academia is not a neutral place for research, but that it is corrupted by leftist ideologies and that the students are victims of a corrupt academic system. By reclaiming the right to free speech, academia is purified. The word

”indoctrination” refers to control by the elite to impose an ideology, rather than promoting critical thinking, which in turn frames Kirk’s tour as a moral mission to educate students and free them, rather than just having political debates with students. This contextualises Kirk as a defender of freedom of speech and open debate, relating to the ”conservative activist” frame established in the beginning. The president’s safety is mentioned at the end of the article, that Secret Service is guarding him, which implies Republican politicians’ safety could be compromised and requires extra caution during that time.

Treatment recommendation

The article also features statements from former presidents expressing their shock and condolences to the Kirk family, strengthening the ”family man” frame. All were condemning acts of political violence. All living presidents were included, Republicans and Democrats alike. A post on X from vice president JD Vance was also included describing Kirk as a ”genuinely good guy” in a casual tone and a young father. He wrote: ”Say a prayer for Charlie Kirk” and Secretary of War Hegseth also wrote: ”...An incredible Christian, American, and human being. May the healing hand of Jesus Christ be upon him”, these statements activate a moral-religious frame, shifting Kirk from a political stance to a religious one. Urging people to pray creates a sense of community and unity in Christian conservatives and shifts Kirk to a symbol of Christian virtue and family values. While the tone does not seem inherently political, subtle notes of conservative worldviews can be noticed. Using this kind of faith-based discourse can deepen the emotional cohesion within the political ”in-group”.

Observations on tone and CDA

Finally at the very end is a picture of Kirk and his wife Erika, mentioning again that the couple has two children, highlighting the family values and a mention of his podcast and the book he wrote: *The MAGA Doctrine: The Only Ideas that Will Win the Future*”. These final paragraphs seem factual, but also signal Fox News’ values and are part of strategic framing, portraying Charlie Kirk as the ideal conservative, successful family man. Throughout the article, readers can see his portraits and pictures, while it also includes some of dispersing crowds amidst the chaos and police officers securing the area.

The article aligns in a conservative perspective: emphasising “left-wing indoctrination”, free speech on campus and presenting Kirk as a champion against these forces. The absence of deeper context about campus politics, protest movements or the nature of the event means that the framing simplifies the incident into “innocent conservative figure shot while speaking”

rather than a more nuanced situation. Violence is not only framed as crime, but as symbolic violence against ideology and freedom of speech, as president Bush is quoted “a young man was murdered in cold blood while expressing his political views... where the open exchange of opposing ideas should be sacrosanct.”. The article is tailored to Fox News’ conservative readership, emphasising Kirk’s conservative credentials, while the threat is posed by “left-wing indoctrination”. The tone invites readers to view the incident as more than isolated crime – it is an ideological battle.

Overview

As another example of how the shooting was framed and linked to a wider phenomenon, an article called “Charlie Kirk's assassination latest case of conservatives being targeted for murder” is analysed, it was written by Emma Colton on September 10, around six hours after the shooting.

Problem definition

From the title already Fox News frames the political right as endangered, reinforcing solidarity within the in-group and having polarising effects by implying that conservative identity has become a target for violent repression. Shortly after the article continues: “...the latest entry in a grim and growing tally of conservative figures and institutions being targeted for violence, vandalism and murder.”. “Growing tally” suggests that it is a systematic persecution, instead of a singular incident. Conservatives suffer a collective victimhood and “targeted” introduces an intentional and ideological motive.

The shooting of Kirk is linked to other incidents in the article, namely the two assassination attempts on president Trump, arson on churches and Republican party headquarters in New Mexico, protestors attacking pro-life campaigners and vandalism. By clustering these incidents the author implies that there is a pattern or culture of violence against conservative figures and institutions. While the title and beginning suggest that violence against conservatives is on the rise, the examples are scattered throughout the years: 2024, 2023, 2022 and one from 2017. Fox News describes Kirk’s shooting as an addition to a “lengthy recent history of conservatives and Republicans facing violence”, only focusing on the conservative side of victimhood to political violence instead of describing it as a phenomenon affecting political figures and institutions from both the Democratic and Republican sides.

Causal interpretation

This again, reinforces the in-group bias, but can also influence the reader to have harmful views on the out-group, which in this case is the left and liberals. While the article does not directly mention the extreme left or leftist violence, such framing of events implies that the violence is being committed by the other group, the left. Framing like this imposes that there is a systemic bias against conservatives.

Moral judgements

Fox News indirectly quotes the FBI release of statements of the man attempting on Trump's life, describing him as having a desire for notoriety and mental health issues, while the outlet directly claims the shooter of 2017 was "a deranged supporter of Bernie Sanders", shifting the focus from personal grievances to that of an ideological one, supporting division of the left and right. By bringing the attention to arson on institutions, like the headquarters in New Mexico, and wording it as "attacks on conservatives have unfolded at the grassroots level" localises the sense of danger and threat instead of only touching high-profile cases like Kirk and Trump, making it seem more widespread and community-level. The article depicts an image featuring the destroyed building with the graffiti "ICE=KKK", linking leftwing ideas to acts of extremism, making anti-conservative protesting seem equivalent to hate crime. Incidents of masked protesters attacking Turning Point USA gear and staff are mentioned in the article with video evidence, and these incidents are further linked to former NCAA swimmer Riley Gaines's experience of being barricaded in a room after promoting the ban of transgender women from playing in women's sports. The article refers to "biological males" instead of "transgender women", communicating the outlet's and Gaines ideological narratives, hinting at the denial of transgender women not being actual women. It frames Gaines not only as a conservative activist, but as a victim of ideological aggression. By associating her with Turning Point USA and the Leadership Institute, the article embeds her experience in a broader conservative movement, reinforcing the narrative that universities are sites of left-wing intolerance and censorship.

Charlie Kirk is noted for his Christian values in most of the articles on Fox News website, and this article is no different. The author has decided to link his Christian background to churches and pro-life groups facing vandalism and "attacks". The text features a pro-life center that was, in quotation marks: firebombed and an indirect quote that claims a pro-choice group declared "open season" for pro-lifers. By doing so, it links political victimhood to a religious one, conveying that conservative Christianity and family values are under attack by radical pro-choice extremism. These word choices switch political disagreements to moral battles. At the

end of the article the same quote from Trump that is also in the first article, is included, reinforcing Christian values: sending prayers and creating conservative cohesion.

Observations on tone and CDA

The tone of the article is emotive, alarmist, and moralising. From the headline onward, terms like “assassination” and “targeted for murder” frame the piece not as a neutral news report but as a political statement. The article establishes a sense of crisis that conservatives are systematically under attack: by drawing parallels between Kirk’s killing and other alleged assaults on right-leaning individuals or organizations. This creates an atmosphere of collective victimisation, where the reader is invited to share in a feeling of moral outrage and fear. The use of emotionally charged vocabulary “grim”, “growing tally,” “latest case” heightens this urgency and transforms the tragedy from an isolated event into evidence of a broader social injustice. The tone, therefore, functions less to inform and more to rally, appealing to readers’ identities as part of a political community under attack.

The emotional stance is reinforced by binary moral framing; conservatives as virtuous victims and their attackers as embodiments of ideological hatred. The article’s tone leans toward solidarity and mobilisation, urging readers to see Kirk’s death as symptomatic of moral decline and hostility from “the other side.” While it conveys empathy toward Kirk and his followers, it simultaneously constructs an adversarial environment, suggesting an ongoing struggle for survival of conservative values. The tone thus operates on two registers: mourning the loss of an individual, and weaponising that loss rhetorically to sustain a narrative of persecution.

Interpretive summary

The two articles from Fox News show how political violence is covered by a conservative outlet, and how it subtly transforms it into an ideological narrative through framing, tone and selective moral emphasis. Not only are they stories of tragic events, but a view of the world where conservatism is perceived as an identity under attack. The first one establishes the emotional and moral foundation for this narrative: the event is not only an attack on Charlie Kirk, but an attack on freedom of speech and conservative expression. Fox News controls how audiences interpret cause, blame and moral hierarchy, which van Dijk (1980 p. 3) calls the “semantic macrostructure”. By including a quote calling out “left-wing indoctrination in academia” the article sets up a conflict between conservative virtue and liberal repression. Quotes from J.D. Vance and Hegseth sending prayers connects the reporting to a spiritual symbolism and emotions, bringing spiritual unification to the readership. Together with all this,

including a biography of Kirk, turns him into a model conservative; the embodiment of faith, standing by his constitutional rights and practicing patriotism – victim of political hatred. The second article builds from this case to systemic persecution. Through cumulative examples, the narrative shifts from isolated tragedy to collective victimhood. Here the problem is defined: conservatives are being attacked and silenced, and a moral evaluation is made: there is a culture of political hatred fostered by the elites and a system holding opposing views. Linking churches and pro-life groups to the discussion, using words like “targeted”, “open season” produces a collective fear. These articles exemplify how a conservative partisan medium uses framing to blend emotions, morality and ideology into a narrative logic. At the same time liberalism and the left are framed as repressive, secular and destructive. Following Entman’s model (1993) the treatment of the problem is ideological unity: conservatives should protect their communities, faith and freedoms from a corrupt and hostile opposition. By associating the tragedy to ideological narratives, these articles and Fox News can contribute to deeper polarisation in the population and readership. While they can increase solidarity within the group of conservatives, they can also harden divisions between conservatives and those who hold different views.

Table 1 - Comparative summary of Fox News articles

Entman’s framing function	Article 1 (news report)	Article 2 (political analysis)
Problem definition	Tragic shooting of well-known conservative figure.	Systematic pattern of violence, conservatives targeted.
Causal interpretation	Avoids explicit motive, focus on what happened.	Blame is assigned to the left and a culture of hate against the right.
Moral judgement	Kirk portrayed as an innocent victim, moral sympathy, neutral tone regarding blame.	Conservatives are the moral in-group, unjust persecution with blame on liberal culture/universities.
Treatment recommendation	Justice and mourning. Grief and closure.	Political or cultural action, condemnation of anti-right violence.
Tone	Emotionally intense(grief), descriptive, dramatic but restrained, victim-centred, purpose: to inform and	Emotionally more intense(anger, accusatory), opinion-like, partisan, purpose: to rally and

	memorialise.	politicise.
CDA Indicators	Kirk victim narrative, heroism, subtle ideological narrative, violence is symbolic against free speech, Kirk legitimised - no criticism of his message or role. Little discussion of campus security.	Ideological narrative, in-group cohesion and reinforcement, conservative victimhood narrative, naturalising polarisation through justification of defensive postures.

Fox News X posts, social media discourse analysis

To further understand the conservative point of way of thinking, narratives and frames, we have gathered example posts from Fox News' X account and comments and replies to the posts. The focus is more specifically, on members of the public not usually given space in mainstream media, to explore how their views differ from the media's set narrative. The samples are from September 10 2025, almost immediately after the passing of Kirk.

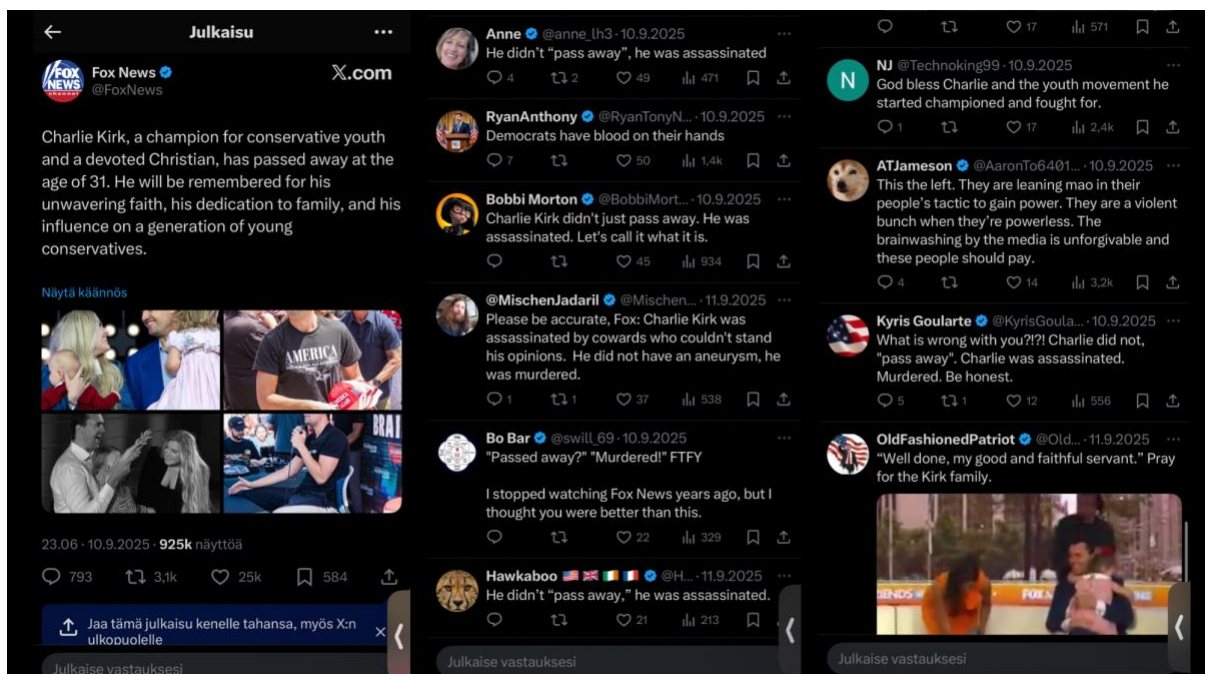


Figure 3: Fox News X post and comment section under it

Fox News' initial post reflects the articles they have on their website and the message is consistent as well. Fox News says Charlie Kirk "passed away" but many users are very critical

of this wording, saying that he was in fact, assassinated or murdered. This suggests that users are denying the framework of Fox News and are making more emotionally charged sentiments. Fox’s frame of mourning turns to a sort of martyrdom — he fought for his cause and he was assassinated for it. The comments reflect common conservative values by sending prayers, but also asking for help from God, disturbed by the event. It reflects the fusion of faith and politics and creates a collective mourning space for conservative solidarity. However, distrust in the media can be noticed, even those seemingly conservative show their displeased attitude on the platform: users are critical; one writes: “What is wrong with you?!?!...Murdered. Be honest.”, and another: “...I stopped watching Fox News years ago, but I thought you were better than this.”, and it reveals internal fragmentation of the conservative media sphere. Fox News reporting and frames are polished and moderately conservative, but some users interpret it as overly cautious and covering up their political truth. This reveals intragroup conflicts and disagreements, where a trusted source is perceived as insufficiently ideological. In Fairclough’s (1995) terms this is a moment of recontextualisation, where media language is contested and re-signified by audiences.

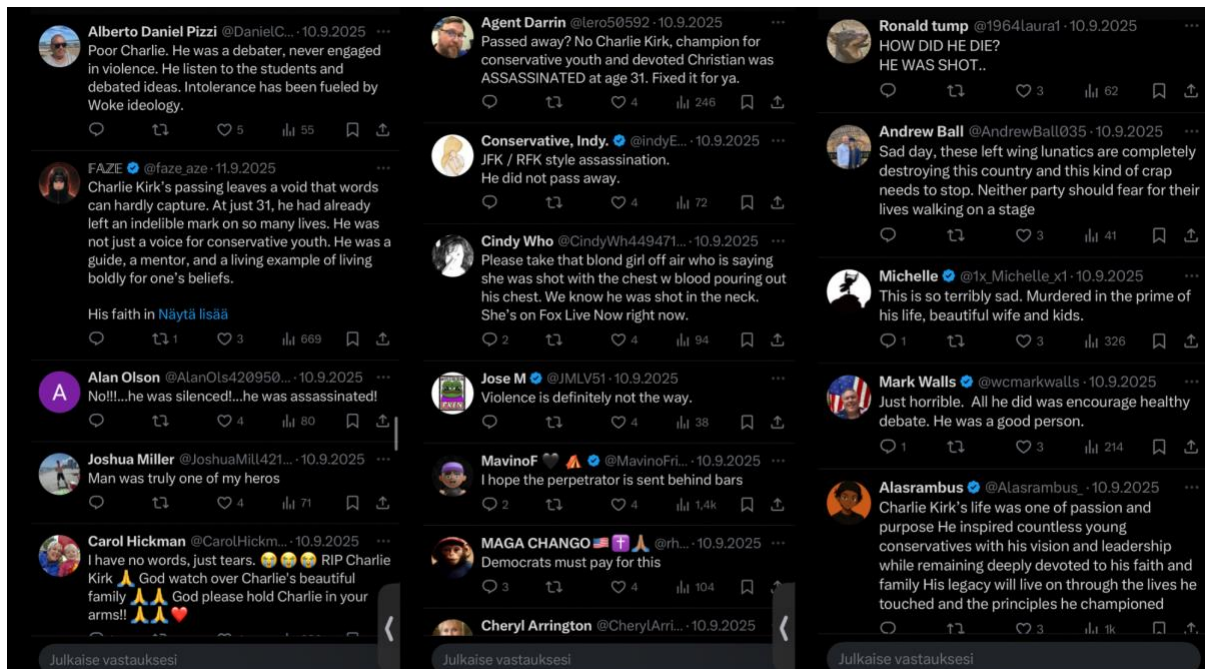


Figure 4: Continuation of the previous comment section

In figure 4, similar discourse is visible to that of figure 3. The replies demonstrate affective polarisation, where the out-group, the Democrats are painted as “lunatics” who are destroying the country with violence, users assign moral guilt and emotional hatred to the opposing side.

They are not only framed as the opposition but as a morally corrupt party, while Republicans are victimised and morally righteous. Users further transform Charlie Kirk into a symbolic victim of liberal intolerance and violence, a causal frame: “This is the left...”, “Democrats must pay for this”; these kinds of statements link his death to partisan blame, showing how social media discourse extends institutional framing to moral absolutism. The discourse moves from institutional conservatism to populist outrage, and ideological polarisation — us versus them. In this one and another post’s comment thread some users compare the assassination to John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King’s assassinations, offering historical analogies that intensify symbolic meaning, which hints that Kirk was a powerful public speaker who was silenced for his views, comparable to civil rights figures. This rhetorical inversion, where conservative identity is aligned with resistance and oppression, illustrates how victimhood becomes a central mode of political identity in polarised discourse. It positions Charlie Kirk as a martyr, introducing a sacrificial narrative, he becomes a symbol of ideological righteousness.

In the other one this becomes apparent: illustrated in figure 5 below, an account called Christian Ascania shares his post in the thread that is referencing Harrison H. Smith, claiming that he was told by someone close to Kirk that Kirk himself suspected that “Israel will kill him”. Kirk had recently started being critical of Israel’s actions in Gaza, and former Turning Point director Candice Owens talks about this on her YouTube podcast and the fact that Kirk was offered a fund to realign himself but refused. Seemingly these claims have gained some traction in the conservative community online, fuelling anti-semitic rhetoric and conspiring ideas, which is reflected in the comments. This is the circulation of conspirational and retributive language, and points to a broader distrust of institutional truth and reliance on moralised rumour, where emotional conviction replaces empirical evidence.

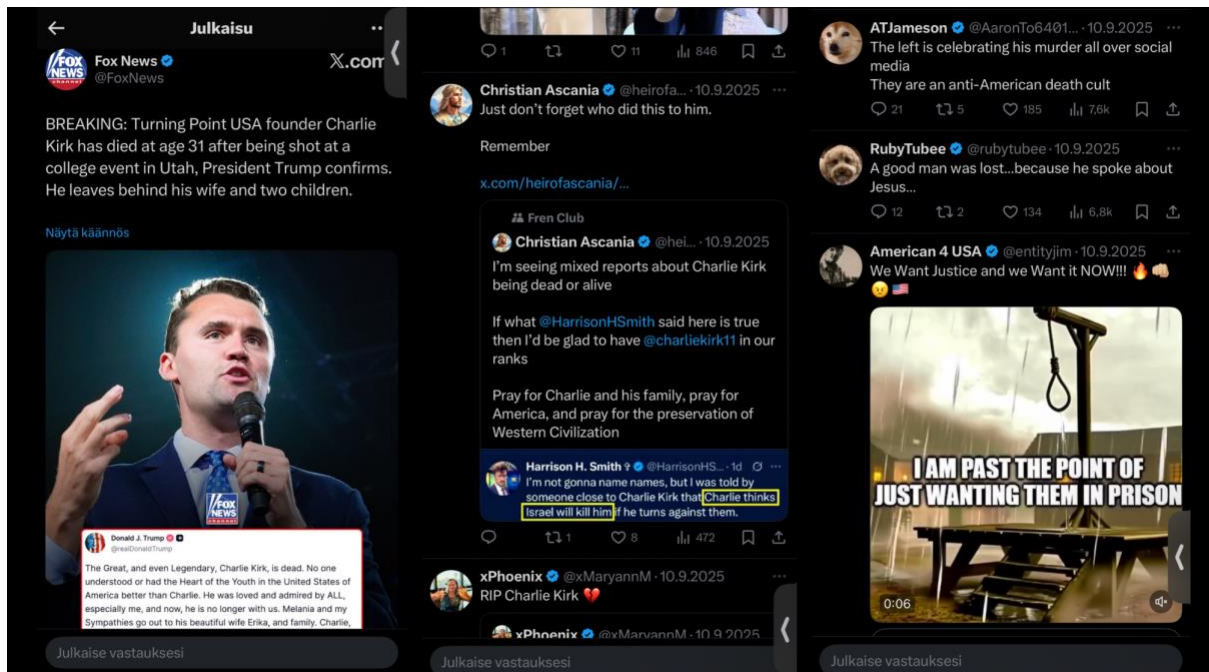


Figure 5: Second Fox News post and comment section

User American 4 USA calls for action and justice, linking a clip of a hanging gallows with the text “I am past the point of just wanting them in prison”, a sign of radicalisation. It is open to interpretation what this user means by “them”, it could be the people committing political crimes, but judging by the overall atmosphere of the comment section the user could very well be referencing to the left or Democrats. Another says they are “an anti-American death cult”, demonstrating typical affective polarisation as Iyengar et al. (2019) describe. Calls for action signal a shift from grief to mobilisation and retribution. The imagery accompanying some posts introduces a punitive justice frame where violence is rhetorically legitimised as a moral defense. This reaction builds upon the initial framing of Kirk as a moral and patriotic figure, but transforms it into a populist demand for action.



Figure 6: Continuation of comments

Across these reactions, emotion replaces factual discussion. Compassionate mourning “Prayers for his family”, “Rest in peace, Charlie” coexists with extreme hostility “This evil is on the back of every single American Democrat”, and this coexistence reveals the dual economy of polarisation: shared grief creates unity and aggression directs that unity against an external enemy. Some comments are calling out for MSNBC and other left-leaning sites to be taken off air, opposing platforms are not tolerated and it implies that left media incite violence and are a part of the problem.

Through the lens of CDA (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998) social media posts about Kirk’s death show how every day users, reproduce, transform and radicalise the ideological meanings of media framing. The posts demonstrate how visibility, anonymity and interactivity magnify affective polarisation, polarise interpretation and reshape collective identity construction.



Conservative influencer Charlie Kirk fatally shot in Utah

Conservative influencer Charlie Kirk fatally shot in Utah

Kirk was speaking on his “American Comeback Tour” at Utah Valley University at the time of the shooting.



Sept. 10, 2025, 9:12 PM GMT+2 / Updated Sept. 11, 2025, 4:56 AM GMT+2

By **Erum Salam**

Figure 7: “Conservative influencer Charlie Kirk fatally shot in Utah”

Overview

This first article from MSNBC “Conservative influencer Charlie Kirk fatally shot in Utah” (Erum Salam, 10 Sept. 2025) presents the incident in a straight and simple news format with less emotional tone and with the element of the typical reliance on official statements. While stylistically generally neutral, subtle framing cues and lexical patterns align it with institutional liberal journalism, highlighting procedural accuracy, official authority, and contextual balance. Compared to MSNBC’s other overtly interpretive pieces, this very first approach here is overall objective but still reflects the values of responsible civic reporting.

MSNBC's first news coverage differed greatly from Fox's moralized framework. The shooter was initially described as merely a "tragic incident" and "developing investigation," thereby viewing the problem not as a question of moral decline but as a consequence of social order failure. In Entman's view, the issue needs to be framed in the context of public safety and democratic stability rather than identity or faith.

Research Identifying the Problem

The article determines that the core problem is a very tragic and politically charged form of violence taking place in a public space. The title immediately demonstrates the factual frame that Kirk was a “Conservative influencer Charlie Kirk fatally shot” while the subheading outlines his political relevance by situating the event in the context of Kirk's “American Comeback Tour.”

The double framing, on the one hand, a personal tragedy and on the other hand, a politically symbolic event are the basis for the interpretation. The argument of quotes from Utah Governor Spencer Cox who stated the murder a “political assassination” helps to amplify the political stakes while making possible to reflect caution through attribution (“called Kirk’s killing...”). The choice not to affirm that claim directly keeps a distance in journalism, but the existence of that point indirectly suggests that the political motives are involved. In general terms, it is through the frame of an act of political violence with a national impact that they pose the issue, but not in a straightforward or detailed way such as seeing it as a varied and recurrent systemic situation like Fox News. MSNBC's framing remains specific and argues through facts where they completely respect unstartable generalizations.

Causal Interpretation

Causality in the news article is intentionally left open. The recurrent phrases of "ongoing investigation," "suspect still at large," and "two individuals later released" show that uncertainty.

This is in following the presumption of the institution's reliance on law enforcement authorities as the primary ones (Utah Department of Public Safety, FBI, and Utah Valley University). Nevertheless, through selective quotations, MSNBC manages to create causal implications that are not immediate. To illustrate, the article states Kirk's campus attendance was accompanied by protests, suggesting a political climate of animosity while not directly associating the protesters with the violent act committed. This linguistic trick is the closeness without giving credit and it is the means through which the audience is allowed to conclude a surrounding tension in the context, while the outlet stays firm on its objectivity position.

The quotation of President Trump's Truth Social post early in the text part` ("The Great, and even Legendary, Charlie Kirk, is dead...") was a rhetorical device that also had its causal function in the text: it is the highly emotional lens through which the tragedy is personalized and politicized. Although it is demonstrated in the quotation form, its placement at the first position near the beginning has the effect of amplifying its significance which is that the reactions of the political leaders, in a way, are interwoven with the events that took place similar to Fox News' coverage.

Moral Evaluation

The idea of moral evaluation is implicit rather than obvious. Through the linguistic construction of those sentential components, NBC positions Kirk as a public figure engaging in civic exchange instead of a polarising agitator. An example of this is the usage of such expressions as "Conservative influencer," "speaking to students," and "known for viral videos in which he debates students," which describe him as a communicator, In comparison to that, a provocateur as a subtle step toward depoliticisation of empathy.

Bipartisanship was also part of the statement, adding moral symmetry - Sen. Mike Lee and Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, neither of which is seen as a party-specific issue. With the assertion that violence is "absolutely unacceptable in America," the moral tenor is pitched around developing a sense of belonging to a common civic community and the strength of the democratic process.

Notwithstanding, MSNBC's inherent tendency for morality is actualized through official restraint. The media outlet, for its part, religiously preaches civility, state capacity, and bipartisan integrity, which are all liberal-institutional norms by emphasizing the restraint, the procedural order, and the respect that the ones in authority show.

Treatment Recommendation

The treatment frame implicitly brings up issues of depoliticisation and institutional trust. By laying emphasis on the official responses (e.g. police statements, FBI involvement, White House gestures), MSNBC identifies law enforcement and government agencies as the stabilizers. The gesture of the state-mediated lowering of flags to half-mast signifies public mourning, and state ritual is a way of solemnly printing the identity.

The last scene - first, a factual retelling of the events, then more about Kirk's followers on social media and his work history - declaratively gives back the order and normalcy. The "developing story" label at the bottom corresponds to the continuity of operations: the system is operating, the lessons are being learned, and society remains the same.

Such a closing structure corresponds to Fairclough's (1995) discursive institutional reassurance: in the moments of crisis, the media, especially the mainstream, illustrate the order, empathy, and procedure to re-stabilise the public meaning.

The observations on tone and CDA

The tone is objective, informative, and predominantly unemotional. But according to CDA, even neutrality can be viewed as an ideological way {van Dijk, 1998}. The linguistic choices

of MSNBC, such as the constant formal titles, the avoidance of speculation, and the quote distribution that is perfectly balanced, all of this creates the institutional authority as querulous legitimacy.

This is consistent with Esser and Strömbäck's (2014) view of professionalism impacted by media: journalists exercise their civic duty when they manage the emotional level and they give priority to the official statements. At the same time, the selective quotation (Trump's commendation, Newsom's rebuke, FBI's procedural assurance) presents political polarisation as an issue to be dealt with, not a matter for direct critique.

In this first sample article, in terms of visuals and tone, MSNBC's discourse is protective of the institutional trust and is pretty much against MSNBC's fiercely interpretive moralizing.

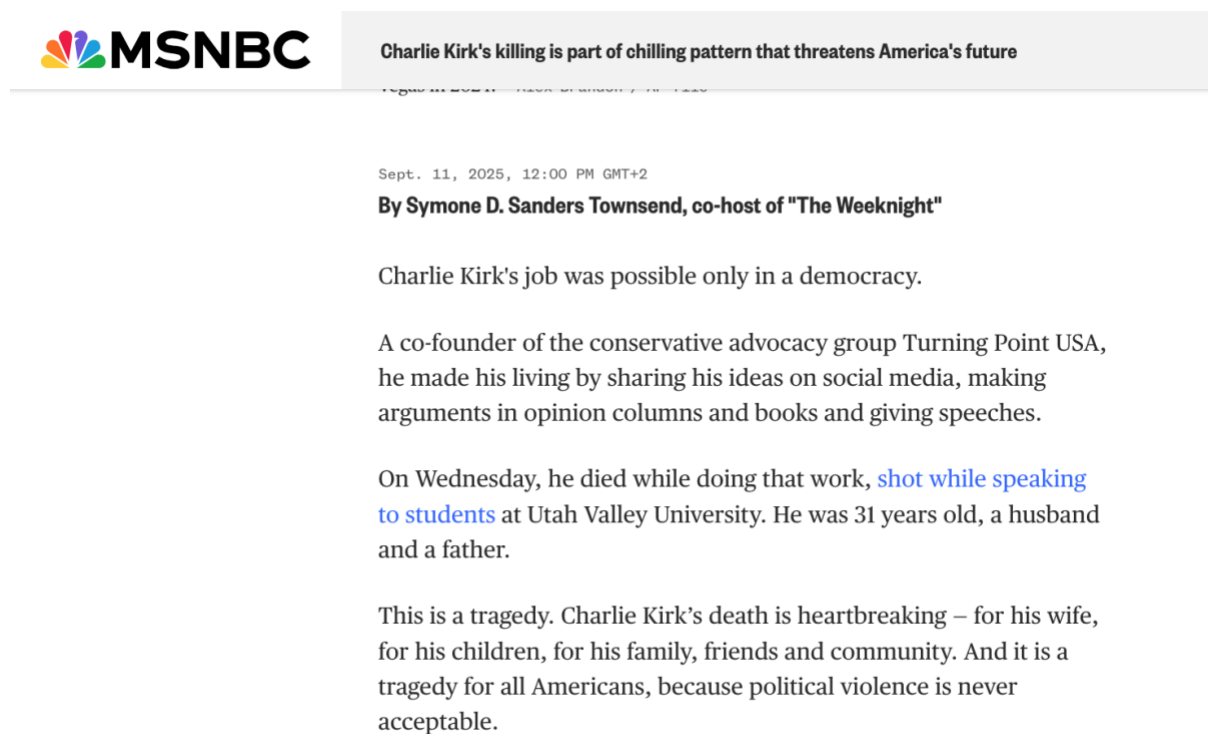


Figure 8: "Charlie Kirk's job was possible only in a democracy"

The primary definition of assassination in the article is the attack on democracy and freedom of expression. The very first paragraph, situates Kirk's passing both as a personal tragedy and a collective democratic loss, by virtue of the fact that his capacity to publicly express his

opinions was reliant upon democratic freedoms. This universalist framing shifts the event to a collective dimension, making a demonized partisan into a symbol of the democratic erosion. Embedding Kirk's demise as “a disturbing string of attacks” and historical references to Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, and Evers, among others, to MSNBC, medial and most of American political violence as to Kirk's death. Such historical grounding works as a moral and political message that the sources of republican troubles are not always isolated but cycled attacks instead.

The causal interpretation

The statement “When leaders demonize opponents as enemies, when they traffic in dehumanizing language, when they normalize threats as part of politics, they create the climate in which violence flourishes” in this editorial article, suggests that the increase in political heating and the process of dehumanising discourse becoming the norm are the main reasons for the rise in such forms of communication.

Here, although the authors do not directly accuse conservatives, the total message links the use of violent language to the modus of communication of conservative populists.

Moral Evaluation

MSNBC draws a moral line between democratic civility and violent terrorism in this article. The moral frame is built on the concept of civic virtue: it is the duty of the citizens as well as the leaders to keep the “bedrock principle” safe that political disputes belong “in legislatures, debate halls, and ballot boxes and not in the sights of a gun.” Through this appeal, MSNBC takes on the role of almost an arbiter, reinforcing its liberal identity as a defender of democratic institutions and rational discourse.

The use of religious and civic language (“Democracy cannot function under fear”) makes the message sound more universal. However, the implicit contrast between citizens as virtuous and demagogues as irresponsible, serves to point the finger at the conservative right in the morally despicable part of a shared tragedy.

Tone and CDA observations

Compared to the first article, here the tone is more reflective and moralistic.

It is a particularly effective appeal to the audience's emotions: grief, anxiety, and urgency which are the chief means to a positive identification with democratic values. CDA presents a persistent we/they dichotomy in which "we" is a reference to rational democratic agents and

"they" are the political extremists and demagogues, as per the CDA. The historical intertextuality (the 1960s are mentioned) serves as the discursive legitimation, situating MSNBC within a history of moral vigilance and social progressivism.

Article 2: “I’ve been haunted every day since Charlie Kirk was assassinated” (Anthony L. Fisher, 2025)



Charlie Kirk's killing is a tragedy – the 'reckoning' is a moral panic

Sept. 17, 2025, 12:00 PM GMT+2

By Anthony L. Fisher, Senior Editor, MSNBC Daily

I've been haunted every day since [Charlie Kirk was assassinated](#). The graphic video images of his killing are the culmination of a kind of savagery that is [appallingly common](#) in America, but which no person should ever have to see. It's an unspeakable trauma and loss for his loved ones and supporters, and it is a legitimately [devastating tragedy for America](#). The political morass into which we have been sinking for years accelerated to terrifying degrees over the past week.

There is no “but” here. Murder is wrong, and political murder should be unilaterally condemned. Period.

Figure 9: Charlie Kirk's killing is a tragedy

According to the author, the assassination is not only a terrible thing but also a cause for the state to step out of its democratic limits. Fisher starts with a statement of the violence of the murder and he calls it “the trauma one cannot talk about” and continues with a critical attitude towards the politicians who misappropriate the incident. The contradictory view of the event as both a moment of sorrow and a political weapon allows MSNBC to be the only voice of reason in the middle of screamers. The period of “reckoning” after Kirk's death is seen through the lens of a “moral panic” driven by the Trump administration and “MAGA media”, thus changing the focus from tragedy to political analysis. In this way, the “problem” is not just a matter of political violence but the authority's use of it. This is the way a redefinition works that brackets MSNBC's coverage as a watchdog role instead of a mere partisan one.

Moral Appraisal

Fisher expresses the outright condemnation of political assassination (“Murder is wrong. Period.”), however, situates this moral clarity line against the selective outrage that

conservative figures express. Calling the MAGA influencers as a point of reference who ridicule past victims of the Democrat party (e.g., Nancy Pelosi’s husband) to draw attention to hypocrisy. The moral judgment thus sets liberal ethics' consistency against conservative ethics' duplicity.

Overall, the piece highlights the manner in which the "ruling party" politicizes sorrow as a means to rationalize its "ideological crackdowns." This description of happenings brings even more to the fore the association of MSNBC with the role of such a champion of civil liberties and freedom of expression by taking a position on moral virtue that values our holding back as institutions rather than a rigidly moral standard.

Treatment Suggestion

The script is a direct plea for the protection of free speech and a countermeasure for moral panic. It contains a directive saying that “the government force applied on one side of the political scale brings down the standard of the constitution” which shows that the government acting on one side of politics does not follow the constitution. Implicitly, MSNBC encourages viewers to be aware of authoritarianism and especially to be cautious about its occurrence from populism. Therefore, the argumentation of this text definitely promotes rational debate, pluralism, and legal restraint as the moral correctives to addictive ideologies.

Tone and CDA Observations

The tone is emphatic, furious, and protective of the liberal principles. The interplay between “speech is not violence” and “violence is not speech” being contrasting yet repeated articulations signifies epistemic limits in linguistic partitions of fair discourse. CDA discloses how MSNBC constructs discursive authority through rationalism, thus presenting itself as the voice of the civic conscience. Nevertheless, the total emotional charge (“terrified,” “shameless hypocrisy,” and “appalling assault”) indicates that there is an emotional engagement just as it is in the conservative media, that is, the liberal media also uses emotions for the purpose of reinforcing the ideology.

Table 2 - Comparative Summary MSNBC articles:

Entman’s Framing Function	MSNBC News Report - Erum Salam	MSNBC Editorial - Symone D. Sanders	MSNBC Opinion - Anthony	Analytical Observation
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			L.Fisher	
Problem Definition	Political Violence, National Tragedy	Attack on democracy and historical continuation of political violence.	Authoritarian rulers' tactics of using political tragedy as a tool.	MSNBC pivots from a direct emphasis on the happening to a discussion on the systemic effects.
Causal Interpretation	Official investigations, procedural uncertainty.	Moral decay through dehumanizing political language	Structural Decay, Ideological Brainwash	Their causes are attributed to the political structures, not individuals.
Moral Evaluation	Empathy tone and call for civic unity.	Civic virtues and democratic values should be defended.	The upholding of free speech and the criticism of hypocrisy.	Moral reasoning based on liberal universalism.
Treatment Recommendation	Have faith in institutions, corporate in mourning	The path towards national unity is through moderation.	Opposition to the moral panic and the safeguarding of personal freedoms.	Advocates for accountability.
Tone/ Affect	Objective, unfeeling and corporate tones	Reflective, calls for democratic values and reformist tones	Hurt, concern, opinion.	Uses emotions to defend liberal rationalism.
CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) Indicators	State-oriented framing, conformity shifting towards official language.	The "we" that includes everyone; legitimation from history.	Presents itself as the voice of the civic conscience.	The ideological identity is closely linked to the feeling of moral superiority and civic reason.

Interpretive Summary

MSNBC is serving a civic democracy lens for Charlie Kirk's assassination, claiming it is a matter of free speech and political pluralism without unconcealing the conservative victimhood aspect at all. The two of the three articles display a common rhetorical strategy of moral

universalism (van Dijk, 1998; and Fairclough 2003), which defines the moral arrangement as democratic governance being the only possibly valid. As even the title suggests, MSNBC utilizes both the formula of sympathy for Kirk's death and the critique of political extremism and right-wing exploitation via the tone and the structure. Quite a lot of the report takes a middle road seemingly neutral while still implicitly spreading the liberal moral hierarchies: rationalism, institutionalism, and compassion are the characteristics of the in-group (liberal-democratic citizens) while emotionality, aggression, and hypocrisy are the downsides of the conservative out-group. This discourse arrangement that the media is biased like two people viewing the same event differently is also a way of looking at the concept. Hence, each side's claim to moral universality, so. Consequently, MSNBC's case is a real case where neutrality and civility that are even requested turn out to be ideological performances in a polarised communicative environment (Carlson, 2016; Waisbord, 2018; Farkas and Schou, 2020), while earlier positions on this topic were different.

This framing employs what van Dijk (1998) and Fairclough (2003) term a rhetoric of moral universalism, in which democracy and free speech are positioned as self-evident moral goods. Within this discourse, democratic governance is not presented as one normative option among others, but as the only morally valid political arrangement—a pattern also observed in Western media coverage of political violence (Chouliaraki, 2006; Couldry, 2010).

Even though MSNBC's reporting was largely professional, the audience's response showed that they were recasting the channel as a both political-partisanship and moral wrongdoer.

MSNBC News X posts, social media discourse analysis

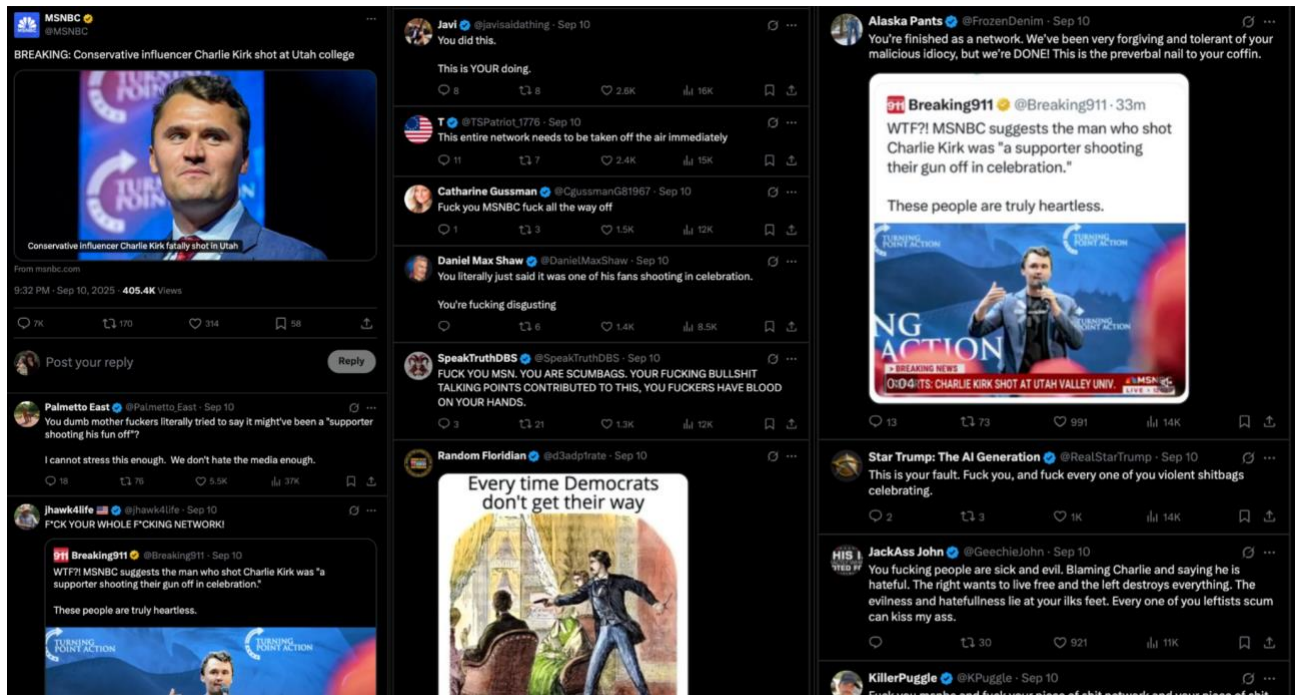


Figure 10: MSNBC News X post and comment section under it

On the platform X, MSNBC’s first post to announce the shooting of Charlie Kirk was received by the audience with an instant flood of very emotional and blaming responses. The majority of the comments include rather strong feelings of anger, disbelief, and moral condemnation, and users almost exclusively blame the network for creating a hostile environment. As Entman (1993, p. 52) points out, this kind of causal framing operates by recognizing individuals as causes and assigning blame for intricate events, thus, helping viewers to turn the information into moral interpretations.

Numerous commenters charge the cable TV station with being the primary actor in the violence, making use of statements like “You did this” and “This is your fault.” The following statements are typical of what Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2019, p. 133) refer to as affective polarization; i.e. nothing has replaced deliberative engagement rather than moral emotions of anger and contempt. Not concentrating on factual correctness, the users reframe the reporting against the backdrop of ethical indignation, associating the disaster with putative ideological enmity. The vibrant expressiveness of such reactions indicates that in politically-divided communicative surroundings, journalism might not be perceived as an unbiased repository of facts but rather as a symbolic part of partisanship.

Certain individuals go to the extent of demanding punitive action against the media house that would be, e.g., withdrawal of its broadcasting license or the naming of the reporters personally responsible. This kind of pattern resonates with Fairclough's (1995, p. 57) comment that discourse in public settings is very often personalized while critiquing institutions, with blame on morals directed toward particular people or specific places rather than general systems. In this regard, MSNBC becomes the symbolic embodiment of the ethical shortcomings of the entire media or the whole left side in public.

On the language level, the comments evidently present a firm dichotomy of in-group/out-group identifiers. While the "we" pronoun = a moral space between a virtuous community of victims and a culpable out-group the "you" pronoun = a moral space between a virtuous community of victims and a culpable out-group. According to van Dijk (1998, p. 69), such a binary way of speaking is a mark of ideological discourse, which, by virtue of collective grievances and moral superiority, builds the walls of social identity. Similarly, the authors Tajfel and Turner (1986, p. 16) notice that solidarity of the group is further assured through the expression of shared feelings of indignation towards an antagonistic other.

All in all, the responses to the very first post of MSNBC can be seen as a tangible example of how specifically the audience turned quickly from sharing information to moral challenges. To summarize, the major interpretative options are the following:

Causal attribution – blaming the media agency for the occurrence of the event (Entman, 1993, p. 52);

Moral outrage – affective responses substituting rational discourse (Iyengar, Sood & Lelkes, 2019, p. 133);

Collective identity reinforcement – the use of "us vs them" framing for community building based on (van Dijk, 1998, p. 69; Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 16).

These conditions put together show how institutional communication can be reconstituted by online audiences into emotional narratives of condemnation and moral opposition. Thus, the post of MSNBC turns out to be a news piece, but it is also a place for ideological renegotiation where users act out identity and grievance in a politically divided public sphere.

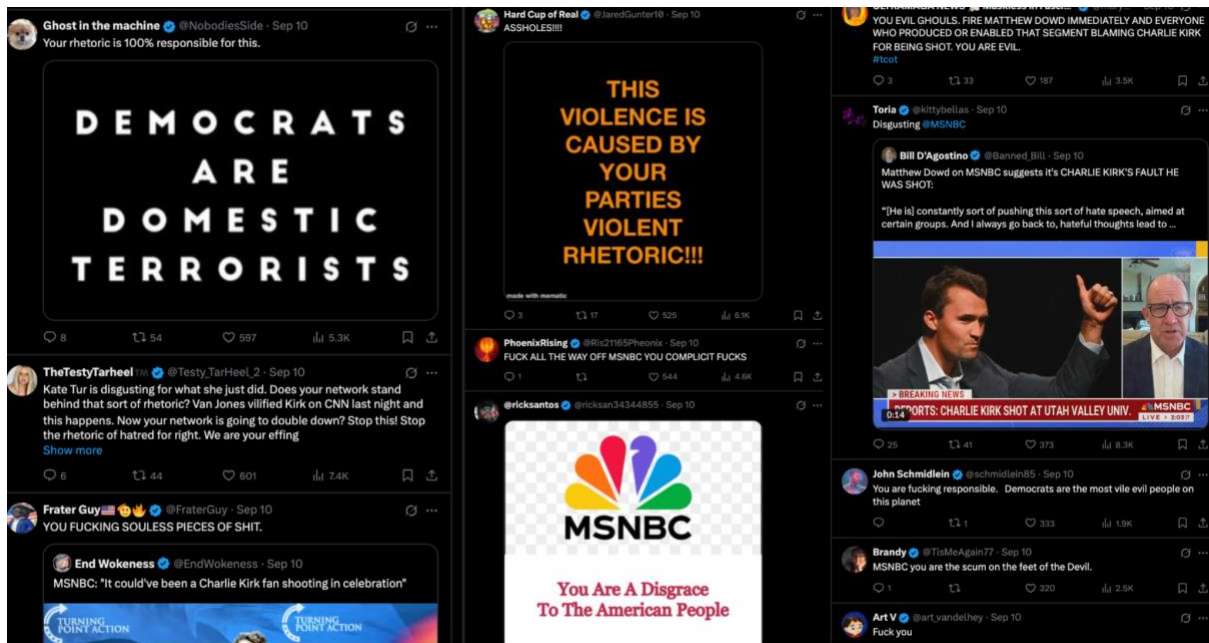


Figure 11: Continuation of comments

Following MSNBC's post, the responses from the audience noticeably shift and become more dramatic and morally evaluative. A huge percentage of the responses are loaded with text and images such as “Democrats are domestic terrorists” or “This violence is caused by your party’s rhetoric” that vividly exhibit the transition of the political discussion from descriptive commentary to moral evaluation. Lakoff (2004, p. 33) points out that dumb moral framing is the reason why politics seem so hard to grasp since it divides the social world into simple categories of right and wrong, which is a common feature of polarized communication.

The talk exemplifies a feature, which, according to Entman (1993, p. 52), is called causal interpretation, where people attribute actions to particular agents and organizations. Posts often depict MSNBC's report as a part of the accompanying broader communicative environment on political division, while users see it as contributing to moral or social tension. Instead of dealing with the facts only, the replies create a moral link between the perceived consequences in society and the network’s reporting style.

Some users prefer to concentrate on the people responsible for the bad consequences, such as naming individual journalists Katie Tur. This process of individualisation of critique corresponds with Fairclough’s (1995, p. 57) remark that ideological disagreement usually comes up as a moral evaluation of people not of institutions. Affective polarisation, which is

where political opponents are seen not only as being in disagreement but rather morally lower (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015, p. 691; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2019, p. 133), is underlined by emotional expressions like “disgusting,” “soulless,” or “disgrace.”

Furthermore, there is also a ripple effect of the replies in that it creates a strong bond and reaffirms collective identity. The majority of users make use of collective pronouns such as “we” and “our side,” and they frame a shared identity in opposition to “you people” or “the left.” Such linguistic contrasts are, according to van Dijk (1998, p. 69), a fundamental element of ideological discourse, manifesting the positive image of an in-group and the negative image of an out-group. In the same way, Tajfel and Turner (1986, p. 16) posit that communicating in a group makes distinction “us” and “them” which in turn is the source of ideologically grounded cohesion.

All in all, the responses presented in Figure 11 reveal a transformation from event narration to emotion and ethics that makes clear social boundaries.

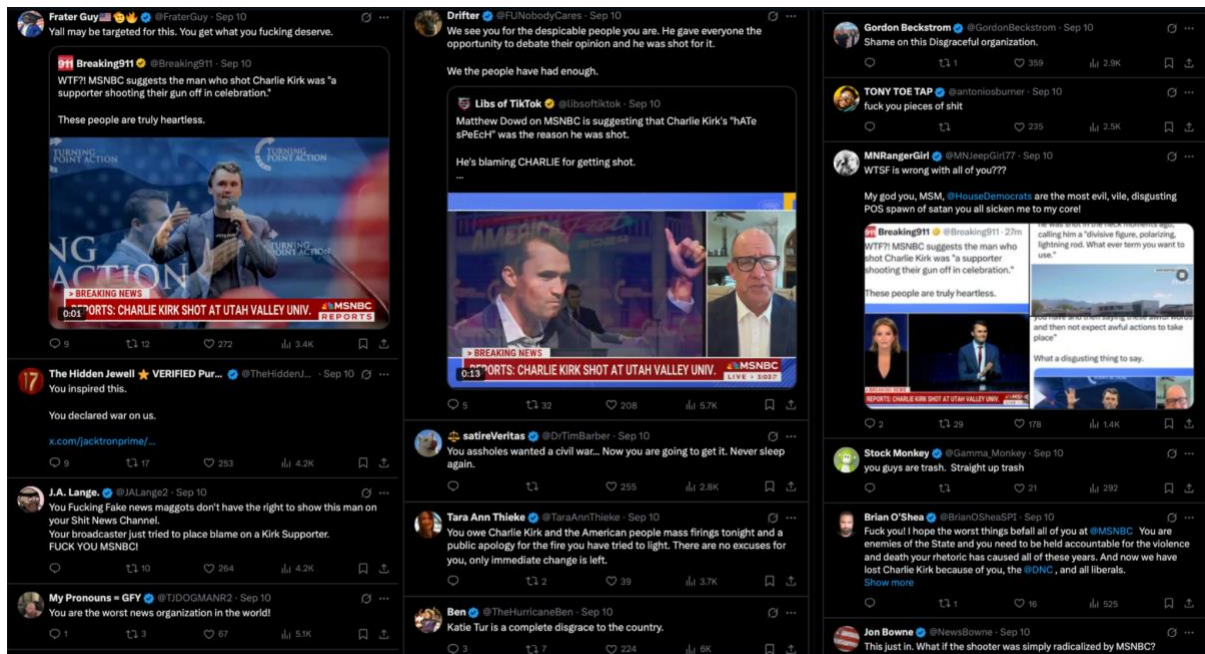


Figure 12: Continuation of comments

The third set of replies exhibits a considerable progression from outrage to open hostility in the emotional and moral expressions of the respondents. Thus, they go from extreme oblivion such as "You declared war on us," "You inspired this," and "You will get what you deserve" that are

sustained by users who also show clips and screenshots of MSNBC's live coverage. This rhetorical escalation of the media station, which is instead now considered not as a witness but as a moral instigator of political violence, is a direct causal reversal. Based on the framing process model articulated by Entman (1993, p. 52), this happens when audiences reinterpret causes in assigning agency and blame that fit their worldview beforehand.

These replies emotionally illustrate what Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2019, p. 133) describe as affective polarization--where political adversaries are seen not only as opposing forces but as existential threats. Language of vengeance ("you wanted a civil war," "you have blood on your hands") and moral degradation ("the most vile evil people on this planet") are employed by users, turning political disagreement into moral censure. The communicative tone shifts from that of an open conversation to a one where the speaker is directly blaming the other side, therefore, setting ethical positions as the right in-group and the corrupted out-group.

The comments also intimate the integration of collective identity, using the framework of Tajfel and Turner (1986, p. 16). The hoodlums build MSNBC and, by extension, liberal elites as the collective enemy, in which they utilize the pronoun "you" to the detriment of the word "we." This idea corresponds to the model of ideological discourse proposed by van Dijk (1998, p. 69), where the minority group is represented as morally divergent and harmful while the majority group projects itself as a victim of systematic aggression. Sentences such as "You are the main reason for this" and "You are the one to have declared war on us" are the exact dualism in this case because they shift Kirk's assassination from being a tragic event to a partisan identity battle.

From the point of view of discourse, these replies are a demonstration of the blend of emotional and ideological registers. Thus, Fairclough (1995, p. 57) argues that the instances of political communication effectively blur the line between factual and moral critique in such moments. The expression of death and anger intertwines with the ask for accountability thus, "You owe mass firings and a public apology" becomes a document of such ontology. This fusion thus is what Iyengar and Westwood (2015, p. 691) see as the antagonistic empathy environment—the collective emotion is referred to rather than bridges social division.

Therefore, the responses of Figure 12 and 11 demonstrate how e-discourse serves as a medium for the amplification of media polarisation.

Thus, it is those combinations that reflect and demonstrate the fact that media-related discourses evolve on social media platforms.

In these online discussions, the showing of social media platforms as the spaces where political emotions are directly articulated and group identities are promoted instead of neutral information exchange has been demonstrated well.

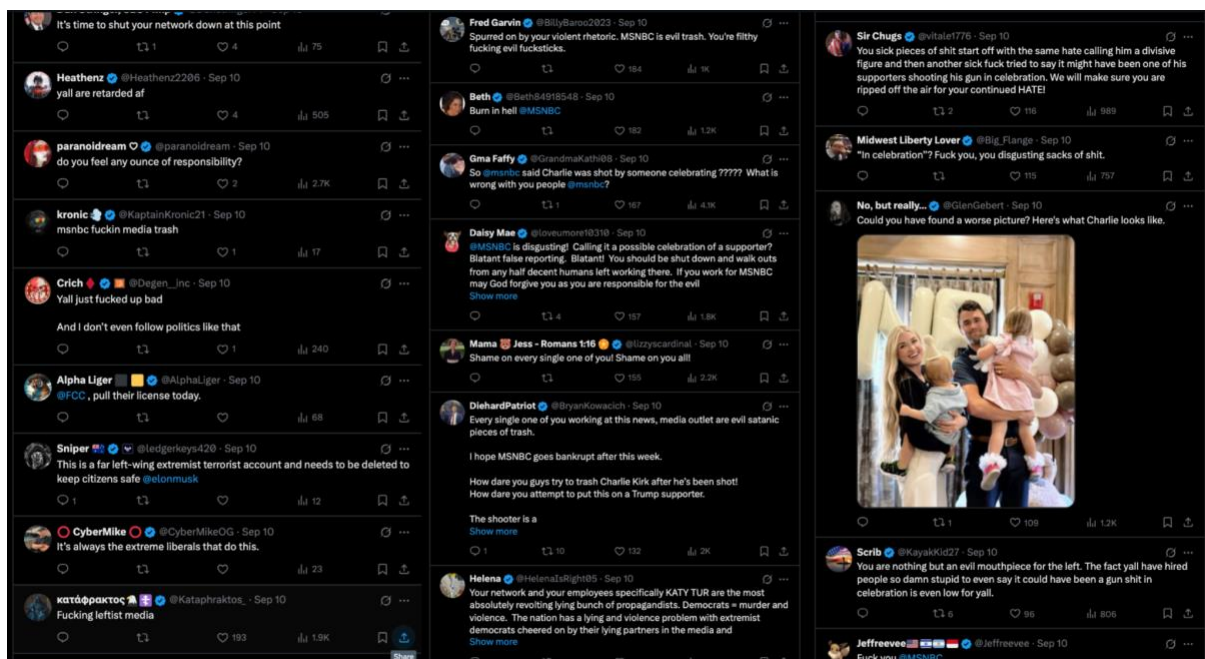


Figure 13: Continuation of comments

The last batch of replies on the MSNBC post underscores the further expression of outrage and emotional reactions as mentioned earlier. The comments are getting more and more aggressive as well as personal with a lot of users aiming their attacks at the whole network or particular journalists. For instance, statements like “You are an evil mouthpiece for the left” or “MSNBC is the scum on the feet of the Devil” are strong enough to assert a moralist standpoint that changes political discussion into a moral one. Another important note is that several comments are explicitly stating their feelings of rage toward the media and accusing it of creating hostility or violence through its reporting. This is an illustration of the idea of causal attribution discussed by Entman (1993, p. 52), where the audience identifies a responsible agent in the moral structure of an event. Instead of treating the outlet as a neutral observer, users frame it as a direct contributor to the wrongdoing. The visuals provided by some commenters, especially the ones with Charlie Kirk and his family, serve as a counter-frame that tends to inspire compassion and innocence. As Fairclough (1995, p. 57) points, the visual and linguistic

choices help to signify moral value and emotional response. It is by these images and words that users detect the essential moral difference between the presumed honesty of Kirk and the supposed bias of the outlet. The persistent appearances of demands like “Shut them down” or “Pull their license” basically represent a viewpoint of MSNBC as having infringed moral and civic norms instead of just professional ones. This type of ideological discourse both empowers the in-group’s position and, on the other hand, represents the out-group as illegitimate or harmful (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 69). As a whole, this comment thread has continued the same framing tendencies seen in previous figures: causal reversal, moral outrage and collective blame and demonstrating how an online audience rotated a news post into a broader expression of moral and political hostility.

Overall, both MSNBC’s and Fox News’ online reception on the platform X, shows how the audience not only interprets but also reinterprets the layout of the initial framing and coverage. The message discussion lists turn a sole report into a felt space of emotional display and construction of political identities. This operation is reflective of the larger U.S. media polarization process, in which narratives and ideological boundaries are constantly redefined in the public reactions.

Discussion

Fox News’ initial reports about Charlie Kirk’s death employed a framing strategy that foregrounded morality, religion, and identity. The outlet’s posts described Kirk as a “champion for conservative youth” and a “devoted Christian” remembered for faith, dedication to family, and influence on a generation of young conservatives. Through Entman’s (1993) four framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation: Fox’s discourse constructs Kirk not as a political actor but as a moral symbol. The problem is framed as the loss of a virtuous and faith-driven leader; the cause implicitly lies in societal moral decline and left-wing hostility; the moral evaluation centers on the injustice of political violence; and the solution is unity within conservative moral values. CDA highlights how such framing functions as a discursive legitimation strategy, portraying conservatism not just as a political stance but as a moral identity. This reinforces existing in-group solidarity among right-wing audiences while deflecting responsibility for polarisation. In contrast, MSNBC's focus on the issue highlighted it as an act of responsibility on institutions, democratic ethics, and the need for moral reform. In all its news, editorials, and opinion pieces,

the station presented a unified civic-moral narrative whereby the assassination of Kirk was not only a personal loss but a metaphor of the failure of the political system.

The news report spotlighted the event with an undistorted neutral and factual tone and the mentioned institution of objectivity was followed. Rather than values and beliefs, verified information and procedural changes prevailed in the discussion. The ongoing investigation, which was still open, was responsible for the explanation of the cause without the use of any subjective view or emotional framing. Starting from Entman's (1993) position, this framing framework, with the least intervention, serves the function of problem description without moral assessment or treatment proposal, thus manifesting a detached approach typical of the order of corporate news reporting.

The editorial, on the other hand, explicitly defined the problem as a danger to democracy per se and reckoned causation to the decay of civic discourse and moral restraint in public life. CDA exposes the use of reformist and institutional language with terms like “democratic crisis,” “collective responsibility,” and “restoring faith in dialogue” by demonstrating the positioning of the media outlet as the moral guardian of civic order. In this case, the moral evaluation of the outlet raises the democratic norms and moderation which contrast sharply with the moral hierarchy centered on faith and conservative virtue of Fox.

At the same time, the opinion article applied this interpretive standard in a moral judgment of the social decline. The occurrence was depicted as a manifestation of a wider loss of morality and empathy in U.S. politics. The causal frame was structural: polarization, hate speech, and disinformation were mentioned as normalized conditions that allowed violence. Tone analysis shows a change in the report from neutrality to alarm in the editorial and emotional lamentation in the opinion article. Thus, NBC's inner genre differentiation mirrors its ideological stance: the forward-looking factual reporting builds institutional trust, while the commentary destroys that trust into moral urgency. MSNBC's discourse thus jointly portrays the moralization of the elite as per CDA - the translation of political discord into questions of democracy, virtue, and institutional integrity. While the framing of Fox news utilized moral solidarity within a conservative in-group, the framing of MSNBC placed morality in the hands of civic institutions and public responsibility. Both of them depend on moral discourse, although their narrative functions are different: Fox's is defensive and identity-based, while MSNBC's is reformist and system-oriented.

Table 3 – Summary Comparison Table for news coverages:

Framing Dimension	Fox News articles	MSNBC News Report	MSNBC Editorial	MSNBC Opinion
Problem Definition	Assault on faith, family and free speech (conservative values).	The event is defined as a tragic case of political violence.	Defined as a threat to democracy itself.	Defined as a symptom of civic and moral decline. Slow death of democratic norms.
Causal Interpretation	Liberal intolerance. Moral decay of society.	Official investigations, procedural uncertainty.	Moral decay and dehumanizing political language.	The primary reasons are considered to be structural political decay and the normalization of hate speech.
Moral Evaluation	Conservative views are higher in the hierarchy. Injustice of political violence.	Tone of empathy.	Civic virtues and democratic values should be defended.	Moralizes the incident as a collective failure of ethics in the whole politics of the U.S.
Treatment	Conservative unity, reclamation of free speech.	Have faith in institutions, corporate in mourning	The path towards national unity is through moderation.	Advocates for accountability and reforms.
Tone/ Affect	Urgent, sympathetic, moralising, ideological undertones.	Objective, moderate and corporate.	Reflective, calls for reforms and democratic values.	Emotional tones expressed over moral degradation.
Framing Outcome	Conservatism framed as under attack, free speech limited.	Moderate.	Democracy is used as the main theme. The narrative of left-liberal morality is reframed.	Links violence to the structural political decay.

As for social media, the responses under Fox News’ post exhibit intensified polarisation and ideological contestation. Many users reject Fox’s initial “passed away” phrasing, insisting that

“he was assassinated,” “murdered,” or “silenced.” This linguistic correction acts as a counter-frame, challenging mainstream media credibility and emphasising the narrative of victimhood. Fox News’ original framing: faith, family, and tragedy, is thus recontextualised within social media discourse as injustice, persecution, and vengeance.

Others explicitly accuse Democrats or the political left of moral culpability, statements like “Democrats have blood on their hands” and “the left is evil” reveal how users interpret the event through a binary moral lens. Here, CDA identifies discursive polarisation — the division of the social world into morally opposed groups (“the righteous right” versus “the corrupt left”), which sustains ideological conflict through emotionally charged, moralised language. Some users were calling out for the removal of left-leaning outlets like MSNBC, which was also prevalent on the MSNBC’s posts as well.

Conversely, the audience comments/replies under the MSNBC’s X post manifest a communicative blame reversal and a very high moral tension. To many users, it was not the assassination which the network is to be part of, but instead, the network itself is accused of fuelling the division and violence. Expressions like “You did this” and “This is your fault” illustrate causal reversal (Entman, 1993, p. 52), as a result, the media are reframed not as reporters but as moral perpetrators. The comment section was transformed from the platform for information-sharing to that of moral adjudication, thus embedding affective polarisation (Iyengar, Sood & Lelkes, 2019, p. 133) accomplished through emotional outrage, contempt, and demands for punishment. Users are in the habit of personalizing their interventions especially by naming journalists and invoking religious or moral language, which resonates with Fairclough’s (1995, p. 57) view that institutional critique becomes individualised in ideological discourse. Throughout the thread, the distinction “you” and “we” in pronoun usage manifested a clear in-group/out-group opposition, consequently reinforcing collective identity mobilization (van Dijk, 1998, p. 69; Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 16). Thus, MSNBC’s post turned a discourse battlefield where audiences converted journalistic coverage into a moral account of guilt, betrayal, and outrage. Thereby changing the neutral media communication into an emotionally charged statement of political grievance.

Table 4 - Summary Comparison Table for X replies:

Analytical Category (based on Entman’s framing & CDA)	Fox News Replies	MSNBC Replies
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Problem Definition	Assassination is seen as a collective tragedy and a moral violation against conservatives, which is mentioned as evidence of societal decline and political intolerance.	The assassination seen through the lens of anger toward the media itself. MSNBC is depicted as part of the more general moral and political problem.
Causal Attribution	Leftists, liberals, and Democrats form the majority of people to whom the blame is directed. Causality is defined in the context of a story where conservatives feel victimized.	MSNBC is held responsible for the promotion of hatred or the provision of violence through one-sided reporting.
Moral Evaluation	The deceased Charlie Kirk pictured as a virtuous person and a family man as well as the embodiment of faith and patriotism. The assassination was perceived as a moral defeat for freedom of speech and conservative values.	The media was framed as being corrupt, dishonest, or immoral. The comments use evaluative language which sets MSNBC as guilty of the moral crime.
Treatment Recommendation	Calls for unity, prayer, and faith-based healing. Some comments advocate “justice through God.” Calls for holding the left accountable.	Punishments or censorship of MSNBC and other requests to “shut down” or “boycott” the network as a corrective action.
Discursive Strategies (CDA perspective)	The inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our" create a conservative in-group identity. The predominance of religious language and the use of moral order as a tool for persuasion are observable.	Use of dehumanizing and accusatory phrases to outcast MSNBC.
Framing Outcome	The strengthening of the conservative community and moral unity. Distrust in the mainstream media.	Intensification of distrust and antagonism toward liberal institutions.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY PAPER

The objective of this research was to investigate the process of political polarisation being generated through the media framing primarily in the news items covering the assassination of Charlie Kirk. As for the study, it was achieved by the comparative methodological approach between Fox News and MSNBC plus the audience analyses conducted on X. The findings of the research revealed that the same incident can be narrated in two opposite ways through different styles of language and the tone used. The dominant mode of framing utilised by Fox News was the use of moral and religious metaphors; in this way, they presented Kirk as a historical figure who dies for the defense of conservative principles and in addition to that, he is the victim of the cultural stake. At the same time, the way the MSNBC reported it was different as they revealed it in terms of civic and democratic discourse which was related to the nation being divided, ruined institutions, and the moral duty of the people.

The disparity of their results makes it obvious that mainstream media do not only deliver news about political violence but also, they do it within different moral frames. Reactions from the audience escalated into extreme divisions. The comments on the social media posted below the articles by both channels transformed the journalistic information into a moral debate, which was hitting so hard with an outsider spirit of blame, rage, and emotional polarisation.

The moral framing of MSNBC was crafted as a victim, whereas the moral characterization of Fox News was turned into a beneficiary one - hence, the digital audiences are shown to be the active agents in the reconfiguration of the media messages to fit the partisan worldview. In general, the study substantiates that their framing is not a neutral act of storytelling but rather a communicative channel that determines how citizens, in particular, attribute blame, outline morality, and establish partisan identities, therefore sustaining and reinforcing polarisation.

SUMMARY

This study investigated how political polarisation is produced through media framing in the coverage of the assassination of Charlie Kirk. Using Entman's four point model with discourse analysis and tone analysis main frames were identified, and a critical assessment of each article and social media post was made. Tone analysis was used to identify the emotional tones of language and messages. Using a comparative analysis of Fox News and MSNBC, along with audience discourse on X (formerly Twitter), the research revealed that the same event can be framed in fundamentally opposing ways depending on the outlet's ideological orientation and linguistic style.

The study found strong evidence of political polarisation in how the event was framed by U.S. media outlets. Fox News and MSNBC narrated the same incident through opposing moral and ideological lenses, especially Fox News, reinforcing partisan divides rather than presenting a neutral account, even if seemingly neutral. As for Fox News, the following frames were identified: Charlie Kirk was given a heroic and martyr like status, who died because of his conservative values. The framing emphasised cultural conflict and moral righteousness. MSNBC on the other hand, used a civic and democratic frame, focusing on themes of national division, institutional decay and collective moral responsibility. The social media discourse — particularly on X, was transforming the frames mainstream media provided into moralised, emotionally charged debates. Users acted as active interpreters, reshaping journalistic messages to fit partisan worldviews. This process intensified blame, rage and moral polarisation, showing how digital audiences amplify and radicalise existing media frames.

Overall, the study concludes that media framing is not a neutral act of storytelling. It serves as a communicative mechanism through which citizens assign blame, construct moral meaning and reinforce partisan identities — thereby sustaining and deepening political polarisation in contemporary American discourse.

The future investigations can take the research further by including the transnational approach or context and longitudinal datasets to see how the divisive discourse evolves through time.

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