How to Rate Language

The first factor we rate for bias is Language because it is the easiest to rate. Even if you do not have much knowledge about the political topic or the people discussed in the article, you can start to get a good sense of bias by looking at language.

There are two types of politically biased language we are looking for:
1) Opponent Characterization; and
2) Political Terminology

1. Opponent Characterization

These types of biased words refer to adjectives used for ad hominem (personal) attacks on politicians. For example, if an article applies the words "ugly" or "stupid" to politicians, those words are "most extreme" biased words. (As an aside, such words also correlate with low reliability on the vertical axis because they are unnecessarily mean, and therefore fall into the category of "unfair persuasion").

You should be able to determine whether adjectives, as applied to politicians, are fair and neutral or whether they indicate bias. Typically, the most neutral articles will refrain from using ANY adjectives to describe a politician, because even objectively provable and benign adjectives typically provide some small amount of judgment. For example, saying "the *visibly tired* candidate," or "the *excited* candidate" provides a bit of judgment, and therefore bias.

Use *your* best judgment to determine the degree of bias that the words provide. Words like "secretive" or "cunning" would typically fall into the "skews left/right" categories; words like "lazy" or "vindictive" would fall into the "hyper-partisan" categories, and more extreme words than that would fall into the "most extreme" categories. Use your context clues and personal values to guide your decisions.

2. Political Terminology

There are three main types or categories of terminology we are looking for in articles. These types of words do require some background political knowledge of what they mean, so if you are unfamiliar with these terms, they are good ones to discuss in class.

The first category of biased words refers to the preferred terminology about a political position or political topic by one side or the other. These include characterizations of positions like being for/against abortion as "pro-life" or "pro-choice," or referring to certain immigrants as "illegal aliens" or "undocumented immigrants."

The second category of words includes specific insults and pejorative terms that have inherent contemporary political connotations. Examples include "deplorables," "snowflakes," "leftists," and "the mainstream media."

The third category of words—bogeymen—refers to people or groups that may or may not exist, but whose names are invoked by politicians or media figures to incite fear, anger, or loathing among their constituents or audience. These may be real people or groups that have committed

bad acts, or acts perceived as bad by their political opponents. However, they evolve into "bogeymen" terms when they become used as abstractions of these acts, thereby transforming into a sort of common enemy. Examples include "the Muslim Brotherhood," "the 1%," "the Deep State," and "Big Pharma."

Look for the presence of these words, and then use what you know about them to determine whether one side or another tends to use them and how extreme they are. Then, make your rating on whether the language in the article is neutral, skews, hyper-partisan, or most extreme.

Again, if you are not sure what a political term means, it is a good topic to discuss in class.