

# Final Report CPDI 2024/25

## Group Name

Italo - Americani

## Title of Project

“Shattering Glass Ceilings? The Media’s Role in Shaping Public Perceptions of Women Candidates”.

A Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage on Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris.

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## Outline

This project, titled “*Shattering Glass Ceilings? The Media’s Role in Shaping Public Perceptions of Women Candidates*”. *A Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage on Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris*, investigates how the media have portrayed and represented two historic *female political figures* during their respective presidential campaigns.

*Hillary Clinton*, the first woman to secure a major American political party’s presidential nomination in 2016, and *Kamala Harris*, the first Black woman of Asian descent to run for U.S. president in 2024, faced unprecedented levels of public scrutiny that both reflected and reinforced existing biases in society. These candidacies marked milestones in U.S. political history, challenging traditional norms of leadership while triggering critical discussions on gender, race, and representation. Their significance also lies in revealing the persistent barriers women face in attaining political power, amplified by the media’s role in shaping public perceptions and, by extension, voter behavior.

The media play a pivotal role in shaping how political candidates are perceived, often acting as both a mirror and a magnifier of societal attitudes. For female politicians, this lens is frequently distorted by gendered mediation, a framework through which gender becomes the dominant lens for evaluating women’s capabilities, leadership styles, and public personas. Research has consistently

demonstrated that women in politics face heightened scrutiny based on their appearance, demeanor, and emotional expression, rather than their qualifications or policy positions (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233-257). Clinton's 2016 campaign, for instance, highlighted these challenges as she was often labeled “*untrustworthy*” or “*unlikable*”, terms rooted in deep-seated stereotypes that cast ambitious women as threatening or insincere. Harris’s campaign, on the other hand, not only reflected similar gendered critiques but also revealed the compounded challenges of racialized and intersectional biases. Her identity as a Black and South Asian woman placed her at the crossroads of multiple forms of marginalization, offering a unique perspective on the media’s role in perpetuating or dismantling systemic inequalities.

Central to this analysis is the exploration of intersectionality, a framework introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which examines how overlapping systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, create unique experiences of discrimination. Harris’s campaign provides a critical case study for examining these dynamics, as her media coverage often reflected misogynoir, a specific form of prejudice targeting Black women. Studies on intersectionality in political media representation have revealed that women of color are frequently trivialized, with their achievements overshadowed by narratives questioning their authenticity or competence. While Clinton’s campaign was shaped by broader struggles to break into a male-dominated political arena, Harris’s candidacy also highlighted how multiple aspects of identity can influence public perceptions of women’s leadership capabilities.

This study adopts a comparative approach, analyzing media narratives from articles published in October 2016 and October 2024, the critical months leading up to each respective election. By focusing on this pre-election period, the research captures a high-stakes moment when media coverage significantly influences public opinion and voter behavior. Articles were selected based on their visibility, level of public engagement, interactions, and relevance to the political context, ensuring a representative and impactful dataset. This methodology allows for the identification of recurring patterns in how female political candidates are portrayed, with specific attention to biases such as framing their leadership styles, emphasizing their emotionality, or scrutinizing their appearance over their qualifications.

The literature on women in political media representation underscores the systemic nature of these biases. Research has shown that female politicians are often underrepresented in news media, both in terms of visibility and substantive coverage. Even when women are covered, the focus frequently shifts away from their policies or professional achievements to their appearance, family roles, or emotional expression (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233-257). This tendency reflects and reinforces the perception that politics remains a male-dominated arena, creating barriers for women seeking leadership positions. Moreover, global studies have revealed that women’s underrepresentation in media coverage mirrors their underrepresentation in political institutions, creating a feedback loop that perpetuates systemic inequities in governance (Galy-Badenas, 2020).

An important dimension of this project is its examination of political marketing strategies used by female candidates to navigate these challenges. Political marketing is a key tool for shaping voter perceptions, but it is constrained by societal expectations that demand women balance competence and relatability, traits often perceived as mutually exclusive. For example, Clinton’s campaign sought to emphasize her extensive experience and qualifications but struggled to counteract the narrative that she was “*cold*” or “*unapproachable*”. Similarly, Harris faced criticism for her laughter and informal demeanor, which were interpreted as signs of insincerity or a lack of seriousness. These examples highlight the tension between societal norms and the realities of political communication, as well as the media’s role in amplifying these dynamics (Massuchin *et al.*, 2020).

Globally, the relationship between media representation and political participation is deeply intertwined. Research comparing women's representation in news media and political institutions has revealed consistent patterns of trivialization, sexualization, and commodification, regardless of cultural or political context. These portrayals not only reflect existing biases but also shape public perceptions of women's legitimacy as leaders, influencing their ability to gain electoral support. For minority women, this challenge is compounded by the double barrier of racism and sexism, which frames them as less capable or less electable than their male or White female counterparts (Galy-Badenas, 2020). The systemic nature of these issues underscores the need for a comprehensive framework that addresses both gendered and racialized dimensions of media bias.

Another critical contribution of this project lies in its engagement with broader democratic principles. The media, as a key institution in public discourse, have a profound responsibility to promote equitable and inclusive narratives. However, research suggests that biased media coverage not only undermines women's political representation but also limits the diversity of perspectives available to the public. This creates a democratic deficit, where certain voices and experiences are marginalized, distorting the public's understanding of political leadership and governance (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233-257). Addressing these challenges requires a shift toward journalistic practices that prioritize fairness, accuracy, and respect, ensuring that all candidates are evaluated based on their qualifications rather than their gender or ethnicity.

By integrating insights from intersectionality, gendered mediation, and political marketing, this project provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the systemic barriers faced by female politicians. It also highlights the transformative potential of media as an agent of social change, capable of challenging entrenched stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive public sphere. Through its comparative analysis of Clinton and Harris's campaigns, this research not only sheds light on the evolving dynamics of media representation but also advocates for practices that reflect the diversity and complexity of modern society. Ultimately, the findings underscore the importance of creating a media landscape that supports equity, inclusion, and democratic engagement, ensuring that all candidates have an equal opportunity to shape the political future.

## **Goals and Target**

### **Goals**

The primary objective of this project is to analyze and compare the media coverage of Hillary Clinton's 2016 and Kamala Harris's 2024 presidential campaigns, focusing on the presence of gender and racial stereotypes. By examining the narratives constructed around these two historic campaigns, the research seeks to uncover how stereotypes and prejudices are embedded in media representations and how these portrayals shape public perceptions of female leaders. Central to the analysis is the question of whether the representation of women in politics has evolved over time, becoming less stereotypical and more equitable, and what this reveals about societal progress.

A core element of the project is the exploration of intersectionality, particularly how overlapping aspects of identity, such as gender, race, and ethnicity, affect media narratives. While Clinton's campaign faced challenges rooted in entrenched gender biases, Harris's candidacy adds complexity by introducing dimensions of racial and ethnic identity. This dual focus provides a unique lens to analyze how intersectional identities amplify or diversify public perceptions and the obstacles faced by women in politics.

Another goal is to foster critical reflection on the mechanisms through which media perpetuate or challenge stereotypes. By analyzing patterns of bias, such as the framing of leadership styles, the use of gendered language, and the emphasis on personal traits over qualifications, the study emphasizes the importance of media practices in shaping societal norms. This reflection also highlights the role of the media as both a mirror and a driver of cultural attitudes, making it a pivotal arena for fostering equity in representation.

Finally, the project aims to promote awareness and equity in media representation, advocating for narratives that focus on professionalism, qualifications, and leadership rather than reductive aspects of identity. By identifying areas where progress has been made and where challenges persist, the study provides actionable insights for improving media practices and fostering a more inclusive public discourse.

## Target

The target audience for this project is communication students and future journalists, as these groups will play a critical role in shaping future narratives in the media. However, their distinct roles and responsibilities require tailored approaches to how the findings of this research are communicated and applied.

For *communication students*, this project serves as a theoretical and practical framework for understanding how stereotypes and biases are embedded in media narratives. As aspiring media professionals, they must recognize the subtle mechanisms through which gendered and racialized portrayals are constructed and perpetuated. This research equips them with the tools to critically analyze existing media practices and develop a more nuanced perspective on the societal impact of these representations.

By engaging with the findings of this study, communication students are encouraged to reflect on their future roles as creators and disseminators of public messages. They are not only informed about the biases present in media coverage but are also guided toward solutions that foster inclusivity and fairness in storytelling. This process bridges the gap between academic knowledge and its practical application, preparing students to enter the professional world with a heightened sense of ethical responsibility.

For *future journalists*, this project emphasizes the practical application of ethical reporting standards in crafting narratives that prioritize accuracy, fairness, and respect. Aspiring journalists have a unique responsibility to shape public discourse through their reporting, making their role pivotal in addressing and challenging biased portrayals of underrepresented groups, including women in politics.

The findings of this study serve as a guide for identifying and countering stereotypes in news coverage, whether through the use of inclusive language, balanced sourcing, or equitable framing of leadership traits. By applying these principles, future journalists can contribute to reshaping the media landscape to be more reflective of societal diversity. This research not only highlights the challenges they may face but also provides strategies for navigating the complex dynamics of modern journalism with integrity and accountability.

Both communication students and journalists are encouraged to view themselves as *agents of change* within the media ecosystem. By raising awareness of the biases inherent in media practices, this project underscores the importance of fostering a deeper understanding of the media's role in shaping public perceptions. It also emphasizes the shared responsibility of communicators to challenge discriminatory narratives and actively promote equity in their work.

Moreover, the findings of this research extend beyond individual practices to influence the broader culture of media organizations. By advocating for inclusive and balanced storytelling, the study inspires both aspiring professionals and established institutions to adopt practices that reflect the complexity and diversity of the modern world. In doing so, it calls for a shift toward narratives that respect and represent all individuals fairly, fostering a healthier and more democratic public discourse.

## Methodology

The methodology involves data collection through a comparative analysis of articles published in major American political newspapers, which are:

- *The New York Times*
- *NPR* (National Public Radio)
- *Fox News Channel*
- *Breitbart News Channel*
- *Associated Press*

These outlets were chosen as they represent a range of editorial perspectives, going from a liberal political orientation, found in *The New York Times* and *NPR*, moving then to a more conservative approach, identified in *Fox News Channel* and *Breitbart News Channel*, to conclude with *Associated Press* and a central political orientation.

It has been searched for specific articles on the outlets' online databases referring to Hillary Clinton's candidacy in 2016 and Kamala Harris's candidacy in 2024.

The articles considered were selected on the basis of a specific time window, corresponding in both cases of 2016 and 2024, to one month before the elections, more precisely from October 1<sup>st</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup>.

Other important aspects taken into account for the selection of the articles were their visibility, level of public engagement and relevance to the political context. In this way, an attempt was made not only to provide a focused overview of media coverage in the critical pre-election period, but also to better understand the recurring patterns in how the media covers female political candidates, with particular attention to the influence of gender and racial dynamics.

After choosing the articles that would be used in the research, these were analysed individually through the [Media Monitoring Tool](#). Precisely, after filling in the Google Form on the basis of the specificities of each article and receiving a summary of the results via an Excel file, in order to interpret the data and understand if each article was biased or not, a point system was created. For each of the questions within the Media Monitoring Tool referring to reflection and analysis on the presence or absence of biases in the text of the article (viewable just below), one point was assigned, according to the following scheme:

- 0 pt: no stereotypes
- 0.5 pt: few stereotypes
- 1 pt: many stereotypes

Specifically, as the final focus was to understand whether or not the texts contained biases, prejudice or gender-based norms, the points assigned took into account the following themes:

- *Gender Stereotypes*: allocation of specific characteristics attributed to women, such as sweetness, emotionality, or, conversely, being perceived as too ambitious or aggressive

- *Descriptions of Physical Appearance*: references to their way of dressing or their beauty
- *Explicit or Implicit Sexualization*: comments that sexualize or diminish the professional image of the candidates
- *Race and Religion*: references to race and religion and how they influence their representation
- *Imagery*: angle from which the picture was taken and the location of the woman politician in the photograph

Below, as mentioned earlier, it is possible to see more in details the questions taken into consideration, along with their unique point criteria:

*Question 16: How does the article represent the woman politician?*

- Gender-stereotypical: 1 pt
- Gender-blind: 0.5 pt
- Gender-aware: 0 pt
- Gender-neutral: 0 pt.

*Question 17: Does the news story demonstrate gender balance in the sources who are consulted?*

- Only men are interviewed/quoted: 1 pt
- Only women are interviewed/quoted: 0.5 pt
- There are similar numbers of women and men interviewed/quoted: 0 pt
- No one is directly quoted: 0 pt

*Question 21: Where is the woman politician looking?*

- Down: 1 pt
- Directly at the camera/audience: 0 pt
- To the left: 0 pt
- To the right: 0 pt
- In the distance: 0 pt
- There is more than one women politician: 0 pt

*Question 22: Is there a contrast/contradiction between the headline and the photo accompanying the story? (for example: Minister X launched a specific policy, but the picture is of her at home petting her dog)*

- Yes: 1 pt
- No: 0 pt

*Question 23: From which angle is the image taken?*

- High angle (from above): 1 pt
- Neutral angle: 0 pt
- Low angle (from below): 0 pt

*Question 24: Where is the woman politician located?*

- Private space (eg home): 1 pt
- Public space: 0 pt
- Own office: 0 pt
- Government building/Parliament: 0 pt

*Question 25: If the news story is written in a language which is gender-marked, is the female form used (for example, in Italian: "La Ministra" instead of "Il Ministro"; "La presidente" instead of "Il presidente"; in English, is the female pronoun - "she" - used)?*

- Yes, always: 1 pt
- Sometimes (both the female and male forms are used): 0.5 pt
- Not applicable (The language in which the news story is written is not gender-marked e.g. Finnish, Hungarian; 0 pt
- No, never: 0 pt

*Question 26: Are there elements of sexist language in the news story? (for example, terms that signal physical appearance or family status, for example “the attractive minister”, “Mrs Clinton”)*

- Yes: 1 pt
- No: 0 pt

*Question 27: Are any of the following (stereotypical) elements present in the news story?*

- The woman politician is described in relation to a man (wife, partner, sister, daughter, etc.): 1 pt
- References to the woman politician's family and/or marital status: 1 pt
- The woman politician is presented as a sex object: 1 pt
- References to the way the woman politician is dressed : 1 pt
- Assumptions are made about 'appropriate' roles for women and men (e.g. a successful politician who is 'nevertheless a good wife'): 1 pt
- Sex-based characteristics are perpetuated (for example, women are emotionally fragile or natural carers): 1 pt
- The woman politician's leadership style is described as feminine: 1 pt
- The woman politician's leadership style is framed as masculine: 1 pt
- The story highlights the woman politician's (non-political) achievements: 0.5 pt
- None of these are present in the news story: 0 pt

*Question 28: Are any of the following elements present in the news story? (intersectional aspects)*

- If the politician belongs to an ethnic minority, negative racial stereotypes are present in the way the woman politician is represented: 1 pt
- There are ageist stereotypes present in the way the woman politician is represented (for example, "despite her young age..."; "at the age of 67, she is still working as an MP"): 1 pt
- Disability is framed as an obstacle the woman politician has had to overcome: 1 pt
- There are ableist stereotypes in the way the woman politician is represented: 1 pt
- If the politician belongs to a religious minority, this is mentioned in a negative/stereotyped way: 1 pt
- If the politician belongs to an ethnic minority, this is explicitly mentioned in a positive or neutral manner: 0 pt
- If the politician belongs to the LGBTIQ+ community, this is mentioned in a positive or neutral way: 0 pt
- If the politician belongs to the LGBTIQ+ community, this is mentioned in a negative way: 1 pt
- The politician's age is explicitly mentioned in a positive or neutral way: 0 pt
- If the politician self-identifies as a disabled person, this is mentioned in a positive or neutral way: 0 pt
- If the politician belongs to a religious minority, this is mentioned in a positive or neutral way: 0 pt
- None of the above: 0 pt

*Question 29: If the story focuses on violence against, or harassment of, women/women politicians, check any of the following which apply:*

- The story justifies male violence (blaming the victim): 1 pt

- The story focuses on the perpetrator/s and not the victim/survivor: 0.5 pt
- The coverage is neutral: 0 pt
- The woman tells her own story: 0 pt
- Women are presented as victims rather than survivors: 0 pt
- The story is not about violence against women/women politicians: 0 pt

*Question 30: If you apply the rule of reversibility (change the subject of the news story from a woman to a man), does the story still work?*

- No: 1 pt
- Yes: 0 pt

*Question 31: If you have identified gender stereotypes in the story, how would you describe them?*

- A range of different stereotypes: 1 pt
- Blatant stereotypes (for example, the woman politician is presented as a sex object): 1 pt
- Subtle stereotypes (for example, her leadership style is framed as "masculine" because she has a more inflexible, less dialogical approach to politics): 0.5 pt
- The story challenges gender stereotypes: 0 pt
- There are no gender stereotypes in the story: 0 pt

*Question 32: Do you consider that the news story is an example of good practice in gender-sensitive political reporting?*

- No: 1 pt
- Yes: 0 pt

*Question 33: Do you consider that the news story is an example of poor practice in gender-sensitive political reporting?*

- Yes: 1 pt
- No: 0 pt

After assigning the answers provided for each question a score, based on the scheme presented earlier, a final count was made for each of the articles analysed. The sum obtained was transcribed in a specially added column within the Excel file of the Media Monitoring Tool in order to allow an immediate comparison between the various media outputs.

In the Table 1. below, the scoring criteria used to define whether an article could be defined as biased or not can be identified.

Not biased/Very low biased article	Medium biased article	Very biased article
0 - 3 points	3.5 - 6 points	6.5 >

Table 1.

As can be seen, articles with final scores between 0 and 3 points were defined as containing no or little bias, articles with scores between 3.5 and 6 medium bias, and articles with scores above 6.5 were identified as highly bias-laden.

The following categorisation and scoring was very useful for the data analysis phase, as it made it possible to identify which articles had more or less bias and stereotyping, thus facilitating an in-depth understanding of trends in the analysed content and enabling a critical assessment of the factors influencing representation in the media.



## Data Analysis

A main takeaway from the data is that most of the articles with no bias or little bias are from the October 2024 time period related to Kamala Harris's election campaign, while the medium biased articles are all related to Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign. Articles that were categorized as extremely biased come from both the 2016 and 2024 time periods relating to the respective candidate during that time.

In addition, when comparing the final point calculations with the corresponding news publication, it has been found that the most biased articles were from *Breitbart News Channel* and *Fox News Channel*, both Right Wing news media outlets. It should also be noted that two of the top three most biased articles were written by women.

Interestingly, race, ethnicity, age, and social capital were not leading factors in the bias of the collected articles. It was predicted that articles analyzed from the period of Kamala Harris's campaign would contain many mentions of racial bias as Harris was the first nonwhite woman to run for the White House.

In the 15 articles reviewed from Harris's candidacy, two were marked with "*If the politician belongs to an ethnic minority, this is explicitly mentioned in a positive or neutral manner*" and two were marked with "*If the politician belongs to an ethnic minority, negative racial stereotypes are present in the way the woman politician is represented*"; the remaining articles were not labelled with racial or ethnic remarks being present.

Focusing on age, only one article included negative and ageist remarks.

In general the strongest bias found in the articles were gender-based stereotypes. This result reinforced the concept that women in politics face more scrutiny than men regarding their competence, communication style, and public appearances. Several articles contained provocative and emotionally charged language with references to the personality and behaviours of the women candidates, rather than their political actions or role as public figures. This aids in the creation of narratives built to delegitimize candidacies by emphasizing alleged personal flaws, rather than providing an objective analysis of the policies or qualifications.

Below we present some key examples collected through the Media Monitoring Tool:

- Kamala Harris was referred to as "*nasty and gloomy*", "*illiterate*" and the "*dumbest candidate*". There are also several references to her health status
- Hillary Clinton has also been referred to as "*nasty*" and "*too funny*" as she was labeled as making "*too many jokes*". Clinton was also sexualized and referred to as "*wife of*" rather than by her name
- Both in 2016 and 2024, Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris were subject to gender-specific criticism. They have been labeled as "*stupid*" and suggested by the media to be physically unfit to assume the responsibilities of leading the United States, based solely on their gender

It is important to emphasise that the interpretation of the data showed that there was no real difference between 2016 and 2024 in terms of how the two female candidates were represented in the media. In both cases, Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris were, in a more or less explicit way, portrayed as women not capable of running for the White House. Whether as a Black woman or a White woman with prior experience in the White House as a First Lady, their gender was the primary focus. Any trivial and irrelevant details were emphasized with the intention, if possible, of undermining their candidacies and portraying them as inferior to their male counterparts.

As previously stated, ethnicity, age and social capital are not central aspects in the candidate's description, both for 2016 and 2024, however, gender and being a woman is a focal point. As in fact

it was possible to observe from the analysed data, the media leverages on this aspect, shaping the public perception of women in leadership roles in comparison to men and their ability to govern. The provocative and emotionally charged language frequently used contributes to reinforce negative stereotypes about female politicians, particularly in terms of competence and intelligence. The references to the personality and personal behaviour of women candidates, rather than their political actions or role as public figures, creates narrations built to delegitimize the candidacy by emphasizing alleged personal flaws, rather than providing an objective analysis of the policies or qualifications, portraying women politicians alongside entertainment and pop culture to sensationalize news coverage.

In light of these considerations, it becomes evident that the media creates narrations about female figures running for the White House that didn't change or evolved significantly over time. Similar to what happened to Hillary Clinton in 2016, Kamala Harris a few months ago was subjected to sexualized portrayals, being unfairly characterized as lacking intelligence and indirectly questioned about her physical ability to cope with the exigencies of leading a nation like the United States.

On a more positive note, the situation did not worsen in some respects; Kamala Harris was not criticized for her race, and no evidence of racism was found in the articles we analyzed.

To conclude, seventy percent of the articles were marked as "yes" on the Media Monitoring Tool when asked in Question 34: *"Is this news story interesting for further qualitative analysis?"*. Content included in these articles that was not measured directly by the Media Monitoring Tool includes: intersectionality in political reporting, how women politicians face different expectations compared to their male counterparts, and the media's role in shaping public expectations of female politicians. These topics can be included in various qualitative and comparative analyses to further discover frames of gendered expectations and perceptions.

## Media Theories

The results of the project were contextualized through a careful analysis of media theories focusing on female politicians and the role of media in shaping public opinion of female politicians. Thorough background research allowed the researchers to contextualize their research questions, identify a gap in research that could be addressed and identify areas of further research.

Many politicians don't interact with voters directly, therefore the public's first impressions of politicians are often shaped by the media (Wagner *et al.*, 2018). There is strong evidence that the representations of gender stereotypes and construction of images of women leaders influence voters' evaluations (Massuchin *et al.*, 2020). For political marketers, the media is their preferred channel for image construction of female candidates, however the media's frequent use of stereotypes can impede citizens in making informed choices about evaluating candidates (Massuchin *et al.*, 2020).

The problem of women represented stereotypically by the media is aggregated by the fact that women are under-represented in news as sources and subjects including female politicians who hold great newsworthiness (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233–257). Ross discussed how female politicians are under-reported and when included in news discourse are often trivialized, sexualised or commodified, their sex being the most newsworthy thing about them.

Biased media treatment received by female politicians is often called gendered mediation (Galy-Badenas, 2020). Ross cited a study highlighting the different forms of biases female politicians are subjected to by the media, political bias, when women are too junior to be of interest to the media, male bias, male journalists prefer speaking to male politicians. Political and male bias

combine to create a gender bias that proscribes women's visibility (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233–257). In a 2013 study of Belgian television news the researcher argued that gender bias is not an illusion but an inconvenient truth citing the fact that women are less visible in the media than men regardless of their seniority and despite their relevance to a story (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233–257).

Another example of gender bias is when women politicians are allowed media airtime to participate in a TV panel discussion, for example, however despite being physically present they are often passed over in favor of male colleagues or talked over by male panelists (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233–257). In simpler words, it's not enough to include a female voice but the voice must be heard.

Galy-Badenas discussed the “double barrier” that exists for individuals that are both minorities and women, highlighting that minority female politicians receive less media coverage and are more racialized than male and white female political colleagues. (Galy-Badenas, 2020). A hierarchy of discrimination is also at play, minority women politicians are treated differently from minority men and white peers, they also receive different treatment between minority groups. Unequal political coverage was found to be reflected in voters' support towards minority congresswomen (Galy-Badenas, 2020).

## Conclusion

The researchers analyzed and compared the media coverage of Hillary Clinton's 2016 and Kamala Harris's 2024 presidential campaigns, focusing on the presence of gender and racial stereotypes. The researchers analyzed articles published in *The New York Times*, *NPR* (National Public Radio), *Fox News Channel*, *Breitbart News Channel*, and *Associated Press* in October 2016 covering Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and in October 2024 covering Kamala Harris's campaign. The researchers utilized the Media Monitoring Tool to analyze said articles and then created a unique point system to assign a point value for each article ranging from not biased/very low biased article, medium biased article and very biased article.

The strongest bias identified in the articles were gender-based stereotypes. The result was not surprising as previous research had found strong evidence of gender based discrimination and female political candidates in the media. Multiple articles included provocative and emotionally charged language referring to the behavior and personalities of the female candidates rather than their political agendas. Only 2 of the 15 articles reviewed about Kamala Harris contained a negative racial stereotype in the way she was represented. Only one article contained a negative and ageist remark about a female candidate, focused on Hillary Clinton and published on *Breitbart*.

As emerged from the analysis, the media portrayal of female political candidates, particularly Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Kamala Harris in 2024, showed a persistent pattern of gender-based biases and a lack of improvement in the representation of women politicians.

Despite the existence of differences in ethnicity or background, both were depicted as unsuitable for leadership primarily because they were women. Media narratives often focused on personal characteristics or health, rather than their qualifications, reinforcing stereotypes about women's competence and physical ability to lead. The provocative and emotionally charged language used in coverage contributed to delegitimizing their candidacies. However, it is worth noting that compared to past instances, the media coverage of Kamala Harris did not explicitly resort to racist narratives, marking a slight improvement in how female politicians are portrayed. Nonetheless, the broader trend of framing women in leadership roles as inferior to their male counterparts remains largely unchanged.

After analyzing the results of the media analysis and relevant background research on female politicians' media representation, the researchers identified actionable ideas for communication students and future journalists to implement in their professional roles in order to create a more equitable media representation of female candidates in the future. These insights were inspired by the results of the research and strengthened by media analysis.

For both communication students and future journalists, it is critical that when discussing female politicians, professionals should be conscious of the language and tone of the copy and story topic (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233-257). Journalists should be conscious of the words they use to describe politicians, as many words describing politicians replicate gender-normative behaviors such as calling men assertive and for the same behavior women aggressive. "The game frame" also known as horse-race coverage, is common with election reporting, this use of masculine language when reporting on politics strengthens the tie between masculinity and political power (Wagner *et al.*, 2018).

Language is also crucial when reporting on female minority politicians. The media's use of hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity and racism as norms reinforces to the public that the ideal political leader is a white heterosexual man (Galy-Badenas, 2020). Media gendering of leadership abilities is a major cause of women not being considered competent politicians (Wagner *et al.*, 2018).

It's not enough for male and female politicians to be represented equally. But the tone, language and focus also need to be equal. Both politicians should be represented for their politics. Media representation of women politicians negatively impacts the likelihood women consider a career in politics, which is problematic for a democratic society (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233-257). There is also strong evidence that gendered stereotypical representation of female candidates influences voters' evaluations (Massuchin *et al.*, 2020)

Additionally, more female journalists and women in high levels of media organization can broaden the reporting perspective and help reduce male bias (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233-257). This includes assigning female journalists "hard news" beats including political topics. Most important is creating an awareness of gender (in)equality amongst the next generation of journalists, and amongst journalists of all generations and sexes an ideological belief in diversity and equity (Ross *et al.*, 2020, pp. 233-257).

Journalists and communicators have a responsibility to uphold journalistic principles and promote a democratic society. It is crucial that professionals understand the powerful impact their reporting can have in shaping public perception of female politicians and consequently the results of the election. Professionals and media outlets should seek to quote a diverse range of sources, employ a diverse staff, and avoid using discriminatory or gendered language when referring to candidates.

Further research could be conducted on the female candidates social media presence and their representation on social media. A more longitudinal study could be conducted comparing the results of this analysis against a future female presidential candidate should the opportunity arise. Additionally, as both Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris campaigned for president against Donald Trump, an analysis could be conducted regarding Trump's discourse surrounding his opponents and how his word choice affected voters' perceptions of the candidates.

## Challenges and Limits

Most American newspapers have a declared political bias, which could significantly influence the portrayal of Clinton and Harris. This factor leads us to carefully consider the differences between left-leaning and right-leaning outlets and how each may contribute to gender or racial biases.

As for the limitations, some biases may stem from cultural and historical factors that are not solely related to the candidates' gender or ethnicity. For example, Hillary Clinton represents an established political figure in the American landscape, while Kamala Harris has gained prominence more recently. Moreover, the political context has changed significantly from 2016 to 2024. The social and political issues that characterize these two periods are different, as is the media landscape, which has evolved rapidly. This makes direct comparison complex and requires us to also consider the historical and cultural context in which the candidates conducted their presidential campaigns. Additionally, we analyzed only a limited sample of articles—30 in total—focusing on those published during the month preceding the elections. This restricted timeframe and dataset may not fully capture the broader trends or nuanced shifts in media coverage.

## Kahoot

To complement our main project, we created an interactive activity using the articles analyzed during our research. This activity, a Kahoot quiz, was designed to encourage participants to critically assess biases in media coverage of women politicians, focusing on Kamala Harris and Hillary Clinton.

The quiz incorporates key concepts from our project, including the use of biased language, and framing techniques. To deepen the participants' understanding, we integrated educational videos from the *AGEMI Platform*. These videos provide context and evidence to challenge or validate perceptions, making the quiz not only engaging but also highly informative.

The purpose of the Kahoot quiz is to educate future journalists, journalism students, and anyone interested in media representation about how stereotypes and biases can be perpetuated through specific journalistic practices. By identifying biased language, unequal representation, and framing, participants are encouraged to reflect on how media narratives can influence public perception.

This gamified approach aims to equip participants with tools to identify and address biased reporting. Through a blend of general knowledge questions, media analysis, and actionable insights, the quiz serves as a stepping stone towards fostering gender-aware and equitable journalism practices. The researchers envision the game could be used to inspire future studies or serve as an interactive supporting material to relevant lectures.

Here is the link to access the Kahoot:

<https://create.kahoot.it/share/representation-of-women-politicians-in-the-media/5723167b-5c3b-427a-bd9c-001a81d792dc>



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