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Exploring the Climate Crisis: Economic Inequality Nexus in the U.S. American Media Landscape

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Abstract

The unfolding climate crisis is deeply interwoven with economic inequality in multiple ways. This study investigates the coverage of the intersection between the climate crisis and economic inequality in the US news-media. It asks whether coverage of this nexus is different between media outlets, depending on their respective political leanings, ownership structures or journalistic styles. To do so, a unique corpus of news content from 2014 to 2020, from 13 different American media outlets, is assembled. Using structural topic model (STM) and critical discourse analysis, the effects of political leaning and ownership covariates are analyzed. As a comparison, a second STM model is built from another data set: this corpus is taken from two alternative news outlets, selected for their explicitly 'progressive' and more climate-crisis focused journalistic style. Results show a dominance of certain groups of actors in media discourse; the prevalence of market and technology-centric solutions; similar skews between economically aligned ownership groups; and conspicuous omissions of topics related to historical responsibility and shared burden. These findings are discussed through a critical political economy lens drawing on the Imperial Mode of Living concept and political economy of communication approaches. This article reveals that the American mainstream media system perpetuates long-standing asymmetries both on a global and domestic scale, effectively serving the interests of powerful actors. It is an instrument through which consensus around a particular mode of living is created, consciously or not. Consequently, the media system creates and diffuses a particular understanding of the intersection of climate crisis and economic inequality.

Introduction: Unfolding social and ecological crises and the Imperial Mode of Living

Both social sciences and public debate increasingly acknowledge that the unfolding climate crisis is also a socio-political crisis of multiple dimensions. First, CO_2 emissions, drivers of climate change, can be mainly attributed to the wealthy within and across countries (Barros & Wilk et al., 2021). Second, the most vulnerable populations will be disproportionately affected by the physical impacts of this crisis (Barbier & Hochard, 2018). Third, political and economic elites in the Global North have hindered or delayed effective climate crisis measures (Nielsen et al., 2021). In the public realm, climate and environmental activists have repeatedly called attention to the deep injustices inherent to the climate crisis. For instance, Greta Thunberg's speech at the U.N. plenary in Katowice, Poland in 2018 stated that: "Our biosphere is being sacrificed so that rich people in countries like mine can live in luxury. It is the sufferings of the many which pay for the luxuries of the few" (Democracy Now!, 2018).

The concept of the Imperial Mode of Living (IML), developed by Brand and Wissen (2021), is a useful lens through which to understand the connection between the climate crisis and economic inequality. Rooted in political ecology and Marxist thinking, IML emphasizes that the ecological crisis is "more than simply an overuse of resources and sinks [, it is the] result of unequal distribution of power along the lines of class, gender and ethnicity" (p. 153). The IML perspective highlights an inherent contradiction. Capitalism's social reproduction depends on stable socio-ecological conditions to expand production and consumption, even as its own dynamics cannibalize and erode these very conditions (see also Fraser, 2023). This contradiction is not an accidental by-product but a structural feature of capitalist expansion dynamics. Asymmetry and imbalance are essential for capitalism's persistence and are present in various power dynamics among people, communities, nations, and classes. When viewed through the lens of IML, it becomes clear that the climate crisis and economic inequality are deeply intertwined. Economic inequality is one aspect of the reproduction and global proliferation of the IML. These dynamics occur not only on a global scale but also within nations and communities, reflecting asymmetric relationships.

The success of the IML is reflected in the neoliberalization of climate governance, which has not only facilitated the institutionalization of unequal access and power imbalances of some dominant actors but also systematically hindered relevant mechanisms from levelling the field (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017). It is also shown in the unequal use of resources and emissions both between countries and within countries. Many studies highlight how upper classes both use and consequently emit more CO_2 within multiple nations despite accounting for a smaller proportion of the population (Chancel & Piketty, 2015; Barros & Wilk et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2020). Boyce (1994) and Downey (2015) add to this by showing how the asymmetric power of upper classes allows them to push the negative consequences of environmental degradation onto lower classes and manipulate the public into accepting this. Taken together, these arguments show the intrinsic relationship between the climate crisis and economic inequality on both an international and domestic scale. This line of reasoning resonates clearly in Thunberg's (2022) introduction to the section 'What We Must Do Now' of *The Climate Book*.

Imperial Mode of Living and the role of the media

Brand and Wissen (2012, p. 549) write that the hegemonization of modes of living occurs through a "capillary process" over large expanses of time and space. In this context, the IML indicates that common sense assumptions of the Western "good-life" outcompete subaltern conventions of how to live and what defines progress. Common sense in this regard builds on Gramsci's concept of "senso comune" as the "uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become 'common' in any given epoch" (Hoare & Nowel Smith, 1971, p. 322). This common sense, however, is not fixed and never uncontested. In contrast, it is reproduced and at the same time also challenged by various groups and actors in society. Here, civil society plays a key role, as it is the space where this competition for hegemony of the common sense occurs—keeping in mind that the power relationship between actors is skewed.

Brand and Wissen themselves note that media is a key part of the IML capillary process. This can be substantiated by drawing on various scholars from the field of political economy of media and communication. In this perspective, media serves as an ideological force that naturalizes certain perspectives and obstructs others. Setting the boundaries of established discourses and policy debates exercises power over democratic decision-making (Freedman, 2014). Marxist political economists particularly, contend that the ideologies put forward by media largely depend on their economic base with commercial media primarily catering to the needs of owners and advertisers (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Curran, et al., 2005; Murdock & Golding, 2005). The IML concept outlined above can thus be situated within a political-economic understanding of the media system, which highlights how structural asymmetries and power distribution have ramifications for society.

In line with conceptual arguments concerning the media's role, various empirical analyses have likewise called into question the ability of the current media and journalism systems to adequately address topics as complex and interlinked as climate change and inequality (see Brüggemann et al., 2022; Gess, 2012; Grisold & Theine, 2020; Theine et al., 2025b; Vaughan et al., 2025). For example, Schäfer and Schlichting's (2014) meta-analysis of 133 studies on media representations of climate change shows a highly event-driven, elite-focused coverage with limited contextualization. This tends to fragment and simplify the complexities of climate change without reference to its structural inequalities. In a similar vein, Wetts (2020) finds that opponents of climate action and large business coalitions are far more likely to be cited than climate justice advocates or scientific organizations. The former sources reinforce elite-oriented, vested interest framings and sideline justice and inequality perspectives.

This criticism is also echoed in more popular accounts. For instance, *The Guardian* journalist George Monbiot's (2022) chapter "Changing the Media Narrative" in *The Climate Book* begins with a sweeping critique of media:

> If you were to ask me which industry is most responsible for the destruction of life on Earth, I would say the media. This might seem like an astonishing answer. When you look at what the oil, gas and coal industries have done, at the devastating impacts of cattle ranching, timber cutting, industrial fishing, mining, roads, the chemicals industry and the companies manufacturing useless consumer junk, you might wonder how I could justify placing a sector with relatively low environmental impacts at the top of my list. I do so because none of these industries could continue to operate as they do without the support of newspapers, magazines, radio and television. (p. 581)

Similarly, Thunberg (2022) articulates that Western media has practically erased those most affected by climate change from public consciousness, while simultaneously omitting indications of historical responsibility and accountability. Given media's critical role in society, its ongoing failure to recognize climate change as a crisis, in terms of time and scale, renders the institutional mitigations necessary to address it unattainable.

Research questions and data

In light of such a scathing critique, it is clear that more attention must be given to the media's role in perpetuating the multi-faceted climate crisis. While there is existing literature on the connection between this and economic inequality, as well as the influence of media, there are few comprehensive studies examining their intersection in specific contexts. In particular, there is not much focus on how media as a system might be influenced in different directions. In consideration of this matter, our contribution addresses the following research questions:

i. Is the connection between the climate crisis and economic inequality made in news media in the United States? If so, how is this nexus covered?

ii. Is there a difference in frequency or framing between types of news media? As in: does ownership status, political leaning or type of journalism have an impact?

There is an extensive body of literature on media content concerning the climate crisis, which we cannot review at this point. In line with our research interest, we want to mention two important themes of inquiry. First, media coverage of the climate crisis is broad and diverse but varies according to who creates it and in what context. There is a wealth of evidence that highlights how ownership structures and related political orientations are key determinants for media coverage of the climate crisis—with conservative outlets particularly, perpetuating market-liberal economic ideals (Feldman et al., 2012; Schmid-Petri, 2017; Lee et al., 2013; Schmid-Petri, 2017; Brüggemann et al., 2018; Theine & Regen, 2023). Second, changes in the traditional media system, particularly in regard to economic stresses, have severely limited the capacity for climate reporting. This has led to certain shifts that undermine climate content such as the changing role of journalists from creators to "curators," and an even further increased dependence on elite sources (Schäfer & Painter, 2020; Theine & Regen, 2023).

To address our research questions, this article analyzes how 13 traditional U.S. newspapers and broadcasters treated the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus from 2014 to 2020. Our analysis relies on two key datasets. The first dataset (from now on referred to as "Model 1") was based on a corpus of news content from eleven different outlets between the years 2014 and 2020. The corpus was selected from a keyword search on two platforms, FACTIVA and Meltwater. The search string ensured terms relating to both climate crisis and economic inequality were present in the media text (e.g., 'global warming' and 'wealth inequality'). This ensured that the corpus was relevant to the nexus of interest.

The categorization of outlets by political leaning was based upon the Media Bias Ratings assigned to each media outlet by AllSides, a media solutions company which uses a variety of methods to assign a rating from -6.00 to +6.00. However, it is important to acknowledge that this scale is not an objective measure but a relative categorization derived from manifest published content, editorial positioning, and audience perceptions. From a critical political economy

perspective, such measures have clear limitations: they do not systematically account for structural, economic, or ownership-related forms of bias; they privilege visible content rather than omissions; and they conflate distinct ideological dimensions (e.g., cultural liberalism vs. economic conservatism). Therefore, our use of the AllSides scale should be understood as a pragmatic, standardized input for STM covariates rather than a conceptual endorsement of its ideological framing. It provides a transparent and replicable categorization, but one that necessarily simplifies the complex terrain of political bias.

The ownership categorizations were based on multiple criteria: public listings on a major stock exchange, the distribution of shares and voting power (where a higher proportion of voting power associated with a higher ownership stake was considered 'controlled'), or whether an institution or individual was the majority owner of private companies. Here we draw on media ownership research which differentiates different types of media, namely private media, public media and other media (Benson, 2019, Benson et al., 2025). Importantly, growing economic pressures on traditional commercial media turn consumers into the product, as advertisers become the primary client, which shifts the power within media debates even further towards the economic and financial elites, thereby limiting free speech (Lewis, 2016; Atal, 2018). Public media is sometimes conceptualized as offering a countervailing vision and practice (e.g., Benson et al., 2018; Thomass et al., 2022) to the 'hyper-commercial' media (McChesney, 2004). However, others suggest that public media is more often than not co-opted by the power of the state and dominant political institutions as a core part of hegemonic consensus building (Curran, et al., 2005; Freedman, 2024). Civil society non-profit media can show "a certain distance from commercial pressures" (Benson, 2019, p. 388; Theine et al., 2025a); however, this type of media is more a constellation of different forms rooted in the specific institutional settings of different media systems.

Table 1 shows the categorization of the outlets, and Table 2 the documents associated with each over the time span.

Table 1: Media outlets included in Model 1

Media outlet	Key	Political Lean	Ownership General	Ownership Subgroup	Type of Media	Access
The New York Times	**NYT**	Left	Publicly Traded	Private Control	Newspaper (Online, Print)	Subscription Based (paywall after 10 articles/month)
Microsoft/National Broadcasting Company	**MSNBC**	Left	Publicly Traded	Private Control	Broadcaster + Online News	Free website; Need cable or streaming service
National Public Radio	**NPR**	Lean Left	Public NonProfit	Full Public	Radio Network + Online Show	Free
Public Broadcast System	**PBS**	Lean Left	Public NonProfit	Full Public	Broadcaster + Online Shows	Free
Cable News Network	**CNN**	Lean Left	Publicly Traded	Diverse Control	Broadcaster + Online News	Free website; Need cable or streaming service
The Washington Post	**WAPO**	Lean Left	Privately Owned	Individual	Newspaper (Online, Print)	Subscription Based (paywall after 20 articles/month)
USA Today	**USAT**	Lean Left	Publicly Traded	Diverse Control	Broadcaster + Online News	Mostly free website with Premium Content; Need cable or streaming service
The Wall Street Journal	**WSJ**	Centre	Publicly Traded	Private Control	Newspaper (Online, Print)	Subscription Based (paywall after 10 articles/month)
The Chicago Tribune	**CT**	Centre	Privately Owned	Institution	Newspaper (Online, Print)	Subscription Based (paywall after 10 articles/month)
Forbes	**FB**	Centre	Privately Owned	Institution	Magazine (Online, Print)	Subscription Based (paywall after 5 articles/month)
The Washington Times	**TWT**	Lean Right	Privately Owned	Institution	Newspaper (Online, Print)	Subscription Based (paywall after 5 articles/month)
FOX News	**FOX**	Right	Publicly Traded	Private Control	Broadcaster + Online News	Free website; Need cable or streaming service
American Thinker	**AT**	Right	Privately Owned	Individual	Online Magazine	Free with Premium Option

Note. The table lists the 13 media outlets included in the corpus; their classification is based on ownership and political leaning, as well as information regarding their accessibility and distribution. Table is ordered by political leaning.

Table 2: Number of news content by outlet and year (Model 1)

Media outlet	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
AT	8	7	16	13	11	24	30	109
CNN	104	203	200	92	112	296	267	1274
CT	10	42	45	34	30	49	77	287
FB	89	54	103	71	92	278	459	1146
FOX	44	14	32	10	25	82	45	253
MSNBC	122	114	22	21	11	62	51	403
NPR	7	9	6	7	3	10	9	51
NYT	198	243	225	216	173	374	474	1903
PBS	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	9
TWT	29	69	42	27	28	70	97	362
USAT	7	16	11	23	18	76	120	271
WAPO	311	362	280	176	235	453	482	2299
WSJ	50	119	117	55	60	126	126	653
Total	964	1237	1077	725	784	1866	2198	**8914**

Note. The table gives a broken-down look of Model 1's corpus composition, by source and year. There is an overrepresentation of some outlets compared to others, as well as a general trend of decline between 2017-2018, followed by a steadier increase towards 2020. The table is ordered alphabetically.

Model 2 was based on a corpus from two media outlets, *The Guardian* and *Project Syndicate*, selected for their more 'transformative' journalism style, which serves as a reference point for Model 1 (Brüggemann et al., 2022). For this second model, outlets were not categorized for political leaning or ownership in the modelling process, as there is no consistent way to compare covariates across models. Comparing *The Guardian* to *Project Syndicate* independently is not relevant to the research questions. Model 2 is meant as a corpus content comparison—the differences between topics generated in each model is the point of interest. Table 3 shows the categorization of the outlets. Table 4 shows the documents associated with each over the time span.

Table 3: Media outlets included in Model 2

Media outlet	Key	Political Lean	Ownership General	Type of Media	Access
The Guardian	**GUA**	Lean Left	Privately Owned	Newspaper (Online, Print)	Free
Project Syndicate	**PS**	Unclear	Non-Profit	Magazine (Online, Print)	Subscription Based (Paywall post 3 articles/month)

Note. The table summarizes Model 2's outlet classification – the Political Lean and Ownership categories are merely descriptive and were not included as covariates for Model 2.

Table 4: Number of news content by outlet and year (Model 2)

Media outlet	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
GUA	77	401	395	270	375	523	406	2447
PS	0	11	16	51	35	112	121	346
Total	77	412	411	321	410	635	527	**2793**

Note. The table gives a broken-down look of Model 2's corpus composition, by source and year.

Methodology

By combining structural topic modelling, a method from computational social sciences, with critical discourse analysis (CDA), we introduce a novel methodology to analyze our datasets. In our view, this combination suits our research interest as the quantitative method allows us to look at a larger media corpus while grounding it in a critical approach in line with the IML perspective (for related arguments, see Hunting, 2021; Gerbner1958; Tornberg & Tornberg, 2016).

Structural Topic Modelling (TPM) is a newer type of probabilistic topic modeling developed by Roberts et al. (2013), which allows researchers to discover "latent semantic structures and meaning-making in textual data" (Aranda et al., 2021, p. 198). STM identifies a certain number of topics within a corpus of text-data—done through automated processes that test word associations, frequencies and probabilities. It also shows how much any inputted document (e.g., article) is related to a specific topic. For researchers interested in large-scale patterns of discourse—such as how climate change and economic inequality are jointly or separately framed in news media—STM is particularly valuable because it allows us to handle larger sample sizes beyond what is qualitatively possible.

STM's advantage for social science research in particular lies in the capacity to implement document-level metadata directly into the topic model. Essentially, information about each document from the corpus (i.e., author, publishing date, political leaning, etc.) is incorporated into the probability model. That allows researchers to estimate the effects of different metadata on the prevalence of topics. Consequently, researchers can ask not only what the main discursive clusters are, but who is most likely to articulate them and under what conditions. This is crucial for our research because questions of climate change and inequality are fundamentally about power, voice and structural positioning—dimensions that require the linking of textual content to social, institutional and political attributes of the outlets producing it.

In an STM model, a topic is "defined as a mixture over words where each word has a probability of belonging to a topic" (Roberts et al., 2013, p. 2). In short, there is a cluster of words often found together with a high probability. Users can determine a desired number of topics to find or evaluate models across different topic outputs. Models are scored based on levels of semantic coherence and frequent and exclusive term ratings (FREX). Each word in a corpus is assigned a probability of being associated with a certain topic. A document can have multiple topics associated with it, at different proportions, which add up to one. Metadata can influence topical prevalence (how much a document is associated with a topic) and topical content (the words used to describe a topic). For this article, political leaning and ownership are the covariates of interest. This approach is especially effective for our research. We not only want to map what is being said about climate change and inequality, but to ascertain how different parts of the media system emphasize or downplay this connection. STM allows us to detect such systematic variation across political and ownership lines at scale.

Both corpuses (see previous section) were cleaned and lemmatized, then put into the STM model. Model 1 included four covariates: political leaning, ownership, publishing date and media outlet. The covariate media outlet was included to explore potential relationships at an individual outlet level, rather than group association according to political or ownership affiliations. Model 2 only included date and media outlet as covariates. Following Roberts et al. (2013, 2014), multiple models were run with different numbers of topic outputs. For both corpuses, models with the highest semantic coherence and exclusivity scores were selected. For Model 1, this meant 50 topic outputs, and 46 for Model 2.

Critical Discourse Analysis, our second methodological layer, understands discourse as a social practice that is both socially conditioned by and socially constitutive of systemic power and power relations. Discourses not only reflect reality (and are thus conditioned by it); they in turn construct and reproduce social realities (and are thus constitutive of them). In particular, CDA aims to uncover taken-for-granted assumptions, ideologies and worldviews that people use to describe a complex reality (Fairclough, 2007). CDA studies often start with a macro-level, structural perspective on institutional power relations and hegemonic ideologies, and then proceed to qualitatively reconstruct those aspects in selected events or social practices (Van Dijk, 1993).

In this analysis, combining STM with CDA assists us in two distinct ways. First, it brings in a qualitative element typically disregarded by the computational topic modelling literature. A qualitative analysis is useful as it allows us to explore given topics in more in-depth. Focus centres upon the terms most closely associated with each topic and the related 'top documents' (the documents where a topic is most prevalent) (Tornberg & Tornberg, 2016). In so doing, we named and grouped the topics into larger Discourses and Domains in order to focus on the common discourses permeating through all or several of the topics. This allowed us to potentially identify an underlying ideology. Second, CDA brings us back to the structural and power-analytical perspective at the heart of the Imperial Mode of Living perspective. STM identifies patterns; CDA helps us interpret these patterns in relation to larger hegemonic formations. Together, they allow us to examine how U.S. news media discursively construct—or fail to construct—a connection between the climate crisis and economic inequality.

In what follows, we first report our results in a descriptive fashion and then discuss them within a more structural perspective.

Results: Model overviews

Table 5 shows the topic output for Model 1. Topics are thematically grouped together into discourses, and discourses are iterated together into domains. The domain *US Politics* includes discourses related to individuals or groups prominent in American politics as well as the stratifications of power across levels of government. *Organization of Economic Systems and Politics* deals with questions of economy, power and interactions between states, organizations and individuals. *Areas of Inequality* covers two issues of inequality: *Institutional Access* and *Intersections*. The *Economy* domain also deals with economy, but has a non-global, practical scope—it is about the application of policies and ideals concerning the economy, rather than the organization of systems. Finally, the *Environment* domain includes energy and energy-pollution topics, and global environmental events like oil spills.

Table 5: Model 1 Output, Overview

Topic	Discourse	Domain	Prevalence (%)
T28: Health and Long Term Illness	Institutions and Access	Areas of Inequality	2.924378128
T24: Higher Education	Institutions and Access	Areas of Inequality	2.639138759
T3: Housing and Access	Institutions and Access	Areas of Inequality	2.548588951
T40: COVID	Institutions and Access	Areas of Inequality	1.750565007
T5: Police Brutality and Gun Violence	Institutions and Access	Areas of Inequality	1.348810284
T15: Childcare	Institutions and Access	Areas of Inequality	1.089144394
T10: Race, Gender and Discrimination	Intersections	Areas of Inequality	2.796872281
T14: Sports and Controversy	Intersections	Areas of Inequality	0.846210663
T6: Social/Impact Investing	Capitalism and Future	Economy	3.894591113
T46: Monetary Policy	Capitalism and Future	Economy	2.494580071
T2: Technology and Future	Capitalism and Future	Economy	2.198087841
T34: Labor Issues	Entities	Economy	2.937105029
T41: Private Companies and Executives	Entities	Economy	2.328363003
T33: Green Energy and Emissions	Energy	Environment	3.418563335
T44: Global Environmental Crises	Man-Made Disasters	Environment	0.697910208
T49: Theories and Ideals	Economic Systems and Politics	Organization of Economic Systems and Politics	4.116835048
T31: Taxation and Spending	Economic Systems and Politics	Organization of Economic Systems and Politics	3.855664297
T39: Role of Government, Welfare	Economic Systems and Politics	Organization of Economic Systems and Politics	1.939842494
T38: Global Economic Development and Institutions	Global Power Structures	Organization of Economic Systems and Politics	2.436101254
T7: Geopolitics	Global Power Structures	Organization of Economic Systems and Politics	1.903060942
T25: International Trade	Global Power Structures	Organization of Economic Systems and Politics	1.775232958
T4: American Exceptionalism	Influence	Organization of Economic Systems and Politics	2.370020219
T27: Catholicism and Pope Francis	Influence	Organization of Economic Systems and Politics	2.18088515
T26: European Politics	Non-US	Other	1.71787892
T29: Latin American Politics	Non-US	Other	1.50760244
T17: Middle East Conflicts	Non-US	Other	1.190772821
T11: American History and Slavery	Other	Other	1.886670411
T47: Arts	Other	Other	1.509821912
T37: Travel	Other	Other	0.539898281
T36: Democrat Presidential Candidates	Actors	US Politics	3.338382429
T8: US Prominent Political Actors	Actors	US Politics	3.184350101
T16: Democrat Presidential Candidates	Actors	US Politics	2.561869865
T43: Republicans	Actors	US Politics	1.6894568
T21: Caucuses Presidential	Actors	US Politics	1.671874617
T1: Elections and Democracy	Structures	US Politics	3.802263621
T35: State Governance	Structures	US Politics	1.554636036
T20: New York Government and Housing	Structures	US Politics	1.164701042
T9: Political Power Misuse	Structures	US Politics	0.945215929

Note. This table shows the topic output of Model 1, organized into relevant Discourse and Domain categories. The Prevalence column shows the prevalence of each topic with respect to the entire corpus: i.e., a higher prevalence implies the topic occurs more frequently within the corpus. The table is sorted first by Domain, alphabetically, followed by Discourse, alphabetically. Within each respectively colored Domain categorization, the Prevalence is conditionally highlighted to show the higher values in a darker color.

Figure A1 (see Appendix) shows the distribution of Discourses in Model 1. Overall, topics related to *Institutions*, *Systems* or generally *US Politics* are positioned at the forefront of nexus coverage; these are primarily political actors.

When looking at relationships between topics (Figure A2, Appendix), it is clear that topics have a higher connection to their own domains. However, connections across domains focus on political controversy. This might include government interventions through taxation and other policies. Individual stances on these issues are also included. Areas of Inequality is a cluster with external links primarily to the Economy domain. One implication of this is that issues of inequality are largely taken up in conjunction with economic-related solutions or market-compatible approaches to the future. There is also the implication that content about U.S Politics, particularly about Actors and Organizations of Economic Systems and Politics, mostly does not take up inequality-related topics. This is quite unexpected, given the political and societal element of the Inequality topics uncovered in the model.

Table 6 shows the output for Model 2. The domain *Disproportionate Access* is similar to Model 1's *Inequality* domain, but all topics focus on access. The *Economy* domain more directly deals with growth, productivity measures and what is assigned value. *Politics* deals with prominent individuals and groups, as well as relationships between nations and power dynamics. *Globalization* covers its negative and positive aspects, including movement of people, land use and public health. Finally, *Ideology, Critiques and Awareness* includes topics that critique bigger themes such as democracy and capitalism. There is a prevalence of critically related topics and discourses; notable is T41: Global Sustainable Development with the highest prevalence. Also, T13: Global Warming and Emissions is prevalent within the corpus, a stark contrast to any *Environment* topics in Model 1. Figure A3 (Appendix) shows the distribution of Discourses in Model 2.

Analyzing relationships between topics shows they are mostly correlated by domain, with some topics acting as links to other domains. T46: Voicing Concerns is the only topic with a positive correlation to at least one other topic in every domain. Though the *Political Actor* discourse is most prevalent, there is not much co-occurrence with other topics. Furthermore, *Disproportionate Access* is very independently linked, save for some connections to *Ideology, Critiques and Awareness* (as shown in Figure A4, Appendix).

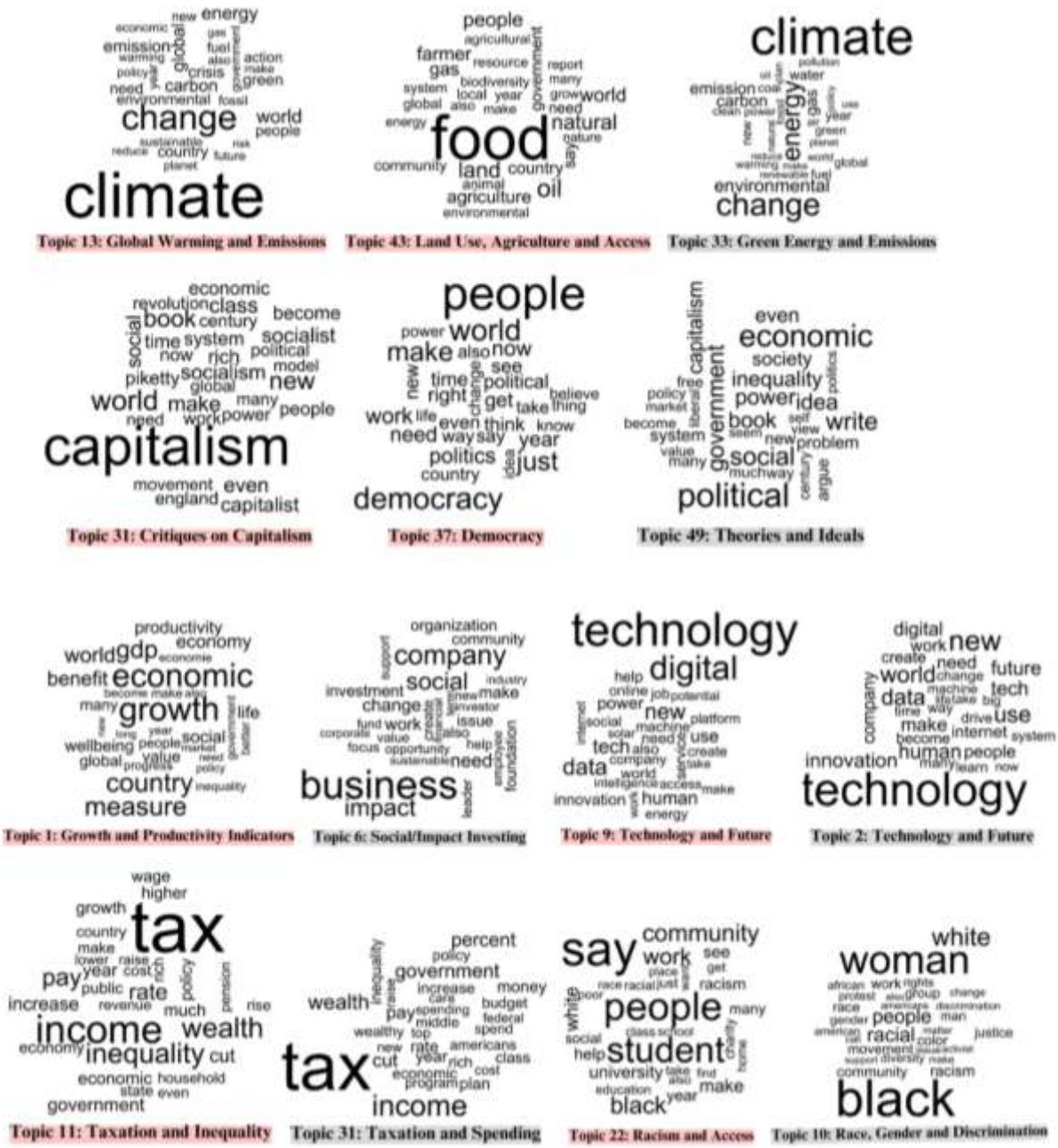
Table 6: Model 2 Output, Overview

Topic	Discourse	Domain	Prevalence
T38: Children, Families and Access	Basic Goods	Disproportionate Access	1.81839296
T12: Education and Access	Basic Goods	Disproportionate Access	2.53759267
T27: Healthcare and Access	Basic Goods	Disproportionate Access	2.90684927
T15: Housing	Basic Goods	Disproportionate Access	1.44368857
T32: Gender and Education	Intersections	Disproportionate Access	1.14469819
T22: Racism and Access	Intersections	Disproportionate Access	2.20193066
T24: Business Values, Capitalism and Change	Growth, Values and Change	Economy	1.92253203
T1: Growth and Productivity Indicators	Growth, Values and Change	Economy	1.52552364
T9: Technology and Future	Growth, Values and Change	Economy	1.82028558
T7: Banking	Policy and Instruments	Economy	1.74053352
T44: Monetary Policy	Policy and Instruments	Economy	1.67790387
T17: UK Financial Ministers and Budgeting	Policy and Instruments	Economy	0.58093701
T13: Global Warming and Emissions	Environment	Globalization	4.23850914
T43: Land Use, Agriculture and Access	Environment	Globalization	1.91791379
T14: Cities and Urban Development	Global Development	Globalization	2.59295524
T26: Development and Globalization	Global Development	Globalization	1.36391152
T41: Global Sustainable Development	Global Development	Globalization	4.77875935
T35: Multilateralism and Development	Global Development	Globalization	1.6388584
T16: COVID	Global Human Crises	Globalization	2.82125743
T21: Escalating Conflicts Global	Global Human Crises	Globalization	1.04656051
T5: Global Public Health Responses	Global Human Crises	Globalization	2.25413177
T29: Migration and Asylum	Global Human Crises	Globalization	1.36253591
T31: Critiques on Capitalism	Ideology and Organization	Ideology, Critiques and Awareness	1.25443866
T37: Democracy	Ideology and Organization	Ideology, Critiques and Awareness	1.32335481
T11: Taxation and Inequality	Ideology and Organization	Ideology, Critiques and Awareness	2.93935956
T36: Climate Change and Awareness	Raising Awareness	Ideology, Critiques and Awareness	1.34329993
T3: Protests-Gender	Raising Awareness	Ideology, Critiques and Awareness	1.41668466
T46: Voicing Concerns	Raising Awareness	Ideology, Critiques and Awareness	2.78032568
T39: Catholicism and Pope Francis	Role of Religion	Ideology, Critiques and Awareness	2.07939695
T23: Judaism and Islam	Role of Religion	Ideology, Critiques and Awareness	1.37117898
T10: Brexit - Impact	Geopolitics	Politics	2.52561678
T42: China, Expansion and East Asian Relation	Geopolitics	Politics	2.14312359
T8: Liberal vs Conservative Trends	Geopolitics	Politics	1.18144644
T40: Australia	Political Actors	Politics	1.85728641
T28: Brazil - Elections	Political Actors	Politics	0.91639048
T18: EU Parties, Elections and Class Issues	Political Actors	Politics	1.87948283
T2: New Zealand- Elections	Political Actors	Politics	0.74467782
T25: Political Parties UK	Political Actors	Politics	3.57338121
T6: U.K Referendums and Elections	Political Actors	Politics	3.29568329
T34: US Democrats - Candidates	Political Actors	Politics	2.48607308
T45: US Presidential Elections	Political Actors	Politics	4.2543697

Note: This table shows the topic output of Model 2, organized into relevant Discourse and Domain categories. The Prevalence column shows the prevalence of each topic with respect to the entire corpus, i.e., a higher prevalence implies the topic occurs more frequently within the corpus. The table is sorted first by Domain, alphabetically, followed by Discourse, alphabetically. Within each respectively colored Domain categorization, the Prevalence is conditionally highlighted to show the higher values in a darker color.

Figure 1 shows a comparison between terms used in Models 1 and 2 for similar topics. Model 2 uses many more critical terms in general and emphasizes different terms.

Figure 1: Topic Word Comparisons Across Models



Note. The word clouds represent the frequent terms associated with each topic, where bigger terms have a higher occurrence. Topics associated with Model 2 are highlighted in pink, and those from Model 1 are highlighted in grey. They are clustered based on their thematic similarity, to highlight the different use and frequency of terms between Models, putting into focus the occurrence of more critical terms used in Model 2's corpus.

Focusing only on Model 1, it is pertinent to understand the relationship between topic prevalence and the covariates of political leaning and ownership. The Political Lean covariate took three values for estimate effects calculations: Left, Centre and Right; Ownership took five: Full Public, Public Diverse, Public Controlled, Private Individual and Private Institutional. The estimate effect formula regresses each covariate on topic prevalence, meaning it reveals the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the values of the covariate and expected topic prevalence. The formula employed only included one covariate at a time. This is because when all covariates were included

in the estimate effect formula, the function automatically chooses a reference category. Both 'centre' and 'private individual' are chosen as references, and their effect cannot be separated or interpreted. However, when estimating effects using only the relevant covariate, one can assume the intercept coefficients are those of the reference category, hence can be included in the analysis. This is a limitation of the study, because different covariate effects cannot be referenced to the sample medians of all other covariates.

Table 7 shows the resulting significant estimated effects for each political leaning on topics. Table 8 shows this for ownership. Tables 7 and 8 also score topics based on their sensitivity to changes in the political leaning covariate. This was measured by taking all the significant estimates of a topic and finding the greatest difference (delta) between estimates for each ownership. Deltas were then scored from 0 to 1, a relative index assigned based on the other delta values: 0 does not mean the observed difference is 0, but that it is the least sensitive to shifts.

Table 7: Political Leaning, Covariate Sensitivity

Topic	Center	Left	Right	Delta	Sensitivity Score
T6: Social/Impact Investing	0.11185794	-0.10016853	-0.10132651	0.21318445	**1**
T2: Technology and Future	0.05483784	-0.04155241	-0.04344192	0.09827976	**0.45190463**
T46: Monetary Policy	0.04930772	-0.02957801	-0.03584267	0.08515039	**0.389277547**
T34: Labor Issues	0.04031844	-0.01769703	-0.01169768	0.05801548	**0.259844025**
T41: Private Companies and Executives	0.03429153	-0.01191874	-0.02109041	0.05538194	**0.247282073**
T38: Global Economic Development and Institution	0.03635948	-0.01847357	0.01809816	0.05483306	**0.244663882**
T49: Theories and Ideals	0.04337906	-0.01007726	0.001652614	0.05345631	**0.238096804**
T33: Green Energy and Emissions	0.03645635	-0.00892098	0.008311798	0.04537732	**0.199560037**
T28: Health and Long-Term Illness	0.03343156	-0.00417963	-0.01019486	0.04362642	**0.191208216**
T31: Taxation and Spending	0.03682451	-0.00627796	0.008463727	0.04310247	**0.188708998**
T24: Higher Education	0.02735293	-0.00290492	-0.01107858	0.03843152	**0.166428529**
T47: Arts	0.01951204	-0.00318674	-0.01530195	0.03481399	**0.14917295**
T10: Race, Gender and Discrimination	0.02706276	-0.00023209	-0.00085904	0.0279218	**0.116297166**
T39: Role of Government, Welfare	0.02309767	-0.00254596	-0.00026201	0.02564363	**0.105430329**
T3: Housing and Access	0.02210016	0.004546277	-0.00296919	0.02506934	**0.102690971**
T40: COVID	0.02075985	-0.00364106	-0.00308806	0.02440091	**0.099502541**
T44: Global Environmental Crises	0.01448469	-0.00786212	-0.00814062	0.02262531	**0.091032934**
T26: European Politics	0.01917872	0.000243338	-0.00329403	0.02247275	**0.090305218**
T27: Catholicism and Pope Francis	0.01868658	0.002142377	0.0244692	0.02232682	**0.089609151**
T4: American Exceptionalism	0.02235004	0.003169232	0.009038674	0.01918081	**0.074602674**
T8: Prominent Political Actors	0.01829063	0.011621637	0.028311621	0.01668998	**0.062721429**
T29: Latin American Politics	0.01603895	-0.00019604	0.009787629	0.01623499	**0.060551108**
T15: Childcare/Carework	0.01179286	0.002893414	-0.00436318	0.01615604	**0.060174502**
T11: American History and Slavery	0.01842338	0.003254863	0.00500599	0.01516852	**0.055464037**
T25: International Trade	0.01581219	0.001008632	0.014875719	0.01480356	**0.053723192**
T14: Sports and Controversy	0.01006028	0.001268375	-0.00395227	0.01401255	**0.049950079**
T9: Political Power Misuse	0.00095687	0.014378962	0.004485202	0.01342209	**0.047133571**
T43: Republicans	0.00515103	0.017808641	0.01088365	0.01265761	**0.043487001**
T7: Geopolitics	0.01639744	0.004527977	0.0049124	0.01186946	**0.039727521**
T20: New York Government and Housing	0.01120103	0.004478647	0.0000615	0.01113953	**0.036245765**
T36: Democrat Presidential Candidates 2016	0.02012561	0.012704261	0.02240043	0.00969617	**0.029360933**
T37: Travel	0.00680967	0.000569565	-0.00235921	0.00916887	**0.026845726**
T16: Democrat Presidential Candidates	0.01296256	0.015091155	0.021740083	0.00877752	**0.024978972**
T5: Police Brutality and Gun Violence	0.00634281	0.010358774	0.013513191	0.00717038	**0.017312934**
T17: Middle East Conflicts	0.00778307	0.008620989	0.014056977	0.00627391	**0.013036744**
T21: Caucuses Presidential	0.0072042	0.013168634	0.011831251	0.00596444	**0.011560581**
T35: State Governance	0.00863359	0.011150467	0.014459072	0.00582549	**0.01089778**
T1: Elections and Democracy	0.01976164	0.017569989	0.016220798	0.00354084	**0**

Note. The table shows the estimated prevalence for each topic based on each value for the political leaning covariate. The Delta takes the difference between the maximum estimate and minimum; this was used to calculate the sensitivity of each topic to political leaning—a high sensitivity score implies that a change in political leaning makes a difference to the prevalence of a topic within the corpus.

Table 8: Ownership Structure, Covariate Sensitivity

Topic	Private Individual	Private Institutional	Public	Public Controlled	Public Diverse	Delta	Sensitivity Score
T6: Social/Impact Investing	0.011755223	0.111865504	-0.009990087	0.003105678	-0.000895824	0.121855592	1
T49: Theories and Ideals	0.048036432	-0.01027343	-0.015389447	-0.008788733	-0.037956111	0.085992543	0.678749425
T1: Elections and Democracy	0.04651991	-0.027818938	-0.029487495	-0.012206493	-0.019167544	0.076007405	0.589305515
T43: Republicans	0.037103872	-0.030918293	-0.026334186	-0.022545008	-0.025940626	0.068022165	0.517776098
T31: Taxation and Spending	0.039882869	-0.006997068	0.009972402	-0.004235281	-0.024268273	0.064151141	0.483100613
T28: Health and Long-Term Illness	0.036981339	-0.001973349	-0.023596622	-0.008968019	-0.01952757	0.060577961	0.451093121
T36: Democrat Presidential Candidates 2016	0.039070817	-0.021176941	0.006189314	-0.006532239	-0.010817085	0.060247758	0.448135259
T16: Democrat Presidential Candidates	0.031949073	-0.018892969	-0.013222546	-0.007221126	-0.002749526	0.050842041	0.363881635
T2: Technology and Future	0.013932624	0.043895579	0.009089775	0.002476879	-0.004075399	0.047970978	0.338163499
T33: Green Energy and Emissions	0.032689933	0.005148925	-0.001793986	-0.000581904	-0.014792705	0.047482638	0.333789098
T8: Prominent Political Actors	0.033894208	-0.013229078	0.014327327	-0.001120094	-0.012741963	0.047123287	0.330570131
T3: Housing and Access	0.02884367	-0.003456713	-0.017792035	-0.000377681	-0.017072833	0.046635704	0.326202514
T11: American History and Slavery	0.027896627	-0.014454498	-0.002108439	-0.001816452	-0.018483863	0.046380489	0.323916373
T39: Role of Government, Welfare	0.028228957	-0.004320894	-0.014756489	-0.009310519	-0.015149027	0.043377983	0.297020814
T9: Political Power Misuse	0.002328631	-0.000302191	0.027612981	0.004433464	0.041988579	0.04229077	0.287281881
T24: Higher Education	0.028849132	-0.003238039	-0.00102863	-0.00419284	-0.011724559	0.040573691	0.271900792
T46: Monetary Policy	0.026093315	0.006804766	-0.010273504	0.003304286	-0.013354232	0.039447546	0.261813122
T4: American Exceptionalism	0.025341912	0.001398931	-0.013732411	-0.003685925	0.00671326	0.039074323	0.258469896
T38: Global Economic Development and Institutions	0.018874143	0.025272792	-0.012396195	0.004526822	-0.001760429	0.037668986	0.245881306
T34: Labor Issues	0.025531683	0.01337266	0.001363618	0.002527927	-0.011697599	0.037229282	0.241942566
T27: Catholicism and Pope Francis	0.025102896	-0.004549257	0.015536807	-0.001930682	-0.009110745	0.034213641	0.214929348
T35: State Governance	0.019182114	-0.008250897	-0.011568778	-0.003597937	0.006353958	0.030750892	0.183911066
T25: International Trade	0.020056458	-0.007765319	-0.009522298	0.003046629	-0.009085972	0.029578756	0.173411419
T7: Geopolitics	0.020857379	-0.006174406	-0.008026322	-0.000167218	0.003912169	0.028883701	0.167185323
T10: Race, Gender and Discrimination	0.026537478	0.004546318	0.000313449	-0.001980239	-0.000911658	0.028517717	0.163906941
T26: European Politics	0.017566598	-0.005265797	-0.010906651	0.009125612	-0.003643268	0.028473249	0.163508615
T21: Caucuses Presidential	0.016834732	-0.008529013	0.000781719	-0.001503454	0.014822462	0.025363744	0.135654592
T41: Private Companies and Executives	0.019594298	0.00714734	-0.003876486	0.012097024	-0.005769403	0.025363701	0.135654199
T40: COVID	0.016534892	0.008878883	0.023735635	-0.001458354	0.00089959	0.025193989	0.134133974
T47: Arts	0.009592883	0.006144231	0.016176019	0.017258986	-0.005108387	0.022367373	0.108813982
T29: Latin American Politics	0.014533632	-0.001662978	-0.007722205	0.008948011	-0.004112638	0.022255837	0.107814877
T5: Police Brutality and Gun Violence	0.015581153	-0.005497984	0.008572426	-0.003941575	0.008103449	0.021079138	0.097274354
T20: New York Government and Housing	0.011785479	-0.004669417	-0.00681078	0.012518798	-0.005054598	0.019329578	0.081602316
T17: Middle East Conflicts	0.013701202	-0.002764867	2.41281E-05	-0.000174885	0.010938511	0.016466069	0.055951849
T15: Childcare/Carework	0.013319488	0.001188034	0.004424247	-2.63456E-06	-0.001644993	0.014964482	0.042501074
T44: Global Environmental Crises	0.004023838	0.010026604	-0.003350779	0.00720676	-0.000721914	0.013377382	0.028284308
T14: Sports and Controversy	0.007565727	-0.000435909	-0.004304485	0.00560477	0.006548128	0.011870212	0.014783524
T37: Travel	0.005888529	0.00147395	-0.004331314	0.003948354	-0.002909129	0.010219842	0

Note. The table shows the estimated prevalence for each topic based on each value for the ownership covariate. The Delta takes the difference between the maximum estimate and minimum; this was used to calculate the sensitivity of each topic to ownership – a high sensitivity score implies that a change in ownership makes a difference to the prevalence of a topic within the corpus.

For political leaning, Topic 6: Social/Impact Investing shows the highest sensitivity, with the biggest delta occurring between Centre and Right. The topics which follow are all related to *Economy*, though the gap in score is high to T6. *Organization of Economic Systems and Politics* topics are among the most sensitive, as well as some key topics in *Areas of Inequality*: T10: Race, Gender and Discrimination, T28: Health and Long-Term Illness, and T24: Higher Education.

For ownership, T6 also has the highest sensitivity, followed by T49: Theories and Ideals. Interestingly, mostly *US Politics* topics are at the higher end of sensitivity. When compared to the sensitivity scores of political leaning there is not such a clear effect on *Economy* topics. Shifting to a domain-level comparison of differences in estimated prevalence, then, *Inequality* seems to have some more mixed effects worth looking at closer, as do *US Politics* and *Organization of Economic Systems and Politics*. Figures B1.1-B3.2 (Appendix) further substantiate the differences in estimated effect for domains of interest between different covariates.

The discursive construction of the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus

Re-connecting our results to the overall discursive field and structural perspective, the following aspects emerge.

First, there is *some* coverage of the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus in US American media, which primarily occurs in Left leaning outlets (Model 1). Public media coverage is surprisingly low, but this could be an issue of data availability. In contrast, the non-American alternative media outlets analyzed in this article had a comparatively large and significant nexus-related corpus size despite their smaller outlet sample (Model 2). These alternative outlets place a higher value on climate-inequality content, in line with Brüggemann et al.'s (2022) concept of transformative journalism. It is difficult to assign these two outlets (*Guardian* and *Project Syndicate*) an unequivocal label such as 'transformative', as not enough about all four dimensions of the Brüggemann et al. (2022) outline is discussed. However, they show a higher potential to be transformative and have an explicit commitment to increased coverage of 'public goods' issues. This provides an optimistic outlook for the promise of alternatively structured and funded public-service media.

Second, focusing wholly on Model 1, there is a strong politicization of the nexus by traditional media. A key finding is that this politicization is consistent across political leaning and ownership categories. This is directly tied to the valuation of some actors over others and corroborates what the literature shows. Schäfer and Painter (2020) highlighted the reliance on 'authority' information for climate reporting, as well as the over-reliance on authoritative sources primarily political ones. Results show that the *US Politics* domain was the most prevalent in the corpus, in particular the *Actors* discourse, as well as the *Economic Systems and Politics* and *Institutions and Access* discourses. This implies that how relevant political figures or institutions address or relate to the nexus is thus the biggest concern for media. In particular, members and associates of the Democratic Party are the most elevated voices. While terms do not show a strict positive or negative skew, the fact is they are more relevant to nexus coverage than other political parties. The prevalence of *US Politics* topics is not very sensitive to the political leaning of the outlets in our corpus. From Table 7, prevalence of these topics is rather consistent and high across political leanings, implying that all media outlets similarly cover topics related to *Actors.* This corroborates the expectation that political figures/institutions should be addressed as authorities. Interestingly, T9: Political Power Misuse is most associated with the Full Public and Public Diverse ownership groups, with a big difference in estimated effect compared to the Public Controlled group. Speaking critically about how political power is employed refers to a fundamental watchdog function of media, fitting for these ownership structures seemingly more compatible with public good provision (Benson, 2019).

Third, we identify a strong economization of the discursive field. This is significantly skewed by both political leaning and ownership. Economization here refers to the subjugation of these crises to economic logic. Centre and Private Institution groupings had the highest estimated effect on *Economy* domain topics, though belonging to the Centre group had a much higher effect on these expected topic prevalences, as shown in the sensitivity score. However, comparing the size of significant estimates shows differences between the two groups at a topic level. For example, T2: Technology and Future is more strongly affected by the Centre ownership covariate than the Private Institution one. This could imply that technology or technological reliance is more important or salient to promote as a political measure. This has an interesting temporal dimension relevant to politics—actors can create temporal space between their own actions and expected results of technological solutions because it is not directly their responsibility to develop these technologies. When the interest is maintaining short-term approval, this is a salient strategy.

Fundamentally, this parallel between topic prevalence within the Centre and Private Institutional groups shows the overlapping effect powerful economic interests have, which reflects the notion that media is shaped by its economic base. This is particularly notable when recognizing a similar parallel between the Full Public and Public Diverse groups. This implies that the differences in controlling rights within publicly traded media have a strong effect on output content (with references to Benson's [2019] idea of allocative power and Curran and Seaton's [2018] discussion on ownership power and agenda setting). The idea that financial instruments or technological change are the solution, or major components of the solution, to the climate crisis and economic inequality tendentially benefits groups of people who see these crises as profit opportunities—as Thunberg said, the luxury of the few is paid for by the suffering of the many. It reduces the space to promote other possible measures, such as wealth and income redistribution, universal basic services, or degrowth. Consequentially, most audiences do not even *know* of these alternatives. This ties into the homogenization of content and prioritization of profit over public interest that Murdock and Golding (2005) related to concentrated media ownership. There is also the question of time-sensitivity: promoting technological change as the sure-fire way to secure a sustainable future ignores the reality that something must be done in the meantime. It also ignores the very real, *immediate* severity of the crisis at hand. Thunberg (2022) points out that this oversight is common in media coverage. The fact that the Full Public and Public Diverse groups are significantly less associated with *Economy* discourses also furthers the separation between economy, politics and society in a very harmful way (as shown by their lower expected estimates). Readers must self-select into being interested in economics or business by accessing other sources. Mainstream media coverage creates the incorrect idea that topics are something independent and exclusive to those who are able to understand them. This is also relevant to T39: Role of Government, Welfare. Arguably, the topic is primarily related to the more limited scope of the Private Individual and Centre-leaning groups.

Fourth, two different types of actors were elevated in Model 1: Pope Francis and Private Executives. The significance of Pope Francis to climate-inequality coverage was a surprising finding given how significant this was across all covariate groups, especially the Full Public group. Executives were more tied to both Centre and Private groups, and to Public Controlled, in line with these outlets' higher emphasis on economics and business. However, there is an unmistakable omission: other non-governmental actors, like scientists, NGOs, think tanks or activists did not have sufficient profile to show up in topic output. This has important ramifications, given the lack of plurality in the voices amplified. Also, simply the fact religious and economic elites are mentioned creates the impression that all people *should* be strongly interested in what they have to say.

The relationship of actors like Pope Francis and wealthy business elites to the Imperial Mode of Living (IML) is blatant. Institutions like the Catholic Church that have historically played a role in perpetuating global inequalities continue to be favorably treated as authoritative in mainstream media. What's more, their elevation opens up room for new applications of the naturalization and legitimization narratives. As Ciplet and Roberts' (2017) description of the neoliberalization of climate governance revealed, reliance on 'expert knowledge' that favors financial and business interests overrules other forms of context-specific knowledge. This is also a question of procedural justice and justice as recognition (Walker, 2012). Non-elites are treated as unimportant to the deliberation of possible solutions; therefore, they are not given prominence and are not being properly provided for. If business elites are continually given a wider platform for their ideas and interests, they drown out subaltern voices and solutions. This is especially problematic when

considering T31: Taxation and Spending's or T39: Role of Government-Welfare's higher relationship to the Private Individual and Centre group. As Theine (2019) and Grisold and Theine (2020) point out, elite interests can create media environments outwardly hostile to developments or policies opposed to their own interests. When powerful owners and elites, like *The Washington Post's* Jeff Bezos, can dominate conversations about increasing taxes on wealth or corporate profits (or about the welfare state), never acknowledging potential redistributive benefits, it hurts the health of society and thus, democracy. This showcases both the manifestation of what Murdock and Golding (2005) and Curran (2002) have warned about, regarding the concentration of ownership and power of media in the hands of the few. The Bezos example also illustrates the successful institutionalization of the IML into all facets of life. As Thunberg points out, "if the media is going to tell the truth about our situation, it must also start to focus on climate justice" (2022, p. 561). In an environment monopolized by particular interests, where is the space for justice?

This links to our final point: the room for improvement we see in both traditional and alternative media—particularly in the way they discursively construct inequalities. Inequality domains for both models were structured mostly along race and gender intersections and focused on access to primarily three goods: housing, healthcare and education. There seems to be more coverage about the *consequences* of disparity rather than *the roots* of this disparity, proving Thunberg's (2022) point about giving space to symptoms rather than the crisis which causes them. That said, Model 1 does show some positive associations between *Inequality* topics and *Economy* topics, whereas Model 2's *Disproportionate Access* links more with *Ideology, Critiques and Awareness*. One explanation is that Model 1 attempts to address these issues from an economic perspective, consistent with the IML/market logic paradigm, while Model 2 focuses on societal critiques. Both Models, however, do not associate *Inequality* topics with taxation. There is a similar hesitancy to cover redistribution as a policy measure, or perhaps an unawareness that redistribution of wealth is in fact related not only to social inequalities but also to the climate crisis. Model 1 also only relates T39: Role of Government, Welfare to T3: Housing and Access in the *Inequality* domain, and to no topics in the *Economy* domain. This ignores the possibility that government intervention or the expansion of social nets beyond questions of housing can be alternative solutions to ESG investment strategies. Notably, class as an intersection was also missing as a stand-alone topic in both Models.

Discussion and conclusion

The contribution of this article consists in using a political economy perspective on media power to consider the findings of a comprehensive structural topic model analysis within the framework of critical discourse analysis across selected US media outlets. Against background assumptions of the Imperial Mode of Living, certain alarming trends concerning the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus become apparent. These trends highlight the significant impact of media ownership, political leanings and structural biases on public discourse.

When it comes to coverage of the climate-inequality nexus, the majority of content emphasizes what is already accepted. Such content is not necessarily non-controversial. It may emphasize acceptable existing controversies: the divide between established political parties, the actions of wealthy individuals, the need for new technologies and so on. This is clear when looking at biases in the *Inequality* domain. All groups had rather low differences in most topics because it is acceptable to argue about peoples access to housing, healthcare and education—though the

conclusions of such arguments might differ. But discussing why inequalities exist, how they helped create the conditions for the climate crisis, how they are integral to adequately solving it; these are missing from the corpus topics. *Why*? Because such matters reside outside the entertainment and comfort zones expected by audiences and manufactured by owners and advertizers.

This is dangerous, firstly because people still rely heavily on traditional news for information on climate change or economic inequality (as established by Newman [2020] and Entman [1989], for example]. There is a big difference between relevant, researched information and recurring entertainment. Secondly, absences in the representation of inequality shifts the relationship between information provider and information receiver. Receivers are left with less choice and plurality in content; yet somehow, they are meant to believe they have agency through choice of outlet. This also affects the choices that journalists themselves have in regard to addressing audiences. This is a direct threat to democratic health, as a robust media system is essential for an informed citizenry capable of meaningful participation in democratic processes. Owners are driven by economic imperatives to see audiences as something to be pacified and placated, and not citizens with a right to be adequately informed. Journalists, who rely on owners for compensation and the means to create, are undermined. This is exactly the shift to a 'curator' role that Schäfer and Painter (2020) adeptly describe. What results is a crafted and limited bundle of content options presented to specific audiences. The concentration of ownership and the continued subjugation of the media's many possibilities to these imperatives reduces not only the scope of media content but also the importance of one of the most crucial institutions within society. That is precisely what political economy of media literature highlights (Curran, 2002; Curran & Seaton, 2018; Murdock & Golding, 2005). This concern is not limited to traditional forms of media (see Murdock & Brevini, 2019, on digital media ecosystems, where this issue is even more augmented). This, in turn, helps maintain an unsustainable mode of living based on exploitative consumption, which Monbiot explicitly emphasizes: "Advertising, on which most of the media rely for their money, helps to sustain levels of consumption the Earth systems cannot bear" (2022, p. 583). A hopeful point, though, is the differences seen in Model 2: more critical viewpoints expressed from outlets with different ownership configurations and financing models.

Differences in corpus composition reveal distinctions between mainstream and alternative outlets in their engagement with the climate crisis nexus. In comparing corpus composition between Models, Model 2 demonstrates a more critical undertone, particularly in evaluative topics like T46: Voicing Concerns, which are more interconnected and prevalent. Alternative media outlets (Model 2) cover a broader range of nexus-related aspects, including nuanced perspectives on capitalist values, the positive and negative effects of globalization, and non-energy environmental issues like biodiversity and food security. Model 2 initiates discussions on the adequacy of mainstream progress measurement methods, challenging their hegemony. This aligns with transformative journalism principles, which place the public good at the centre to foster honest reporting. This contrasts with the potentially unconscious consent facilitated by traditional outlets lacking space for subaltern perspectives (Brüggemann et al., 2022). Public service media needs the opportunity to take up more space to provide the pluralist, non-profit motivated content we need to strengthen democratic participation and reduce systemic asymmetries (Pickard, 2020).

At the heart of this contribution is one of the most glaring omissions in coverage of the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus: global power disparities and responsibility. In Model 1, no topics dealt explicitly with any questions of differentiated responsibility or obligations. There was no mention of the historical role played by global North countries, or even specifically the US, in

creating the climate crisis (or how historically rooted inequalities stratify the severity of its consequences). What's more, media mentions of non-US areas like Latin America were concerned with the negative effects of migration and crime, perpetuating existing asymmetries and harmful stereotypes. This shows the continued persistence of the IML and its pervasiveness within media discourses. The result is an "us vs them" mentality towards nations that have been systematically handicapped by powerful players. The US is elevated: the land everyone wants to escape to, or the power everyone wants help from. But the role of the US in creating the destabilizing social and physical environments, within and beyond Latin America, is ignored. This is at the core of Thunberg's message in *The Climate Book,* namely that we as a society must face the truth, the responsibility and the shame that is inextricably linked with the root causes of this multifaceted crisis if we are to ever inspire change. The media must help guide us in this direction.

Overall, this article has shown the status of the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus in the US mediascape. The interpretation of these findings through a political economy perspective—combining the IML concept with media and communication scholarship—allows for a deeper understanding of how the media perpetuates hegemony. By explicitly analysing differences in nexus coverage in relation to political leaning and ownership, this article addresses how the current setup of the American mainstream media effectively hinders the ability for hegemony to be fully contested in this arena, at the expense of democracy. The institutional failings of the mainstream media landscape have been publicly recognised, as reflected in critiques contained within *The Climate Book*. The rise in alternative media and popular communication platforms also underscore the challenges traditional media face. *The Climate Book* itself is representative of an alternative way to bridge the gap between complex coverage of the climate crisis and wider audiences. This exemplifies new ways of engagement which could be applied to media systems.

The wider socio-ecological transformation that is necessary to create a truly sustainable future hinges on the capacity to both inform people about the climate crisis-economic inequality nexus while including people in decision making. Media has both the power and the responsibility to do so, if it is resituated as an essential public service (Pickard, 2020). The urgency of the climate-inequality crisis makes the need for such changes ever more pressing.

Author Bios

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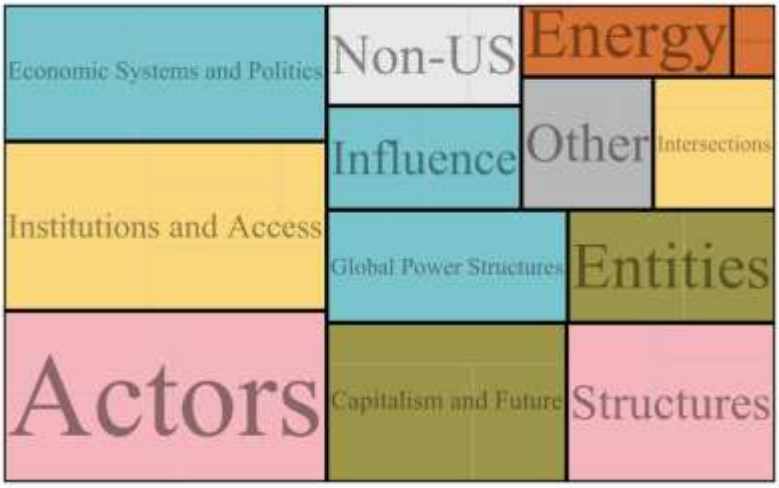
Appendix

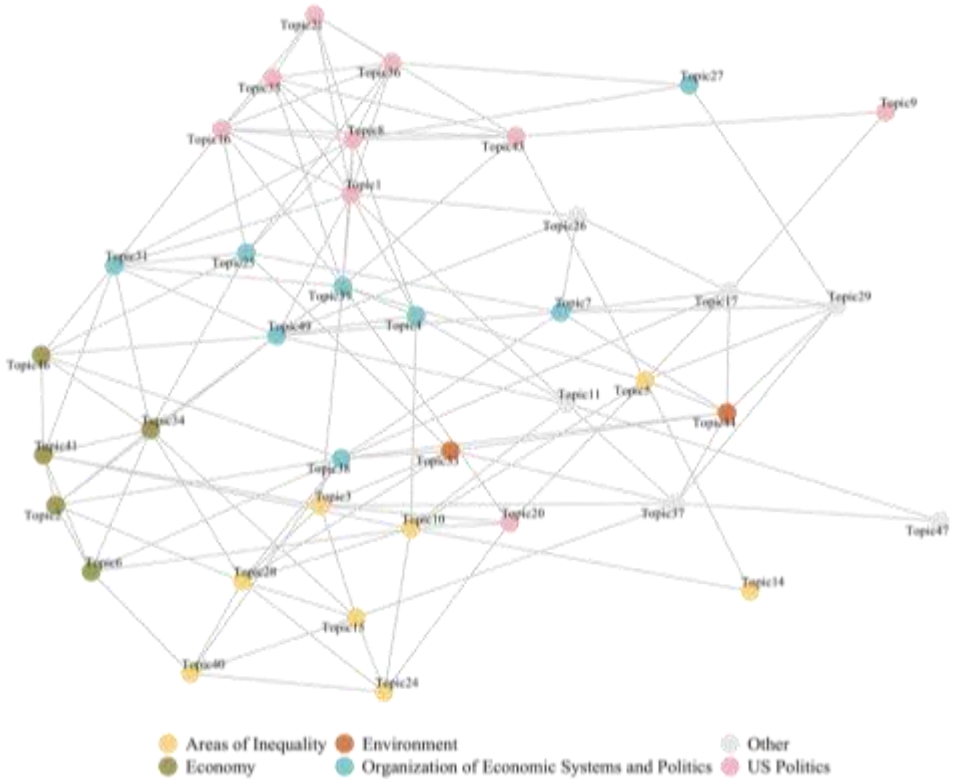
A: Supplementary Information for Model 1 and Model 2

Figure A1: Model 1, Prevalence of Discourses



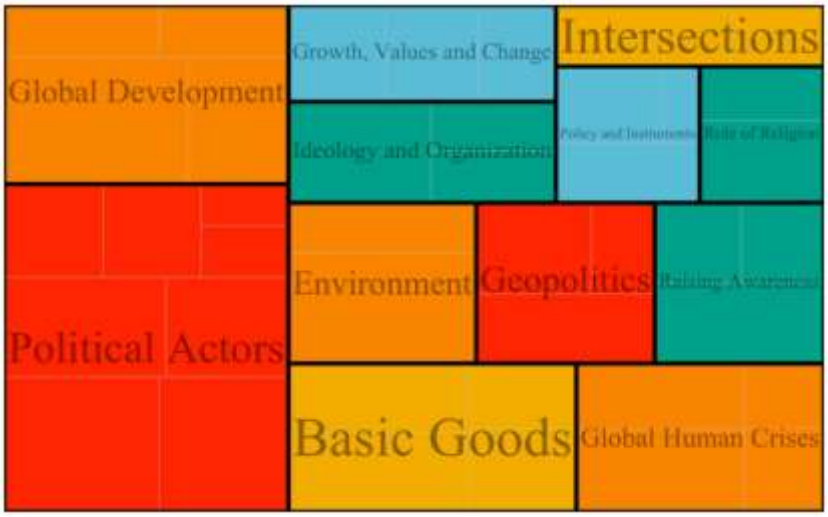
Note. The figure shows the distribution of discourse prevalence in the corpus, represented by the area of each square. The colors reflect Domain association. Actors has a slightly higher area than Institutions and Access, which are the most represented in the corpus. Overall, topics related to Institutions, Systems or generally US Politics are positioned at the forefront of nexus coverage, primarily political actors.

Figure A2: Network Links, Model 1



Note. The nodes represent each topic; the color references which domain each pertains to. The closer nodes are clustered together, the more often they appear together in documents. There is a clear clustering based on domain, with links mostly flowing between *Organization of Economic Systems and Politics*, and other singular links between *Economy* and *Areas of Inequality*.

Figure A3: Model 2, prevalence of discourses



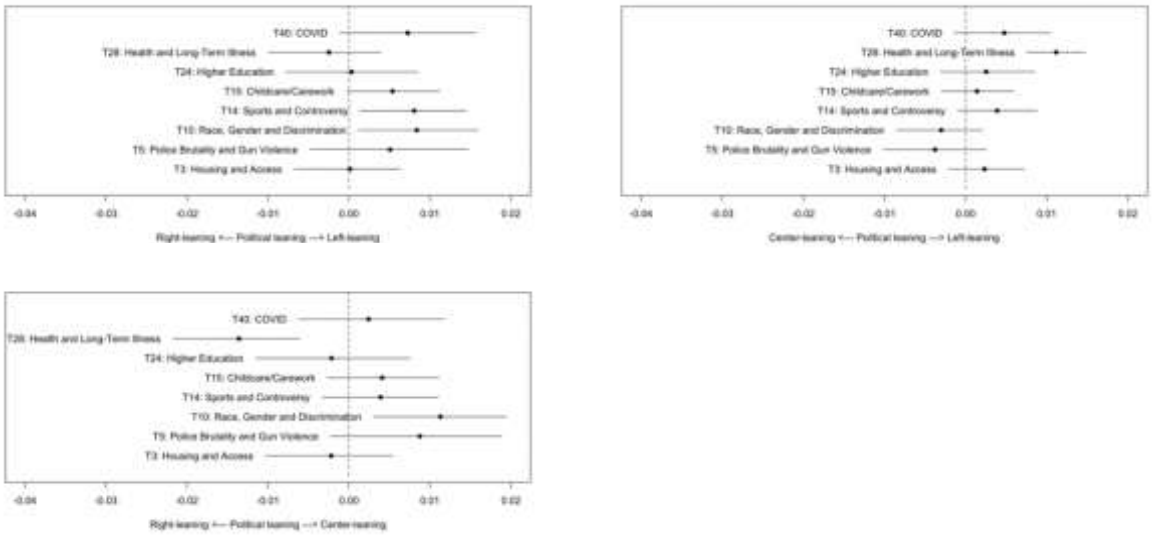
Note. Similar to Model 1, Political Actors is the most prevalent discourse, followed by Global Development. Interestingly, there is a higher differentiation in prevalence of discourses in Model 2 as opposed to Model 1, where the following Actors discourses had similar prevalence. Basic Goods and Global Human Crises have larger areas than Growth, Values and Change, and Ideology and Organization. What is interesting is the rather larger prevalence of discourses that are more critically oriented, or rather, have the potential to be, like Raising Awareness, Ideology and Organization and Environment. Politics and Globalization are the most prevalent domains.

Figure A4: Network Links, Model 2

Note: When compared to the network of Model 1, there are some key differences in domain correlation. Disproportionate Access, which most closely resembles the Inequality domain of Model 1, is even more independently linked. It only has singular links to T46: Voicing Concerns, T11: Taxation and Inequality (both in the Ideology, Critiques and Awareness domain), and T1: Growth and Productivity Indicators (Economy domain). Model 1 showed more clustering between inequality related topics and economy. Model 2 shows higher links between Economy and Globalization, which makes sense given the high prevalence of "development" related discourses.

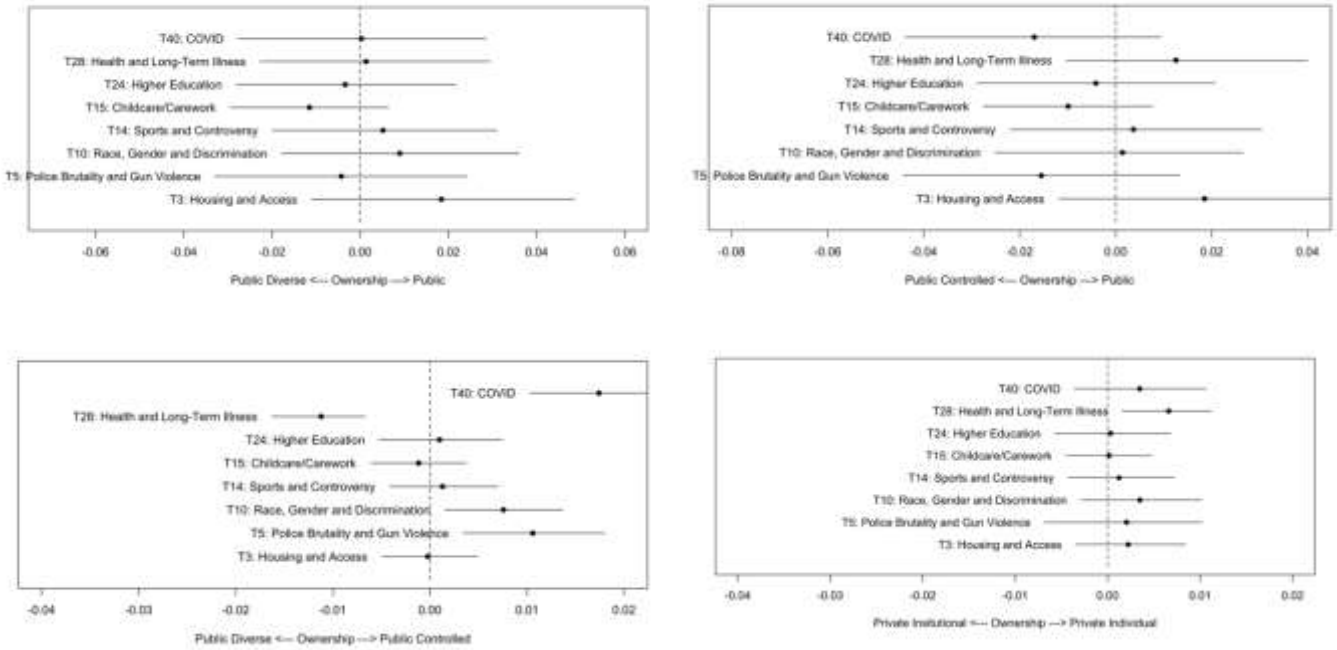
B: Supplementary Information on Model 1 Covariates

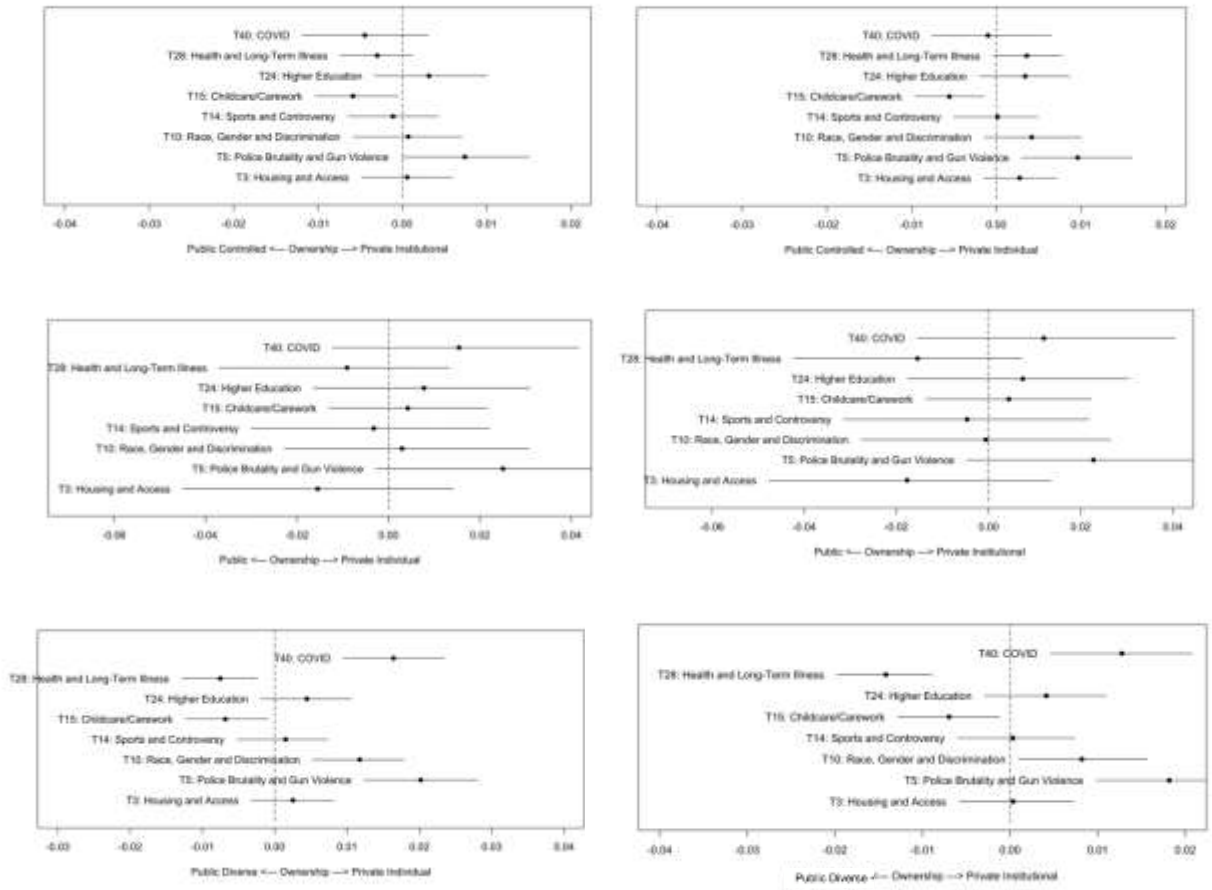
Figure B1.1: Political Leaning – Areas of Inequality



Note: Areas of Inequality seem to be more associated with the Left Group, though some topics in particular are more associated to Centre, like those regarding *Race* or *Police Brutality.*

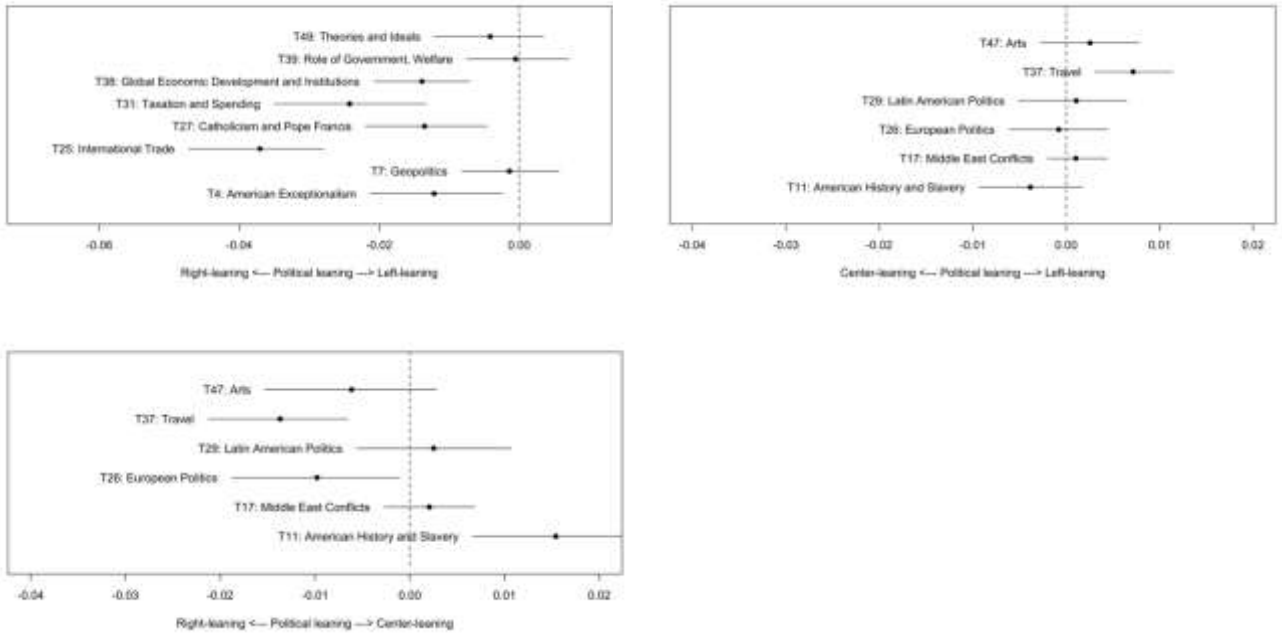
Figure B1.2: Ownership - Areas of Inequality





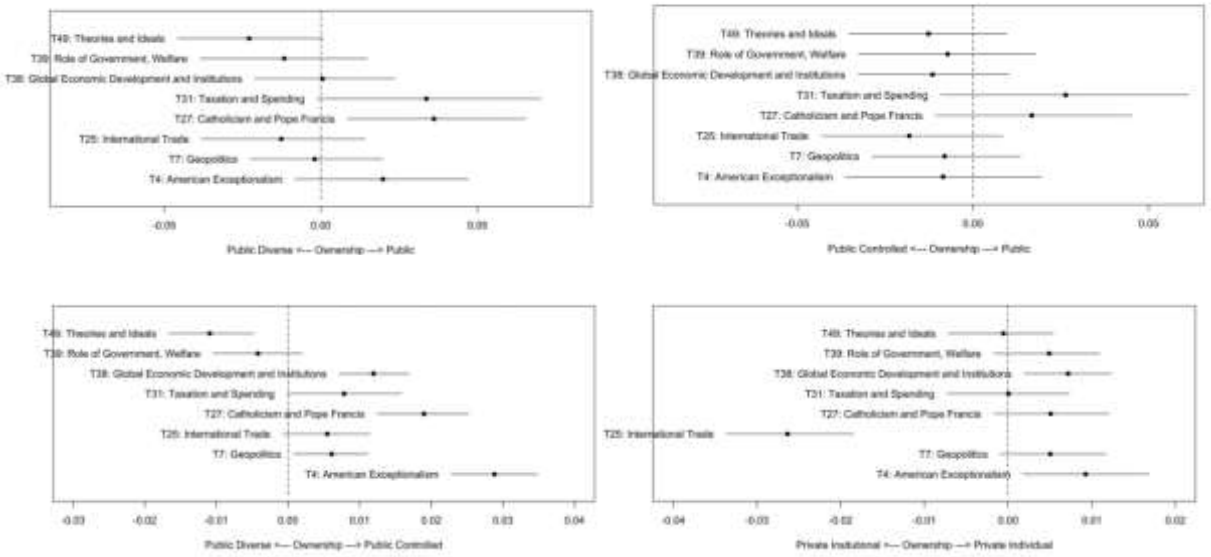
Note: Differences between both Private groups to either Public Diverse or Full Public are more pronounced than between both Private groups to Public Controlled. The biggest differences seem to center around T40: COVID, T5: Police Brutality and Gun Violence, and T28: Health and Long-Term Illness.

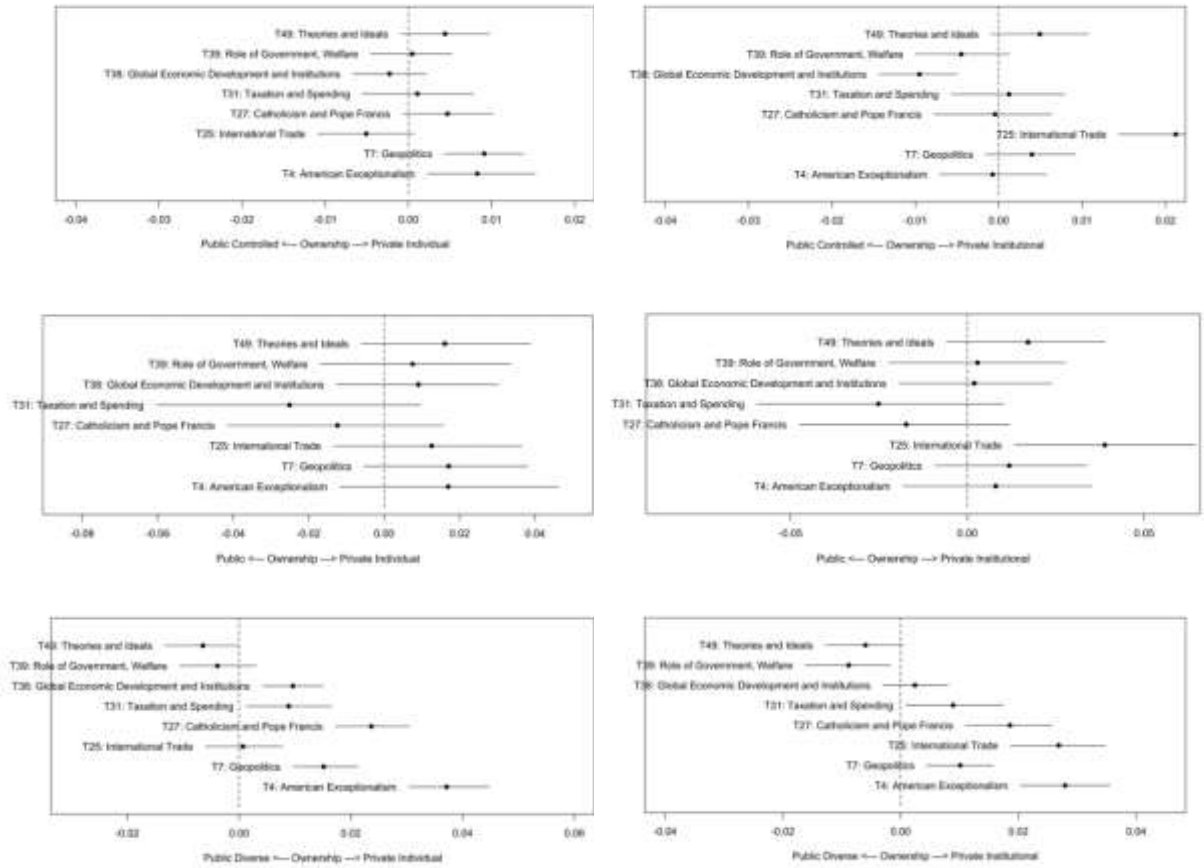
Figure B2.1: Political Leaning - Organization of Economic Systems and Politics



Note: The predominant skew to the Right Group is rather evident, particularly in comparison to the Left Group.

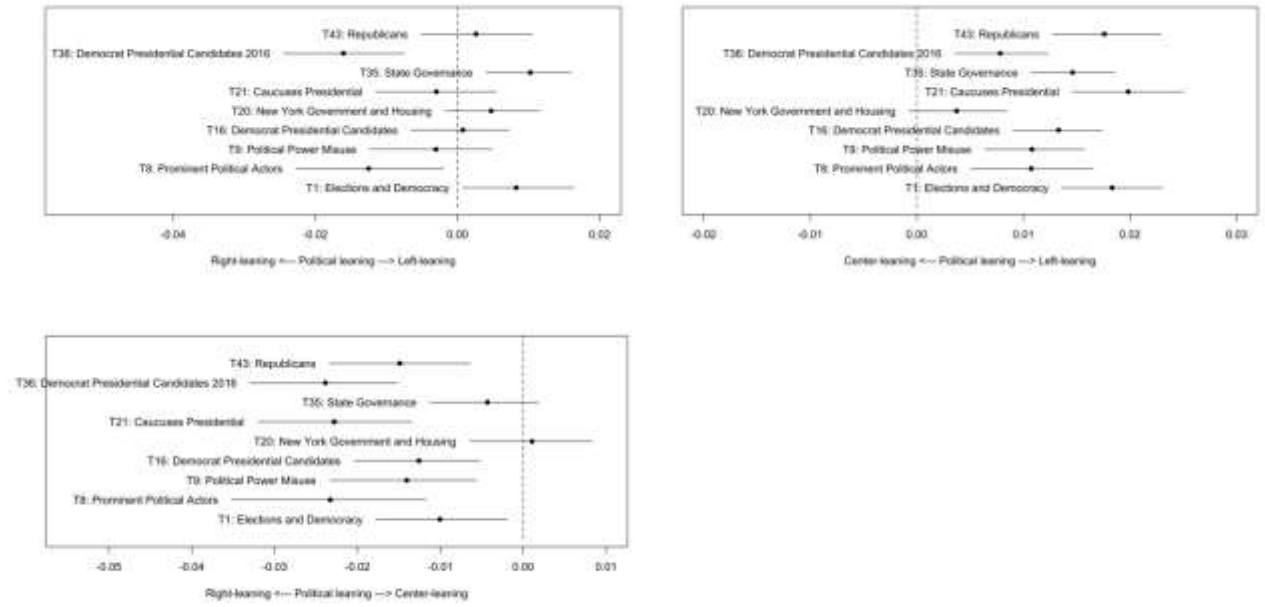
Figure B2.2: Ownership Structure - Organization of Economic Systems and Politics





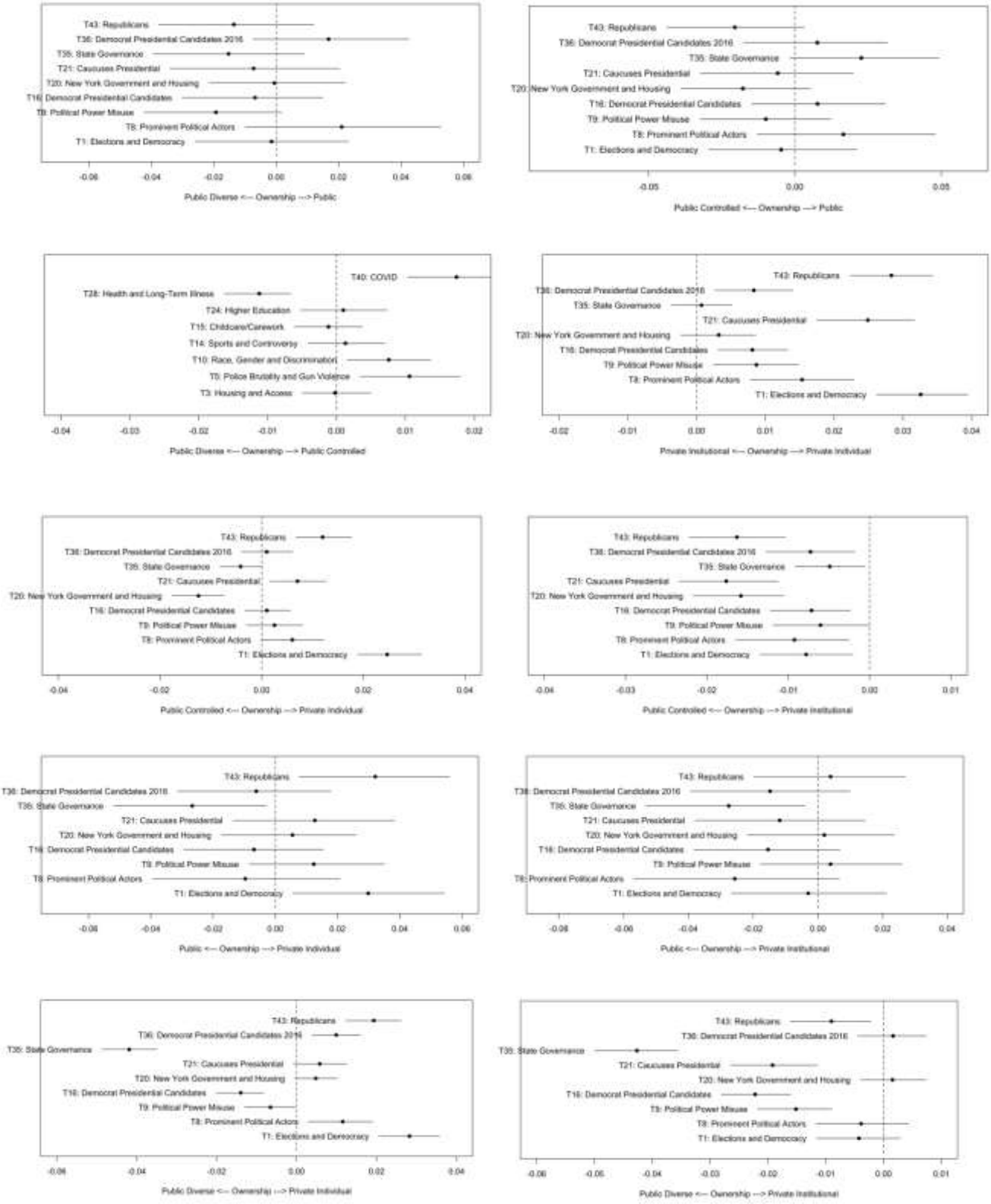
Note: Public Controlled acts more similarly to the Private Groups than the other Publics - interesting to note that TE1: Taxation and Spending is, however, more related to the full Public group.

Figure B3.1: Political Leaning - US Politics



Note. The skew to Right and Left is quite dominant, meaning that US Politics is highly relevant to either end of the political lean spectrum, while Centre sources more likely will talk about T20: New York Government and Housing

Figure B3.2: Ownership Structure – US Politics



Note. There is a strong negative direction associated with Private Institutional and a notably strong one towards Private Individual. T35: State Governance shows similar direction and strength towards Public Diverse and Full Public Group, while Public Controlled and both Private Groups have a much smaller difference in skew.