

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****INTERSECTIONALITY AND MEDIA BIAS: GENDER AND IDENTITY FRAMING IN JOURNALISM OF FEMALE POLITICIANS IN AMERICAN NEWS OUTLETS****Azzadina N. Ikhwan<sup>1</sup>, Sisilia Setiawati Halimi<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Universitas Indonesia, Depok, West Java, Indonesia**Article History**

Received 29 July 2024

Revised 04 November 2024

Accepted 04 January 2025

**Keywords**

Media bias, intersectionality, gender stereotypes, political journalism, critical discourse analysis

**ABSTRACT**

Despite the number reaching an all-time high in the most recent election, female participation in U.S. politics has its drawbacks. One longstanding issue that continues to occur today is media bias, which often manifests in news coverage. Media bias plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of female politicians, intertwining aspects of gender, socio-economic status, and political ideology. This study critically examines the media coverage of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez by American left-leaning and right-leaning outlets through the lens of intersectionality. Employing critical discourse analysis, it reveals how semantic choices and thematic patterns perpetuate identity-driven biases. Right-wing outlets often emphasized stereotypical traits, portraying Ocasio-Cortez as overly emotional or inexperienced, reinforcing traditional gender roles. In contrast, left-leaning outlets framed her actions as calculated and strategic, albeit selectively omitting details that might provoke backlash. These biases, though subtle, significantly shape narratives, impacting public trust and female political representation. As few studies explore how identity aspects intersect to drive media bias toward female politicians, this study calls attention to the compounding effect on bias created by the connection between various identity aspects such as gender, age, socioeconomic class, and political ideology. The research highlights the pervasive nature of identity-based discrimination in political journalism by dissecting linguistic markers and framing tactics. The study also underscores the necessity for balanced reporting practices to reduce biased portrayals and calls for more critical media consumption to avoid echo chambers that perpetuate stereotypes. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of how intersectionality influences media narratives, offering global insights into fostering equitable journalism. This analysis further sheds light on the intersection of identity and power in media discourses, particularly during electoral periods when public perceptions are most malleable.

**Introduction**

Over the past few decades, people have continuously worked to increase women's political participation. Female representation in the United States (U.S.) political climate today stands at an all-time high compared to previous decades. In the most recent election, women held 153 out of 540 seats in the House of Representatives and the Senate combined. This represents a significant 59% increase compared to a decade ago when women occupied only 96 seats (Leppert & Desilver, 2023). Nevertheless, these accomplishments don't negate the fact that politics remains a field that often portrays women unfavorably. There are many examples of contentious treatment against women within the political realm. However, this research focuses on one in particular: media bias toward female politicians in the U.S. Most—if not all—female politicians in the U.S have experienced media bias in connection to their gender. The concept of “media bias” describes a predisposition often observed within editorial policies regarding the framing and emphasis of coverage given to a certain event. In turn, this reflects the political and socio-economic views of the media outlet (Elejalde et al., 2018). When this concept is applied to news outlets, framing female politicians with subconscious bias rather than objectively highlighting their achievements or policies can lead to distorted public perception.

**Corresponding Author:** Sisilia S. Halimi, Email: [halimisisilia@gmail.com](mailto:halimisisilia@gmail.com)  
Universitas Indonesia, Depok, West Java, Indonesia

Moreover, bias within news reports undermines the fundamental purpose of mass media as an objective source of information. Although bias in writing is generally unavoidable since journalists are also susceptible to societal bias (Kalra & Boukes, 2020), a high amount of it presents a barrier to objective reporting. Suppose people cannot trust the media to relay accurate information. In that case, a crucial question arises: where can people turn to for information that shapes their political decisions and, consequently, influences policies that govern their livelihoods? Not only that, but highlighting the existence of bias is crucial at the present time. The upcoming U.S. elections are scheduled to be held in late 2024. Until then, there will be a higher amount of attention and coverage towards political discourse. Therefore, acknowledging bias is crucial to approach media consumption during these times critically. Lastly, it would hopefully also encourage greater objectivity in journalism in the long-run beyond election period. If both fail to be addressed, the audience may become more susceptible to propagandistic messages, potentially resulting in a range of societal problems.

To understand how bias can be identified within news articles reporting female politicians, this study analyzes how the same event was portrayed by different news outlets, focusing on one politician. The subject chosen for this analysis is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democratic U.S. representative for New York's 14th congressional district known for her brazen approach to political discourse through digital media. According to research by Pew Research Center on the congressional social media landscape, Ocasio-Cortez's holds the biggest following out of all American representatives and senators, amounting to 8 million in 2025. In addition to that, her Puerto Rican identity and working-class background have also contributed to how she is framed in news outlets. These identity aspects must be considered and acknowledged as interconnected to create a more nuanced analysis. Hence, the aim of this research is to highlight the intricate connection between identity aspects. It also explores how identity impacts media portrayal under the sub-context of political representation.

This study hypothesizes that bias exists to some extent regardless of the news outlets. However, the degree of criticalness varied depending on the identity of the subject as well as the writer. In the context of U.S. news outlets, their political identity would fall somewhere within a spectrum in which each end is one of the two largest political parties in the U.S, the Democratic and Republican Party. The Democratic Party is known to support more liberal or left-leaning ideology while the Republican Party advocates for more conservative or right-leaning values (Goren, 2005). Therefore, this research aims to answer the question of how Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was portrayed by four different American left-leaning and right-leaning news outlets in relation to her identity aspects.

In the context of biased reporting by news outlets, researchers dedicate considerable effort to describing the impact of bias. In their research, Sazali & Basit (2020) stated that the media wields the ability to steer public attention. According to the cultivation theory of mass communication, mass media subtly affects the audience through messages, images, or symbols (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). This theory is echoed in the study by Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga (2017), where news outlet readers are exposed to a different narrative of the same event depending on where they read it.

Consequently, the media can also influence how society depicts women in politics. Sensales & Areni (2017) stated that the mass media plays an important role in discouraging women's active political engagement by using specific linguistic markers that stigmatize women. Gender roles, a set of stereotypical values imposed on the general population of a gender group (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), is also commonly employed. The media tends to concentrate on personal details like family, personality, and appearance for female politicians, while their policy and political stances take the backseat (Kalra & Boukes, 2020). Journalists commonly employ gender roles, a set of stereotypical values imposed on the general population of a gender group (Eagly & Steffen, 1984).

This pattern is not exclusive to the United States. Research on the representation of female politicians in Indonesia (Sarwono, 2024) revealed that women's political decisions are often viewed through a biased lens, with a particular tendency to portray women more positively if they exhibit a demure temperament in their advocacy. Similarly, a study analyzing hate speech targeting Finnish politicians (Meriläinen, 2024) found that while both male and female politicians are subject to such speech, gender roles play a significant role. Female politicians who deviate from traditional gender expectations are more likely to be targeted by

hate speech. These studies demonstrate that gender-based media bias is not confined to U.S. media but reflects a broader, cross-cultural pattern observed in various countries and contexts.

Highlighting this issue further, gender-based media bias also intersects with other identity aspects of a particular subject. To explore this interconnectivity, this research uses intersectionality theory as its theoretical framework. Intersectionality theory is grounded in the premise that an individual's various social identities are intricately intertwined and cannot be considered independently in assessing their collective influence on human experiences (Bauer et al., 2021). This theory suggests that society needs to take other forms of identities, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and ideology, into account to address the interplay of gender and media bias. In the case of this study, the intersectionality theory can highlight how Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's identity aspects affect how certain groups favor or disfavor her political stance.

Therefore, based on the studies so far, it could be concurred that a considerable amount of research has been dedicated to the exploration of the wrongful portrayal of female politicians in media. In spite of that, researchers need to elaborate further on how gender-based media bias may intersect with other identity aspects such as race, ethnicity, ideology, and socioeconomic status. In addressing the interplay of gender and media bias, previous research has not taken into account how these other identity aspects will unconsciously play a part in affecting the severity of bias shown by the media on the subject. Therefore, this study aims to build on past research on gender bias and bridge the research gap. It explores the intersectionality between various aspects of identity, such as gender, ideology, ethnicity, and socioeconomic standing, to understand how they affect the degree of bias female politicians experience.

## Materials and Methods

Using the intersectionality theory framework, this research focuses on analyzing political discourse, which is a specific subject matter of written or spoken communication that is thematically related to politics and government (Wilson, 2005). The data are excerpts from articles written by four American news outlets: The Washington Post, CNN, The New York Post, and Fox News. These news outlets were chosen based on their dominant partisan ideology—left-leaning (The Washington Post and CNN) or right-leaning (The New York Post and Fox News)—and their popularity among American citizens as a source of information (Grieco, 2020).

In determining the validity of this study's data, the articles in question had to fulfill four criteria: 1) the article should be published within the year range of 2018–2024, 2) the article should cover a particular event in which Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was highlighted as the main topic, 3) the article should exhibit a clear stance (that is aligned with the news outlet's partisan ideology) regarding said event, and 4) the stance held by said article should be comparable to another article by a different news outlet which covers the same event. These criteria were established to narrow down the scope of research.

Then, the data were analyzed by comparing the differences in how Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was portrayed in coverage of the same or similar events. The analysis focused on the excerpts' semantics, word choice, and the angle journalists chose to portray the subject. We further analyzed the specific phrase, sentence, or paragraph when differences were found. This analysis revealed its implications on the topic at hand, how it proves bias, and how it may relate to Ocasio-Cortez's identity aspects. For this stage of the analysis, we used critical discourse analysis as the method. This approach, derived from past research, involves critically examining verbal or written discourse. It includes, but is not limited to, interactions, dialogues, discussions, or communications related to the topic under study (Mullet, 2018). By using this method, the study adopted a broader lens in viewing language. This approach also considers its real-life context at the time it happened.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents and elaborates on the result of critical discourse analysis on six articles published in American news outlet, namely Fox News, The Washington Post, New York Post, and CNN, in which Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was the subject of coverage. The articles are presented not in its entirety, but as quoted excerpts that are relevant to this study. These excerpts are then analyzed with a focus on its underlying linguistic qualities such as word choices and semantics. In doing the analysis, the findings show

that there are conspicuously non-objective sentences. The sentences are then taken into account within the wider context of the article to see which identity aspects are affected by bias.

The analysis process identified key dimensions of bias in the six articles, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, and political ideology. Through an intersectional lens, these dimensions often intersect, amplifying the challenges female politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez face in navigating political discourse. It is important to remember that dissecting this topic with regard to intersectionality theory means that one of these topics often intersect with another. Therefore, there could be age, gender, and political ideology-related bias in one article. Lastly, the articles covering the same event and topics are grouped together to highlight and compare their differences in their perspectives.

### Assertive vs. Emotional: Gender-Based Bias in News Framing

Media bias can manifest in articles through a more narrowed and specific aspect of an individual, one of them being gender. A female politician's framing in the news is often interlinked with how women are perceived or expected to act as member of society. Deriving from research by Eagly and Karau (2002), women tend to be evaluated in a more negative and prejudiced due to the clash between leadership traits which are portrayed as masculine and the feminine traditional gender roles. Connecting this issue with the intersectionality theory, a person's tendency to subscribe to traditional gender roles and project those beliefs can also be influenced by their political ideology. Right-leaning news outlets and journalists seem to exhibit a stronger adherence to gender norms. This hypothesis is aligned with the research by Becker (2020) stating that progressive social change is more likely to be promoted by individuals with liberal (left-leaning) beliefs. Conservatives (right-leaning) possess a strong desire for order and are less likely to accept changes; therefore, siding with 'outdated' stereotypes more often than liberals (Stern, West, & Rule, 2015).

Building upon this premise, it is hypothesized that right-wing news outlets would also have a higher likelihood to display gender bias towards women who do not act in accordance with traditional concepts on how women should behave, especially if the subject in conversation and/or holds a different political ideology. The case of Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez exemplifies this phenomenon, as she has frequently been the subject of criticism, notably from conservative circles, owing to her assertive advocacy for progressive causes. In order to prove the soundness of this hypothesis, one instance that was chosen to be analyzed is the news coverage of the dispute between Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez and Ted Yoho on July 23rd, 2020. This exchange resulted in significant news coverage, with the framing of the incident significantly differing between right-leaning news outlets and left-leaning news outlets. Table 1 presented below contains quotes from Fox News (right-leaning) and The Washington Post (left-leaning) that framed the event in a biased manner.

**Table 1.** Examination of Bias in Coverages on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ted Yoho's Dispute

	No.	Fox News	The Washington Post
Headline	1	Ocasio-Cortez delivered <b><u>emotional floor speech</u></b> <b><u>slamming</u></b> Rep. Yoho's <b><u>'abusive language'</u></b>	AOC's speech about Ted Yoho's <b><u>'apology'</u></b> was a <b><u>comeback</u></b> for the ages
Quotes	2	Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez... <b><u>led one hour of passionate speeches</u></b> on the House floor "I am two years younger than Mr. Yoho's youngest daughter. I am someone's daughter, too," Ocasio-Cortez said, <b><u>getting emotional</u></b> <b><u>talking about her late father.</u></b>	It is worth noting that while Ocasio-Cortez laid all of this out, <b><u>she does so in a tone of voice that never veers above mild irritation.</u></b> <b><u>In her floor speech, which totals about 10 minutes, she never raises her voice</u></b> or resorts to calling names.

3	<b><u>Yoho did apologized on the House floor</u></b> on Wednesday following a report he called the congresswoman a "f----- b----."	<b><u>Yoho had said, insisting that he'd been misheard and hadn't used the pejorative phrase</u></b> that a reporter from The Hill heard him say.
---	--	---

The quotes in the table demonstrate how two news outlets can create different narratives from the same event. Not only that, the articles also use certain words in order to portray the event in favor of either Ocasio-Cortez or Yoho. For example, Fox News, which favors Ted Yoho, was more vague and emotionally charged in their word choices to evoke a more intense reaction from readers. Furthermore, the usage of language in the Fox News article acts as a tool to diminish Ocasio-Cortez's credibility in relation to her gender. This amplified the portrayal of Ocasio-Cortez as emotional, playing into gender stereotypes, which refers to a generalized and often untrue characteristics imposed on a specific gender (Hentschel et al., 2019). In accordance with a study by Frasca, Leskinen, & Warner (2022), labeling women as emotional during conflicts compel people to view them as irrational.

In fact, the evidence of gender bias in the framing can be seen as early as the article's headline itself. The framing of AOC's speech in The Washington Post as 'a comeback for the ages,' contrasted with Fox News's emphasis on her being 'emotional,' highlights how political discourse shapes perceptions of female politicians. This duality reflects not only gendered but also ideological biases, revealing the intersectional challenges they face in media portrayal. Furthermore, the word "comeback" was also chosen to support Ocasio-Cortez remarks. On the other hand, Fox News's headline "Ocasio-Cortez delivers emotional floor speech slamming Rep. Yoho's 'abusive language'" used air quotes on the phrase "abusive language" for the same purpose as The Washington Post. Another word that is worthy of highlighting from the Fox News headline is "emotional". In this case, calling Ocasio-Cortez's speech emotional undermined the content of her argument as readers focus more on her state of mind.

Throughout the article, the use of emotionally charged words such as 'emotional,' 'passionate,' and 'slamming' reinforces gender stereotypes, framing Ocasio-Cortez's actions through the lens of traditional expectations for women. This framing exemplifies how intersectional bias marginalizes female politicians, reducing their arguments to emotional outbursts rather than rational discourse. It reached the point where facts in the coverage were written to fit a certain narrative the writers felt aligned with their beliefs, even if the content itself was exaggerated or skewed. An example of this can be seen again in quotes 2 and 3 on Table 1. In quote 2, The Washington Post stated that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez "never veers above mild irritation (in her tone of voice)" and she did not raise her voice throughout her ten-minute speech. On the other hand, Fox News suggested otherwise by stating that she "led one hour of passionate speeches" and she "gets emotional."

Based on the analysis and elaboration above, it can be deduced that the word choices within the Washington Post's coverage tends to be more descriptive and detailed when it benefited Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's side of the story. Interestingly, it does not occur every time and the opposite strategy might be used for the same result. As shown in quote 3 in The Washington Post coverage, the author indirectly quoted Yoho who insisted that did not show contempt for Ocasio-Cortez, the media had simply misunderstood what he said. On the other hand, the Fox News article simply stated that Yoho did apologize. The writing of The Washington Post article gave more room to the reader to decide whether Ted Yoho apologizes or not, as opposed to the second article that simply stated the action directly to the reader.

The analysis proved that bias in the news article did not only manifest through Ocasio-Cortez but Ted Yoho as well, in consequence of their respective identity aspect. The bias in the article would result in both subjects being viewed unfavorably in the article. For Ocasio-Cortez, citizens who consistently only read Fox News and other right-wing news outlet would be more inclined to hold negative viewpoint of her regardless of whether that viewpoint is factual.

### Young Lady: Age-Based Bias in News Framing

Another bias that often manifests in media is age-based bias. In the case of Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, her age has been a recurring topic within media coverage due to the fact that Ocasio-Cortez was the youngest

woman to ever serve in the U.S Congress at 29. Not only that, but her achievement also made her the youngest member of the 116th Congress (Hess, 2018). Currently at 34, Ocasio-Cortez's age is still far lower than the median age of U.S Representatives, which is 58.1 for Democrats and 57.4 for Republicans. It is even much lower when compared to the median age of the US Senates, which is 65.4 for Democrats and 65.3 for Republicans (Blazina & Desilver, 2023).

The extremity of her age compared to the field's average creates an asymmetry of power in which her youth can influence others' behavior and/or perceptions towards her. It also makes her more vulnerable to age-based bias both from political actors themselves and the U.S citizens. Table 2 below examined one example of bias materializing from an age-related topic in U.S news articles. The occurrence happened in September 2021 involving Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez herself and the U.S Senator Joe Manchin.

**Table 2.** Examination of Bias in Coverages of Age-Related Event involving Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Her Age

	No.	New York Post	CNN
Quotes	1	<b><u>The feud</u></b> between Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Joe Manchin <b><u>heated up</u></b> over the weekend, with the <b><u>progressive</u></b> firebrand hitting back at the <b><u>moderate Democrat</u></b> for referring to her as a "young lady."	<b><u>The back-and-forth underscored the challenge</u></b> facing Democratic leadership as they <b><u>work to unite their party</u></b> behind the economic bill – a legislative priority of President Joe Biden's that would expand the nation's social safety net – and advance it through <b><u>a narrowly divided Congress</u></b> with just Democratic votes.
	2	<b><u>The 74-year-old Manchin (D-WV) was responding to allegations by Ocasio-Cortez that he "huddles" weekly with Exxon during an interview Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union" when he made the reference.</u></b>	<b><u>The comments came after Manchin, in a Sunday interview on CNN's "State of the Union," denied recent claims from Ocasio-Cortez that he is beholden to big energy companies.</u></b>
	3	"In Washington, I usually know my questions of power are getting somewhere when the powerful stop referring to me as 'Congresswoman' and start referring to me as 'young lady' instead," <b><u>Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) wrote in a posting on Twitter that included a winking emoji.</u></b>	"In Washington, I usually know my questions of power are getting somewhere when the powerful stop referring to me as 'Congresswoman' and start referring to me as 'young lady' instead," Ocasio-Cortez, a New York Democrat, <b><u>said in a pair of tweets that did not refer to Manchin by name.</u></b>

The article from the New York Post proof the existence of bias through adultism, a term used to describe behaviors or perceptions towards youth based on the stereotypes and assumptions (usually held by adults or people who are older) that they are incompetent and inexperienced (Fuente-Núñez et al., 2021). Adultism promotes the notion that the naivety of youth should exclude or dismiss their opinion from important issues and adults are the ones who know better. This sort of thinking perpetuates a rigid power structure with age as its core. The occurrence that became the news topic can be seen as an example of adultism in politics. As shown in Quote 3 of Table 2, Ocasio-Cortez responded to the moderate conservative democrat (Colegrove, 2016) by stating that referring to someone's age and gender as a way to address them as 'patronizing behavior'. While it would not be abnormal for a 72-year-old man to refer to the 30-year-old Ocasio-Cortez as young, the offhand comment was unnecessary since both Manchin and Ocasio-Cortez



were serving in the same professional environment, the U.S Congress. The age-related embellishment led Ocasio-Cortez to appear inferior to Machin, as well as making her comments invalid due to her age. This bias manifested in tiny, ambiguous, and subconscious ways (Pritlove et al., 2019), which made it particularly tricky for the receiver to point out the issue without any plausible deniability.

After contextualizing the conversation and understanding Manchin's political position, the subsequent analysis involves an examination of how various news outlets have reported on it. Building upon the thought process of bias, news sources that have demonstrated a consistent tendency to be critical of Ocasio-Cortez would be more inclined to align with Manchin or even manifest comparable age-related bias in their coverage. The portrayal of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as a 'young lady' by Senator Manchin, and the subsequent media coverage, exemplifies intersectional bias. The term diminishes her professional status, combining ageism and sexism to undermine her credibility and authority in political discourse. To substantiate this assertion, the two articles presented in Table 2 shall be examined further.

First, in Quote 1, it is worth noting that the New York Post used the word 'moderate Democrat' and 'progressive firebrand' to describe Machin and Ocasio-Cortez respectively. People who adhere to the same belief would be more compelled to side with one party in attributing identities to the subjects. This is in line with studies that state empathy is an affective state that can be modulated through interpersonal similarity, including being part of the same ingroup (Szanto & Krueger, 2019). In this case, readers who associate themselves as a moderate Democrat would feel compelled to side with Machin's stance due to similarity in political stance. Next, still from Quote 1, the New York Post used the word 'feud' to define the situation while CNN simply used the phrase 'back-and-forth'. The usage of 'feud' implied a hostile, unfriendly connotation. Furthermore, the New York Post article also used the phrase 'heating up' in the same sentence, emphasizing on the intensity of the issue. In contrast, CNN framed the situation as a challenge that they must solve to reach political unity within Congress. By using 'narrowly divided', CNN implied that there was only a small difference in opinions. The distinctions between the two highlighted how one news outlet attempted, may it be consciously or subconsciously, to exaggerate the situation while the other one to downplay it.

This approach of using semantics to frame a situation in favor of one party was similarly found in Quote 2. In the CNN article, the author gave more context of the situation by retelling the sequence of events instead of jumping straight into reporting Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's call out to Machin, which indirectly made her call out justified and reasonable. On the other hand, the New York Post article stated that "The 74-year-old Manchin (D-WV) was responding to allegations by Ocasio-Cortez", indirectly framing Manchin as a man who is just defending himself. Finally, as illustrated in Quote 3, the article displayed age-based bias through highlighting the utilization of technological trends, specifically emojis. Both the New York Post and the CNN article quoted the same tweet written and posted by Ocasio-Cortez addressing the incident. However, the New York Post introduced an additional detail, noting the inclusion of a winking emoji in her tweet. While this detail may seem inconsequential on the surface, a subconscious association of emojis with younger demographics exists. The use of emoji just started getting more widespread in the 2010s (Blagdon, 2013), with Gen Z and Millennials being the predominant user groups (Dixon, 2023). Moreover, research also indicates that individuals over 35 are less likely to use emojis compared to their counterparts below 35 (Jaeger et al., 2018). By emphasizing Ocasio-Cortez's use of emojis, these articles directed readers' attention, thereby introducing a bias into their perception.

### **On the Steps of the Met: Political Economic-Related Bias in News Framing**

The media's framing of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's attendance at the Met Gala provides a compelling case of intersectional bias, shaped by her identity as a working-class woman and progressive politician. In the context of this study's focal figure, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has publicly identified her political & economic compass as a working-class democrat (Stickles & Duarte, 2019). This identity aspect then renders her susceptible to both explicit and implicit biases that can either enhance or undermine her public standing. The topic of the articles mostly talked about the societal perceptions of wealth and privilege in contrast to Alexandria's working-class politician image, each imbued with comments on the propriety and efficacy of her decision.

There were presences of bias both against and in favor of Ocasio-Cortez within the news articles. Against her, negatively biased articles drew on socioeconomic bias to cast her participation as hypocritical given her advocacy for economic justice. Such perspectives highlight inconsistencies between her rhetoric and actions, fostering skepticism or disapproval among certain audiences. This, in turn, would severely affect audience's favorability towards her. In contrast, supportive narratives framed Ocasio-Cortez's attendance as a calculated effort to use her platform to amplify her message. By wearing a gown emblazoned with the words 'Tax the Rich,' she reframed the elite event as an opportunity to highlight issues of economic inequity, a move that aligns with her political identity.

In both cases, there are biases present in the coverage of Ocasio-Cortez's Met Gala attendance, and they have power to shape public perception. Each perspective served as a vehicle to reinforce preexisting narratives and further influence interpretations of her actions for its readers. As illustrated in Table 3 below, articles from the New York Post and The Washington Post detailing Ocasio-Cortez's attendance at the Met Gala serve as illustrative examples to examine such biases.

**Table 3. Examination of Bias in Coverages of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Attendance in the Met Gala**

		New York Post	The Washington Post
Headline		AOC <u>begged</u> to go to exclusive Met Gala, even if it meant breaking the rules.	<b><u>The Met Gala is full of rich people.</u></b> Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wore a dress with a message: <b><u>"Tax the Rich."</u></b>
Quotes	1	<b><u>AOC really wanted to attend</u></b> the September 2021 Met ball — <b><u>a charity event for its Costume Institute, yes, but also the world's number one social event for the rich, famous and beautiful.</u></b>	<b><u>All the pomp has a noble purpose: The night is a fundraiser for the museum's Costume Institute, which is putting on an exhibition on American fashion. The 2021 gala raised a record-breaking \$16.75 million and is the primary source for the institute's annual budget.</u></b>
	2	But <b><u>\$35,000 tickets</u></b> for two people <b><u>(she wanted her boyfriend to go, too)</u></b> would cost nearly six figures <b><u>(if the exclusive ball even approves you)</u></b> . Members of Congress can attend nonprofit events, but the Met normally doesn't invite all of Congress, and <b><u>this isn't AOC's district.</u></b>	<b><u>The cost for a seat at last night's Met Gala started at \$35,000,</u></b> and tables went for \$200,000 to \$300,000. <b><u>Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) walked into the room full of celebrities and rich people</u></b> (often one and the same) <b><u>with a message:</u></b> A white gown with blood red letters on the back reading, <b><u>"TAX THE RICH."</u></b>

Table 3 highlights how headlines alone reveal media bias. The New York Post's use of the word 'begged' portrays Ocasio-Cortez as desperate or opportunistic, invoking traditional stereotypes that women must earn their place in elite spaces. In contrast, The Washington Post's headline frames her attendance as bold and principled, emphasizing her advocacy through her attire. It also implied desperation or disregard for protocol on her part. Furthermore, they also made a direct claim that Ocasio-Cortez broke a rule in order to go to the Met Gala. This framing showed a critical stance toward Ocasio-Cortez's involvement in the event.

On the contrary, The Washington Post's headline reflects an opposing viewpoint, employing an antithetical approach to depict Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's presence at the Met Gala. By emphasizing the event's predominantly affluent attendees alongside Ocasio-Cortez's attire featuring the phrase "Tax the Rich," the headline accentuates her boldness and commitment to championing issues of socio-economic equity. Throughout the article, this perspective persists, with each publication offering contextualization of the Met



Gala for readers less acquainted with the event. However, this context was presented in a drastically different manner. In Quote 1, The Washington Post characterized the Met Gala as having ‘a noble purpose’. The word choice here worked in favor of Ocasio-Cortez as it imbued the event with connotations of high moral standing and altruism, thus favorably positioning Ocasio-Cortez and other attendees in the eyes of unfamiliar readers. On top of that, the event was also described as a ‘fundraiser for the museum’s Costume Institute’ through which the Met managed to raise \$16.75 million in 2021.

Meanwhile, the New York Post described the event with a tone tinged with indignation. Along with the mention of ‘charity event for its [The Met] Costume Institute’, they also called out how it was ‘the world’s number one social event for the rich, famous, and beautiful’. This addition played up the superficial aspect of the event, portraying the event as primarily catering to the wealthy and as the direct opposite of the environment in which citizens expect politicians to take part. Thus, it could potentially impair Ocasio-Cortez’s credibility as a modest political figure in the eyes of uninformed readers. Next, in Quote 2, both articles delve into the pricing dynamics of Met Gala tickets, yet they approach this subject matter through divergent perspectives. The Washington Post accentuates the financial affluence of attendees, thereby amplifying the boldness of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s decision to wear her “Tax the Rich” attire, framing it as a deliberate statement. Meanwhile, the New York Post’s mention of ticket prices serves to underscore the perceived incongruity of a sitting U.S. Congress member being in attendance, particularly given the event’s location outside Ocasio-Cortez’s district jurisdiction and the additional company she brought.

The Washington Post provided a rationale for this financial decision by quoting Ocasio-Cortez who stated that she attended ‘in her capacity as a public official trying to support a public arts institution’, as seen in Quote 3. Additionally, the article subtly rebuffs assertions of the Met Gala’s exclusivity by mentioning how ‘New York City residents can even pay what they wish’ if they are interested in attending. This portrayal seeks to mitigate the perception of Ocasio-Cortez’s attendance as extravagant or inappropriate. Interestingly, a contrasting narrative as shown in Quote 2 emerged from the New York Post article, implying that attendance at the event is contingent upon approval by an exclusive committee. The publication further insinuates that Ocasio-Cortez’s invitation may have been secured through persuasion tactics, raising questions about the ethical integrity of her involvement. The juxtaposition between the two articles underscored the way in which a point of contention can be elaborated differently due to bias.

From the three parts of the Findings and Discussion above, it can be summarized that newspapers used different linguistic markers to describe Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, and they were indicators of bias driven by gender, age, socioeconomic class, and political ideology. Emotionally charged words were used to reaffirm Ocasio-Cortez’s feminine identity. Adultism was used to describe Ocasio-Cortez’s young age and show her incompetence and inexperience in politics. In the context of political economic identity, there were biases against and in favor of Ocasio-Cortez and they have the power to shape public perception.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that newspapers employ varied linguistic strategies to depict Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, reflecting biases rooted in gender, age, socioeconomic class, and political ideology. These biases reveal how media language can shape and influence public perceptions of political figures. The use of emotionally charged language to emphasize Ocasio-Cortez’s feminine identity demonstrates how gender biases are entrenched in media discourse. Words highlighting femininity often carry implicit stereotypes that may reinforce traditional roles or cast doubts on women’s leadership capabilities. This not only marginalizes Ocasio-Cortez but perpetuates a broader societal bias against women in politics. In addition to gendered portrayals, the findings reveal an element of *adultism*, where Ocasio-Cortez’s young age is emphasized to question her competence and experience. This reflects a bias often faced by younger politicians who challenge established norms. Describing her as inexperienced undermines her achievements and diminishes her legitimacy, even as she advocates for policies and ideas that resonate with younger demographics. Such portrayals may alienate younger voters or reinforce generational divides in political discourse, highlighting the media’s role in framing political narratives that sustain traditional hierarchies.

Socioeconomic biases also emerge as a central theme in how Ocasio-Cortez is portrayed. As a politician who advocates for working-class interests, media representations sometimes depict her economic identity in polarizing ways. Favorable portrayals align her with grassroots movements and progressive ideals, while negative depictions frame her as radical or disconnected from mainstream political norms. These contrasting narratives underscore the power of media to influence public opinion, depending on the ideological leanings of the publication. By framing her socioeconomic identity through such polarized lenses, the media risks oversimplifying her policy stances and alienating segments of the electorate.

The findings further reveal that political ideology plays a significant role in shaping media portrayals of Ocasio-Cortez. Publications with conservative leanings are more likely to use language that delegitimizes her policy proposals and personal credibility, whereas liberal outlets often present her as a transformative figure for progressive politics. This dichotomy highlights how media bias, influenced by political ideologies, can either amplify or diminish a politician's public image. Such polarization in media coverage affects individual politicians and contributes to a broader climate of political divisiveness.

These findings underscore the profound impact of media language on public perception. By focusing on Ocasio-Cortez's gender, age, socioeconomic class, and political ideology, newspapers reinforce existing stereotypes and biases that shape how audiences interpret her persona and policies. The use of emotionally charged or biased language suggests an agenda-setting function of media, where framing and linguistic choices guide public discourse and influence political opinions. To address these biases, it is essential for media outlets to critically examine their framing strategies and strive for more balanced and inclusive reporting. Highlighting a politician's policy stances and achievements without resorting to stereotypes can foster a more informed and nuanced public dialogue. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between media discourse and political identity, emphasizing the need for ethical journalism that prioritizes accuracy and fairness.

## Conclusions

In summary, the research shed some light on the subtopic of intersectionality in media bias, which had previously been lacking examination. The analysis supports the hypothesis that individuals tend to exhibit bias when it corresponds either positively or negatively with one or more aspects of their identity. Comparing articles from left-leaning and right-leaning news outlets side-by-side showed that the right-leaning media (The New York Post and Fox News) tend to give less support to Ocasio-Cortez. Moreover, they were more critical in assessing her actions than the left-leaning news outlet, which likely reflects that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez openly supports left-leaning ideology. Furthermore, the subject's political ideology does not stand alone to influence bias. Other identity aspects such as gender, age, and socioeconomic standing also plays a part. These aspects can be viewed positively or negatively depending on the alignment of the news outlet's ideology.

In the data analyzed within this study, linguistic markers acted as a tool to skew the audience's perspective of the event, aligning it more with the writer's belief. In the case of female politicians, journalists chose emotionally charged words, consciously or unconsciously, to invoke a more emotional reading experience. On the other hand, journalists used descriptive wording and detailed facts to decrease the emotional impact of the writing. This finding corresponds to previous research stating that the utilization of specific linguistic markers by the media may push the stigmatization of women's engagement in politics (Sensales & Areni, 2017).

Analysis of the articles' semantics also showed that right-leaning news outlets used words with negative connotations more often to describe Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez than their left-leaning counterparts. These semantics cast her actions as deviant or hypocritical, highlighting the inconsistencies between her rhetoric and actions to undermine her credibility. It was done to express their disapproval as well as indirectly encourage their audience to adopt a similar mindset. Despite that, it merits attention that the news article did not address Ocasio-Cortez's personal details such as family and appearance unless they were relevant to the broader topic. This negated previous research by Karla & Boukes (2020), who stated otherwise.

Interestingly, the left-leaning also used a similar strategy with word connotation to create opposite results. News outlets in favor of Ocasio-Cortez tend to use more words with positive connotations to frame her

actions as strategic, intentional, and calculated. They also described events more vaguely to downplay actions that might warrant backlash. The act of cherry-picking which parts of an event or one's identity journalists highlighted in news reporting confirmed the findings made in past research, which stated that readers digest an occurrence differently depending on the news outlet they read the coverage from (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017).

On top of that, it is important to note that though these biases were present in the articles, the journalists presented them in a way that was subtle and sometimes overlooked by the audience. As a result, the public at large would be more susceptible to a particular biased narrative without realizing it. Consequentially, they may also develop political perspectives rooted in false narratives. This would have an adverse impact on countries with democratic systems during the election period. Therefore, readers should seek out multiple perspectives across the political spectrum and assess media more critically to reduce the potential of echo chambers that are likely to happen when engaging with biased news. In a wider scope, this study on intersectionality may support the advocacy for transparency in media ownership as regulation on media misinformation at the policy level. In future research, it would be beneficial to build upon this knowledge to research how the media bias driven by identity aspects may influence the public's political attitudes towards female politicians over time and affect the success rate of female politicians earning a seat at a higher level. Future studies can also analyze whether higher awareness of media bias affects the public's trust in the media.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interest

There are no conflicts of interest concerning the publication of this paper.

### References

- Ardèvol-Abreu, A., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2017). Effects of editorial media bias perception and media trust on the use of traditional, citizen, and social media news. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 94(3), 703–724. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699016654684>
- Bauer, G. R., Churchill, S. M., Mahendran, M., Walwyn, C., Lizotte, D., & Villa-Rueda, A. A. (2021). Intersectionality in quantitative research: A systematic review of its emergence and applications of theory and methods. *SSM - Population Health*, 14(16), 100798. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100798>
- Becker, J. C. (2020). Ideology and the promotion of social change. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 34, 6–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2019.10.005>
- Blagdon, J. (2013, March 4). *How emoji conquered the world*. The Verge. <https://www.theverge.com/2013/3/4/3966140/how-emoji-conquered-the-world>
- Blazina, C., & Desilver, D. (2023, January 30). *House gets younger, Senate gets older: A look at the age and generation of lawmakers in the 118th congress*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/30/house-gets-younger-senate-gets-older-a-look-at-the-age-and-generation-of-lawmakers-in-the-118th-congress/>
- Colegrove, A. (2016, November 10). *Senator Manchin refutes speculation of a party switch*. <https://www.wsaz.com>. <https://www.wsaz.com/content/news/Senator-Manchin-refutes-speculation-of-a-party-switch--400628491.html>
- Dixon, S. J. (2023, June 29). U.S. texts and chats including Emojis by generation 2022. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1395559/us-texts-messages-including-emojis-by-generation/>
- Eagly, A. H., & Steffen, V. J. (1984). Gender stereotypes stem from the distribution of women and men into social roles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(4), 735–754. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.46.4.735>
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573–598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573>
- Elejalde, E., Ferres, L., & Herder, E. (2018). On the nature of real and perceived bias in the mainstream media. *PLoS One*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0193765>

- Frasca, T. J., Leskinen, E. A., & Warner, L. R. (2022). Words like weapons: Labeling women as emotional during a disagreement negatively affects the perceived legitimacy of their arguments. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 46(4), 420–437. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843221123745>
- Fuente-Núñez, V. D. L., Cohn-Schwartz, E., Roy, S., & Ayalon, L. (2021). Scoping review on ageism against younger populations. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(8), 3988. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18083988>
- Gelinas, N. (2023, March 6). *AOC begged to go to exclusive met gala, even if it meant breaking the rules*. New York Post. <https://nypost.com/2023/03/05/aoc-begged-to-go-to-met-gala-even-if-it-meant-breaking-the-rules/>
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (2017). Living with television: The violence profile. *The Fear of Crime*, 26(2), 169–195. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315086613-10>
- Goren, P. (2005). Party Identification and Core Political Values. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(4), 881–896. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2005.00161.x>
- Grieco, E. (2020, April 1). *Americans' main sources for political news vary by party and age*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/04/01/americans-main-sources-for-political-news-vary-by-party-and-age/>
- Hentschel, T., Heilman, M. E., Peus, C. V. (2019). The multiple dimensions of gender stereotypes: a current look at men's and women's characterizations of others and themselves. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1664–1078. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00011>
- Hess, A. J. (2018, November 29). *29-year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez makes history as the youngest woman ever elected to Congress*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/06/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-is-now-the-youngest-woman-elected-to-congress.html>
- Jaeger, S. R., Xia, Y., Lee, P.-Y., Hunter, D. C., Beresford, M. K., & Ares, G. (2018). Emoji questionnaires can be used with a range of population segments: Findings relating to age, gender and frequency of emoji/emoticon use. *Food Quality and Preference*, 68, 397–410. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2017.12.011>
- Kalra, P., & Boukes, M. (2020). Curbing journalistic gender bias: How activating awareness of gender bias in Indian journalists affects their reporting. *Journalism Practice*, 15(5), 651–668. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1755344>
- Leppert, R., & DeSilver, D. (2023, January 3). *118th Congress has a record number of women*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/03/118th-congress-has-a-record-number-of-women/>
- Meriläinen, M. (2024). Hate speech targeting Finnish politicians: The impact of gender roles. *Journal of Gender, Democracy, and Social Inclusion*, 2(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.61511/jgedsic.v2i1.2024.1039>
- Mizelle, S. (2021, September 13). *Ocasio-cortez calls out manchin for referring to her as “young lady”* | CNN politics. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/13/politics/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-joe-manchin-young-lady/index.html>
- Moore, M. (2021, September 13). *AOC calls joe manchin's “young lady” remark “patronizing behavior.”* New York Post. <https://nypost.com/2021/09/13/aoc-calls-out-sen-joe-manchin-for-patronizing-behavior/>
- Mullet, D. (2018). A general critical discourse analysis framework for educational research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 29(2), 116–142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202x18758260>
- Pritlove, C., Juando-Prats, C., Ala-leppilampi, K., & Parsons, J. A. (2019). The good, the bad, and the ugly of implicit bias. *The Lancet*, 393(10171), 502–504. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(18\)32267-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(18)32267-0)
- Sarwono, S. (2024). The representation of female politicians in Indonesia: Gender bias in political decision-making. *Journal of Gender and Politics*, 12(3), 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-024-09476-3>
- Sazali, H., & Basit, L. (2020). Meta analysis of women politician portrait in mass media frames. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 36(2), 320–334. <https://doi.org/10.17576/jkmj-2020-3602-19>

- Sensales, G., & Areni, A. (2017). Gender biases and linguistic sexism in political communication: A comparison of press news about men and women Italian ministers. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 5(2), 512-536. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v5i2.721>
- Stern, C., & Rule, N. O. (2018). Physical androgyny and categorization difficulty shape political conservatives' attitudes toward transgender people. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9(1), 24-31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617703172>
- Stickles, N., & Duarte, B. C. (2019, March 5). *Exclusive: alexandria ocasio-cortez explains what democratic socialism means to her*. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-explains-what-democratic-socialism-means-2019-3>
- Szanto, T., & Krueger, J. (2019). Introduction: empathy, shared emotions, and social identity. *Topoi*, 38(1), 153–162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-019-09641-w>
- Wilson, J. (2005). Political discourse. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton, and D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 398–415). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470753460.ch21>
- Yuan, J. (2021, September 14). *The met gala is full of rich people. Alexandria ocasio-cortez wore a dress with a message: 'tax the rich.'* The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/09/14/aoc-met-gala-tax-rich-dress/>

### About the Authors

**Azzadina Nurulain Ikhwan** graduated in 2024 with a bachelor's degree from the English Studies Program at the University of Indonesia. She has been actively involved in a national foreign policy organization, where she gained valuable insights into global affairs. Before publishing her first journal article, Azzadina co-wrote articles and essays focusing on politics, socioeconomic inequality, and gender inequalities. Her work reflects a deep interest in literature, western culture, and the application of linguistics in contemporary discourse. She can be reached at this email address: [azzadinaikhwan@gmail.com](mailto:azzadinaikhwan@gmail.com).

**Sisilia Setiawati Halimi** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia. She earned her B.A. in linguistics from Universitas Indonesia, her M.A. in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the University of Warwick, U.K., and her Ph.D. in ELT from La Trobe University, Australia. She can be reached at this email address: [ss\\_halimi@ui.ac.id](mailto:ss_halimi@ui.ac.id) or [sshalimi@gmail.com](mailto:sshalimi@gmail.com)