

The politics of betrayal

The use of verbs *abuse*, *betray* and *sell out* in American opinion media

Sanna Franssila

University of Helsinki

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Examples of betrayal expressions

“Political machines beholden to the teachers unions cannot be allowed to get away with **selling out** poor children for the sake of keeping power.” (*The Wall Street Journal* 2001)

“I will be working as hard as I can to pass the strongest legislation possible to end the **abuses** by the NSA and other intelligence agencies.” (*The Nation* 2013)

“If they can also reveal that Obama is **betraying** his liberal base, then they can possibly make him more vulnerable from a political perspective.” (*Salon* 2009)

The expressions and their senses

betray , betrayal = hurt, abandon, disappoint, be untrustworthy

abuse, abuses = corrupt practice, wrongdoing, take unfair advantage of

sell out, sellout = betray

Moral politics: a sense of anger or distrust

- How is moral disappointment expressed? Does lexical frequency play any role?
- Lakoff (1996/2002), Conceptual Metaphors: THE STRICT FATHER for conservative mindset, THE NURTURANT PARENT for liberal mindset
- Cienki (2005), presidential debates: no significant difference between G.W.Bush and Gore in the use of language (metaphors)
- Ahrens (2009) found some support for SF and NP mindsets in presidential speeches (Clinton, Reagan, G.W. Bush): a study of lexical frequency
- No extensive research on expressive, emotional language in conservative/liberal media from the quantitative viewpoint

Moral politics: a sense of anger or distrust

- The role of group identity in sociology: emotional entrainment (Collins 2005, Walby & Spencer 2011)
 - the building up confidence and solidarity in one another through some ritual doing
- could expressions of betrayal be a "ritual" exercise of conservative/liberal identity?

The aim: the research questions

- Is there a quantitative difference between conservative and liberal media in the use of expressions of betrayal?
- Which topics are expressions of betrayal used of?
- Are the topics different in conservative and liberal media?
- How does the use of these expressions relate to the political identity of conservatives and liberals?

The data: opinion pieces and presidential speeches corpora, 4M words

1. General opinion articles (randomized, every December, every four years: 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013)

- focus on presidents and their actions

2. Articles on equality, immigration and education 1993-2013

- differences of opinion well-known between conservatives and liberals

- articles found with keywords from electronic databases

3. Articles on conservatism or liberalism 1993-2013

- from *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Review*, *The Nation* and *The American Prospect*

4. Presidential speeches (weekly radio addresses)

- Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama (1993, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2013)

The four corpora:

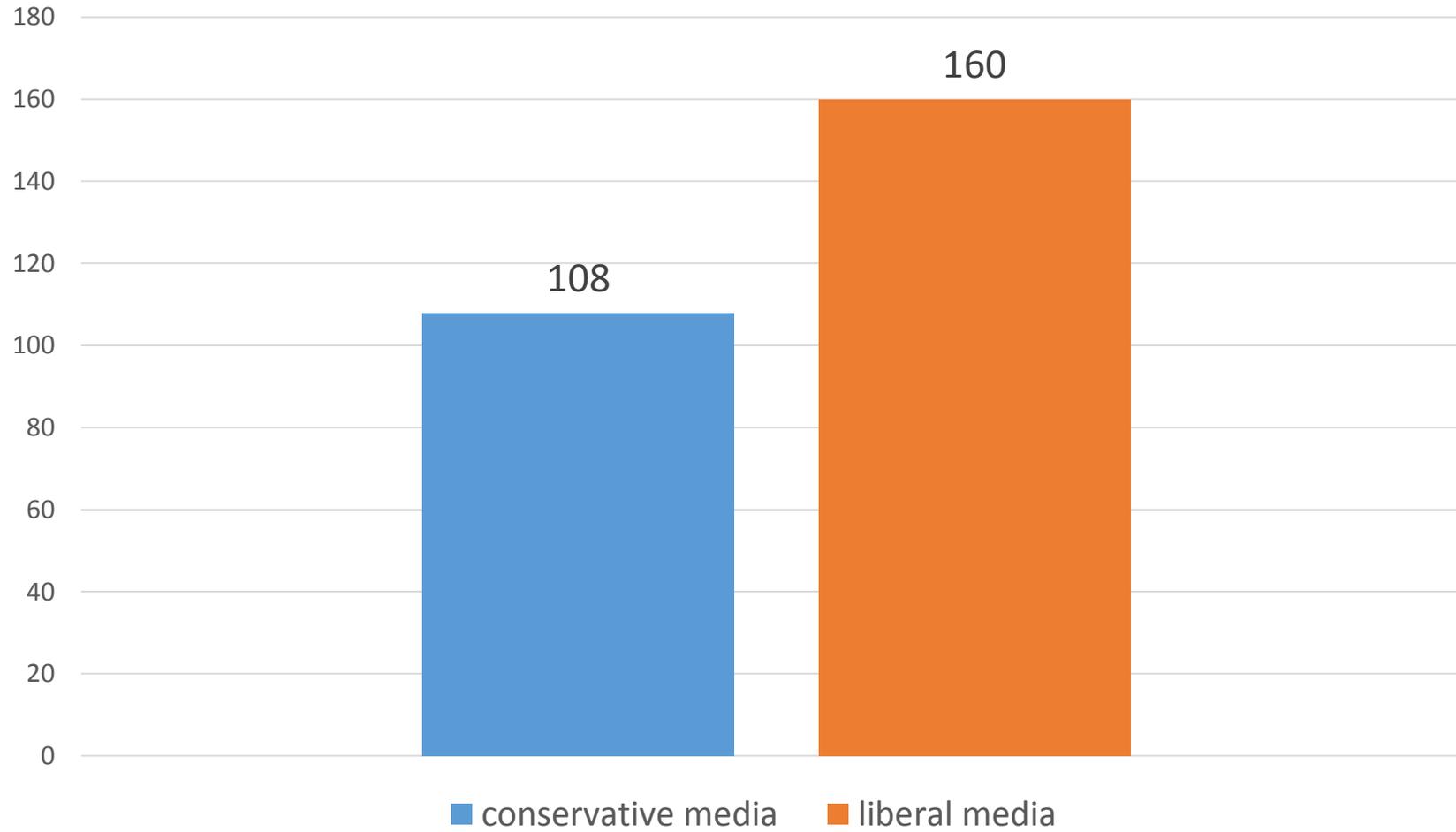
-general opinion articles is the main corpus

| Corpus | conservative | liberal |
|---|---------------------|----------------|
| general opinion articles | 1 219 069 | 1 306 875 |
| topics: equality, immigration, education | 278 953 | 333 283 |
| topic: conservatism/liberalism | 255 230 | 197 851 |
| presidential speeches | 100 037 | 268 540 |
| all | 1 853 289 | 2 106 549 |

**A list of news and opinion magazines in the
articles corpora**

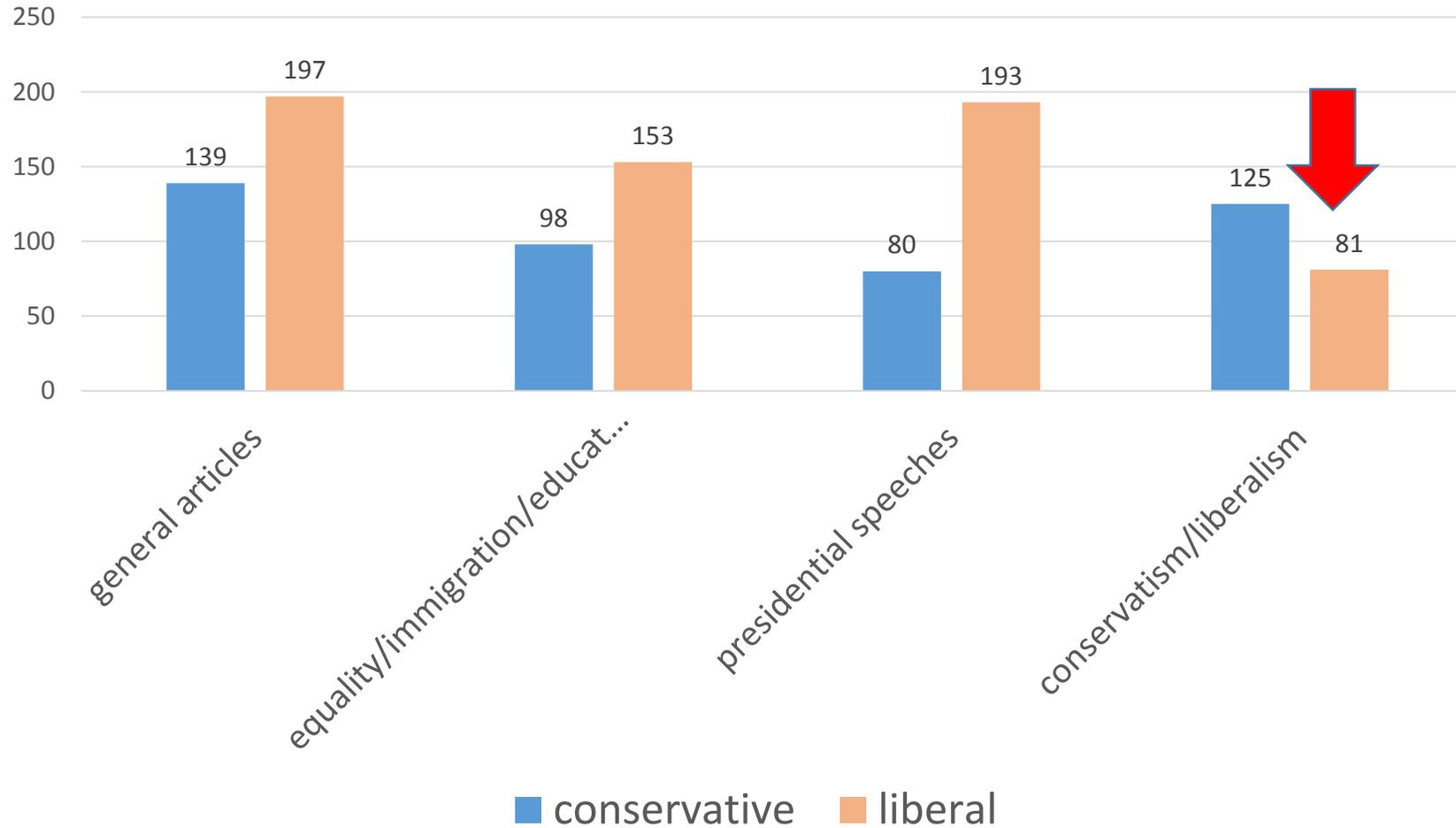
| conservative opinion | liberal opinion |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <i>American Thinker</i> (online) | <i>Mother Jones</i> |
| <i>Commentary Magazine</i> | <i>Rolling Stone</i> |
| <i>Human Events</i> | <i>Salon</i> (online) |
| <i>National Review</i> | <i>Slate</i> (online) |
| <i>The American Conservative</i> | <i>The American Prospect</i> |
| <i>The American Spectator</i> | <i>The Harper's Magazine</i> |
| <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> editorials | <i>The Nation</i> |
| <i>The Weekly Standard</i> | <i>The New Republic</i> |
| <i>U.S. News and World Report</i> | <i>The New York Times</i> editorials |
| | <i>The New Yorker</i> |
| | <i>The Washington Monthly</i> |

ABUSE, BETRAY, SELL OUT
535 occurrences



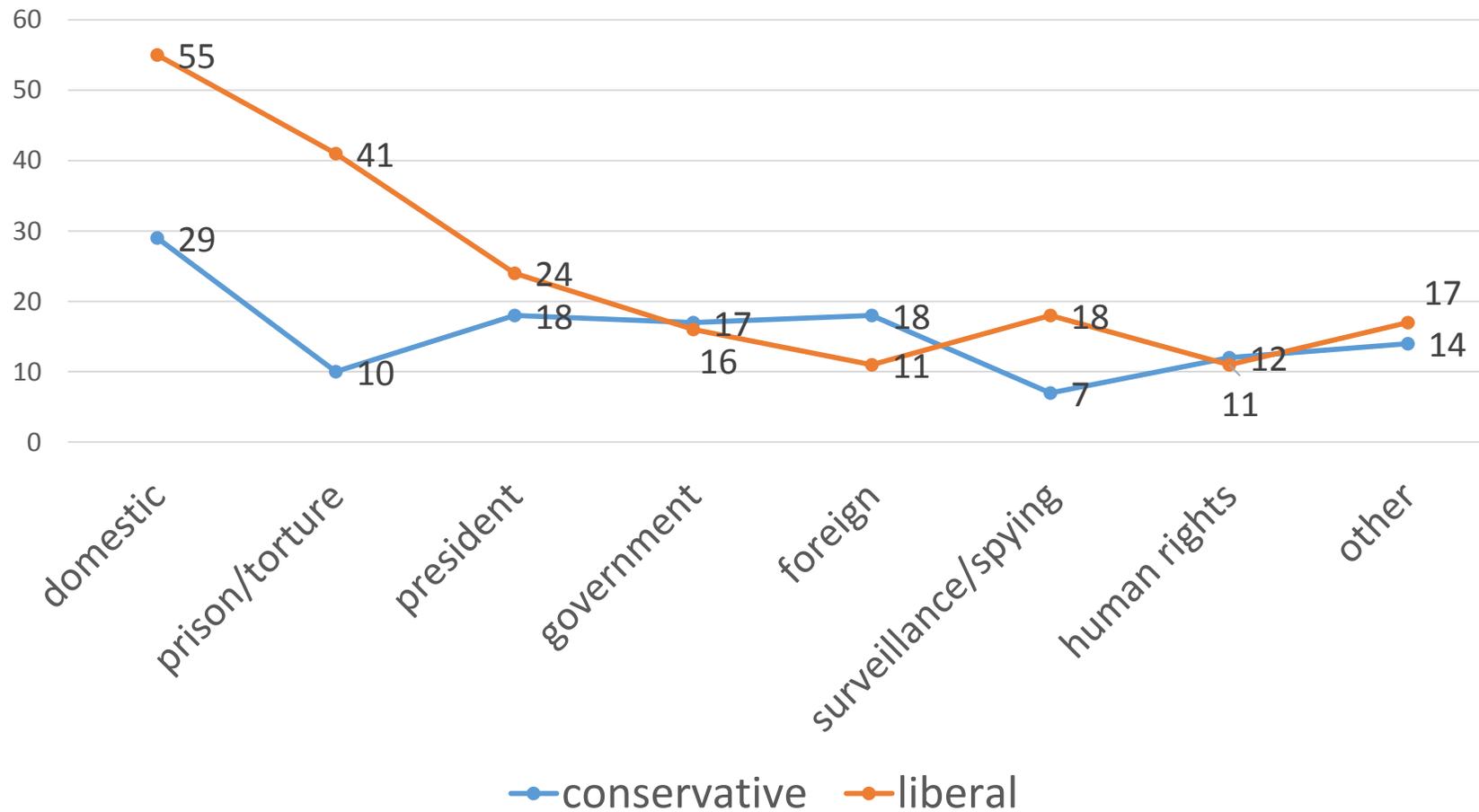
N = 535, standardized frequency x/1 000 000 words

More in liberal media, except when the topic is ideology
(conservatism/liberalism)



N = 535, standardized frequency x/1 000 000 words

Topics in General Articles Corpus 1993-2013 -in the context of betrayal



N = 384, standardized frequency x/1 000 000 words

General articles corpus: partisan differences

Liberals talk in terms of betrayal/abuse with domestic issues

-conservative self-identification with the USA more positive?

Conservative media addressed the prison/torture scandals in 2005 (and later) significantly less than liberal media

Only liberal media addressed Edward Snowden and the surveillance issue in 2013 (conservatives perhaps agreed with the Obama administration on this and kept silent)

General articles corpus:partisan differences

Liberals blame their own president of betraying "liberalism": 70 % of data with a Democrat President (B. Clinton, Obama), yet more negative evaluation with terms of betrayal

Governmental oversight: conservatives accuse liberal administrations of controlling extreme conservative groups, liberals demand better oversight of corporatism, businesses, health care institutions

Other three corpora: partisan differences (N = 151)

Equality/immigration/education corpus

- liberals talk of racism, LGBT rights and feminism
- conservatives keep silent on these, they talk of police work and disability issues

Presidential speeches corpus

- Clinton & Obama talk of waste, fraud and abuse
- G.W. Bush uses very few expressions of betrayal

Conservatism/liberalism corpus

- betraying true conservatism or true liberalism: a conservative edge

Discussion

- liberals seem to express more moral dissatisfaction (cf. Lakoff, Ahrens)
 - The Annoyed Mother/The Frustrated Nanny metaphor?
- the old conventional wisdom: pragmatic, realistic conservatives vs. theoretical, idealistic liberals
- the "own" President: conservatives restrain from criticism, liberals don't
- big data helped to confirm some differences, but results slightly trivial: partisan media differ from each other with regard to the topics they address
- yet it is interesting that conservatives and liberals focus on different issues
 - this difference has not changed in 20 years 1993-2013

Reservations

- conservatism/liberalism balance? the selection of the publications
- political topics in the general articles corpus may be unevenly distributed: whatever happens in December 1993 etc.
 - what is worth writing about
- topic corpora: my selection of articles found with keywords
 - publications have their own practices, databases use their own key words
 - the Equality/Immigration/Education and Conservatism/Liberalism corpora
- negative emotions (distrust, doubt, opposition, suspicion) can be expressed in many complex ways, not just using the verbs *betray/abuse/sell out*
- presidential speeches differ from other media

Future research

- the role of emotional expression in political media: any other partisan differences?
 - the ritual of outrage?
- the silence of conservative media on social justice issues: equality, minority rights, LGBT issues, civil rights
 - the word "rights" is about 38% more frequent in the liberal media corpora
 - conservatives use "victim" and its lemma 27% more than liberals
- are there linguistic differences between conservative and liberal media or do they just use similar expressions of different opinions?

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