

# News Media and Violence Against Women: Understanding Framings of Stigma

SHRAVIKA MITTAL  
smittal87gatech.edu

JASMINE C. FORIEST  
jay@gatech.edu

BENJAMIN D. HORNE  
bhorne6@utk.edu

MUNMUN DE CHOUDHURY  
munmund@gatech.edu

## MOTIVATION

- Violence against women (VAW) is a **global issue**. [UN Women 2019]
- Media can **influence public opinion**.
  - Inform** political, social justice responses.
  - Reinforce** problematic norms.
  - Silence** survivors from reporting.

**Objective: Understand** (and inform ways to mitigate) **VAW-based stigma** in news media.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS + CONTRIBUTIONS

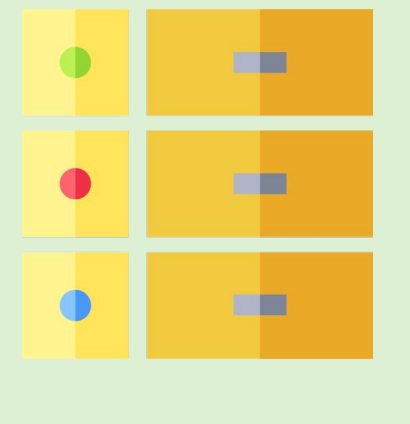
- How is stigma around VAW perpetuated across U.S. news media and how does it differ based on (a) regionality, (b) political leaning, (c) veracity of news sources, (d) issue-generic policies communities, and (e) media communities?
- What are the relative roles of the above mentioned factors in explaining stigma in VAW news reports?



Large news media landscape



Holistic understanding of stigma



Role of media attributes

## APPROACH

### Dataset

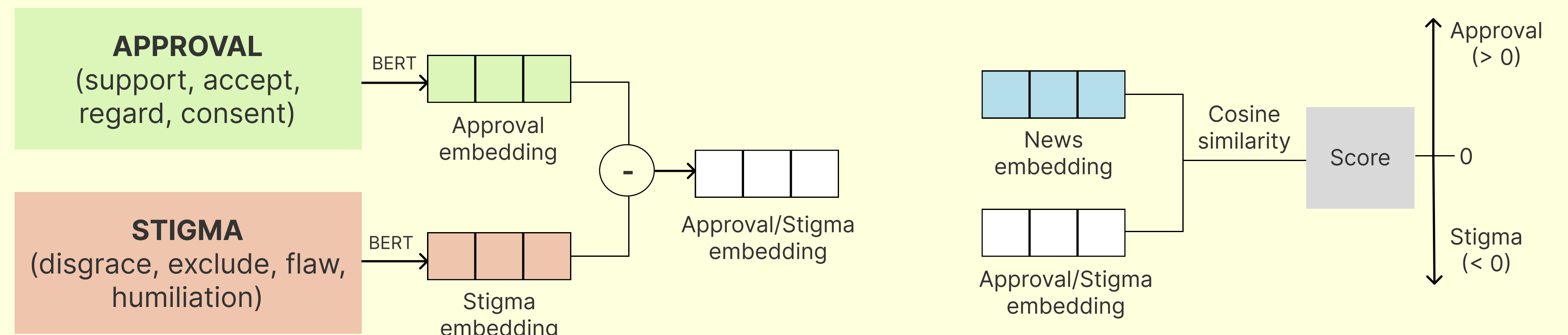
NELA datasets [Nørregaard, Horne, and Adali 2019]

- April 2020 to March 2023
- Filtered articles relevant to VAW
  - Phrases on (1) physical violence, (2) sexual violence, and (3) harmful practices



National: 98,107 articles (US News, NY Times)  
Local: 68,892 articles (The Daily News, Philadelphia Daily)  
Conspiracy: 17,090 articles (Breitbart, Infowars)

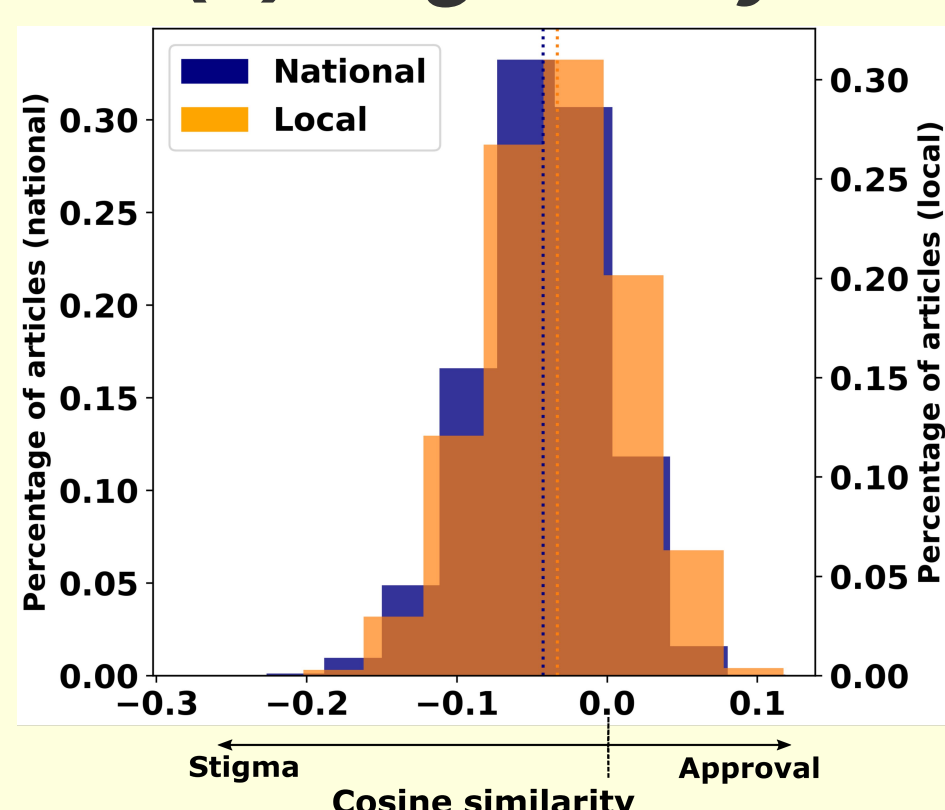
### Measure stigma [Mittal and De Choudhury 2023]



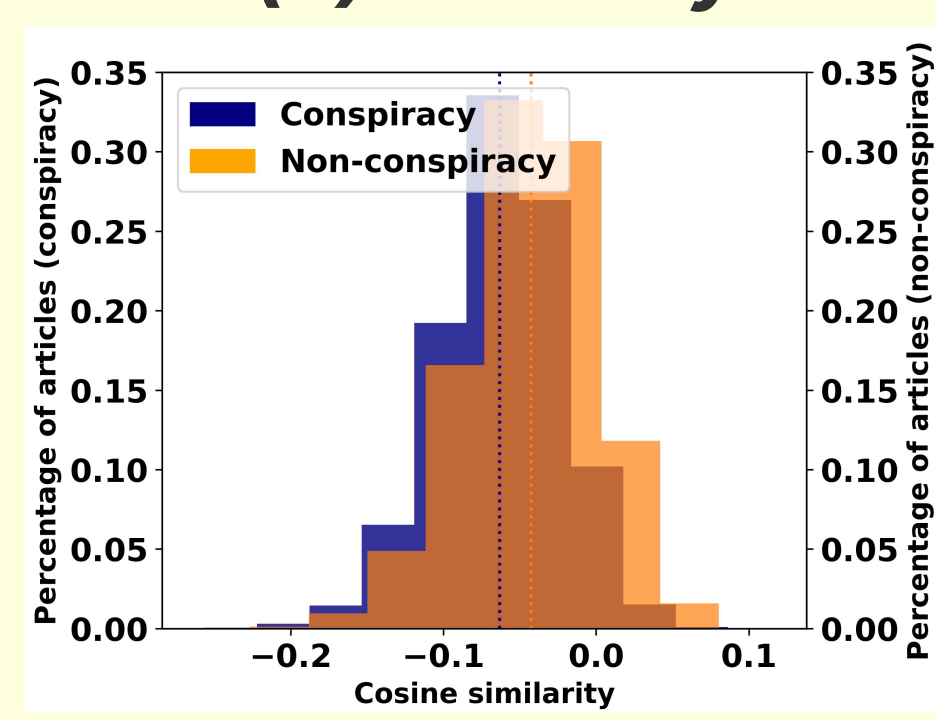
Capture labeling, stereotyping, separation, and status loss and discrimination. [Link and Phelan 2001]

## RESULTS

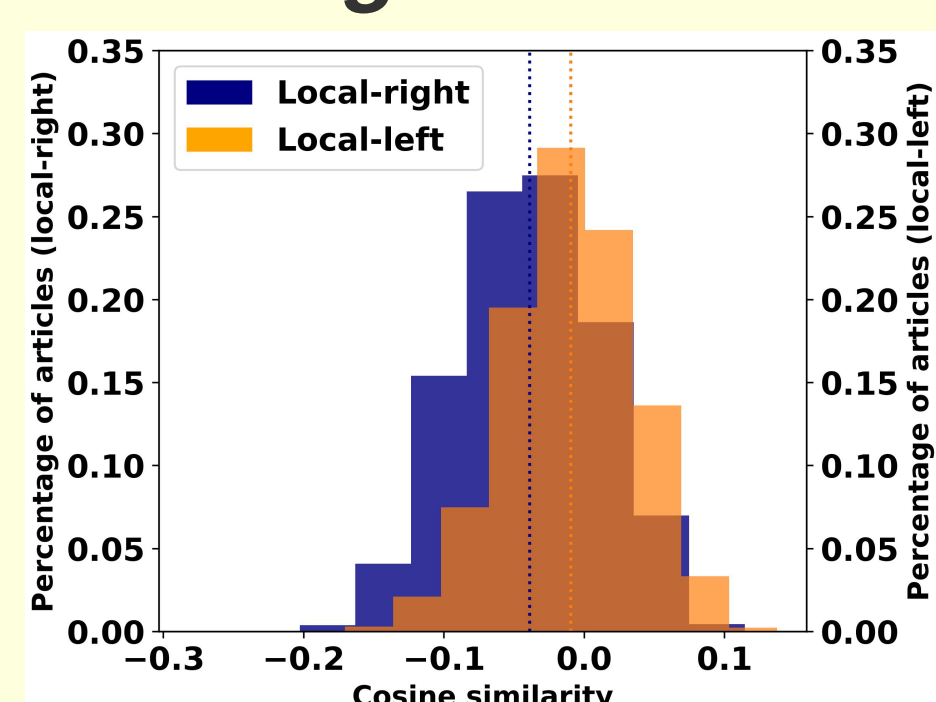
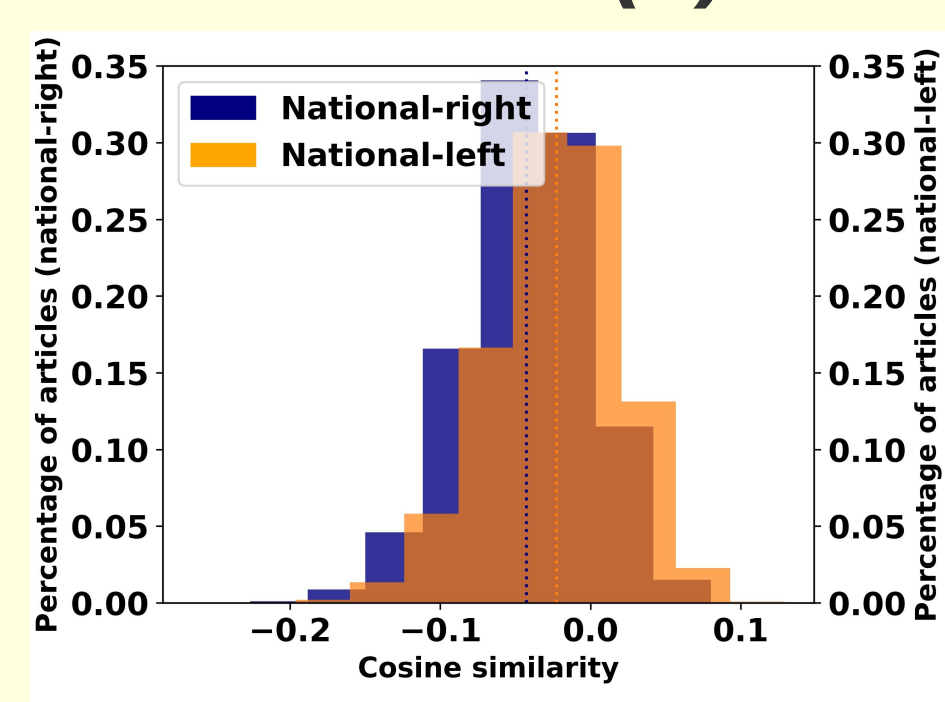
### (a) Regionality



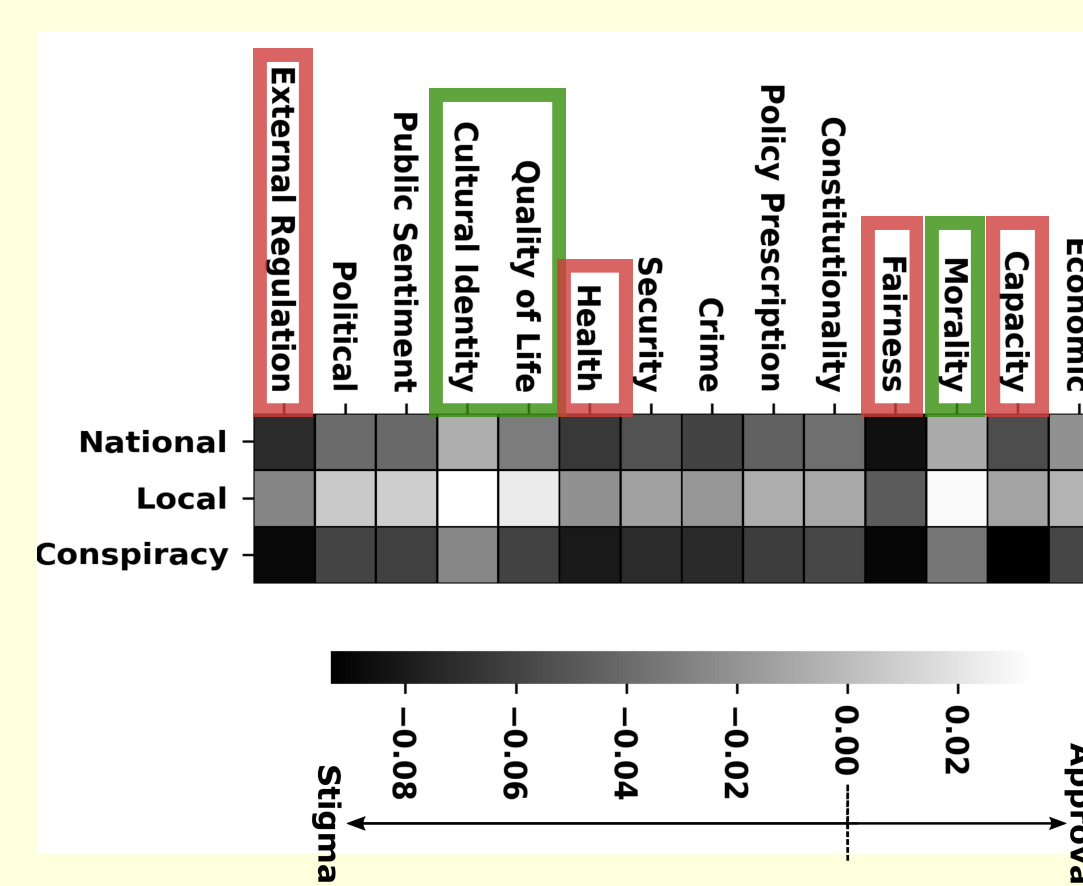
### (c) Veracity



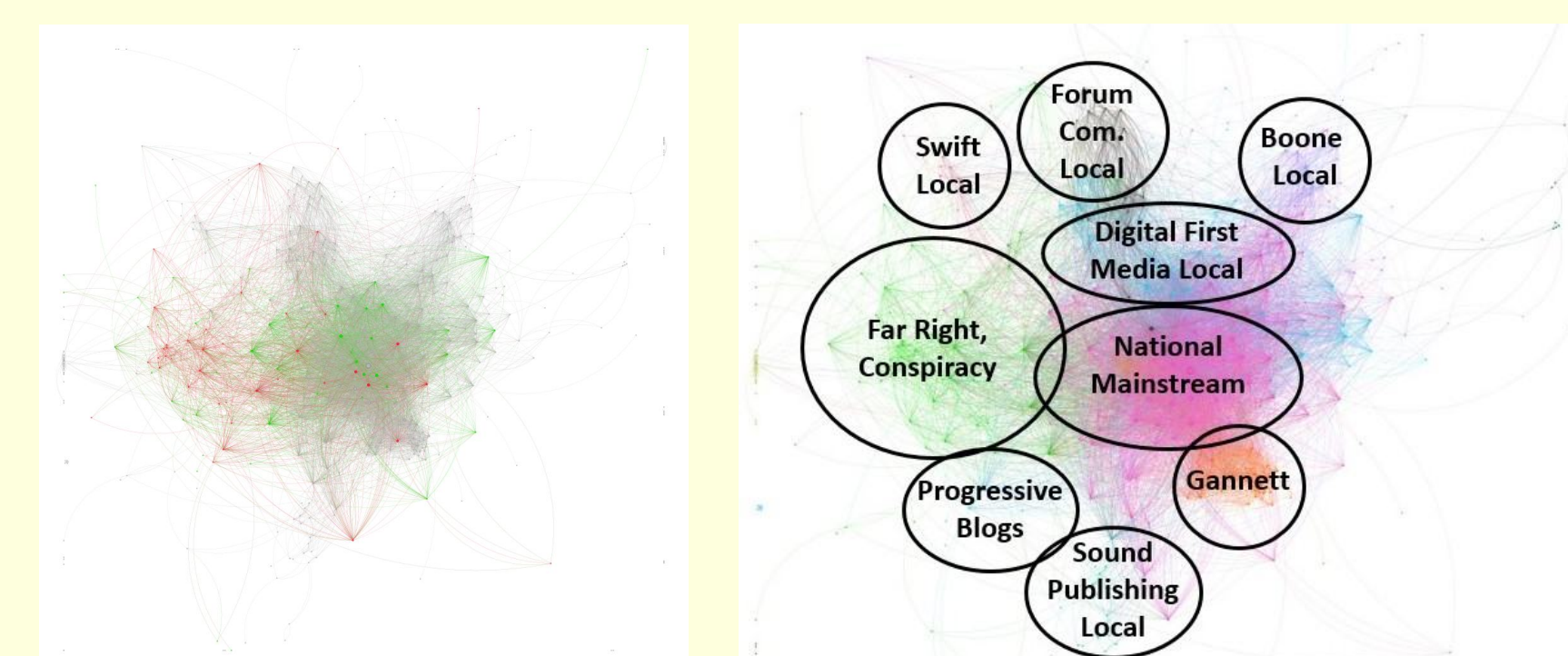
### (b) Political leaning



### (d) Issue-generic policies [Boydston et al. 2013]



### (e) Media communities



"[...] forced her, where he assaulted her. [...] Though the perpetrator had a prior record, the judge ruled against punishment using a **benefit of the doubt** argument."

"DV is a crime that **affects both women and men, of every race and status**. [...] all of us **should care**, and should understand the resources available to those in danger."

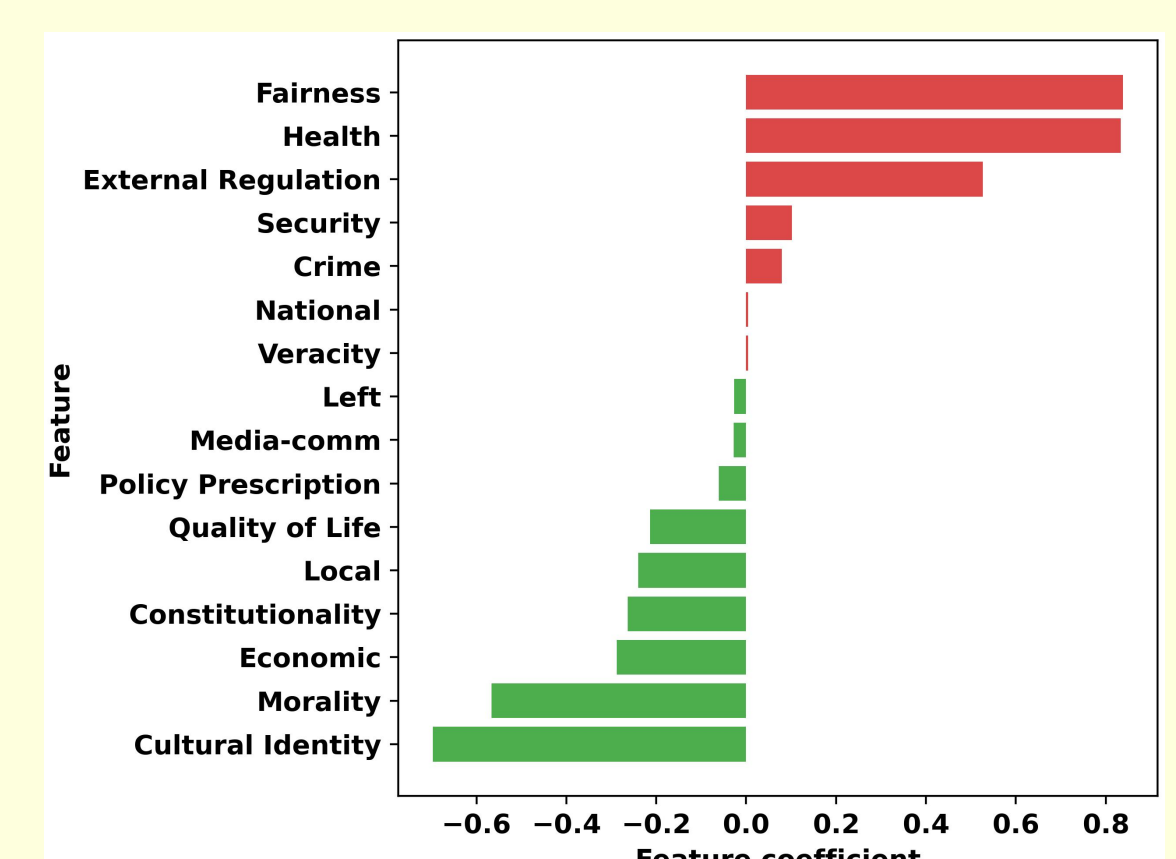
- High stigma: Far Right, Conspiracy outlets (e.g., The Blaze, Free Beacon, and Breitbart).
- More stigma in central mainstream outlets (e.g., CBS, NPR).
- Some progressive outlets (e.g., The Raw Story, Crooks and Liars) contain stigma.

"Prosecution is rare, and the conviction rate is very low. [...] 88% said they faced no legal consequences. [...] **blame assaults on a culture of impunity**." (US News)

"Legislative session brought an organized effort to **communicate priorities as one voice**. [...] filed 'Athena's Law,' [...] authority to delay release of those accused of SA." (Kennebec Journal)

### RQ2: Importance of factors

- Issue-generic policies offer the highest explanation in the dependent variable (presence or absence of stigma).
- Stigma: Fairness and equality (0.839), Health and safety (0.834)
- Approval: Local regionality (-0.240), Morality (-0.566), Cultural Identity (-0.697)



## POTENTIAL FACTORS

## SURVIVOR-CENTERED GUIDELINES



Target audience



Sensationalism



Disconnect

- Use **trauma-informed language**; avoid victim-blaming.
- Hold **perpetrators accountable**.
- Provide **context** and **educate** readers.
- Avoid** perpetuating **conspiracy theories**.
- Avoid** perpetuating **political biases**.

