

Abstract

The thesis explores the concepts of “wokeness” and “being woke” in connection to U.S. political institutions. It is argued that the “wokeness”, a term originating from the awareness of social injustices faced primarily by black Americans, has evolved into a multi-faceted concept influencing modern political discourse. U.S. federal government’s, along with state governments’ and U.S.-based universities’ press releases from 2001 to 2024 are classified based on predefined criteria indicative of “wokeness”, such as emphasis on the primacy of group identity, inter-group equality of outcome measures and social activism to those ends. Methodologically, the thesis utilises language models for text classification, particularly the fine-tuned DeBERTaV3-Large model, and proposes novel techniques for fine-tuning and evaluating its performance. The findings reveal temporal and institutional variance in the expression of “wokeness”, with a significant increase since the advent of the Biden administration, pointing to it being a more recent phenomenon. Statistical analysis further reveals a more significant association of “wokeness” with the Democratic party and much more so in recent years, falling in line with the assumption of “wokeness” as a left-wing ideology with a complicated relationship with multiculturalism and heavily drawing from critical theory. Generally, the research aims to contribute to political science in two ways: to validate the use of automated text classification in its various sub-fields and to, based on the empirical findings, coupled with an extensive literature review, argue for the incorporation of the concept of “wokeness” as a distinct ideological construct for further study.