

Media analysis: political and social bias in the usa

[Media](#), [Social Media](#)



The peak of the fall season usually involves Thanksgiving and other holiday dinners. As we begin to approach the 2020 Presidential election, those holiday dinners can turn into hostile political interactions. Especially in families with split Democratic and Republican views, it can be an issue because each side has a different view, especially with the media. The media can be perceived as biased from both sides, but the question is whether or not it is, or if the media is biased as a result of how the public perceives them. In society today, political bias is much more widespread and as a result, this leads to multiple news sources being split to each political side. Political bias is the political preferences of journalists, editors, owners, and the market who make their way into the news (Wagner, 2019). With multiple issues arising from various political parties within the news, the media ultimately becomes biased because people grow to sway towards one side over the other, and as a result makes the media biased according to the people viewing it.

Whilst investigating media bias, I interviewed my cousin Trinity and my friend Bennett to determine how media bias affects their lives. My cousin is currently a sophomore at San Diego State University, studying journalism and public relations, and leans politically toward the left with the Democratic party. My friend, however, leans toward the right politically with the Republican party. Normally, my cousin reads the news like The New York Times and The Washington Post daily. My friend, on the other hand, does not read as frequently, but when he does he reads Fox News. He does not like to read news sources like CNN, and my cousin does not like to read sources like

Fox News. Both of them do not generally like to view local news, but my friend does receive more local news than my cousin does.

In a recent study in 2018, about two-thirds of Americans said that news organizations tend to favor one side when they covered political and social issues, compared with three-in-ten who say that news organizations deal fairly with all sides (Gottfried, J., Stocking, G., & Grieco, E., 2018). My cousin and friend also both agreed that the media is biased, but each had a different interpretation of it. My cousin said, " It really depends on the news source. If it is Fox News I think it leans more conservative, but other sources like the Washington Post and the New York Times lean more liberal" (Tran, 2019). There was no clear cut answer from my cousin on whether one political party is more biased in media than the other, but my friend believes that there are more biased liberal outlets than conservative. This study lined up with what Bennett said, and it wrote that in previous years, Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say the news media favor one side, with 86% of Republicans saying that news organizations favor one side in their coverage, 34 percentage points higher than Democrats (52%) (Gottfried, J., et al, 2018). In terms of evaluating news bias, my cousin stated that " articles on issues like gun control and abortion can demonstrate types of media bias" (Tran, 2019). My friend also agreed with this claim, clarifying that by looking up a controversial topic on Google, it is easy to find a wide range of media bias (Rabach, 2019). Ultimately, there are more people out there perceiving media as biased, especially national news outlets. It does not necessarily mean that the actual media is biased, it is how people from both sides of the political spectrum view it.

It can be difficult to measure media bias because each person can have a different interpretation of each news source they run into. However, there are new technologies being created that can help determine which media source is leaning towards. In this article written by Tamar Wilner, he writes that academics are making advances in large-scale content analysis, with new machine-driven techniques and more sophisticated yardsticks with which to measure content (Wilner, 2018). The problem with these new types of technology is that people might not change the way they consume the news. In a quote from Jonathan Ladd, public policy and government professor at Georgetown University, he says, " Measures of trust or belief in bias and what [media] you actually use, they're not completely disconnected, but they're only very loosely connected" (Wilner, 2018). If media bias is loosely connected, this demonstrates that even if there are tools that determine whether a source leans more toward the left or right politically, people will gravitate towards the news they want to read. On the contrary, another problem with this technology is that news outlets may not want to be perceived as biased. Financially, even if some people do not choose to use the technology, the chance of being found as biased would pose too great of a risk (Wilner, 2018). Profit is evidently the main focus of news sources, and taking any slight risk can lead to disaster for companies. This leads to mainstream media and how journalists are compromised on what to write. Journalists' integrity can be questioned on whether they truly capture the feelings and lived experience of their readers, or whether they paint the spectrum of our country's opinions, cultures, and belief systems (Wilner, 2018). The growing media bias that occurs as a result of readers,

journalists have learned to adapt to write what fits with the proper ideologies their readers have. Media becomes biased because of the citizens who choose to view it as biased.

After looking at media bias through the lens of people who read the news, it is important to look at media bias through the lens of those who do not read as much news. In the study referenced earlier, it is written that most Americans say they do not feel understood by or connected to news organizations, and the sense of disconnectedness is stronger among Republicans than Democrats (Gottfried, et al., 2018). A possible explanation behind this is that there is simply a lack of communication with the readers and news media. However, it can be difficult to measure this lack of communication most Americans feel because of the biased processing of information or assimilation bias. Assimilation bias is the tendency to interpret, favor, and recall information that confirms what we already believe (Wagner, 2019). About $\frac{2}{3}$ of Americans think the news media favor one side, and as a result, overall press evaluations grow even more negative (Wagner, 2019). With this growing negativity with overall press evaluations, it can be expected that since readers are continuing to read news sources they are comfortable with, they will also continue to ignore news sources that do not exactly cover what they want to read. This growing disconnect can also lead to the hostile media effect, which happens to partisans who have strong opinions about an issue, versus those nonpartisan individuals who see the stories as balanced (Wagner, 2019). Results of the hostile media effect can be increased participation, more confrontation and corrective action, lower political efficacy, and third-person perception in the direction of perceived

bias (Wagner, 2019). Although increased participation can be seen as a positive for those who want the public to be more involved, especially in politics, the third-person perception can be toxic to the point where perceived bias can be distorted without proper knowledge. Third-person perception can lead to ego enhancement/biased optimism and differential media effects “ theories” (Wagner, 2019). In society, we continue to find ways to be objective with media and try to make media bias avoidable, but as humans, we are prone to these effects and how strongly they can affect some over others. Individuals throughout the world will ultimately view media as biased as a result of these media effects.

Evidently, it can be difficult to avoid getting into an argument about politics, especially during the holidays post voting season. There can be two strong viewpoints from both sides of the political spectrum, but it does not factor into how media bias is perceived. Media bias is ultimately perceived by all types of citizens because of how they choose to interpret their news. It can be difficult as a reader to remain objective with the news, but it is important to examine various types of news outlets to formulate a fair opinion. The ultimate obligation from journalists is to report the verifiable truth (Wagner, 2019). It is up to news sources to continue to properly educate citizens and decrease the negative viewpoint of news and media bias. For now, news outlets are viewed as politically biased because those negative viewpoints from those on both sides of the political spectrum create those viewpoints, and as a result, leads to media bias.