

# Essay on understanding bias in the media: academic analysis comparison

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



The American media often presents itself as unbiased, but in reality, most research that has been done into the topic has discovered that American media is heavily biased. There are liberal and conservative biases within the media, and determining where the bias lies in a particular type of media or network is important when it comes to analyzing the information received from that media outlet. This paper will deal with two different pieces of research that focus on American media: the first, entitled “ Selective Exposure to Cable News and Immigration in the US: The Relationship Between FOX News, CNN, and Attitudes Toward Mexican Immigrants” is a study on different cable news networks and their approach to the issue of Mexican immigration. The second, entitled “ Understanding Culture Wars through Satirical/Political Infotainment TV: Jon Stewart and The Daily Show's Critique as Mediated Re-enactment of the Culture War,” focuses on the use of satire to examine the bias and theatricality of American media. Although these two articles address vastly different topics within the confines of the topic of bias in American media, there are important similarities as well as important differences contained within the research that are important to discuss.

Zuniga, Correa and Valenzuela conducted research into the attitudes of various media networks insofar as Mexican immigration is concerned. Mexican immigration is a contentious subject in the United States, as Mexican immigrants still face a large amount of racism from many Americans. Sometimes this racism is so heavily institutionalized that it allows for Mexican immigrants to face racial profiling in some states, like Arizona. Zuniga, Correa and Valenzuela examined a number of responses to CNN and

FOX news, and analyzed viewer responses to Mexican immigrants and immigration reform policies based on what type of media the individual consumed (Zuniga, Correa et al. 609).

Zuniga, Correa and Valenzuela conducted their study with the hope of determining how watching conservative, anti-immigrant media changed the average viewer's perception of immigrants, immigration, and particularly Mexican immigrants. Defining CNN as a "moderate" or "mainstream" news outlet and FOX News as a "conservative" news outlet, Zuniga, Correa and Valenzuela write:

First, the results showed that conservative Republicans are more likely to watch FOX News and less likely to watch CNN than liberal Democrats who, in turn, are more likely to watch CNN and less likely to watch FOX News.

Second, even after controlling for respondents' partisanship and ideology, watching FOX News was associated with negative perceptions of Mexican immigrants and higher support for restrictive immigration policies. [ ] the FOX News effect was not constrained to conservative Republican respondents because liberal Democrats who reported watching FOX News had more anti-immigrant attitudes than liberal Democrats who did not (Zuniga, Correa et al. 610).

In short, the Zuniga et al. study found that regardless of an individual's personal politics, consuming news media with an anti-immigration slant provoked those individuals into holding an anti-immigration opinion, and supporting restrictive immigration policies (Zuniga, Correa et al. 610). This effect is by no means limited to FOX news; consuming media with an anti-immigration slant, regardless of the origin, results in an individual who favors

more restrictive immigration policies (Zuniga, Correa et al. 610).

The Grondin article, on the other hand, details the “culture wars”—really a term used to describe the ideological struggles between conservatives and liberals in the American media—that are waged through what Grondin terms “infotainment” television (Grondin 348). Grondin writes, “political infotainment TV comprises public affairs TV shows that aim to inform and entertain as well as other shows that are sometimes labelled as “soft news media”—entertainment-oriented, quasi-news and information programmes’ (Baum). Shows like the satirical TV news show *The Daily Show*, as well as *The O’Reilly Factor* and Glenn Beck’s former Fox News show, *The Glenn Beck Show*, belong to this last category” (Grondin 351). Like the Zuniga et al. article, Grondin writes that people’s opinions are heavily influenced by the political entertainment they consume, even though this influence may be unconscious (Grondin 374).

Grondin notes that the primary function of satirical news shows on television is to highlight the absurdity of extremist views on shows like *The O’Reilly Factor*, and other so-called “no spin” FOX News shows (Grondin 354). Shows like Stewart’s “*The Daily Show*” often use clips of FOX News network shows in an effort to demonstrate how extreme and how ridiculous these shows can be. Stephen Colbert’s “*The Colbert Report*” is similar, but designed in such a way as to appear to be one of these extremely conservative shows. In this way, Colbert mocks conservative media by becoming a part of the conservative media, while Stewart uses barbed remarks and other types of satire to demonstrate why news shows like those on the FOX News network are not valid sources of information. Grondin notes that these shows often

express contradicting opinions based almost solely on the prevailing political atmosphere at the current time and date, and have no compunctions about expressing completely different opinions at different points in time. Satirical shows often use these contradictions as a way to discredit shows that appear on biased networks like FOX News.

In the “Democalypse” video that The Daily Show presented in 2012, Stewart comes on the air to discuss President Obama’s immigration reform policies and the Republican outrage concerning these policies (The Daily Show).

Stewart notes the ridiculous nature of the Republican outrage-- Republicans, Stewart states, have long been ardently against immigration reform.

However, when the President took too long to institute immigration reform, Republicans spoke out against him for “taking too long” (The Daily Show).

Stewart mocks the Republicans after playing their responses on the air: “We were begging him to fundamentally change American policy towards immigration,” he says to a laughing studio audience. “I mean, look how we rallied around him with the whole healthcare thing! We love the guy” (The Daily Show). The power in Stewart’s approach to immigration reform is in his delivery-- the audience can feel that there is a wink and a nudge in his satire, that they are sharing in the joke with him.

Both of these articles have a clear liberal bias, but the bias against conservative ideology does not mean that these academics are wrong about the cause and effect situation regarding media and the American culture.

Zuniga, Correa and Valenzuela are all part of the Mexican-American population of the United States, and often fall victim to the racism that runs rampant in the United States against Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and

even legal immigrants (Zuniga, Correa et al.). However, personal experience in this realm does not discredit their experiences; on the contrary, it makes their research seem stronger and more important, because the research is done on a topic that has a deep personal impact. These researchers note in their acknowledgements that they began their research looking for answers regarding the media influence on the perception of Mexican immigrants in the United States, and quickly found that the influence of the media was much heavier than initially thought.

Understanding media bias is important, because of the large amount of information that is available to people today. Without the ability to properly recognize bias in media and respond to that bias appropriately, it is difficult to parse what information is true and factual and what information is manipulated “ spin.” In American media today, there is no such thing as a completely unbiased news program, although some news programs seem to be much more biased than others. FOX News presents itself as fair and balanced, while in reality it is anything but fair and balanced. On the other hand, infotainment programs like “ The Daily Show” and “ The Colbert Report” provide biased information in another manner.

Satirical programs are excellent for exposing the bias in the mainstream media, because they focus so heavily on the factual inaccuracies and the inconsistencies of other media representations of cultural issues. The Daily Show, for instance, often uses clips from FOX News that are current, juxtaposed against clips that are older; this makes it much easier for viewers to make decisions regarding the validity of information that comes from media sources like CNN or FOX News.

## Works cited

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