



Do politics control news?

The author argues that some American news outlets tailor the news to fit the political beliefs of their audiences. Britain's national newspapers have done this for years; it was a feature of early American newspapers, based on the belief that people are drawn to news that validates their own beliefs.

Activities for students:

Flashlight: Conduct a survey. Students will distribute a simple anonymous survey, either digitally or physically on campus. The survey will consist of two questions:

- 1) Check how you voted (or would have voted, if you didn't actually do it) in the most recent presidential election: _____
Republican _____ Democrat _____ Independent _____ Not voting
- 2) Check the television news outlet you depended upon on most for national news: _____ Local affiliate _____ Fox _____ CNN _____ MSNBC _____ NBC _____ ABC _____ CBS _____ PBS As a class, go over the survey results. Which outlets push "comfort news"? What percentage of the surveyed students uses those outlets? Are they politically aligned with the outlets? Help your students create an infographic of the results.

Spotlight: Have the students read this description of structural bias, focusing on the section on media bias. The writer says political bias is not as important as the others. What examples can the class give of the nine forms of media bias listed? Are these conscious or unconscious acts? Do you think "expediency bias" was to blame when [a KTVU news anchor read obviously fake names in a jet-crash story](#). (Note: The Asian American Journalists Association found the video "grossly offensive" and chose not to repeat the names. From South Korea, CNN reported [a similar reaction](#) to the incident.)

Searchlight: Some stories are interesting but unimportant, what we might *want* to know (like celebrity gossip); others are important but not interesting, what we might *need* to know (like local zoning changes). Have students pick a local news outlet and estimate the percentage of stories in each category. Class discussion: If you ran an outlet, how would you

handle the “story mix”? Does social responsibility come into play, or is the priority what works best for the business? Consider how the [TV anchor in HBO’s Newsroom](#) handles story mix: Does he try to make important things interesting by having a point of view?

Extra credit: In newsrooms, some stories are called “DBI” – Dull But Important. [It’s an issue the Christian Science Monitor grappled with as it went web-only](#). Can such “broccoli” stories be made into tasty broccoli soup? Student activity: Find a Monitor story that could not be called “light” or “soft” news. Recast it so that it would be interesting to you.