

Political Bias: Analysis of political-type, front-page articles in *USA Today* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* from October 8- November 8, 2010.

Heather Lowery

Robert Morris University

ABSTRACT

While the American press has been known as the ‘watchdog of government’ since its foundation, reporters and news outlets frequently face the challenge of maintaining objectivity. Though easily dictated, objectivity is not as simple to put into practice. Hence, the question of how successful news media avoid bias altogether has long since been the subject of a majority of media analysis, criticism, and academic research. In recent years, however, political bias has

taken over as the most researched aspect of media bias.

“Liberal media bias” has become the catch phrase for conservative critiques of mainstream media reporting in the past two decades. Republican candidate Bob Dole, while speaking with Howard Kurtz in an article called “Media Notes: Taking on the Times,” blamed his 1996 presidential loss to Democratic candidate Bill Clinton on biased media news coverage (Kurtz, 1996). Others claim a conservative media bias is prevalent (Mantler, Whiteman, 1995). While still others conclude that the media is well balanced and no bias exists (D’Alessio, Allen, 2000).

This article will focus on analyzing the presence of political bias as indicated by the placement of political-type articles on the front page of *USA Today* and compare findings with more local reporting in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* during election coverage of the mid-term Congressional race from October 8, 2010 to November 8, 2010.

The study’s primary interests include: 1) whether there is a difference in measurable bias evident between a national daily newspaper (*USA Today*) and a more regionally-focused city daily (the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*); and 2) what sort of training or policies the newspapers offer to help avoid overt bias. The study compares identifiable political ideologies of sources, article placement, and visual emphasis using articles from October 8-November 8, 2010, the month before Election Day.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, political bias in the media has taken over as the most researched aspect

of media bias (Eisinger, Veenstra, Koehn, 2007). The influence that the news media have over the public agenda, creating stereotypes and choosing what is important to report, is nothing new to the field of research (Moldovan, 2009).

While readers and critics often ask whether news media will cover the political aspects of a particular event, the question of how the news media will portray the political constituents of it is more important. Watts, Domke, Shah, and Fan hypothesize that citizens may believe the media to be biased because reporters and political elites give more attention to certain topics. For example, in the spring of 2011, American journalists have covered the political demonstrations in Libya, Yemen, and Egypt, focusing on how the demonstrations were influencing the U.S. political and economic fronts. Due to the explicit attention to political and economic interests in favor of human and social concerns, media consumers may come to believe that political agendas are privileged over other issues, despite the fact that in reality, most issues are inextricably linked. Fico and Freedman would go so far as to say that bias is unavoidable in the journalism profession, citing that the number of people who believe journalism is politically biased is increasing (Fico, Freedman, 2008).

In their meta-analysis, D'Alessio and Allen name three categories of media bias: gatekeeping bias, coverage bias, and statement bias. Gatekeeping bias exists when editors choose certain news stories from a range of news stories over others because of specific, and often self-interest.

Coverage bias occurs when there is unbalanced news coverage of a certain event or issue. For example, news media frequently report on crime, giving the public a false perception that crime is a commonality or that certain groups are involved in criminal activity more often.

George Gerbner's examination of audience perception of community, which led to Cultivation Theory and *mean world syndrome*, was ultimately driven by coverage bias. *Mean world syndrome* deduced that heavy television viewers routinely believed that their world was filled with more violence than actually existed because of the unrealistic emphasis on presented stories and images (Griffin, 2010).

In another example, Bjornstrom, Kaufman, Peterson and Slater analyzed television news reports of perpetrators and victims of crime, comparing the reports with the actual population of offenders. Broken up into races, Bjornstrom et al found that white offenders were underreported even though they were the highest populated offenders, which could give the public a false perception of criminal perpetrators (Bjornstrom, Kaufman, Peterson, Slater, 2010).

In *Communication: A First Look at Communication Theory*, Em Griffin mentions Salma Ghanem's study on the percentage of Texans who reported crime as the most important problem in the United States between 1992 and 1995. Ghanem presumed that the prominence of crime became significant because the media often led with crime stories. Additionally, "she found a high correlation (+.70) between the amount of media coverage and the depth of public concern," supporting her hypothesis (Griffin, 2003).

Statement bias exists when news media member(s) put their own opinions in the text of an event or issue's coverage (D'Alessio, Allen, 2000). While D'Alessio and Allen were not able to find a significant difference between conservative and liberal coverage in their 59 academic article study, statement bias exists in articles printed daily. For example, if a journalist were to report on a protest, and were to use words like "disorderly," "unsettling," or "troublesome" to

describe the protestors, that may be seen as statement bias, because clearly the reporter does not agree with the protestors' actions.

Political bias introduces the idea of political slant. If present in a news medium, it can portray a preconceived agenda in favor of a particular party and in slant of the other. Not every single event can be covered, which is important to note when analyzing articles. However, when looking at the whole a researcher will be able to see the overall unbalanced perspective.

This study will limit the scope of bias inquiry to the question of coverage bias. Specifically, it will focus on coverage bias and the placement of political-type articles on the front-page of *USA Today* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* from October 8, 2010 to November 8, 2010, the month before the mid-term Congressional election. This study will compare whether or not there is a difference in political bias between *USA Today*, a national daily, and *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, a local daily, from October 8, 2010 to November 8, 2010. The media bias claims, whether liberal, conservative or neutral, and the public perception of media bias will be discussed in this literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Claims of Liberal Media Bias

While the question of liberal media bias and its implications has long been a popular topic—even among news pundits themselves—perhaps the best recent example was Bob Dole's claim that the media was the cause of his loss to Bill Clinton in the 1996 Presidential campaign (Kurtz, 1996). Dole was quoted saying, "They don't put any anti-Clinton stories in the

New York Times. Only anti-Dole stories in the *New York Times*.” In reality, Kurtz then cited that the *Times* had printed such articles as “Changing Tactics, Dole Challenges Clinton Ethics,” and “Clinton Commercial Misleading, Election Finance Expert Says.” (Kurtz, 1996). However, Dole’s perception was one that drew attention to inequality in coverage and ‘liberal media bias,’ a long-held complaint among conservatives.

Watts et al determined that claims of liberal bias in the media by the public were common in the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential campaigns. However, Watts et al do acknowledge that these claims were primarily driven by the conservative elites. Interestingly, Watts et al concluded that the ‘coverage of coverage’ that continues to increase moves the news media from reporting the news to being the news (Watts et al., 1999). George H. W. Bush claimed that there was a liberal bias and went so far as to change his reelection campaign to “Annoy the Media: Reelect Bush,” (Eveland and Shah, 2003).

Moldovan researched the two most popular weekly news magazines, *Time* and *Newsweek*, from January 2007 to June 2008, looking at the coverage of the 2008 presidential election campaign. Even though Moldovan was primarily researching political bias between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama during the race for the 2008 presidency, Moldovan also found that Obama was favored over Rep. John McCain in *Newsweek* articles during the 2008 presidential election, which he concluded hurt both McCain and Clinton (Moldovan, 2008). Moldovan also referenced a May 10, 2008 *Newsweek* article written by Evan Thomas and Richard Wolffe that stated John McCain “may not be able to resist casting doubt on Obama’s patriotism.” This article received a 1,300-word response from the McCain campaign, chastising the authors for their lack of objectivity.

Domke, Watts, Shah and Fan concluded that in the 1988, 1992, and 1996 media coverage, most of the claims were of a liberal media bias, in which over 95 percent of all media bias claims in each campaign were liberal (Domke, Watts, Shah, Fan, 1999). Domke et al., furthermore, deduce that these claims were not supported by negative Republican coverage or positive Democratic coverage.

Lee proposed that liberal trends are more likely to be reflected in news and entertainment media, leading conservatives to dislike and distrust the media. Conservatives, according to Lee's study, prefer to have things unchanged and traditional and may develop negative feelings toward societal changes, which the liberal trends support, adding that conservatives and Republicans are more likely to distrust the news media (Lee, 2005). It is not that an actual liberal news media bias exists. However, it is the public's perception of a news media bias that determines whether it is liberally, conservatively, or neutrally biased.

Media Bias Claims of Conservative Bias

Even though there are an abundance of claims of a liberal media bias, there are claims of conservative bias as well. Finding assertions that media coverage has a Republican partisan bias is almost as hard as finding articles that promote a balanced media, unless of course Fox News or talk radio become the focus. Comparing towns with FOX News to towns without FOX News in 2000, DellaVigna and Kaplan found that FOX News was responsible for nearly 200,000 votes nationwide with its availability in 35 percent of U.S. households and 0.15 to 0.2 percentage points. DellaVigna and Kaplan also concluded that between 1996 and 2000, FOX News convinced 3 to 8 percent of its non-Republican viewers to vote for the Republican Party

(DellaVigna, Kaplan, 2007).

Butler and Schofield assert that newspapers would publish more letters to the editor that were opposite the candidate that they endorsed. In 2008, 70 percent endorsed Obama, and so more pro-McCain letters were published (Butler, Schofield, 2010). The fact that editors were promoting an outlet for opposing opinions, though, suggests a more objective media, a more balanced media.

Mantler and Whiteman studied six major newspapers, the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, concluding that Republican candidate George H. W. Bush received significantly more press coverage than Democrat Bill Clinton and third-party candidate Ross Perot during the 1992 presidential campaign (Mantler, Whiteman, 1995).

Lowry researched the first six years of Bill Clinton's presidency and George W. Bush's first six years of presidency and compared their coverage. Optimism scores showed that there was a slight difference in favor of the Bush years than the Clinton years—networks reported in a more optimistic tone during Bush's six years than during Clinton's, which disproves partisan liberal bias. Although, the Accomplishment scores for those two-time periods was the direct opposite of the Optimism scores, which supports the partisan liberal bias (Lowry, 2008).

Whether a liberal or conservative media bias exists, there are still researchers who concluded that there is such a thing as a balanced media.

A Balanced Media

Objectivity is the goal of every journalist. Alex Jones, in his book “Losing the News: The Future of the News That Feeds Democracy,” says that objectivity is a necessity because journalists are biased. Furthermore, Jones claims that the public believes journalists “would twist the facts and distort the ‘objective’ truth. They would sneak into a house of a family mourning the loss of a child and steal a picture of the child off the wall. They would lie and connive,” (Jones, 2009). Remaining objective, and altering the public’s perception of news media is of the utmost importance to news media outlets. There is research that indicates that the media are balanced and have no significant bias.

Domke, Fan, Fibison, Shah, Smith, and Watts determined that there was an overall balance in candidate valence coverage during the 1996 presidential election coverage, indicating a lack of political media bias between Rep. Dole and Dem. Clinton, despite Dole’s claims that the *New York Times* reported more con-Dole articles (Domke, Fan, Fibison, Shah, Smith, Watts, 1997). Domke et al analyzed the media coverage of candidates and issues from March 10 to November 6, 1996 and found that Clinton had a 1.18 ratio compared to Dole’s 1.17 ratio for paragraph totals. Further analysis showed that Clinton had a 56 percent total coverage rate compared to Dole’s 44 percent. However, the authors concluded that there was little statistical difference between the coverage of Dole and Clinton, indicating general neutrality (Domke et al., 1997).

Niven also suggests that the media strives to be neutral for fear that their ethics and agenda may be questioned, which could result in less profitability (Niven, 2001). Reporters and audiences alike value objective news coverage, and to report anything less would promote

bias. Niven hypothesizes that there may be no partisan bias, but there is still the undisputable presence of negativity in the media. Niven explains that Presidents and Bill Clinton George H.W. Bush received negative coverage more than positive coverage every year they were in office. Positive stories take a back seat to stories focused on the negative aspects of government and governmental figures (Niven, 2001).

Furthermore, Niven found that President George W. Bush and President Bill Clinton received the same amount of coverage when they faced the same unemployment rate, which indicates a lack of partisan bias. However, the negative stories continued to increase the more the unemployment rate rose, and the more the unemployment rate was covered, the longer the stories got, which shows an overall negative tone in media coverage (Niven, 2001).

Lee concluded that the 2000 presidential election between Democratic candidate Al Gore and Republican candidate George W. Bush was fairly balanced because both candidates received nearly equal coverage, which also increased the public's trust in the media (Lee, 2005). When looking at the whole of press coverage, it is important to remember that newspapers in Democratic states are more likely to report on a liberal slant. Likewise, newspapers in Republican states are more likely to report on a conservative slant.

Peake found that newspapers in Democratic states covered President George W. Bush more, but the coverage was more negative than in the Republican states (Peake, 2007). Niven also researched congressional party switchers and their effect on media coverage. He found that members of Congress who leave the Republican Party will most likely receive the same amount of coverage as members of Congress who leave the Democratic Party because party-affiliates engaged in the same behavior receive the same coverage (Niven, 2003). Despite

researchers' claims of a balanced media, the majority of the public perception of media bias supports the claim that there is a liberal bias.

Public Perception of Media Bias

The theory of selective exposure states that people are more likely to listen to news media that mirror their ideological beliefs. (Morris, 2007). Morris reports that, in general, conservatives believe that there is a more liberal media bias and because of that, in their eyes the Presidential elections are influenced (Morris, 2007). Furthermore, Morris hypothesized that perceived media bias was associated with partisan identification, finding that Democrats are likely to see Republican bias, and Republicans a Democratic bias. Republicans and Democrats are not likely to see bias in favor of their party affiliate in the mainstream media (Morris, 2007).

Despite a journalist's attempt to remain objective, audiences are going to perceive the news media the way they want to. In a recent survey on the public's perception of media bias, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reported that 60 % of Americans believe news organizations are politically biased (Paulson, 2010).

Watts et al propose, though, that the public is claiming a more liberal bias because the media is giving more attention to the topic (Watts et al., 1999). Watts et al, through their research, concluded that the public perception of bias in the media continues to rise because of increased criticisms of media coverage (Watts et al., 1999). So because there were claims that there was a liberal bias throughout the 1992 and 1996 election coverage, the public perception was that there was a liberal media bias even though both were generally balanced in coverage,

with a slight liberal bias during the 1992 election (Watts et al., 1999).

After having participants rate CNN and FOX News headlines, Weatherly, Petros, Christopherson, and Haugen concluded that despite the article being the same, the CNN headlines were deemed more liberal than the FOX News headlines (Weatherly, Petros, Christopherson, Haugen, 2007). Furthermore, FOX News headlines were actually found to be on the liberal side of neutral, despite its conservative label. Weatherly et al had three different groups study the headlines (participants who were told the source was CNN, participants who were told the source was FOX News, and participants who were not told the source), which showed that the networks did not affect the result, but the headlines did.

Niven also agrees that the perception of media bias is fueled by the public's knowledge of media bias, which is enhanced through the media's coverage of bias in the media (Niven, 2001). Trust in the media also plays into the perception of the media. In a 1976 poll, 72 percent of the respondents said they had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media, compared to a 2005 poll that resulted in 50 percent of the respondents having a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media (Carroll, 2005).

Additionally, Lee found that trust in the media was related to trust in the government and could be positively predicted by that trust. Lee concluded that the more consumers believed in the government to do the right thing, and the more liberal they are, the more likely the public will trust the media to report objectively (Lee, 2010).

Rouner, Slater, and Buddenbaum concluded that if the public's perception of source bias is different than that of the journalist, the more likely the public is going to believe journalists

present quotes from one side of issues or present unfair, unbalanced news coverage (Rouner, Slater, Buddenbaum, 1999).

D'Alessio examined readers' perceptions of media bias and found that one in eight participants considered the article s/he read to be biased. D'Alessio, using Social Judgment Theory, concluded that this was because many of the participants were not focused on individual statements, and many may have considered them biased because they view all news reports as biased (D'Alessio, 2003).

In 1972, journalism professors Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw coined the term, agenda-setting theory, while studying the 1968 presidential campaign. McCombs and Shaw believe that the "mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agendas to the public agenda," (Griffin, 2003). They were not implying that reporters strive to put forth their views so as to influence the opinion of the audience. However, McCombs and Shaw do believe "we look to news professionals for cues on where to focus our attention," (Griffin, 2003). And it is that agenda-setting that determines what is reported, and eventually printed.

However, it is difficult to determine where media agenda begins and public agenda ends. It is not easy to determine whether media agenda affects the public agenda, or if it is public agenda that drives media agenda. In their study, McCombs and Shaw say, "readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position," (McCombs, Shaw, 1972). For example, when the World Trade Center buildings were destroyed September 11, 2001, reporters covered the issue from the point of view that the United States was under attack. Most of the

information provided to the public shared that same agenda, which was supported by President George W. Bush.

METHODS

In order to determine whether there is a presence or a difference in political bias between a national daily, *USA Today*, and a city daily, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, this study analyzed every political-type article on the front-pages of both newspapers from October 8, 2010 to November 8, 2010. For the purpose of this study, front-page articles on local political affiliates in *The Pittsburgh-Post Gazette* were not considered. For example, articles on the Mayor or city council members were not included.

This selection is representative of the comparative between a nationally circulated daily and a locally circulated daily. That database included every political article found on the front-page of every issue from October 8, 2010 to November 8, 2010, which resulted in 17 articles from *USA Today* and 45 articles from *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Non-political articles were excluded. My study defined “political articles” as those that were concerned with political candidates, issues raised in the Congressional races, and local or national issues that relied more than 50 percent on sources associated with politics for commentary.

Article placement and coverage bias were the main determinants of this study. McCombs and Shaw used position as a main determinant in their 1972 agenda-setting study, explaining that articles privileged on the front-page were evidence of primary focus on an issue (Griffin, 2003).

Likewise, this study uses the placement of front-page articles, whether above the fold or below the fold, as a determinant for privilege. Articles that were placed above the fold were viewed as more important, and so were categorized as such. Articles positioned below the fold would be viewed as not as important as articles placed above the fold. In order to determine coverage bias, sources, photographs and headlines were analyzed.

Sourcing

While examining the media coverage of the allegation of WMDs in Iraq and terrorism, Sharp and Kiyon concluded that sourcing used in newspaper articles had a large impact on the overall narrative of the stories (Sharp, Kiyon, 2007).

Liberal sources were any referenced source that belonged to a liberal organization (i.e. Democratic National Committee, Democratic party, College Democrats, etc.) or were self-described liberals. Democrats were counted as part of the liberal sources.

Conservative sources were comprised of sources that belonged to conservative organizations (i.e. Republican National Committee, National Federation of Republican Women, etc.) or were self-described conservatives. Republicans and Tea-Party members were counted as part of the conservative sources.

Neutral sources included any source that was not affiliated with a party (i.e. political analysts, political scientists, professors, etc.). Members of the Independent party and non-partisan organization members were counted as neutral sources. Neutral, in this study, does not mean moderate.

Photographs

Visual design includes visual art, which works to communicate information visually to an audience. Photographs are a type of visual design. Articles that are accompanied by a photograph are seen as having more importance or significance. Photographs placed on the front-page "receive the most attention and generally the most reaction," (Rasmussen, 2002). Readers are attracted to color and graphics. Therefore, having a photograph beside an article will attract readers to that article.

In their 2005 article, Barrett and Barrington, studied 435 candidate photographs in seven different newspapers during the 1998 and 2002 election cycles, looking for bias. They found, using Political Atmosphere Theory, that the bias concerning visual images would be consistent with the political character of each newspaper (Barrett, Barrington, 2005). Based on their findings, I decided to examine pictures of candidates and party affiliates for bias.

Headlines

In their study of front-page headlines in five major Croatian newspapers, Omazic, Vlahov, and Ozanic determined that headlines on the front-page had the biggest influence on readers because their first contact was with the front-page (Omazic et al., 2010).

In this study, headlines were analyzed for content. If the headlines mentioned or focused on a liberal party or organization, or a member of either, the headline was labeled liberal. For example, in the November 3, 2010 issue of *USA Today*, the headline "Hurdles ahead for White House agenda as Democrats falter: Concern over policies cripples incumbents,"

would be counted as a liberal headline because of the headline's focus on the Democratic Party.

If a conservative party or organization, or a member of either, was mentioned in the headline or was the focus of it, the headline was labeled conservative. In the October 8, 2010 issue of *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* the headline, "GOP attacking Manchin embarrasses Raese camp," because the GOP and a Republican candidate were mentioned, despite the fact that a Democratic candidate was also mentioned in the article. When conservative and liberal aspects are both mentioned in equal numbers, the headline is considered neutral. However, when there are more of either conservative or liberal, the headline will be labeled whichever is mentioned most. So in the afore-mentioned headline, there are two conservative tallies to one liberal tally, which makes for a conservative headline.

Headlines that did not mention conservative or liberal party or organization members were counted as neutral headlines. The headline, "10 years later, new concerns about voting: Upgrades since Fla. debacle not enough," appearing in the October 19, 2010 issue of *USA Today*, there are no conservative or liberal members or organizations mentioned, and so the headline was labeled as neutral. Likewise, in an October 19, 2010 issue of *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the headline, "Corbett, Onorato set sights differently on guns," mentions both a Democratic candidate and a Republican candidate. Therefore, the headline was marked as neutral.

RESULTS

After analyzing the articles in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and *USA Today* for sourcing, visual imagery, headline content and placement, the results indicate that both newspapers are generally well-balanced.

While there is a lot of discussion about politically biased media, these newspapers appear to consciously work toward political neutrality, considering my sample included all of the political-type articles featured on the front-pages of both newspapers the month before the mid-term Congressional election.

Table 1 shows the results of the sourcing, visual imagery, and headline content analysis for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. The results show that the sourcing was very balanced, as there was only a difference of about 1 percent between conservative and liberal sources used.

Even though the photographic results show a difference of about 8 percent between liberal and conservative images, there was only one more image categorized in the 'liberal' content area used than conservative image. Regardless, there were more neutral images used than both liberal and conservative images.

The results of the headline content analysis also illustrate a lack of bias. There were more neutral headlines than liberal and conservative headlines, although there were nearly 4 percent more liberal headlines than conservative headlines. Despite that 4 percent difference, the headlines are still considered balanced because there are more neutral headlines.

Table 1: *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* Sourcing, Visual Imagery, and Headline Content

	Liberal	Conservative	Neutral
SOURCE	69 (40.8 %)	67 (39.6 %)	33 (19.5 %)
PHOTOGRAPH	4 (33.3 %)	3 (25 %)	5 (41.7 %)
HEADLINE	14 (31.1 %)	12 (26.7 %)	19 (42.2 %)
TOTALS	87	82	57

Table 2 displays the results of the sourcing, visual imagery, and headline content analysis of *USA Today*. The source attribution in *USA Today* is very balanced. The percentages only differ by 2 percent between liberal and conservative and by about 3 percent between conservative and neutral.

USA Today only used photographs with eight of their articles. Fifty percent of those photos offered content that would be considered liberal. Nearly 38 percent of the photos offered neutral content, and 12.5 percent of those, which ended up being one photo, were classified as conservative.

The content of the headlines in *USA Today* were the most balanced of the results. The liberal and conservative headlines were even at 35.3 percent, and the neutral headlines were only a slightly less 29.4 percent.

Table 2: *USA Today* Sourcing, Visual Imagery, and Headline Content

	Liberal	Conservative	Neutral
SOURCE	47 (33.1 %)	50 (35.2 %)	45 (31.7 %)
PHOTOGRAPH	4 (50 %)	1 (12.5 %)	3 (37.5 %)
HEADLINE	6 (35.3 %)	6 (35.3 %)	5 (29.4 %)
TOTALS	57	57	53

Article placement is a very important component to consider when analyzing a newspaper for bias, as previously indicated in the methods section. Table 3 displays the results of the design choices for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, while Table 4 shows that of *USA Today*.

Overall, there were more neutral articles placed above the fold and below the fold than liberal and conservative articles in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. The conservative articles were evenly distributed between above the fold and below the fold. The liberal articles only differed by 4.5 percent, giving below the fold articles the most.

Table 3: *Pittsburgh-Post Gazette* Article Placement

	Liberal	Conservative	Neutral
Above the Fold	5 (11.1 %)	6 (13.3 %)	8 (17.8 %)
Below the Fold	7 (15.6 %)	6 (13.3 %)	13 (28.9 %)

USA Today featured more neutral articles on the front page than conservative and liberal articles combined. However, there was a slight conservative bias when it comes to the design choices of *USA Today*. All of the conservative articles were featured above the fold, which indicates a small lean toward conservative bias. The liberal articles were fairly even if the totals are considered instead of the percentages, as the above the fold articles only have a one article advantage over the below the fold liberal articles.

Table 4: *USA Today* Article Placement

	Liberal	Conservative	Neutral
Above the Fold	2 (11.8 %)	5 (29.4 %)	6 (35.3 %)
Below the Fold	1 (5.9 %)	0 (0 %)	3 (17.6 %)

While the results did not indicate a significant bias for either *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* or *USA Today*, they do say something about the media industry.

DISCUSSION

So what does this all mean? When I began my inquiry into the issue of political bias in newspapers, I anticipated I would find what much of the public believes to be true: that it is

clear that bias exists. Instead, my sampling suggests that both newspapers I examined make a concerted effort to balance their political coverage.

Before I conducted my research, I expected to find the local news medium to be more biased. Instead, I found that there is a slight lean in the above the fold and below the fold results in *USA Today's* article placement. However, this sample size is so small it is difficult to draw broad conclusions from it.

I will suggest however, more studies like that of Mantler and Whiteman. Mantler and Whiteman analyzed the six major national dailies, looking for bias in the 1992 campaign coverage. I expanded upon their study, analyzing another major daily newspaper, *USA Today*. I also thought it would be interesting to add in a regional daily newspaper, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and find if there were any significant differences in bias between the two. However, I did not find that either one was particularly biased. Nonetheless, more studies like Mantler and Whiteman's should be replicated as they ensure the entire news industry keeps balance and fairness at the fore in content decisions.

The media have long since been known to be the watchdogs of democracy. So who becomes the watchdog of the media? Neutrality is of the utmost importance in the media. Thus, it is incumbent upon all news media to be vigilant in terms of policies as well as self-analysis. The news field would benefit from an assessment tool, based on the criteria used here or in the Mantler and Whiteman study that helps to keep track of content choices and tracks history. A normative assessment tool that tracks patterns of source attribution, visual imagery, and headline content of newspapers could go a long way in bolstering consumer faith in the industry.

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