

Media Bias – Just What a Lot of Americans Want

One of the great college basketball coaches in the history of the game, a very smart and successful fellow named Michael William Krzyzewski, better known as Coach K of Duke University, [recently interviewed me on his satellite radio show](#) about a wide variety of subjects – and one of the questions was about my first book *Bias*, which explored liberal bias in the mainstream news media. The book came out in December of 2001 and Coach K wanted to know how things have changed since then.

My short answer was that bias in the media has gotten worse in the ensuing years. Before cable news, bias was nuanced, subtle. Now it's in your face. And it's not just liberal bias anymore.

“You tell me what kind of news you want,” I told the coach, “and I'll tell you where to go to get it.”

So, if you want news about how great President Trump is, you go to one place. If you want news to confirm your belief that he's incompetent, you have a whole bunch of other places where your views will be validated.

This, I said, is not good.

A few days after the interview, while surfing the web for more information about media bias, I noticed a report from Gallup that came out in January, about a poll it conducted in the second half of last year. The results are anything but comforting.

Only 32 percent of those polled say news organizations are careful to separate fact from opinion. In 1984, the number was 58 percent.

Forty-five percent say they see a great deal of political bias in news coverage. That's up from only 25 percent in 1989.

And less than a majority (44 percent) said they were able to name a source that reports news objectively.

It turns out, not surprisingly, that where you stand on the political spectrum has a lot to do with how you see bias in the news.

According to the poll 53 percent of Democrats, but only 27 percent of independents and 13 percent of Republicans, believe the media are careful to separate fact from opinion.

And while only 26 percent of Democrats see a great deal of bias in news coverage, 67 percent of Republicans do.

I'm not going out on a limb to conclude most Democrats don't see a great deal of bias in the news because the news reflects their liberal values.

Or to put it a slightly different way: Democrats don't think there's a lot of bias in the news ... because there *is* a lot of bias in the news. The kind of bias they like.

We spend a lot of time pointing out the biases of news organizations, but precious little time pointing out the biases of news consumers.

"The survey asked those who could name an objective source to identify which specific outlets they believe report news objectively," Gallup reported. "Among Republicans, Fox News was the overwhelming winner, with 60% of Republicans who named an objective news source identifying Fox News as that source.

"There is far less agreement among Democrats about which news source is objective. Rather than coalescing around a single news organization, Democrats name a number of sources, led by CNN (21%) and NPR (15%)."

So if you're a conservative Republican you think Fox is giving you the news straight. But if you're a liberal Democrat you think CNN and NPR are the honest brokers of information.

Are you following this? The very people who yell the loudest about media bias don't notice it when it reflects their own biases.

So let's knock off the sanctimony. Is there too much bias in supposedly straight news reporting? Yes. But more and more, the American people *want* bias in the news. As long as the bias is their kind of bias.

This is like a game of Ping-Pong. Lots and lots of Americans go to comfortable places for their news; places that put just the right kind of slant on the information. And news organizations – not all, of course, but too many – cater to what the viewer wants.

They don't call it the news *business* for nothing.

I've often said that a free country needs not only a free press, but also a fair press. Too often, we don't have that. But a free country also needs its citizens to *want* a fair press. And too often these days, we don't have that either.