



## **April/May 2021 Blind Bias Survey**

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## Survey Overview

In May 2021, AllSides conducted a multi-partisan blind bias survey to assess the political bias of five popular U.S. media outlets: **ABC News, National Review, CBS News, Reason magazine, and USA TODAY.**

A total of 1,455 people across the political spectrum took the survey, including 144 participants with a self-reported Left bias; 349 with a Lean Left bias; 432 with a Center bias; 414 with a Lean Right bias, and 116 with a Right bias.

**Participants assessed written, online news content *only* — not radio, TV, or broadcast content.** The purpose of the survey was to gather more data on news source bias and ensure that the AllSides Media Bias Ratings™ for the five news outlets reflect the average judgement of Americans. The data collected in blind bias surveys is just one of multiple methods AllSides uses to rate media bias.

## About AllSides Media Bias Ratings™

AllSides provides over [800 media bias ratings](#) of online media outlets, writers, think tanks, and other sources. We assign each source a bias rating on a 5-point scale: [Left](#), [Lean Left](#), [Center](#), [Lean Right](#), and [Right](#).



The AllSides **patented bias detection and display technology** drives what is arguably the world's most effective and up-to-date bias detection engine. It's powered by a combination of wisdom-of-the-crowd technology and statistical research and methodologies.

Our bias rating system utilizes multiple methodologies for assessing media bias, and combines them for the best possible results. On AllSides.com, we list which methods we used to arrive at the bias rating for any given source. Blind bias surveys are our most robust methodology; we also employ editorial reviews, independent reviews, and third party data. [Learn about these other methods for rating bias at AllSides.com.](#)

Our bias ratings are fluid and are subject to change over time as the bias of a source changes or as we acquire new information.

## Subjectivity of Bias Ratings

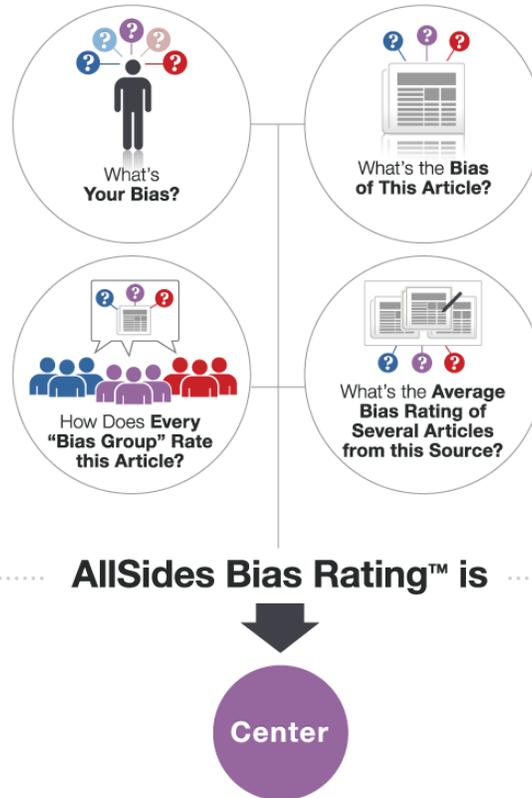
The AllSides patented media bias rating system reflects the average judgment of the American people. It is not “accurate” – bias is subjective and “in the eye of the beholder,” so there is no strictly accurate measurement of political bias. What is considered a left-wing view to a right-winger may seem like a centrist view to a left-winger.

AllSides recognizes that a five-point bias rating scale (Left, Lean Left, Center, Lean Right, Right) cannot capture the multitude of nuance that makes up the landscape of political thought. Far from seeking perfection, our ratings simply serve as a “map” of bias that helps readers to get a general idea of where a media outlet may fall in the modern political landscape, thus helping them to understand which perspectives may be represented or omitted in reading that particular news outlet. Our bias ratings reflect the average judgement of the American people, who have various views and hail from all points on the political bias spectrum.

## About AllSides Blind Bias Surveys

During an AllSides Blind Bias Survey, participants are asked to rate the bias of online news content “blindly” — with all branding and identifying information removed. This provides a robust bias evaluation because it eliminates respondents’ preconceived notions of that brand’s bias — they assess content only. This method is at the core of the patented AllSides Bias Rating™ methodology.

## AllSides Bias Rating™ HOW IT WORKS



### How AllSides Chose Which Sources to Evaluate

The April/May 2021 Blind Bias Survey collected responses on content from the following media outlets:

- ABC News (online news only) — Rated by AllSides as **Lean Left** as of April 2021
- National Review (online news only) — Rated **Right** as of April 2021
- CBS News (online news only) — Rated **Lean Left** as of April 2021
- Reason — Rated **Lean Right** as of April 2021
- USA Today — Rated **Center** as of April 2021

AllSides chose these outlets to assess based on multiple factors, including one or a combination of the following:

**Community feedback from readers.** Visitors to the AllSides website are invited to indicate whether they agree or disagree with our media bias ratings. Community feedback does not determine AllSides Media Bias Ratings™, but can trigger a deeper review. Some outlets may be chosen because a significant portion of readers indicated they disagreed with our bias rating for that outlet.

**Traffic to the source page from search engines.** AllSides uses Google Analytics to determine which source pages receive the most traffic from search engines.

**Existing data.** AllSides took into consideration whether or not the outlet had been subject to other AllSides media bias rating methodologies, such as past Blind Bias Surveys, Editorial Reviews, independent reviews, or third party data.

AllSides chose **ABC and CBS News** because they are both major news outlets that we wanted to get more data on to be confident in our ratings. AllSides has not done a Blind Bias Survey for CBS News, and has not conducted a Blind Bias Survey for ABC since [2013](#).

**Reason and National Review** are more conservative outlets that produce a lot of opinion/analysis content, yet each have news sections. AllSides chose to include both outlets for our survey in order to do further analysis on the *news* part of their websites, not their opinion or analysis content (See *Selecting Coverage of Major Ongoing Stories* below). Furthermore, AllSides had never done a Blind Bias Survey on either outlet.

AllSides chose **USA TODAY** for similar reasons to ABC News — they are a major news outlet for which AllSides has never conducted a Blind Bias Survey. In addition, we had received some emails and other feedback that USA TODAY was inching Left. At the time, AllSides had recently entered into a partnership with USA TODAY to promote America Talks, a conversation event that happened in partnership with [AllSides Talks](#), in June 2021. USA TODAY also publishes some of our [op-eds](#) as part of their Hidden Common Ground Series. Media outlets can't pay us to receive a favorable media bias rating, nor do our partnerships with them influence our ratings. You can read more about our partnerships [here](#).

## Methodology

Content added to the survey was stripped of any clear indications of brand, source, author, etc. No logos, reporter names, or other signals of where the content originated from were included. This ensured that the reader was “blind” to the content’s origins.

## Anchor Outlets

AllSides chose three articles covering the same topic from three “anchor” outlets — Wall Street Journal (Center bias), Vox (Left bias) and Breitbart (Right bias) to present at the very beginning

of the survey. AllSides chose content from these outlets because we are very confident in their bias ratings.

Because bias is subjective, the inclusion of content from “anchor outlets” was meant to “anchor” participants to a general idea about the range of bias that appears in media from left to right, and to provide them with a baseline of a Left, Center, and Right bias rating in American media. Because bias is subjective and contextual, providing anchor outlets helps readers to get a sense of the extremes of bias before rating content.

AllSides acknowledges that this system is not bulletproof, as bias is still ultimately subjective and there may be people who disagree that WSJ, Vox, and Breitbart are Center, Left and Right, respectively. However, we are confident that these three outlets are good representations of Center, Left, and Right political bias in the U.S.

## Selecting Content to Measure Bias

AllSides selected content in two ways: 1.) collecting *the top 5 headlines most prominently displayed on the website on two different days at the same time of day*, and 2.) collecting *one article each of the top stories the outlet most prominently displayed around two major national news stories, on two different days at the same time of day*.

### Selecting Top Headlines

AllSides collected the top five headlines on each outlet’s homepage on two different days, at the same time of day.

AllSides pulled headlines from each outlet on two separate occasions. The first pull was done between 2:30 and 2:45 p.m. ET on March 22, 2021; the second was done between 2:30 and 2:45 p.m. ET on March 29, 2021.

For CBS News, some headlines at the top of the page were passed over because they were videos. This is to keep with our standard of only reviewing written news content.

### Selecting Coverage of Major Ongoing Stories

AllSides also took into account how each outlet displayed bias in its coverage of two major, ongoing news stories: **Biden Unveiling a 2.2 Trillion Dollar Infrastructure Plan** and **Biden Announcing Executive Action to Curb Gun Violence**.

Top headlines on the Biden’s infrastructure plan were pulled from each outlet at 11:59 am ET on April 1, 2021; top headlines on Biden’s executive actions on guns were pulled at 11:59 am ET on April 12, 2021.

In addition to the headline, AllSides included the first 75 to 150 words of each article in the survey for respondents to evaluate for bias.

Content was pulled from the homepages of each site, except for National Review and Reason. We used their respective news pages (Reason.com/latest and NationalReview.com/News) because their homepages feature many opinion and analysis articles prominently. This is to keep with our standard of only reviewing written news content.

## Minimizing Subjectivity

Each media outlet formats its homepage differently, and determining which stories are “most prominently” displayed is somewhat subjective. In order to determine “prominence” of a story on a homepage, AllSides took into consideration **photo size, headline font size, and whether or not the story was in the center of the display screen**. Stories that had very large headline fonts and photos and were displayed in the middle or at the top of the page were considered to be “most prominent.”

Top headlines were selected either because they were ***the five most prominent stories on the outlet’s homepage at the selected time***, or ***the five top stories specifically labeled in an outlet’s “Top Stories” section at the selected time***.

The content pulled to reflect coverage of major ongoing stories was ***the most prominent story an outlet displayed on the chosen topic at the selected time***.

AllSides retained screenshots of each site’s homepage on the days and times the content was pulled; anyone interested in obtaining them can [contact us](#).

## Understanding the Personal Political Bias of Those Who Formatted and Participated in the Survey

Content was gathered by two AllSides team members who have a Lean Left and Lean Right bias. Having people with two different political biases pull the content provided a check and ensured it was done objectively.

Each survey participant was asked to self-determine their bias using the [AllSides Rate Your Bias tool](#) and report their results in the survey. **A total of 1,455 people took the survey — 144 participants with a self-reported Left bias; 349 with a Lean Left bias; 432 with a Center bias; 414 with a Lean Right bias, and 116 with a Right bias.**

Note that when examining the results, each group was viewed independently and then the data was normalized. In other words, in normalization, the overall results of all participants with a Left bias were given the same weight as the results from those with a Right bias (which had fewer

participants overall) and from those with a Center bias (which had more participants overall). Each group had an equal impact on the survey results.

Using the tool, participants self-rate their bias on social issues, economic issues, foreign policy, the environment, healthcare, education, social security, and welfare. Users are asked to say whether they believe their views are left, lean left, center, lean right, or right on these issues. They are also asked to rate the importance of these issues to them personally, in order for AllSides to generate an overall bias rating for the individual.

The Rate Your Bias tool does not purport to be definitive, and AllSides acknowledges that political thought is complex and does not fit neatly into boxes of left, center, and right. It is also important to remember that ideas often “change sides” in the political landscape. For example, in the past, those on the left openly supported stricter immigration control to curb job competition for native blue-collar workers; now, those on the left are more likely to support open borders or more liberal immigration policies, while conservatives are more likely to support stricter immigration control (however, this is not monolithic: some conservatives do support liberal immigration policies and vice versa).

When people use this tool, they are able to provide an indication of *where they perceive their own views to fall on the political spectrum*. Because bias is “in the eye of the beholder,” many people approach news articles with their own bias in mind. For example, someone who believes themselves to be Lean Left on many issues likely filters news articles through the lens of that bias. For this reason, while not perfect nor “accurate,” the self-rated bias of AllSides team members and survey participants is a key aspect of our blind bias survey and overall rating system, because it helps us to identify media bias as Americans perceive it.

## Distribution

AllSides distributed the survey sign-up link on our website, to our newsletter subscribers, and on our social media platforms — Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram — between the days of May 5th and 17th, 2021.

## How the Survey Was Formatted

Participants were asked to disclose their age, gender, [Rate Your Bias](#) result, state or country of residence, and whether or not they live in a rural, urban or suburban area.

Participants were then provided a headline and the first 75-150 words of the three articles taken from the “anchor outlets” — The Wall Street Journal (Center), Vox (Left), and Breitbart (Right). They were told the following:

*“Below are headlines from 5 major online media outlets in the U.S.*

*Please indicate whether you think the bias of the headline and content are from a media outlet with a left, lean left, center, lean right, or right political bias. There are no "correct" answers — AllSides is interested in what you perceive the bias of the media outlet to be.”*

Participants were then presented with eight pages of survey content (each page displaying all the content for a given media outlet) and were asked to give an overall bias rating for the content. For example, the survey question with the ABC News content looked like this:

Please indicate what you believe ***the overall bias of the media outlet to be*** based on the headlines and content.

**Headlines Day 1:**

*Atlanta shooting victim's husband says police detained him in handcuffs for hours*

*Donations pour in for families of Atlanta shooting victims*

*I 'strongly believe' Atlanta shootings were hate crimes: House Dem*

*Miami Beach mayor's plea to spring break revelers: 'Please vacation responsibly'*

*New photos show overcrowded Border Patrol tent for migrants*

**Headlines Day 2:**

*Derek Chauvin trial live updates: 1st witness questioned by prosecution*

*Floyd family kneels outside courthouse in symbolic statement*

*What to expect on day 1 of Derek Chauvin trial*

*CDC director feels sense of 'impending doom' about another COVID-19 surge*

*WHO report says animals likely source of COVID*

**Story 1**

**Biden unveils sweeping infrastructure plan, calling it a 'once-in-a-generation investment in America'**

President Joe Biden on Wednesday unveiled what he has called his next major priority, a roughly \$2 trillion infrastructure plan to modernize thousands of miles of roads, fix

thousands of bridges, expand broadband access and replace all lead pipes carrying drinking water.

"It's not a plan that tinkers around the edges," Biden said in a speech in Pittsburgh. "It's a once-in-a-generation investment in America, unlike anything we've seen or done since we built the interstate highway system and the space race decades ago. In fact, it's the largest American jobs investment since World War II."

## **Story 2**

### **Biden announces limited gun control actions, saying gun violence epidemic 'has to stop'**

President Joe Biden announced limited steps, using his executive power, to address gun violence Thursday -- three weeks after three mass shootings and under pressure to act.

Biden announced six actions, including asking the Department of Justice to issue a proposed rule to regulate the sale of so-called "ghost guns" within 30 days. Those firearms are assembled from kits of parts purchased online and don't have serial numbers, making them difficult to track.

"Gun violence in this country is an epidemic," Biden said in remarks delivered in the White House Rose Garden before an audience of gun control advocates and Democratic lawmakers who have pushed for gun control legislation on Capitol Hill. "And it's an international embarrassment," he said.

Participants were then presented with a multiple choice answer and the five options of Left, Lean Left, Center, Lean Right, and Right.

## **Data Analysis**

AllSides counted how many people with each self-proclaimed personal bias rating rated the content from each outlet as Left, Lean Left, Center, Lean Right or Right. For example, we found that of the 112 people who describe themselves as on the Left and provided a rating for ABC News, 53 rated content from ABC News as Lean Left, 43 rated the content as Lean Left, 13 as Left, and so on.

AllSides then assigned a numeric scale to represent each Left-to-Right bias rating, both as part of a bell curve and as a flat curve, and assigned each of those numeric scales a number. The ranges were:

**Bell Curve Range:** 0 - 1.5 Left, 1.5 - 2.75 Lean Left, 2.75 - 3.25 Center, 3.25 - 4.5 Lean Right, 4.5 - 6 Right

**Flat Range:** 0 - 1.2 Left, 1.2 - 2.4 Lean Left, 2.4 - 3.6 Center, 3.6 - 4.8 Lean Right, 4.8 - 6 Right

**Standard Values:** 0 Left, 1.5 Lean Left, 3 Center, 4 Lean Right, 6 Right

Bias	Left	Lean Left	Center	Lean Right	Right
Range : Bell Curve	0-1.5	1.5 - 2.75	2.75 - 3.25	3.25 - 4.5	4.5-6
Range: Flat	0-1.2	1.2-2.4	2.4-3.6	3.6-4.8	4.8-6
#	0	1.5	3	4.5	6

Using these numbers, AllSides then calculated an average for each group of results from users across the spectrum.

In the example below, people’s self-proclaimed biases are on the X-axis (columns B - F) and their responses — what they believed the bias of the media outlet to be — are on the Y-axis (rows 64 - 68). So, cell B51 indicates 43 people who self-reported a personal political bias of Left said they believe ABC News’ bias is Center; C51 indicates 133 people who Lean Left believe ABC News’ bias is Center; D51 indicates 111 people in the Center said they believe ABC News’ media bias is Center; and so forth.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
1		People’s Bias								
2	Responses	Left	Lean Left	Center	Lean Right	Right			Average	
3	Range : Bell Curve	0-1.5	1.5 - 2.75	2.75 - 3.25	3.25 - 4.5	4.5-6				
4	Range: Flat	0-1.2	1.2-2.4	2.4-3.6	3.6-4.8	4.8-6	TOTAL	%		
48	ABC	Left	Lean Left	Center	Lean Right	Right				
49	Left	13	31	65	104	42	255			
50	Lean Left	53	121	150	122	25	471			
51	Center	43	133	111	97	21	405			
52	Lean Right	2	0	1	3	0	6			
53	Right	1	1	4	2	2	10			
54	Total Responses	112	286	331	328	90	1147			
55	Average	1.995535714	2.050699301	1.771903323	1.522865854	1.25			1.718200838	

AllSides then took the average of these responses, using 0, 1.5, 3, 4.5 and 6 as a proxy to represent each bias rating from Left to Right, to calculate the numbers in row 55. For example, the following equation computed the result in cell B55:

$$= ( (B49 * \$B\$5) + (B50 * \$C\$5) + (B51 * \$D\$5) + (B52 * \$E\$5) + (B53 * \$F\$5) ) / (sum (B49 : B53) )$$

These averages were then compared against the bell curve and flat range numbers in rows 3 and 4 to determine what bias, on average, people on the Left believed ABC News to have (cell B55 = 1.99, which amounts to a Lean Left bias), or people who Lean Left (cell C55 = 2.05, which amounts to a Lean Left bias), or people who are in the Center (cell D55 = 1.77, which amounts to a Lean Left bias), and so forth.

We then took an average of these individual averages to arrive at a final number in cell I55. This final average was compared against the bell curve and flat curve ranges to arrive at a final bias rating for the media outlet. In this case, 1.7 places ABC News as Lean Left on the flat curve ranges and Lean Left on the bell curve.

## Conclusions

Upon calculating a flat average for all media outlets, AllSides determined the following:

Outlet	Average Rating	Bell Curve/Flat Curve Analysis	Notes
ABC News	1.72	Lean Left	<b>Current Rating: Lean Left Survey: Lean Left Final Analysis: Keep Lean Left</b>
National Review	3.79	Lean Right	<b>Current Rating: Right Survey: Lean Right Editorial Review: Near-Consensus Right Rating Final Analysis: Keep Right</b>
CBS News	2.21	Lean Left	<b>Current Rating: Lean Left Survey: Lean Left Final Analysis: Keep Lean Left</b>
Reason	4.41	Lean Right	<b>Current Rating: Lean Right Survey: Lean Right Final Analysis: Keep Lean Right</b>
USA Today	2.25	Lean Left	<b>Current Rating: Center. Survey: Lean Left Editorial Review: Inconclusive; AllSides plans to review this outlet again soon Final Analysis: TBD</b>

## Changes to Bias Ratings Due to Survey Data and Subsequent Analysis

The results confirmed our **Lean Left ratings for ABC and CBC News**, as well as our **Lean Right rating for Reason magazine**. On average, **respondents rated USA TODAY Lean Left**,

which differed from our rating of Center. Respondents rated **National Review Lean Right**, which differed from our rating of Right.

The results triggered [Editorial Reviews](#) of USA Today and National Review. Editorial Reviews allow the AllSides team to review more content from outlets than a Blind Survey does. The USA TODAY review was inconclusive, and we opted to do further review a month later; we opted to keep National Review rated as Right. You can read more about our Editorial Review of National Review [here](#), and about our USA TODAY review [here](#).

## Survey Results

### ABC News

A total of 1,147 people across the political spectrum rated [ABC News](#) Lean Left on average.

People who self-identified as having a personal bias of Right rated ABC News as Left on average, and people with a Lean Right bias rated ABC as on the border of Left and Lean Left. All other bias groups rated ABC News as Lean Left on average. The average rating of all groups together was Lean Left.

A plurality of respondents who rate themselves as Lean Left rated ABC News as Center. Pluralities of people with a Left, Center, and Lean Right bias rated ABC Lean Left; a plurality of people with a Right bias rated ABC Left.

### CBS News

A total of 1,053 people rated the bias of [CBS News](#) in this survey. The average rating for CBS News from people across the political spectrum was Lean Left.

Among the groups of people who self-identified as Left, Lean Left, Center, or Lean Right, a plurality of respondents rated CBS News as Center. A plurality of respondents who rated themselves as Right rated CBS News as Lean Left. The second most common response for CBS from people with a Right bias was Center; the second most common response from people from all other bias groups was Lean Left.

### National Review

On average, 1,093 people across the political spectrum rated [National Review](#) firmly Lean Right. People on the left and in the center all rated National Review as Lean Right on average; people on the right rated National Review between Center and Lean Right on average.

Pluralities across all bias groups rated National Review's bias as Lean Right; the second most common response among people on the left was Right, and the second most common response among people on the right was Center.

## Reason Magazine

A total of 1,030 people rated the bias of content from [Reason](#) as Lean Right in this survey.

The average rating for Reason from people who self-identified as having a Left bias was Lean Right, but close to Right; the average rating from people with a Lean Left bias was Right; the average rating for Reason by people in the Center and on the Right was Lean Right.

Taken together, the average rating across all groups was Lean Right.

A majority of respondents with a Left and Lean Left bias saw Reason as Right; a plurality of Center respondents also saw them as Right. A plurality of people with a Lean Right and Right bias saw Reason as Lean Right.

## USA TODAY

A total of 1,020 people across the political spectrum blindly rated [USA TODAY](#)'s content in this survey. The average rating from people across the political spectrum for USA TODAY was [Lean Left](#).

People who self-reported they have a Left or Lean Left bias rated USA TODAY on average as being just between [Center](#) and Lean Left; respondents who rated themselves as Center, Lean Right and Right on average rated USA Today as firmly Lean Left.

A majority of people on the left rated USA TODAY as Center; a plurality of people in the Center rated USA TODAY as Center; a plurality of Lean Right respondents rated USA TODAY Lean Left; a plurality of people who rate themselves as Right rated USA TODAY as [Left](#).

The average rating of all bias groups was Lean Left.

This Blind Survey triggered our [May 2021 Editorial Review](#), which was inconclusive; AllSides kept USA TODAY's rating as Center but planned a second review a month later.

## Notes and Limitations

AllSides has conducted blind bias surveys differently in the past; for example, asking participants to rate only headlines for bias. Our process is evolving and is subject to change again as we determine the best ways to evaluate media outlets for bias.

Because the blind bias survey was distributed online, we had to be mindful of participants' time and ensure the survey was not too long. This means respondents only saw a few pieces of content from each outlet over a few days. Bias may be better determined by looking at more

articles and headlines from an outlet over a longer period of time; however, making the survey longer would have meant a drop-off in completion rates.

We acknowledge that users could have possibly found ways to “cheat” while taking the survey. Although we trust that the vast majority of respondents completed the survey in good faith and with the intention of contributing to meaningful research, we take many precautions against cheating or gaming the system. These protective measures include but are not limited to recruiting participants from many different places and using other methods in addition to this one to determine a bias rating.