



## **February 2020 Blind Bias Survey**

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## Survey Overview

Between February 19 and 27, 2020, AllSides conducted a multi-partisan blind bias survey to assess the political bias of five popular U.S. media outlets: Associated Press, The Hill, NPR, The Washington Examiner, and The Washington Post.

**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 [600 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

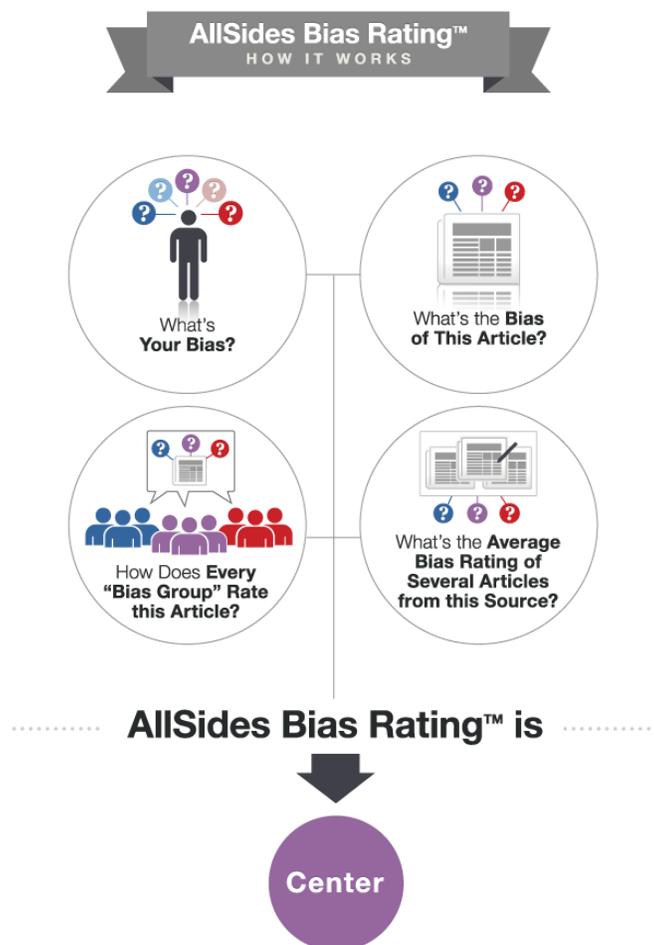
The AllSides patented media bias rating system reflects the average judgment of the American people. It is not “accurate” – bias is subjective and “in the eye of the beholder,” so there is no strictly accurate measurement of political bias. What is considered a left-wing view to a right-winger may seem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



## How AllSides Chose Which Sources to Evaluate

The February 2020 blind bias survey collected responses on content from the following media outlets:

- Associated Press — Rated **Center** as of February 2020
- The Hill — Rated **Center** as of February 2020
- NPR — Rated **Center** as of February 2020
- The Washington Post — Rated **Lean Left** as of February 2020
- The Washington Examiner — Rated **Lean Right** as of February 2020

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 were 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 used Google Analytics to determine which sources 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 NPR (online news only) and Associated Press because many users disagreed with our current bias ratings of those outlets as Center. As of January 2020, 20,288 users agreed with our rating for NPR online news, and 15,428 disagreed.

AllSides rates online content only; not video, TV, radio, or broadcast content. NPR's written, online content differs significantly from its radio content; AllSides believes readers who disagree with our Center rating may mistakenly believe the rating is for NPR's radio content. Still, we opted to investigate further.

As for the Associated Press, as of January 2020, 9,656 readers agreed with AllSides that the source has a Center bias, and 6,915 disagreed.

As of January 2020, 8,192 AllSides users agreed with our rating of Center for The Hill, and 10,388 disagreed.

AllSides chose The Hill, The Washington Examiner, and the Washington Post for evaluation in part because these webpages receive a high amount of traffic from Google, and we want to ensure we have robust data to provide for visitors.

The Hill, Associated Press, and The Washington Examiner had not been evaluated in past AllSides blind bias surveys. NPR was assessed during a May 2017 AllSides blind bias survey, in which its rating came out to Center. Washington Post was assessed during a November 2012 blind bias survey, in which its rating came out to Lean Left.

## Methodology

### **Anchor Outlets**

AllSides chose three articles covering the same topic from three “anchor” outlets — Wall Street Journal (Center bias), Huffington Post (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, HuffPost, and Breitbart are Center, Left and Right, respectively. However, we are confident that these three outlets are good representations of Left, Center, and Right political bias in the U.S.

### **Selecting Content to Measure Bias**

AllSides selected content in two ways: 1.) collecting *the top five headlines displayed on the website, on two different days at the same time of day*, and 2.) collecting *the top stories the outlet ran 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 1:00 and 1:05 p.m. ET on January 7, 2020; the second was done between 12 and 12:05 p.m. ET on January 9, 2020.

## 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: President Trump's impeachment proceedings, and coverage following the U.S. airstrike that killed Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani and six others on Jan. 3 in Iraq.

Top headlines on Soleimani were pulled from each outlet between 12 and 12:05 p.m. ET on January 14; top headlines on impeachment were pulled between 12 and 12:05 p.m. ET on January 16.

In addition to the headline, AllSides included the first 50 to 150 words of each article in the survey to be further evaluated for bias.

## 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 font 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***.

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.

## 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 Center and Lean Right bias.

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 260 participants with a Left bias completed the survey; 530 with a Lean Left bias; 506 with a Center bias; 442 with a Lean Right bias, and 139 with a Right bias.

Note that when examining the results, each group was viewed independently and then the data was normalized. In other words, 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 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, it’s not a monolith: some conservatives do support liberal immigration policies).

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 different political biases as Americans perceive them.

## Distribution

AllSides distributed the survey sign-up link on our website, to our newsletter subscribers, and on our social media platforms — Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn — between the days of February 19 and February 27, 2020.

## 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 50-150 words of the three articles taken from the “anchor outlets” — The Wall Street Journal (Center), HuffPost (Left), and Breitbart (Right). They were told the following:

*“Below are headlines from 3 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 five 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 Associated Press 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:**

*Stampede kills 56 at funeral for Iranian general slain by US*

*US prepares for possible Iranian reprisal after drone strike*

*Death of Iran general spurs anxiety over fate of US hostages*

*Harvey Weinstein’s rape trial begins on heels of new charges*

*6.4 quake strikes Puerto Rico amid heavy seismic activity*

### **Headlines Day 2:**

*Iran says Ukrainian plane was on fire, tried to turn back*

*“Iran sends mixed signals as tensions with US ease”*

*Analysis: Trump changes terms of 2020 race with Iran turmoil*

*"Royal reset: Harry, Meghan aim to control their media image"*

*Facebook again refuses to ban political ads, even false ones*

### **Story 1**

#### **EU rebukes Iran over nuclear violations, sanctions possible**

Britain, France and Germany on Tuesday ratcheted up pressure on Iran to stop violating its landmark nuclear deal in a last-ditch effort to resolve their differences through talks while also starting a process that could bring back punishing U.N. sanctions on Tehran.

### **Story 2**

#### **Watchdog: White House violated law in freezing Ukraine aid**

The White House violated federal law in withholding security assistance to Ukraine, an action at the center of President Donald Trump's impeachment, a federal watchdog agency said Thursday.

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

AllSides collected responses on the survey from February 19, 2020 to Feb. 27, 2020.

## **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 260 people who describe themselves as on the Left, 75 rated content from The Hill as Center, 69 rated the content as Lean Left, 49 as Lean Right, 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

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 B65 indicates 48 people who said they are on the Left said they believe NPR Online News' bias is Lean Left; C65 indicates 66 people who Lean Left believe NPR's bias is Lean Left; D65 indicates 88 people in the Center said they believe Washington Post is Lean Left; and so forth.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1		People's Bias						
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		
5	#	0	1.5	3	4.5	6		Flat
6	Responses	Left	Lean Left	Center	Lean Right	Right	TOTAL	Average
63	NPR							
64	Left	9	12	35	45	16	117	
65	Lean Left	48	66	88	92	29	323	
66	Center	91	211	169	165	41	677	
67	Lean Right	43	105	79	49	14	290	
68	Right	10	10	14	5	3	42	
69	Total Responses	201	404	385	356	103	1449	
70	Average	2.98	3.13	2.80	2.48	2.40		2.76

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 70. For example, the following equation computed the result in cell B70:

$$((B64*0) + (B65*1.5) + (B66*3) + (B67*4.5) + (B68*6)) / (\text{sum}(B64:B68))$$

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 NPR online news to have (cell B70 = 2.98, which amounts to a Center bias on both the bell curve and flat curve ranges), or people who Lean Left (cell C70 = 3.13, Center bias), or people who are in the Center (cell D70 = 2.80, Center bias), and so forth.

We then took an average of these individual averages to arrive at a final number in cell H70. 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, 2.76 places NPR online news as Center, though just barely as it is close to the 2.75 cutoff of the bell curve range representing Lean Left.

## Conclusions

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

Outlet	Average Rating	Bell Curve/Flat Curve Analysis	Notes
Associated Press	2.24	Lean Left	<b>Current Rating:</b> Center. <b>Survey:</b> Lean Left. <i>Editorial board will meet on this one specifically. Left and Left Left perceive AP as on the border of Lean Left and Center, while people from the Center, Lean Right and Right all would rate AP as clearly Lean Left.</i>
The Hill	2.53	Lean Left / Center	<b>Current Rating:</b> Center. <b>Survey:</b> border of Center and Lean Left. <b>Editorial review:</b> Keep The Hill as Center. <i>People who describe themselves as Lean Right and Right perceive The Hill as Lean Left, but not by a lot. People in the Center saw it as on the border of Center and Lean Left. Lean Left and Left groups saw it as Lean Left. The overall average has it on the border line between Lean Left and Center.</i>
NPR Online News	2.76	Center	<b>Current Rating:</b> Center. <b>Survey:</b> Center (barely, close to Lean Left). <b>Editorial Review:</b> Stay with Center. <i>Left, Lean Left and Center perceive it as Center. Lean Right and Right see it as on the border of Center and Lean Left. The overall average is Center, close to the border line with Lean Left.</i>
Washington Post	2.53	Lean Left / Center	<b>Current Rating:</b> Lean Left. <b>Survey:</b> border of Center and Lean Left. <b>Editorial review:</b> Keep Washington Post as Lean Left. <i>The average of all groups believes it is on the border of Lean Left and Center. Usually our results look like a smooth curve, but the majority of those who say they are Left and Lean Left indicated they believe The Washington Post is Lean Right, representing a puzzling outlier that impacted the overall average. Groups from the Center, Lean Right and Right all rated Washington Post as Lean Left.</i>

Washington Examiner	4.17	Lean Right	<b>Current Rating:</b> Lean Right. <b>Survey:</b> Lean Right. <b>Editorial Review:</b> Stay with Lean Right. Every group rated Washington Examiner as Lean Right except for the Left, which rated it on the border line of Lean Right and Right.
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## Changes to Bias Ratings Due to Survey Data

The results appeared to confirm the AllSides media bias ratings for all sources in the survey, with the exception of the Associated Press. The current AllSides rating of AP is Center, while survey respondents rated AP’s content as Lean Left. This discrepancy prompted a [full AllSides team editorial review to definitively determine AP’s bias rating](#).

### 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. Bias may be better determined by looking at more articles and headlines from an outlet; 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.