November 2020 Blind Bias Survey

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Survey Overview

In Nov. 2020, AllSides conducted a multi-partisan blind bias survey to assess the political bias of five popular U.S. media outlets: CNN, Fox News, New York Post, Politico and Reuters.

A total of 2,285 people across the political spectrum took the survey, including 266 participants with a self-reported Left bias; 572 with a Lean Left bias; 683 with a Center bias; 616 with a Lean Right bias, and 136 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.
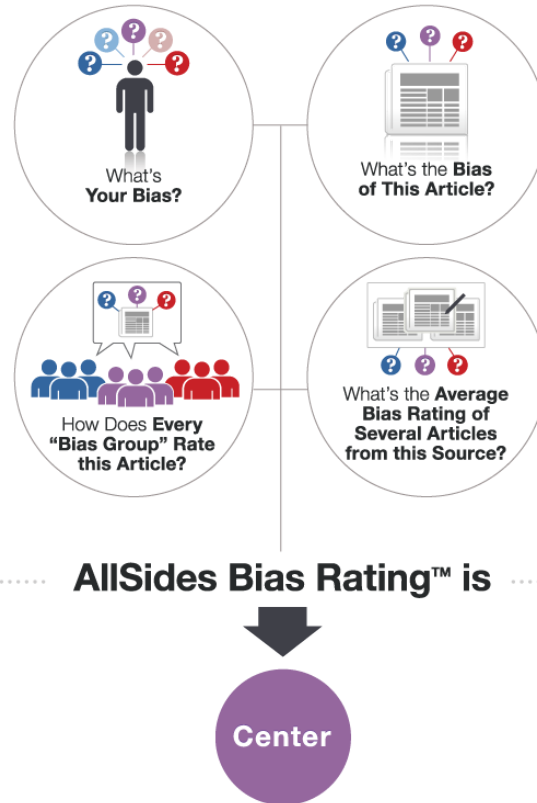
AllSides recognizes that a five-point bias rating scale (Left, Lean Left, Center, Lean Right, Right) cannot capture the multitude of nuance that makes up the landscape of political thought. Far from seeking perfection, our ratings simply serve as a "map" of bias that helps readers to get a general idea 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, and is at the core of the patented AllSides Bias Rating™ methodology.

How AllSides Chose Which Sources to Evaluate

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

- CNN (online news only) — Rated by AllSides as **Lean Left** as of December 2020
- Fox News (online news only) — Rated **Lean Right** as of December 2020
- New York Post — Rated **Lean Right** as of December 2020
- Politico — Rated **Lean Left** as of December 2020
- Reuters — Rated **Center** as of December 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 **Fox News and CNN** because they are both major news outlets that AllSides had not done a Blind Bias survey since 2017 and 2018 respectively.

AllSides chose **The New York Post** for evaluation in part because our source page on AllSides.com had received a high amount of traffic from Google, and we want to ensure we have robust data to provide for visitors.

AllSides chose **Politico** for evaluation because we needed more data on this source, and users voted that Politico was in between Center and Lean Left.

AllSides chose **Reuters** because some users that voted on our website were in disagreement with our current bias rating of Center, and we needed more data on this wire source.

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), 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 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 2:45 and 2:55 p.m. ET on November 19, 2020; the second was done between 1:30 and 1:40 p.m. ET on November 20, 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: **Biden picking his first cabinet members** and **the GSA notifying the Biden team that they could start the transition process.**

Top headlines on the Biden cabinet picks were pulled from each outlet between 2:45 and 2:55 p.m. ET on November 19, 2020; top headlines on GSA notifying the Biden team were pulled between 1:30 and 1:40 p.m. ET on November 20, 2020.

In addition to the headline, AllSides included the first 50 to 100 words of each article in the survey for respondents to evaluate for bias.

Content was pulled from the homepages of each site, except for The New York Post. For this outlet, we pulled content not from the homepage but from nypost.com/news, which features more political news than New York Post's homepage, which often includes entertainment, local crime, celebrity-related news and other tabloid-style 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 2,285 people took the survey — 266 participants with a self-reported Left bias; 572 with a Lean Left bias; 679 with a Center bias; 615 with a Lean Right bias, and 136 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 December 9th and 14th, 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 50-100 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 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 CNN 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:
Trump courts Michigan GOP leaders in bid to overturn election result

Americans should not travel for Thanksgiving, CDC says

Ex-Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan: I've never seen anything like this

Trump baselessly claims Georgia will 'flip Republican'

A gym trainer exposed 50 athletes, but no one else got sick because of a ventilation redesign

Headlines Day 2:
How Trump is sabotaging Biden -- and America

Conversations underway about inviting Pennsylvania lawmakers to the White House

Florida Republican senator says he has Covid-19

Europe averted a Covid-19 collapse -- here's what the US could learn

A 15-year-old Kentucky girl beat cancer last summer. She died of Covid-19 this month

Story 1
Biden picks first woman and first Latino for key national security roles
President-elect Joe Biden on Monday unveiled a slate of top foreign policy and national security picks, including the first woman to lead the US intelligence community and first Latino to helm the Department of Homeland Security.

Cuban-born Alejandro Mayorkas, a former deputy secretary of DHS who Biden has nominated to lead the department, will be tasked with rebuilding an agency that carried out some of the most draconian measures associated with President Donald Trump's hardline immigration policy, including family separations at the US-Mexico border.

Story 2

Key government agency acknowledges Biden's win and begins formal transition
The General Services Administration has informed President-elect Joe Biden that the Trump administration is ready to begin the formal transition process, according to a letter from Administrator Emily Murphy sent Monday afternoon and obtained by [this news outlet].

The letter is the first step the administration has taken to acknowledge President Donald Trump's defeat, more than two weeks after Biden was declared the winner in the election.

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 185 people who describe themselves as on the Left and provided a rating for Reuters, 84 rated content from Reuters as Center, 76 rated the content as Lean Left, 14 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

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 B83 indicates 84 people who self-reported a personal political bias of

Left said they believe Reuters' bias is Center; C83 indicates 158 people who Lean Left believe AP's bias is Center; D83 indicates 157 people in the Center said they believe AP's media bias is Center; and so forth.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1				People's Bias			
2	Responses	Left	Lean Left	Center	Lean Right	Right	
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
80	Reuters	Left	Lean Left	Center	Lean Right	Right	
81	- Left	14	50	102	123	34	323
82	- Lean Left	76	160	195	167	36	634
83	- Center	84	158	157	113	18	530
84	- Lean Right	10	20	20	29	3	82
85	- Right	1	4	5	6	5	21
86	Total Responses	185	392	479	438	96	1590
87	Average	2.25	2.11	1.84	1.73	1.58	1.90

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 87. For example, the following equation computed the result in cell B87:

```
((B81*0)+(B82*1.5)+(B83*3)+(B84*4.5)+(B85*6))/(sum(B81:B85))
```

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 Reuters to have (cell B87 = 2.25, which amounts to a Lean Left bias), or people who Lean Left (cell C87 = 2.11, which amounts to a Lean Left bias), or people who are in the Center (cell D87 = 1.84, 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 G87. 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, 1.9 places Reuters 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
CNN	1.11	Left	*Current Rating: Lean Left. **Survey:** Left **Editorial Review:** Move to Left.*

Fox News	*3.62*	*Lean Right*	***Current Rating:*** *Lean Right.* ***Survey:*** *Lean Right* ***Editorial Review:*** *Keep Lean Right.*
New York Post	*3.3*	*Lean Right/Center*	***Current Rating:*** *Lean Right.* ***Survey:*** *between Center and Lean Right* ***Editorial Review:*** *Keep Lean Right (opinion section is rated Right).*
Politico	*1.87*	*Lean Left*	***Current Rating:*** *Lean Left.* ***Survey:*** *Lean Left* ***Editorial Review:*** *Keep Lean Left.*
Reuters	*1.90*	*Lean Left*	***Current Rating:*** *Center.* ***Survey:*** *Lean Left* ***Editorial Review:*** *Keep Center, do more review in the near future.*

Results and Analysis

The results led us to change the AllSides Media Bias Rating™ for CNN from Lean Left to Left, affirmed our ratings for Fox News (Lean Right) and Politico (Lean Left), and raised questions about our ratings for Reuters (rated by AllSides as Center, though survey results came out as a clear Lean Left) and The New York Post (rated Lean Right by AllSides, though survey results put it between Center and Lean Right). The survey triggered Editorial Reviews for New York Post and Reuters. We decided to keep the Lean Right rating for the New York Post and the Center rating for Reuters.

Read a summary of all the blind bias survey results here.

Note that blind surveys do have limitations and they alone do not determine our ratings, because these surveys ask respondents to assess a relatively small snapshot of the source's content in time. The surveys don't include photos, content published over a long period of time, or other elements. Therefore, we also use other methods to arrive at a final bias rating, such as Editorial Reviews, third party data and independent reviews. (Read more about the AllSides Editorial Review process here.)

CNN

The average rating from people across the political spectrum for CNN was Left.

On average, people who self-reported that they are on the left rated CNN as being between Lean Left and Left; people in the center and on the right found CNN on average to be Left.

After analyzing the results of this survey, members of the AllSides team conducted some independent reviews of CNN's content, and decided to move the outlet's rating to Left.

During our independent reviews, team members on the left, center and right noted a lot of sensationalism in CNN's news reporting. One team member with a Center bias said, "CNN uses proper source attribution and good hyperlinks, and often has clear, accurate labels for content. However, its homepage is dominated by anti-Trump/anti-GOP narratives and features few to zero anti-left/anti-Democrat narratives. The reports themselves are often skewed by a lack of right-leaning sources, biased/subjective language, or omission of facts that may, if included, counter a left-leaning point of view."

We found CNN's fact-checking section was very skewed toward an anti-Donald Trump/anti-GOP focus, and that the outlet didn't focus nearly as much on fact checking Democrats or Joe Biden — or really anything except President Donald Trump. Therefore, CNN was moved to a Left rating from its previous Lean Left rating.

Fox News

In the survey, the average rating from people across the political spectrum for Fox News was Lean Right.

Participants who identified themselves as on the right or in the center on average rated Fox News as being right between Center and Lean Right; people on the left rated Fox firmly Lean Right.

Pluralities within all groups — liberals, conservatives and centrists — rated Fox News as Lean Right. The second most common response among all bias groups for Fox was Center.

New York Post

The survey found people on the left, center, and right on average rated The New York Post's bias as between Center and Lean Right (but a bit closer to Center). These results triggered an Editorial Review, in which the AllSides team (which also contains people across the political spectrum) opted to keep New York Post's AllSides Media Bias Rating™ as Lean Right.

On average, people with a Left bias rated New York Post as Lean Right; people with a Lean Left or Center bias rated NY Post as between Center and Lean Right. People on the right rated New York Post as a firm Center.

The majority of respondents who have a Center or Lean Right bias rated New York Post as Center; a plurality of respondents who have a Left, Lean Left, and Right bias rated New York Post as Center.

Because the blind bias survey results differed from our current rating of New York Post as Lean Right, the AllSides team conducted an Editorial Review of the outlet on Jan. 14, 2021. AllSides opted to keep the New York Post's rating as Lean Right.

Politico

The results signified near universal agreement of Politico's bias on average. The average rating for Politico across all respondents was a firm Lean Left. The average rating for Politico from each bias group — people who identified themselves as Left, Lean Left, Center, Lean Right, or Right — was also Lean Left.

A plurality of respondents across all bias groups rated Politico as Lean Left. The second most common response across all groups was Left — except for people who rated their own bias as Left. For this group, the second most common response for Politico was Center.

Reuters

On average, people across the political spectrum rated Reuters as Lean Left.

AllSides currently rated Reuters as Center. The results triggered an Editorial Review, in which AllSides opted to keep Reuters' rating as Center.

The average rating for Reuters from people on the Left was between Lean Left and Center; the average rating from all other groups — people who are Lean Left, Center, Lean Right or Right — was a firm Lean Left.

A plurality of respondents who self-identified as Lean Left, Center, Lean Right, and Right rated Reuters Lean Left; the most common response from those with a Left bias was Center.

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.