

## Biased Media is a Threat to Democracy

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Attention Grabber: Benjamin Franklin's cautionary words on informed public.

General Statement: Importance of free media in a democratic society

Thesis Statement: Biased media undermines the foundations of democracy by distorting public perception, polarizing society, and weakening democratic institutions.

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2.2 Facilitating public debate allowing diverse opinions

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## 4. Impact of Biased Media on Democracy

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Biased Media is a Threat to Date:.....

## Democracy

Echoing Benjamin Franklin's cautionary words from 'A Republic, If You can keep it', today's biased media is the modern challenge to our democratic republic. Just as Franklin warned, the survival of our democracy hinges on an informed and vigilant public. In an age where information is more accessible than ever, the role of media is crucial in shaping public opinion and fostering an informed citizenry. A free and unbiased media serves as the backbone of any functioning democracy, acting as a watchdog that holds the powerful accountable and provides the public with facts necessary to make sound decisions. However, when the media becomes skewed, the consequences are dire. Biased reporting distorts public perception, creating a reality where facts are <sup>selectively</sup> presented as to favor specific agendas. This manipulation not only polarizes society but also erodes trust in democratic institutions, making it difficult for citizens to engage in meaningful discourse and participate in the democratic process. In this context the argument becomes clear: biased media undermines the very foundations of democracy by distorting reality, exacerbating societal divides, and weakening democratic institutions. This essay will delve into this issue, by exploring the role of media and manifestations of media bias. The essay will focus on how media bias negatively impacts democracy with cases and examples, and provide recommendations to control media bias.



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To understand media bias, it is important to also discuss the role of media in a democratic society. The media plays a crucial role, in that regard, by providing accurate, balanced, and comprehensive information, which is essential for informed citizen participation. By delivering news and analysis, the media enables individuals to understand complex issues, make educated decisions, and engage effectively in democratic processes. For instance, the Panama Papers leak in 2016, exposed widespread tax evasion and corruption among global leaders and business elites. This massive data dump was made public by investigative journalists, revealing how powerful elites were hiding their wealth in offshore accounts. Similarly, the Pentagon Papers of 1971, leaked by Daniel Ellsberg, provided a detailed critical account of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. These revelations not only informed the public about government misconduct but also sparked debates and policy changes. Such instances underscore the media's essential function in uncovering hidden truths and presenting them to the public, thereby empowering citizens to hold their leaders accountable and participate more meaningfully in the democratic process.

Moreover, the media also serves as a critical platform for public debate, facilitating the exchange of diverse voices and opinions which is fundamental to democratic discourse. By hosting and broadcasting debates, discussions, and interviews, the media ensures that a range of perspectives are heard, helping to foster an informed electorate. For example, the U.S. Presidential debates are a key component of the election process, where candidates present their platforms and engage in discourse on national issues. Similarly, French presidential debates offer voters a chance to hear directly from candidates about

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their policies and visions for the country. These debates are not only about presenting differing viewpoints but also about allowing citizens to evaluate candidates and make informed choices. The French presidential debate in 2017 between Macron and Le Pen significantly impacted voters' decisions. The media's role in organizing and disseminating these discussions underscores its importance in encouraging a vibrant and participatory democratic process.

Finally, one of the most vital functions of the media in a democracy is its role as a watchdog, holding government and powerful institutions accountable through investigative journalism and critical reporting. This role is exemplified by the Watergate scandal where investigative reporting by journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein led to the exposure of widespread corruption and illegal activities within the Nixon administration, ultimately resulting in President Nixon's resignation. Another prominent example is the Boston Globe's Spotlight Team investigation into clergy abuse within the Catholic Church, which revealed systemic cover-ups and led to significant reforms. Another exemplary significant example is Julian Assange's ~~Wiki~~ Wikileaks which released classified documents, such as Collateral Murder video and diplomatic cables to shed light on U.S. barbarism in Iraq and Afghanistan. These instances highlight the media's capacity to scrutinize power structures, expose wrongdoing, and drive societal change. Through rigorous investigation and fearless reporting, the media helps ensure that those in power are held accountable, thereby reinforcing the principles of democracy.



However, there are the roles media must fulfill, and but not always does. The media shifts from its role due to manifestation of media bias. This bias is manifested in various ways, one of which is through the selection and omission of information, which can shape public perception by highlighting certain events while ignoring others. For example, in the recent Israel-Gaza War, legacy and mainstream media often omits cause of death of many civilians in Gaza, televising headlines such as "father dies while getting birth certificates for twins." omitting key facts about the cause of the father's death due to an Israeli airstrike. This selective reporting can create an incomplete or skewed picture of reality, leading audiences to form opinions based on limited set of information.

Another type of media bias is story framing and spin. The way a story is framed and the language used can significantly influence public perception and bias. Story framing involves presenting information in a particular context or angle, which can sway audience's perception and viewpoints. For example, during the 2003 Iraq War, media framed the issue around weapons of mass destruction to garner public support for the invasion of Iraq. However, this turned out to be false and millions died due to media bias.

Moreover, media bias can also manifest itself in partisan reporting of issue. Partisan reporting occurs when media outlets align with particular political ideologies, or leading to biased coverage that reflects those viewpoints. This can be seen in the reporting around the Israel-Gaza war, with many western media outlets supporting Zionism and Israel and reflecting their position in their reporting.

Furthermore, economic and corporate influences also create media bias. Media ownership and need for advertising revenue can significantly influence content and create bias. Media outlets often rely heavily on advertising revenue to sustain operations, which can lead to content that favors the interest of major advertisers. For example, during the 2008 financial crisis, news coverage of banking sector varied widely due to advertising relationships. Additionally, media owners may exert pressure to align content with their business interests or political preferences. This issue is further exacerbated by the concentration of media ownership among a few large conglomerates. This concentration negatively impacts diversity of viewpoints and increase prevalence of bias. This can also lead to propoganda by one set of people. For example, Disney owns most of the western media and is itself owned by Jewish Zionists; therefore, most of the western media is seen to advance Israeli propoganda.

Lastly, media bias is also demonstrated through social media and algorithmic bias. Social media platforms, through their algorithms, can create echo chambers and filter bubbles that reinforce existing beliefs and biases. For instance, Facebook's algorithm prioritizes content that generates high engagement, often leading users to see more of what aligns with their pre-existing views leading to lack of diverse information. Similarly, social media also fuels misinformation and disinformation as their are no checks. False claims on Twitter (now X) have recently fueled Muslims v right-wingers and embroiled UK in crises of brawls and riots. The ease with which misinformation and disinformation can be disseminated and amplified on social media is alarming. ALBA



Since, media bias can present itself in various ways, its impacts on democracy are also far-reaching. Firstly, media bias distorts public opinion by spreading misinformation and misrepresentation, which undermines democratic decision-making. For example, during the 2016 Brexit referendum, both pro and anti-EU campaigns were accused of using misleading statistics and fear-mongering tactics. Media outlets that aligned with these campaigns often propagated these claims, which influenced public opinion based on inaccurate information. This kind of biased reporting can lead to citizens to make decisions based on false or incomplete data, compromising the democratic process. Additionally, when media outlets are perceived as biased, their credibility is called into question, leading to erosion of trust in Media. This erosion of trust can be seen in various polls that show declining confidence in media institutions. For instance, a 2020 Gallup poll found that only 41% of Americans had a great deal of trust in the mass media. This lack of trust leads to decreased engagement and decreasing reliability, which will force citizens to resort to less reliable information. This will further weaken the democratic process.

Moreover, media bias can lead to polarization and social division. One of the ways it does this is by amplifying extremist views. This can marginalize moderate perspectives and increase polarization, as individuals are exposed primarily to information that aligns with their existing views and beliefs. The result is a more divided society where ideological extremes are more prominent, making consensus and constructive dialogue increasingly difficult. This undermines social cohesion and erodes the sense of shared democratic values by presenting issues in a manner that inflames conflict.



rather than fostering understanding. For instance, media coverage of social issues like immigration or racial justice can be highly polarized, with some outlets framing these issues in ways that provoke outrage or division. This selective framing can reinforce stereotypes and create an "us vs. them" mentality, undermining social cohesion. When media coverage perpetuates division, it weakens the sense of common purpose and shared values, making it harder for society to address collective challenges and work towards common goals. Examples of this can be found in the Rwandan genocide in 1994, where media incitement led to extreme violence, and the Yugoslav Wars in 1990s which was fueled by ethnic media outlets contributing to ethnic hatred and civil war.

Lastly, media bias undermines democratic institutions by delegitimizing political processes. Biased media coverage can undermine electoral processes, governance, and public institutions by casting doubt on their legitimacy. For example, during the U.S. presidential elections in 2020, various media outlets propagated claims of widespread voter fraud without substantial evidence. This biased reporting contributed to a significant portion of the electorate questioning the legitimacy of the election results, impacting public confidence in democratic processes. When media bias leads to the delegitimation of democratic institutions, it threatens the foundations of democracy by fostering a belief that these institutions are inherently corrupt or unreliable, which can destabilize the government governance and reduce political participation.

Since media bias can be extremely devastating for democratic principles, it is imperative to control this bias and work towards a free and unbiased media. Achieving this requires a three-pronged strategy of promoting media literacy, strengthening journalistic standards, and encouraging pluralism and diversity.

Firstly, promoting media literacy is crucial in helping the public recognize and critically assess media bias. Education and public awareness play a key role here; integrating media literacy into school curriculums can help equip students with skills to analyse news ~~and~~ for bias and misinformation, while public awareness projects such as those by News Literacy Project, offer resources for adults to become more discerning media consumers. Encouraging critical consumption of media involves promoting skepticism and using fact checking sources.

Secondly, strengthening journalistic standards is essential for reducing bias and maintaining media credibility. Ethical journalism involves adhering to principles of accuracy, fairness, and impartiality, as outlined in Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics. This ensures news is reported based on evidence and presented in a ~~more~~ balanced manner. Regulatory and self regulatory frameworks can further ensure media accountability. Regulation measures like those from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) enforce standards of fairness, while internal measures such as ethics committees or ombudsmen address complaints about biased reporting and uphold higher standards. ALBA



Lastly, encouraging media pluralism and diversity helps counteract media bias and promotes a balanced information environment. Supporting independent media is vital, as independent outlets like ProPublica and The Intercept offer alternative viewpoints and in-depth reporting often missed by mainstream media. Furthermore, reducing media coverage concentration through policy measures such as antitrust regulations and ownership limits can prevent the dominance of a few large entities, ensuring a diverse media landscape. Promoting community-based and local media also provides additional perspectives, fostering a more varied and inclusive media that supports democratic engagement.

In summary, biased media poses a significant threat to democracy by distorting public perception, polarizing society, and undermining democratic institutions. The selective reporting and omission of crucial information mislead the public, impacting their decision-making and eroding trust in media institutions. Additionally, the amplification of extremist views and the deepening of social divisions highlight how media bias can fragment society and weaken the shared values necessary for democratic cohesion. Moreover, biased reporting can delegitimize political processes and threaten the integrity of elections, further jeopardizing democratic governance. Addressing media bias is essential to safeguard democracy, requiring greater media literacy, adherence to journalistic standards, and promotion of media pluralism. By advocating for these measures, we can restore trust in the media, ensure informed discourse, and protect the integrity of our democratic institutions.