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News Item

Media Bias (Real and Perceived) and the Rise of Partisan Media | Niskanen Center

By Matt Grossmann
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> In the age of Fox News Channel, talk radio, and MSNBC, it is tempting to think we have entered an unprecedented age of biased media. But partisan bias is actually the norm in media history. As Jonathan Ladd argues, “The existence of an independent, powerful, widely respected news media establishment is an historical anomaly. Prior to the twentieth century, such an institution had never existed in American history.”
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> In the nineteenth century, overtly partisan newspapers were the norm. Independent journalism was a successful countervailing movement that brought with it standards of unbiased political coverage. Joseph Pulitzer, the Democratic politician and newspaperman, helped establish the Columbia School of Journalism in 1912 and the Pulitzer Prizes in 1917. The American Society of Newspaper Editors codified an impartiality principle in its 1923 code of ethics: “News reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind.”
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> But Republicans have long been skeptical of the ability of an independent press to equally represent their views. Donald Trump’s declaration of any contrary coverage as “fake news” is a more extreme version of a long-standing complaint. As Ladd finds, “criticism of the institutional news media was a defining characteristic” of the conservative movement and Barry Goldwater’s nomination campaign. His supporters later founded the Committee to Combat Bias in Broadcasting and Accuracy in Media to monitor the news for bias. Complaints about media bias were common in subsequent Republican administrations and eventually came to dominate Republican campaigns. One study found that 92% of claims of media bias in the 1988, 1992, and 1996 elections came from Republicans alleging liberal bias.

Source: Media Bias (Real and Perceived) and the Rise of Partisan Media – Niskanen Center