

Unmasking Polarization: How Conservatives Make Sense of Covid19 Coverage | Columbia Journalism Review

By Anthony Nadler, Doron Taussig, Natacha Yazbeck, Andrea Wenzel

December 8, 2021

Distrust in the “mainstream media” is now a central tenet of American conservatism, and this skepticism has consequences: Democrats and Republicans report vastly different understandings of matters of crucial importance, from the seriousness of COVID-19 and attitudes toward vaccines to the integrity of the 2020 presidential election. A society needs some shared set of facts and mutually trusted sources of information to function. In the U.S., we don’t have them.

While we know *that* there is pervasive distrust of news media among American conservatives—survey-based research has established it time and again—we know less about the precise nature of the sentiment. How do conservatives interpret mainstream news? How do they explain their evaluations of news media and describe their feelings about engaging with it? To delve into these questions, we conducted 11 in-depth focus groups with 25 participants and conducted follow-up interviews with 16 of these participants. All interviews and focus groups took place from September 2020 to May 2021, with participants self-identified as conservatives who lived in Southeastern Pennsylvania or New Jersey. We focused these discussions on news coverage related to the COVID-19 pandemic, though we also addressed coverage of other major events taking place during that tumultuous time. Our approach to interviewing emphasized following up on moments when our interviewees expressed strong emotion or ambivalence.

[...]

Source: [Unmasking Polarization: How Conservatives Make Sense of Covid19 Coverage | Columbia Journalism Review](#)