



Understanding news media bias

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- I'm a journalist and marketing/communications professional.
- I worked in traditional newsrooms and digital startups.
- I follow trends in news literacy, especially in relation to marginalized communities.

What is news media bias?



News media bias

“ “ When assumptions or opinions favoring one side (or interpretation) of an issue or event skew **news reporting** in a way that is unfair or distorting. ” ”

The term “objectivity” can distort our understanding

- Objectivity in journalism is an aspirational ideal, a concept that much of the public may not understand.
- The public may believe that the media holds itself up as having already realized objectivity, when in fact journalists know it is a constant pursuit.
- Thinking of the aspiration to be both **fair and accurate** is a more useful frame for understanding news bias.
- This helps us work away from a binary approach to the subject (objective/biased) and toward a critical approach (less biased/more biased).

Our own biases affect how we
perceive bias in news reports



Often questions are leading or possibly cynical

Where is the bias?

What does this “media message” want you to feel?

Who benefits from this?

What is the intent behind this news report?

Is there a hidden meaning behind this?

Essential questions for a careful and deliberate approach to news media bias



Guiding questions for news media bias

- What counts as “news media bias” and who decides?
- Is most bias in news overt/intentional or perceived/incidental?
- Can our perceptions of bias be reliable?
- If someone says bias is left-leaning or right-leaning, what is the “center” and who decides?
- Is all bias partisan?

Which do you think is less biased?

A Brooklyn pastor known for wearing designer outfits and extravagant jewelry was robbed along with his wife of more than \$1 million while he was preaching at church Sunday, police said.



4:30 PM · Jul 25, 2022 · SocialFlow

NYC bishop robbed of \$1M+ in jewels during streamed church heist says he was targeted for 'celebrity status'



NYC bishop robbed of \$1M+ in jewels during streamed church heist says he wa... Prominent New York City Bishop Lamor Miller-Whitehead was robbed during a live-streamed church service on Sunday, and police say more than \$1 million of...

10:10 AM · Jul 26, 2022 · SocialFlow

Does this change your view?

 CNN 
@CNN

A Brooklyn pastor known for wearing designer outfits and extravagant jewelry was robbed along with his wife of more than \$1 million while he was preaching at church Sunday, police said. [cnn.it/30AzsSn](https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/25/ny-bishop-robbed/index.html)



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 Fox News 
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NYC bishop robbed of \$1M+ in jewels during streamed church heist says he was targeted for 'celebrity status'



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NYC bishop robbed of \$1M+ in jewels during streamed church heist says he wa...
Prominent New York City Bishop Lamor Miller-Whitehead was robbed during a live-streamed church service on Sunday, and police say more than \$1 million of...

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Unconscious Bias

“

When our brains make quick assessments or judgments based on stereotypes or perceptions.

”

Which do you think is less biased?

The Internal Revenue Service is struggling to operate effectively according to some officials, hence the need for an additional \$80 billion in funding.



New spending bill provides \$80B to IRS for enforcement, audits on high-incom...
The Internal Revenue Service is struggling to operate effectively according to some officials, hence the need for an additional \$80 billion in funding.

6:08 AM · Aug 12, 2022 · TweetDeck

GOP lawmakers and the right-wing echo chamber are spreading lies about what this new IRA funding will actually do, explains [@MichaelMechanic](#). In particular, they've glommed onto the falsehood that the agency plans to hire 87,000 new "agents."




No, the IRS is not hiring 87,000 new agents to go after ordinary taxpayers
But wealthy tax cheats may have to watch their backs.

9:10 AM · Aug 12, 2022 · Sprout Social

We must differentiate news from opinion



 WSYX ABC 6 
@wsyx6

The Internal Revenue Service is struggling to operate effectively according to some officials, hence the need for an additional \$80 billion in funding.




abc6onyourside.com
New spending bill provides \$80B to IRS for enforcement, audits on high-incom...
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 Mother Jones 
@MotherJones

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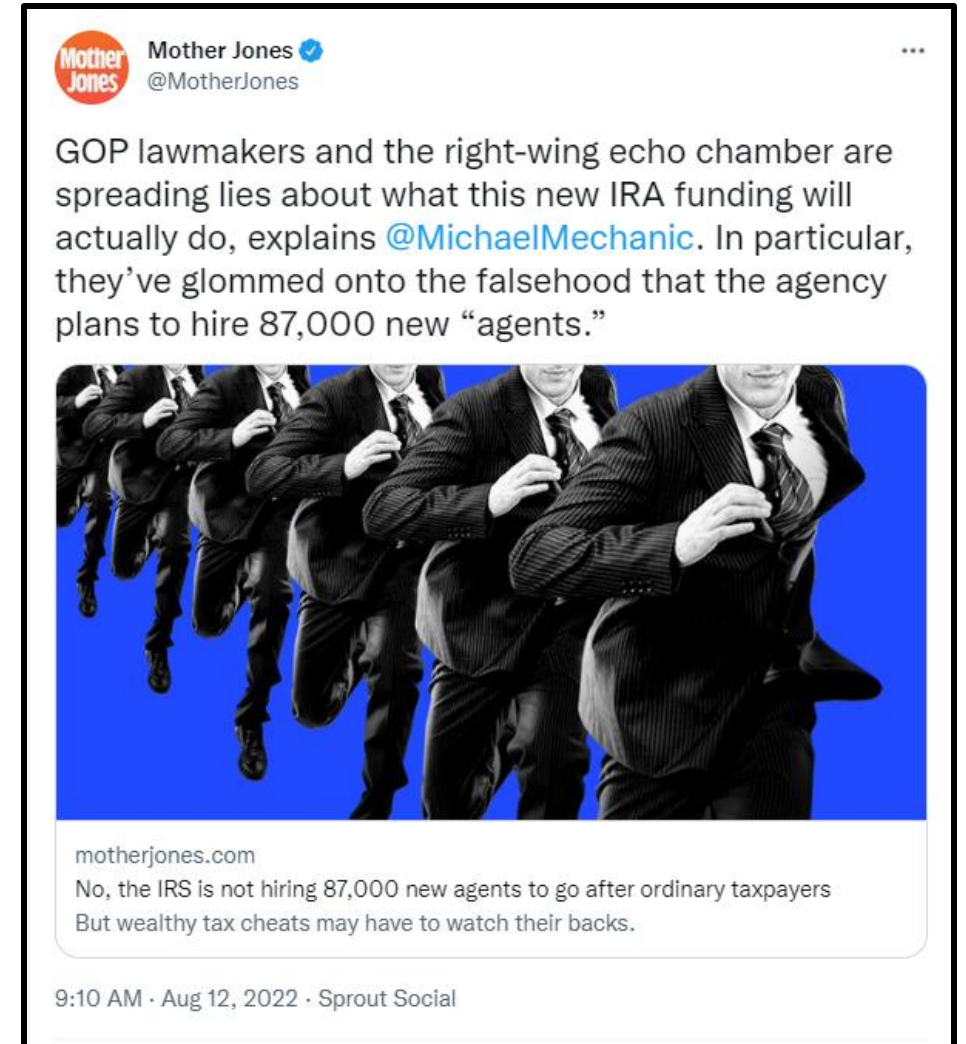



motherjones.com
No, the IRS is not hiring 87,000 new agents to go after ordinary taxpayers
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9:10 AM · Aug 12, 2022 · Sprout Social


Most information we see is inherently biased

- Questions of bias must focus on news.
- Opinion, commentary and even propaganda are far more common.
- Before discussing bias, you must remember the question: “Is this meant to inform or persuade me?”



Mother Jones 
@MotherJones

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[motherjones.com](https://www.motherjones.com)
No, the IRS is not hiring 87,000 new agents to go after ordinary taxpayers. But wealthy tax cheats may have to watch their backs.

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Media bias charts can be helpful
but have limitations



Limitations of media bias charts



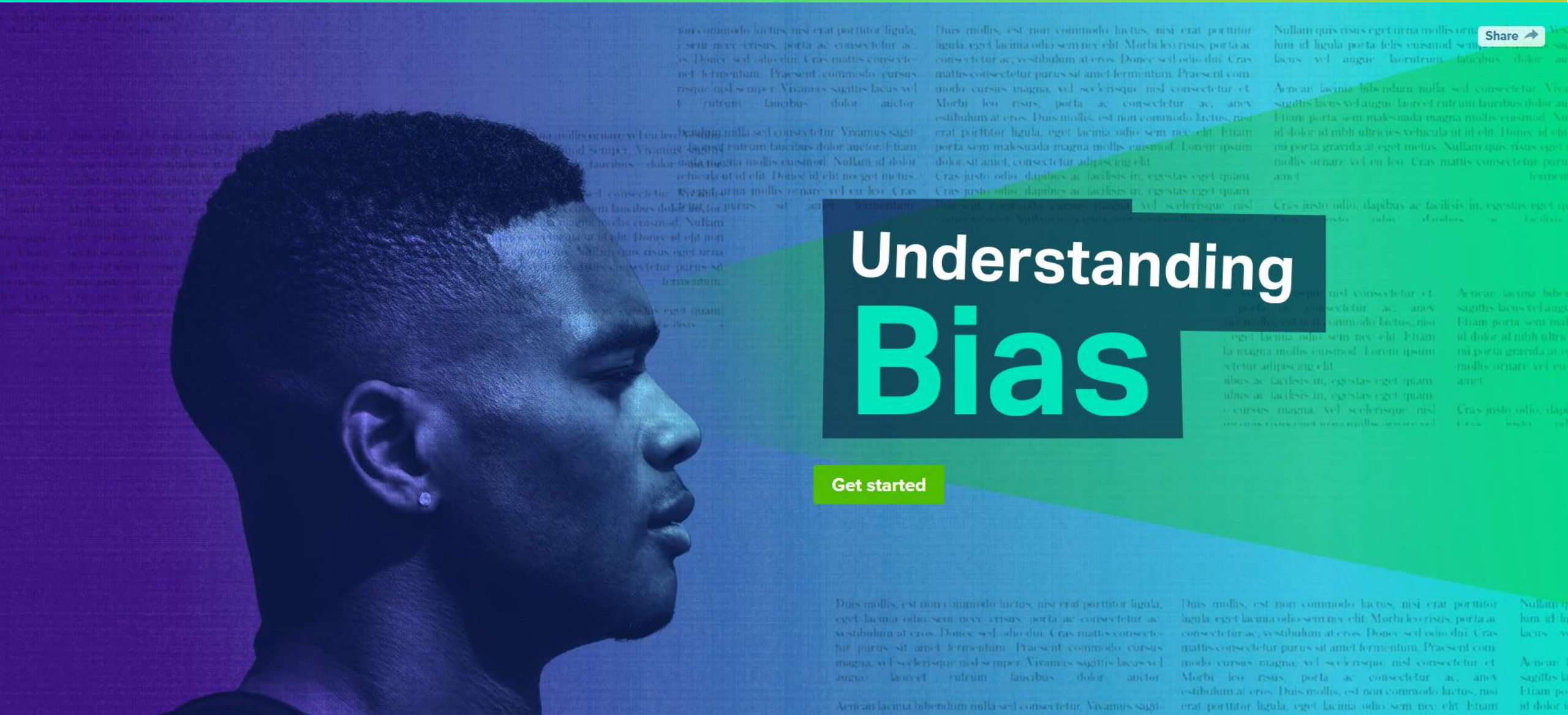
- Focus is almost exclusively on political bias and often reflect the orientation of opinion and commentary, not news.
- Inquiry models that are debatable, not definitive ratings.
- Heavily influenced by perception.
- Can reinforce unconscious biases.

Limitations of media bias charts



- Tend to imply false equivalence between high-quality, standards-based news orgs and overtly partisan or problematic sources.
- Suggest that most newsrooms have a systematic ideological goal or orientation.

“ We need to move from a left/right,
liberal/conservative binary to
recognizing types and forms of biases
on a spectrum of less or more biased. ”



Share →

Understanding Bias

Get started

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Understanding Bias

TYPES

Corporate bias



A type of bias in which the business or advertising interests of a news outlet, or its parent company, influence how — or even whether — a story is reported.

“Big story” bias



A type of bias in which journalists’ perceptions of an event or development as a major, important story can cause them to miss key details and misrepresent key facts.



Partisan bias

A type of bias in which a journalist’s political views affect news coverage.

Demographic bias



A type of bias in which race, gender, ethnicity or other factors — such as culture or economic class — affect news coverage.

Neutrality bias



A type of bias in which a journalist or news outlet tries so hard to avoid appearing biased that the coverage actually misrepresents the facts.

The above types of bias can take any number of

FORMS



Absence of fairness and balance

The failure of a straight news report to present all relevant viewpoints on an event or issue in an accurate, impartial way.

Framing

The way that journalists approach and organize a story, which can affect what it emphasizes.



Story selection

The process that news outlets use to decide which issues and events to cover.



Tone

The use of words and phrases that affect the audience's perception of the issue or event being covered.



Flawed sourcing

A straight news report that neglects to include all of the people, organizations, documents and other providers of information that are needed to make the reporting accurate, fair and comprehensive.



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