

Polarization of America : Media

1. Unbalanced Reporting

In **1987** the Reagan administration directed the FCC to stop enforcing the Fairness Doctrine (passed in 1949) which required radio and TV stations to:

- “devote some programming time to controversial issues of importance to the public” and to “allow the airing of contrasting views on those issues”

<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40009.pdf>

- In **1988**, the Rush Limbaugh Show was nationally syndicated. Other imitators quickly followed

<http://www.biography.com/people/rush-limbaugh-9382334#early-life>

2. Corporate Domination

The Telecommunications Act of **1996** allowed single companies to own more stations and become nationally syndicated. FOX News also began in **1996** and conservative TV and talk radio proliferated.

- 90% of American media is now owned by 6 companies (below), down from 50 companies in 1983.

					
GE Notable Properties: COMCAST NBC UNIVERSAL PICTURES FOCUS FEATURES	NEWS-CORP Notable Properties: FOX WALL STREET JOURNAL NEW YORK POST	DISNEY Notable Properties: ABC ESPN PIXAR MIRAMAX MARVEL STUDIOS	VIACOM Notable Properties: MTV NICK JR BET CMT PARAMOUNT PICTURES	TIME WARNER Notable Properties: CNN HBO TIME WARNER BROS	CBS Notable Properties: SHOWTIME SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL NFL.COM JEOPARDY 60 MINUTES

<http://www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6>

- Media is how Americans get information to vote intelligently. If 90% of media is skillfully pushing the viewpoints of the rich and corporate interests, filtering and spinning information, the majority of Americans can be convinced to vote against their own interests.
- This year, 94 public radio and TV stations are being sold, and their frequencies then taken over by corporate media companies. This means fewer local and independent news outlets. In 1995, and then 2005, congressional Republicans tried unsuccessfully to cut government funding for public media (NPR, PBS).

<http://www.newsvoices.org/blog/2016/12/06/how-spectrum-auction-could-save-journalism>

3. News Accuracy and Coherence Suffer

- When TV, radio and newspapers broadcast falsehoods, they are open to libel. But the internet has allowed huge numbers of individuals and organizations to circulate falsehoods in such volume, that controlling libel is not feasible: fake “news” and fake “facts” are now common, and issuers suffer no consequence. Checking facts is difficult and tedious, and can’t keep up with the stream of new falsehoods.
- Modern media deals in sound and video bites, and not chains of reasoning. With some exceptions, it doesn’t promote comprehensive thinking about issues.
- We live our lives constantly surrounded by electronic entertainment and social media. This can replace private reflection with disjointed distraction.

There are no references here, because these are just my observations.

4. Conservative Domination of Rural Class-A Stations

For a given power, AM radio waves travel many times farther than FM waves. AM radio channels (525 to 1705 kHz on the dial) are classified currently by the FCC as follows

Station Class	Part of Day (hrs)	Max Power (Watts)	Type
A	24	10,000- 50,000	clear channel/regional
B	24	10,000 if 1610 -1700 kHz	regional/local
C	24	1000	local
D	Daytime/24	50000/ 250	regional/local

History: Clear channel stations (not the Clear Channel company) were extra-high-power frequencies licensed by the FCC in 1928 to serve the rural and isolated areas of the US and Canada. Originally, they were 50,000 Watts (much more powerful than other classes) and so carried long distances (up to 1000 miles). Whereas other stations were required to sign off at night, clear channel stations were on 24 hours per day.

Today in the US, there are currently 84 clear channel stations, where 67 are in the Continental US (CUS). Since the **1990**’s, 41 out of 84 (49%) of these US clear channel frequencies have been bought by conservative media companies like Clear Channel (iHeart) and Cumulus. 32 of these 41 carry Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and others like them. See the chart lower left. Also see the FCC clear channel list in the appendix.

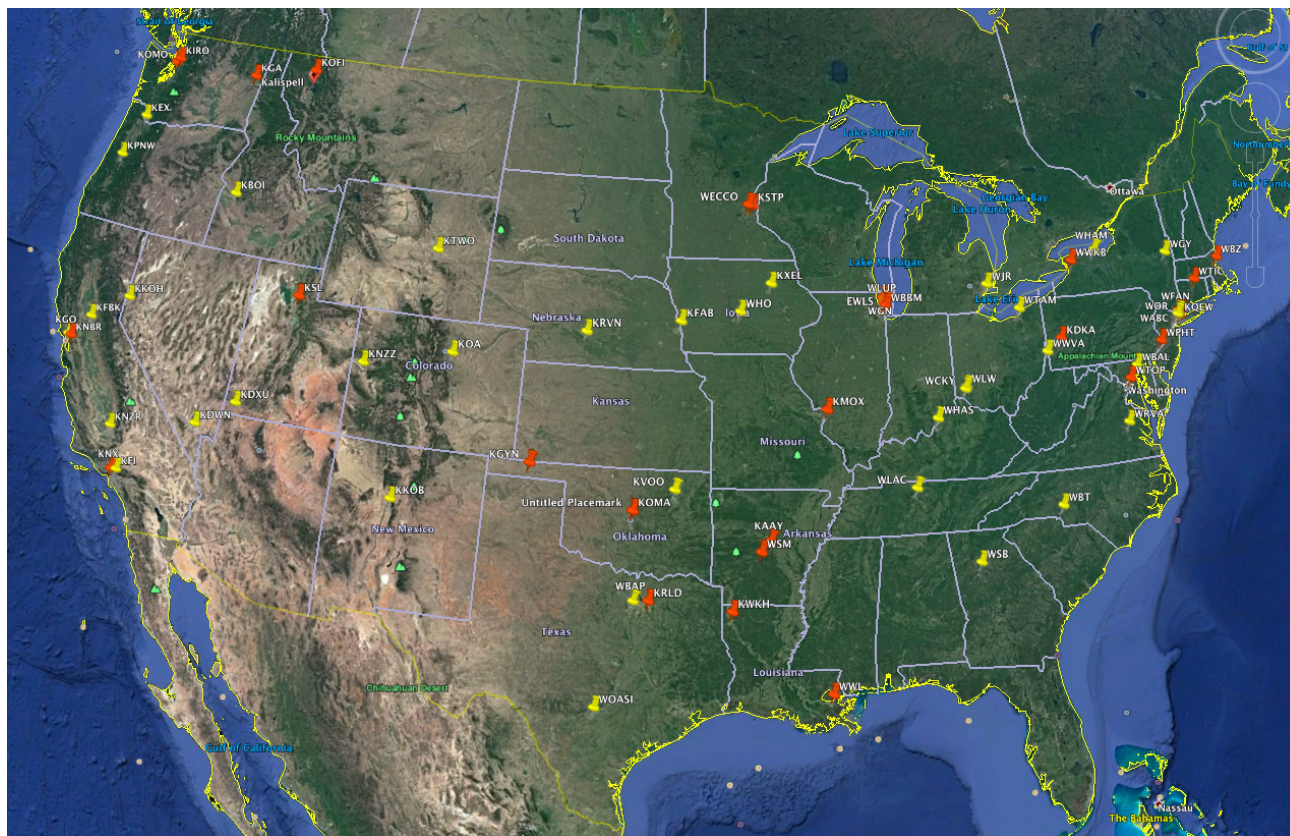
Considering only the continental US (CUS on lower right chart) there are 36 (54%) conservative, vs 3 liberal clear channel stations: a ratio of 12 to one

Station Type	# of Station in US	% in US	Station Type	# of Station in CUS	% in CUS
Conservative	41	49	Conservative	36	54
Christian	4	5	Christian	0	0
Sports	21	25	Sports	19	28
Liberal/NPR	8	10	Liberal/NPR	3	4
Music/Other	10	12	Music/Other	9	13

<https://www.fcc.gov/media/radio/am-clear-regional-local-channels>

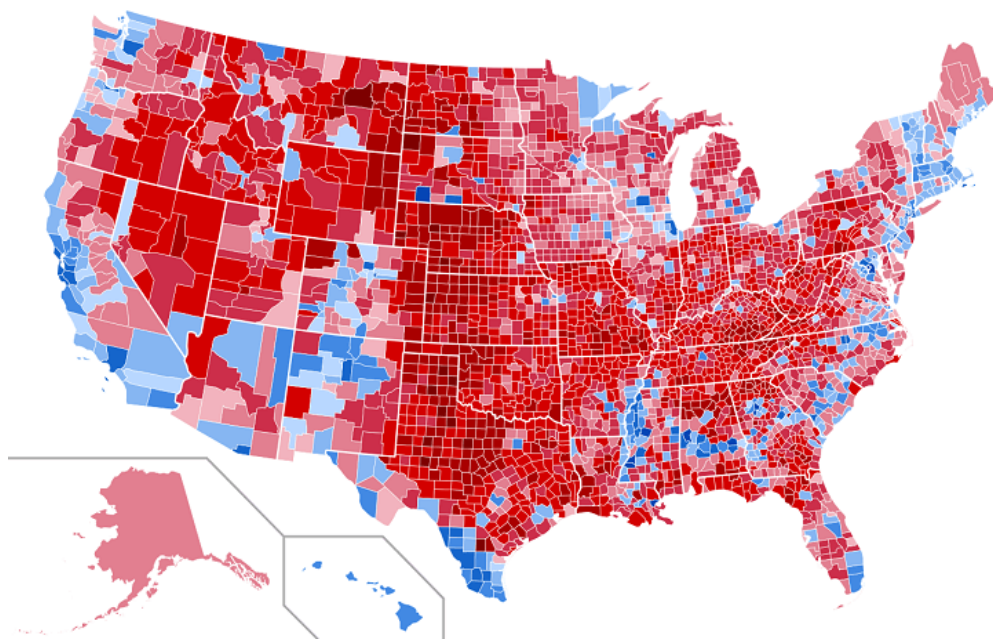
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clear-channel_station

The map below shows the 67 clear channel stations in the continental US. There are 17 more in Alaska. The 36 yellow points shown are conservative stations (33 carry Limbaugh), and the 32 orange points carry other programming. 8 conservative CC stations are found on the coasts, which are more urban and comprise 40% of America's population. Urban areas have a wide choice of competing media options. The other 25 conservative stations are focused on rural red states, which have limited media options.



Below is the map showing how counties voted in the US in the 2016 presidential election. Basically, rural and rust belt is red. The red areas correspond well to placement of the 25 rural conservative clear channel stations.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_2016



5. Accuracy of News Sources

According to Nielsen, the top 3 TV cable news networks in February 2017 are:

Network	Primetime	Proportion	Rank
FOX News	2950	1.00	1
MSNBC	1436	0.49	2
CNN	1275	0.43	3

<http://www.medialifemagazine.com/this-weeks-cable-ratings/>

According to the Pew Research Center, news sources in America can be placed on the continuum below-right:

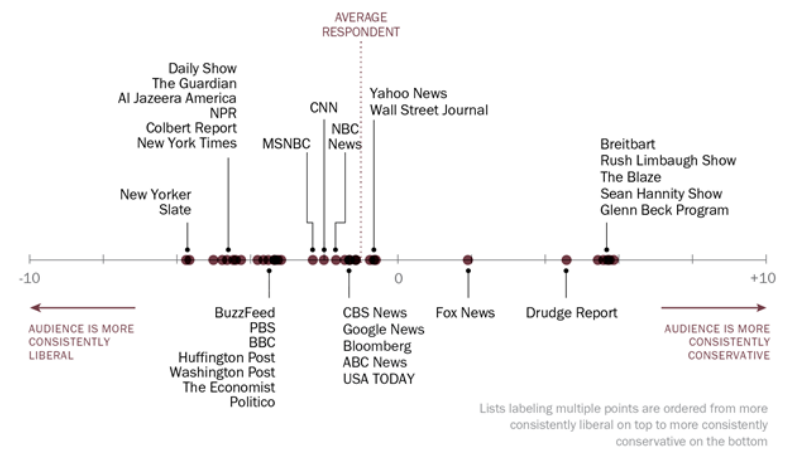
<http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/#>

In 2015, FOX News was watched by 22% of American households. Out of 1780 US TV stations, FOX news is on 200 (11%) of them.

<http://www.journalism.org/2016/06/15/local-tv-news-fact-sheet/>

Ideological Placement of Each Source's Audience

Average ideological placement on a 10-point scale of ideological consistency of those who got news from each source in the past week...



American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q22. Based on all web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see About the Survey for more details.) ThinkProgress, DailyKos, Mother Jones, and The Ed Schultz Show are not included in this graphic because audience sample sizes are too small to analyze.

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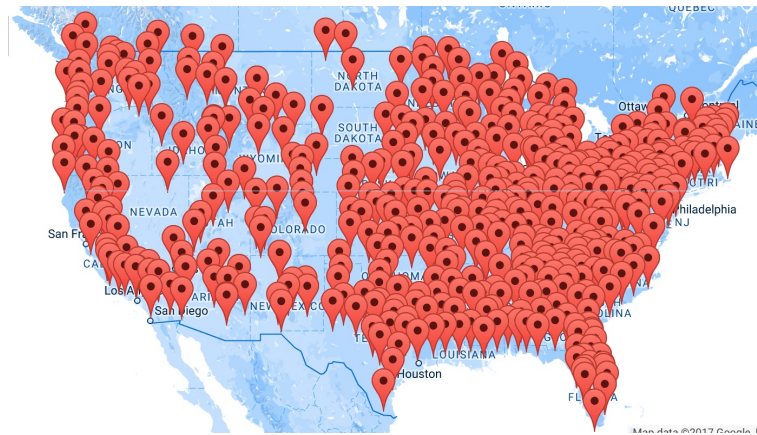
The top cable programs of any kind watched by Americans in February 2017 are:

News Network	Show	Avg Rating	Rank
AMC	Walking Dead	11996	1
AMC	Talking Dead	4807	2
FOX	O'Reilly	4315	3
FOX	Tucker Carlson	3405	4
Discovery	Gold Rush	3547	5
FOX	Bret Baier	3212	6
FOX	The Five	3199	7

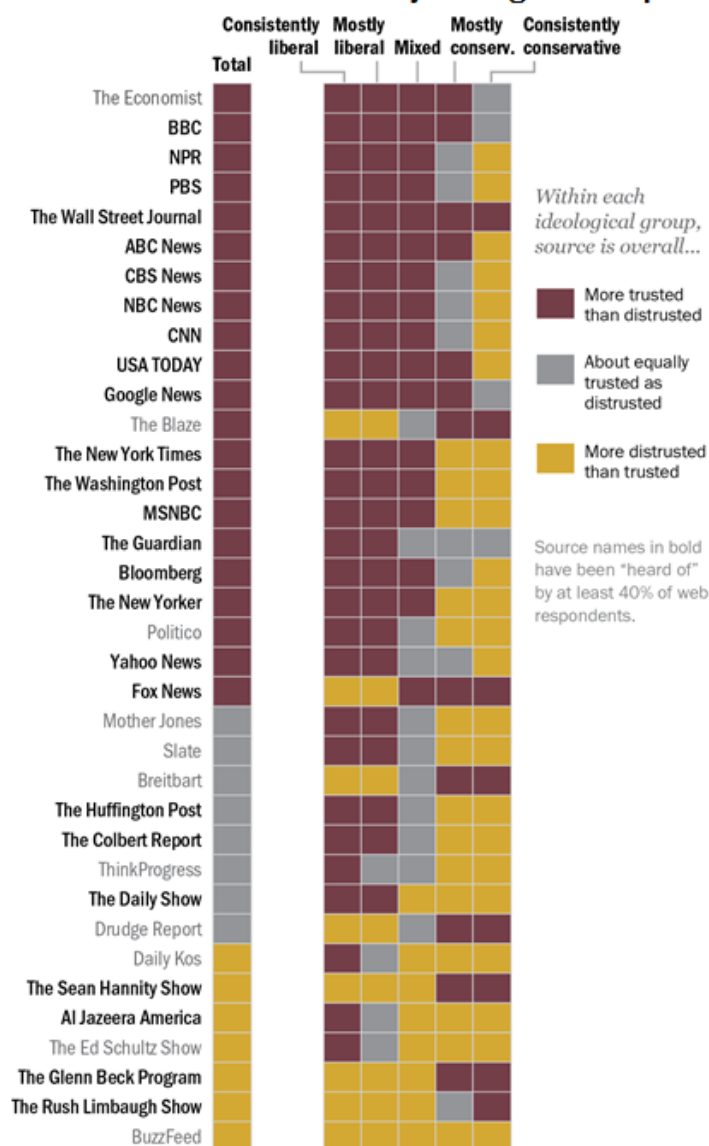
<http://www.medialifemagazine.com/this-weeks-cable-ratings/>

The Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity Shows reflect ultra-conservative, or perhaps pro-corporate, values.

The map at right shows the locations of all stations that run the Rush Limbaugh Show (483). There are concentrations of stations on both coasts, but most are in the rural south and west states, and the rust belt.



Trust Levels of News Sources by Ideological Group



Americans were polled in 2014 on which news services and shows they trusted or didn't trust for information. As can be seen at left, except for The Wall Street Journal, The Economist and BBC, there was little overlap in preferences of expressed conservatives and liberals. They live in different informational worlds.

<http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/#>

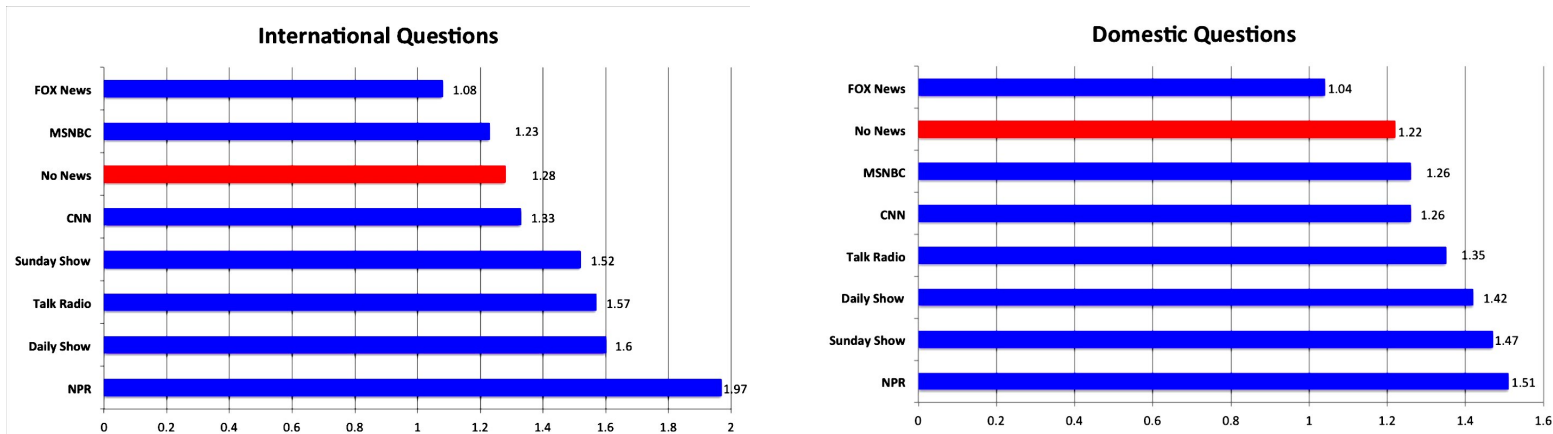
As can be seen on previous maps, urban areas are characterized by more liberal voters, rural and rust belt areas by conservative voters. This corresponds well with conservative media outlets placement.

American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q21a-21b. Based on web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see about the survey). Grouping of outlets is determined by whether the percent who trust each source is significantly different from the percent who distrust each source. Outlets are then ranked by the proportion of those who trust more than distrust each.

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Does it matter where people get their news?

Yes. Fairleigh Dickenson University's study polled 1885 respondents in November 2011 and February 2012. Respondents were asked 4 international issue questions, 5 domestic issue questions, and also what news sources they followed. No one was impressively literate, but the FOX news fans were about half as knowledgeable as NPR fans on international issues, and 2/3rds as literate on domestic issues



Unfortunately, the most popular news programs (FOX News, MSNBC, CNN) create the least knowledgeable listeners, with the two most-popular shows having listeners less literate than people who watch no news.

Summary:

Since 1987, conservative organizations have systematically increased market share in all areas of the US, but have especially dominated the news in rural areas with clear channel radio, where competing media sources are less available.

Out of 67 clear channel radio stations in the continental US, 36 are conservative, 33 carry Rush Limbaugh, and 25 are in rural states.

Of the other 32 CUS clear channel stations, only 3 broadcast NPR, and the other 28 broadcast nonpolitical music and sports.

In TV news, all of the most popular shows are on FOX, which generates the most issue-illiterate viewers.

The predominance of conservative radio and TV shows, especially in rural or isolated areas has been a deliberate strategy, effected over the last 30 years by conservative organizations, spending hundreds of millions of dollars to do so. (See "Money" essay).

It has made rural Americans dependent on an unbalanced, unchallenged and separate news source from the rest of America. Most of these stations are owned by just two corporations, and have no requirement to present contrasting views or a balanced picture. This has promoted popularity of other conservative media like FOX news and local copycats, and the polarization, and arguably, increasing ignorance of America.