



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on April 29, 2010

Newspaper Circulation Continues Decline

Newspapers are dying. That is the message from the latest Audit Bureau of Circulations, an independent firm that checks the average circulation of various print periodicals. The average drop of newspaper circulation nationally was 8.7 percent. This was somewhat smaller than the last quarterly audit, which showed an average circulation drop of 10.6 percent, but the circulation figures were bad enough.



There are different theories to explain the steady decline of newspaper circulation in America. Millions of Americans now have access to the Internet or to cable news sources, which provide much quicker and much cheaper information about what is happening in the world. But print media in general is not falling out of favor with Americans. Bookstores, which ought to be in the same boat as newspapers, show a much smaller decline and, in some cases, even a small rise in book sales (despite the competition from online book sales.)

Not all newspapers are losing circulation. *USA TODAY*, which is sold in airports, hotels, and other places that give it a unique sales advantage, lost 13.6 percent of its circulation. The *Washington Post*, which has a special advantage because of its connection to our nation's capital, saw a 13.1 percent drop in circulation. The *New York Times*, accepted by many elites as the only newspaper worth reading, had a drop of 8.5 percent, which is a continuation of a long, steady drop in that leading establishment newspaper. Other big newspapers, like the San Diego *Union-Tribune*, took a staggering 23 percent drop in circulation.

But the *Wall Street Journal*, as it has done in past recent audit periods, defied the national trends and gained circulation by .5 percent. The *Journal*, again, was the only newspaper among the top twenty-five in America, to actually gain new readers. What has been the difference between the *Wall Street Journal* and other big newspapers? It is intended for the business community and its information, if bad or poorly researched, costs subscribers money.

Also, the editorial policies — and reporting prejudices — of many newspapers put them out of synch with most Americans. Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*, for example, has advocated a “Green Tea Party,” which would impose a “Patriot Tax” on imported oil and require onerous environmental costs. Steven Pearlstein of the *Washington Post* opines that “the American people are badly confused.” Paul Krugman of the *New York Times* consistently disparages ordinary Americans.

Newspapers have always had opinions, but generally those were left on editorial pages and, critically,



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the newspapers themselves gladly embraced a particular slant on the news. A few decades ago, good-sized newspapers would even in the masthead reveal a particular partisan affiliation and the *Almanac of World Politics* used to list newspapers in each country and, typically, identify each as connected with a particular political party or ideological bent.

That is one reason that important leaders often read four or five different newspapers at breakfast. What has happened since then is that news organizations which have a clear philosophical bent now mask that by pretending to be the unbiased referee of public debate. As those eager for news have more options, those pretentious grandees of once giant newspapers are finding out that a lack of honesty with readers has a price



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