



U.S. Media: Only Republican Scandals Need Apply

Before the advent of the Gutenberg printing press in 1450, word of mouth was the main method for transmitting information. Perhaps this is why a proverbial “wise man” might have been so valued: In a largely illiterate world of rare handwritten manuscripts, he was the closest thing you had to a library, a self-help book, or an instruction manual. A visit to him was the ancient and medieval form of Googling. And you certainly had to hope he, the local holy men, and other counselors were wise — and honest. They were your only conduit of information.



The amount of information available has exploded in modern times, but the scale hasn't changed the fact that we still must rely on conduits of information. And even in the Internet age, the main one is the media.

How do you learn of a war in a faraway land, a policy proposal in D.C., a political scandal, or university study? Sure, a soldier, political aide, or graduate student could post a note on a blog, but it would likely become a needle in the haystack of the hundreds of millions of blogs worldwide. The reality is that we rely on the media. And if knowledge is power, the media is that pen mightier than militaries. It also follows, then, that misinformation is the power to destroy.

This is why a recent *National Review* piece about gross media bias — about the media's zeal to disseminate news that damages Republicans and suppress that which hurts Democrats — will distress any truth seeker.

Article author L. Brent Bozell III writes, “It is such common sense as to be undeniable that basic journalism requires a party label to be affixed to a story about an elected public official, the president excepted. It is the DNA of the “who” in a news report.” And if this is so, Bozell tells us, the pen has become an instrument of journalistic genetic engineering, as the media only affixes a party label in scandal reportage when the embattled public official is a Republican. Bozell then [presents](#) Exhibit A:

On Friday, September 29, 2006, Representative Mark Foley of Florida resigned after ABC News exposed him for having sent explicit e-mails to male House pages. That evening and on the next day's morning news shows, ABC, CBS, and NBC all tied Foley to the GOP. “This is more than just one man's downfall,” *Today* co-host Matt Lauer solemnly declared on NBC. “It could be a major blow to the Republican party.”

On March 10, 2008, news broke that New York governor Eliot Spitzer had been linked to a prostitution ring. It took NBC News four nights to acknowledge Spitzer's party affiliation. In its first two days of coverage, Matt Lauer's *Today* show ran 18 segments on the scandal and never once identified him as a Democrat.

Yet the examples are virtually endless. What follows are those provided by Bozell; the analysis was of



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the three major networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS. Information about the year; type of scandal; degree of coverage; whether or not party affiliation was mentioned; and additional facts, if necessary, are provided. First the Republican list:

- Senator David Vitter (R-Louisiana) — 2007, prostitution. Coverage: All three networks (ATN). Party-affiliation mention: ATN.
- Senator Larry Craig (R-Idaho) — 2007, sex scandal (men’s-room solicitation). Coverage: ATN. Party-affiliation mention: ATN (in this case, every single news show).
- Senator John Ensign (R-Nevada) — 2009, adultery. Coverage: ATN. Party affiliation mention: ATN
- Governor Mark Sanford (R- South Carolina) — 2009, adultery. Coverage: ATN. Party-affiliation mention: ATN.
- Senator Ted Stevens (R- Alaska) — 2008, failing to report gifts; ultimately convicted. Coverage: ATN. Party-affiliation mention: ATN.
- Congressman Trey Radel (R-) Florida — 2013, cocaine possession. Coverage: ATN. Party-affiliation mention: ATN.

Note the consistency above with the 100-percent ATN rating. Now take a look at the Democratic list:

- Governor Jon Corzine (D-New Jersey) — 2011, unauthorized use of hundreds of millions of investor dollars. Coverage: only CBS and NBC. Party-affiliation mention: *none*.
- Governor Rod Blagojevich (D-Illinois) — 2009, corruption. Convicted and imprisoned in 2011. Coverage: ATN. Party-affiliation mention: *none* despite major coverage of what was a huge story.
- Congressman William Jefferson (D-Louisiana) — 2009, convicted on charges of bribery, racketeering, and wire fraud. Coverage: initially CBS ignored story; ultimately ATN. Party-affiliation mention: only NBC; ABC and CBS refused to cite.
- Democratic mayor Bob Filner of San Diego (he also had been a congressman) — 2013, multiple cases of sexual harassment. Coverage: ATN. Party-affiliation mention: only CBS; ABC and NBC refused.
- Democratic New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin — 2013, corruption. Coverage: ATN. Party-affiliation mention: *none*. This applies to both when the charges were brought and to his conviction earlier this year.
- U.S. representative Jesse Jackson Jr. — 2013, embezzlement. Coverage: initially only CBS and NBC; later ATN. Party-affiliation mention: *none*.
- Democratic Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick— 2008, perjury and obstruction of justice. Jailed for violating terms of bond. Coverage: ATN. Party-affiliation mention: initially none. CBS mentioned upon incarceration; ABC and NBC never did.
- Senator John Walsh (D-Montana) — August, 2014, plagiarism. Ultimately resigned. Bozell writes, “Network coverage? Nada.”

As for the last case, there has been scant coverage of the Walsh story despite the fact that “a sitting senator who has won his party’s nomination withdrawing from contention before the general election” is “extremely unusual,” as the *Washington Post* [puts it](#). It is also despite the fact — or, critics might say, *because* of the fact — that the story could influence the fierce battle being waged for control of the Senate.



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But conservatives will lament that this is par for the course. When Mitt Romney said in a leaked 2012 fund-raising-event [video](#) that he wasn't going to "worry" about swaying the "47 percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what" because they "believe the government has a responsibility to care for them," the media covered the story relentlessly and used the comments to typify the Romney camp as insensitive and out of touch. But when Barack Obama [said](#) during the same campaign that people in Middle America have gotten "bitter and they cling to guns or religion or to antipathy toward people who aren't like them as a way to explain their frustrations," it was left in that haystack of blogs forgotten.

So, critics might say, is it any surprise that our elections yield the politicians and policies they do? The media is our conduit of information. And garbage in, garbage out.



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