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GEOGRAPHIC AND SOURCE BIASES IN NETWORK TELEVISION NEWS 1982-1984

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ABSTRACT

Content analysis of 5,190 news stories appearing on network weekday evening newscasts between May 1982 and April 1984 reveals under- and over-representations of geographic/political subdivisions and of individuals representing various social groups within the United States and internationally. More specifically, on "geographic" biases, states and regions which are home to newsgathering centers are also proportionately overrepresented. Continued support is found for an "eclipse" effect in which a majority of the news comes from one state or city within a geographic region. Sources, as expected, are biased toward extant centers of power, particularly government, partisan politics, the military, business and professions. Sources not identified as members of major social institutions--"unknowns"--appear in the news primarily in frames previously provided by network news, the study's data indicate.

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Below is a study of news bias. By bias we mean no more than that news--in this case U.S. television network weekday evening newscasts--systematically deviates from some standard of measured "reality" or accuracy.[1] That American news does systematically deviate from reality or from some standard of accuracy has been a persistent theme in studies of news (see, e.g., Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Epstein, 1974; Dominick, 1977; Brown, et al., 1982; Gitlin, 1980). It does so, according to scholars in the area, for multifarious reasons:

1. News reflects power and the reality of power more than it reflects any more generic reality. Whether because those in power actively seek to influence journalists and their organizations, while journalists actively seek out the powerful because they are "newsworthy" (see, e.g., Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1975) or whether news organizations and those in positions of political and economic power share similar class and other interests (cf. Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980), news is viewed to be not representative of the daily lives and activities of the citizens of the political entity purportedly represented; thus, as was early documented for television entertainment programming (DeFleur, 1964), one might expect the news to be no more demographically representative of the American people than prime-time television represents occupational structures.

2. Journalistic routines and news organizational practices are themselves biased, such that some sorts of representations are far more likely than others. The best line of argument here is that of Tuchman (1978), with her metaphor of the "news net." In allocating scarce resources for news coverage, she argues, news organizations must spread such resources thinly and relatively widely (while reserving some for unexpected contingencies). Journalists are sent to where news is most likely, and these (see No. 1 above) are most usually

centers of political power. Once there, journalists (and their sources) fall into routines of coverage, so that understandings of what is news and what is newsworthy likewise become routine and predictable, making nonroutine sources and nonroutine definitions of news face exceedingly difficult hurdles for entry: they fall between the interstices of the "net" (see also Fishman, 1980, and Goldenberg, 1975).

3. Economic and technological constraints make some sorts of news more likely than others. Consistent with the previous observation is that news is organized bureaucratically; the organization of news also involves economic and technological considerations, and this is perhaps most apparent in the most technologically intensive news medium, television (Gantz, et al., 1980; Epstein, 1974). Epstein (1974) suggests that the "geographic" news bias in television news, i.e., that a disproportionate share of U.S. news emanates from a handful of U.S. cities, is (or perhaps was in the early 1970s) attributable to the fact that the networks either had film crews and reporters already stationed in those cities or owned and operated television stations in them and, in either case had access to dedicated phone cables for transmission of stories from such cities. Hence originating news from such posts would be more convenient, quicker and cheaper than feeding news from other places.

The three foregoing observations are at a fairly high level of abstraction; they are, moreover, not mutually exclusive. While the present study does not aim to establish the power of them, what it can do is, in two areas--that of geographic and sources biases--to outline the degree to which news is not a demographic mirror.

I. Geographic News Bias:

As noted above, Epstein suggested a geographic bias in network television news coverage. A content analysis of 360 national network newscasts between

July 1973 and June 1975 by Joseph Dominick (1977) showed that two-thirds of the domestic news emanated from three places--Washington, D.C., California and New York, and fully half came from Washington. In the Dominick study, moreover, when D.C. news was excluded, there were substantial regional variations (with the Northeast and the Pacific states over-covered and the Midwest and Southwest substantially under-covered) and an interesting "eclipse" effect, whereby overcoverage of a single state in a region generally meant under-coverage of other states in the region. The major point, however, is that the bulk of domestic news originated from a very few places, primarily Washington: population density does not equate with news coverage.

The Dominick study represented a jumping-off point for the present one. Dominick, following Epstein (1974) suggests that the geographic bias is in part economic and technological. If this is correct, then changes in the technology and economics of news transmission occasioned by satellite feeds in the past few years may have reduced or altered the geographic bias. We thus sought to replicate the Dominick findings with an analysis of a similarly constructed sample from 1982-1984 network evening newscasts.

II. Source news bias:

Our study had another ambition as well. Several analysts have noted that who makes news, i.e., who gets quoted as a source in news stories, is likewise inequitably distributed. Gans (1979), in a content analysis of national television and newsmagazine news, divided news sources into "knowns," "unknowns" and animals, objects and abstractions. The former accounted for 71% of 1967 television news sources and about three-quarters of a sample of 1967, 1971, and 1975 newsmagazine sources and largely was comprised of federal government officials (especially the President, who accounted for 20% of 1975 newsmagazine domestic news space) state and municipal officials, well-

publicized "violators of the laws and mores," professionals, and business, civil rights and labor leaders. An analysis of two randomly constructed weeks of 1979 and 1980 newspaper news (Brown, et al., 1982), similarly finds a very high degree of reliance on governmental and institutional sources: 55% of the sources were governmental officials, and an additional 24% were "affiliated" U.S. citizens, i.e., sources were identified with a profession, organization or institution; only 4.3% were unaffiliated U.S. citizens (the 4.6% who were foreign citizens were not distinguished between affiliated and unaffiliated). Thus, there are consistent findings that who makes the U.S. news is not "equitably" distributed in terms of location of individuals in social structures as well: those who make news are largely those in the centers of power. They tend to be official representatives. Moreover, within the official sphere, power tends to be concentrated further, so that governmental sources predominate over other large institutions, and within the governmental area, federal sources predominate over state and local ones, and within the federal government, the White House predominates over other sources, and finally, of course, the President predominates over other sources there. Within all of this, finally, males predominate over females as sources of news.

Moreover, when news sources are other than governmental or other official sources, they are so in a highly restricted set of circumstances. As Gans (1979, Ch. 1) noted in his content analysis of newsmagazine and television news, about a fifth of the coverage went to "unknowns"; in television news stories, three-quarters of these were either protestors, "rioters" and strikers, or victims of some sort. The remaining quarter were mostly taken up by "alleged and actual violators of the laws and mores" or "participants in unusual activities." He comments (1979, p. 15):

> The unknowns who appear in the news are, by most criteria, an unrepresentative lot; and most ordinary people never come into the news, except as

> statistics. How ordinary people work, what they do outside working hours, in their families, churches, clubs, and other organizations, and how they relate to government and public agencies hardly ever make the news.

The present study relies most heavily on the Dominick and Gans studies cited above. The former suggests that television news is geographically biased, so that news is more likely to originate from some centers than others, and these centers are not in any way demographically balanced. The latter suggests that the sources of news are likewise biased structurally. Official, especially governmental, sources predominate, and where unofficial noninstitutional sources are used, they are not in any sense reflective of the social distribution of the general population: "unknowns" can come into the news only in a highly truncated set of circumstances. These two studies, however, were conducted some time ago: Dominick's analysis of television was 1973-75, and Gans' television analysis was in 1967. For reasons suggested above, things may have changed. A central purpose of the present study was to assess the degree to which they may have, and a second purpose was to offer more detail on the representation of sources in 1980s television news.

III. The present study:

Our content analysis of television network news followed a procedure equivalent to that employed by Dominick (1977), who analyzed a sample of two years of network evening newscasts, Monday through Friday, from July 1973 to June 1975. Following his procedure, we analyzed a sample of Monday through Friday network evening newscasts from May 1982 through April 1984. In both cases a composite week for each month was constructed, so that first a Monday from each month was selected at random, and next a Tuesday, and so on, until five sample dates from each month were drawn, and the evening news from each date for each network was analyzed. This procedure thus yields a sample of 120 newscasts per network, or a total of 360 news programs.[2] The newscasts

themselves were not analyzed. Instead, the program summaries available from the Vanderbilt Television News Index were analyzed. The content coders were the authors, a faculty member and five graduate students in the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois. Coding was conducted in the summer of 1984. In all, 5,190 newscast items were analyzed, using the following categories:

a. Date of newscast and network of origin;

b. Location of the item in the newscast, numbered from first to last item;

c. Total time of items, in seconds;

d. Type of story, on two dimensions: First whether the item was news or commentary (commentaries were those which were explicitly identified in the Television News Index as such). Second whether the story concerned domestic or foreign news; foreign/international news was further divided into those stories in which a U.S. interest of any sort was explicitly articulated, and those which were "purely" international, or in which no U.S. interest was mentioned.

e. Content: The study employed the content/topic coding system devised by R. L. Stevenson and colleagues for the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR)-sponsored analysis of news content from 17 nations. The coding requires assignment into one of 18 topics as a main topic, with provision, in the present study, for additional assignment into one or two additional subsidiary topics. Stevenson (1984) may be consulted for additional details, but the topics are as follows: 1. International politics; 2. Domestic politics; 3. Military and defense; 4. Economic matters; 5. International aid; 6. Social services; 7. Crime, police, judicial,

legal and penal; 8. Culture, arts, archeology; 9. Religion; 10. Scientific, technical, medical; 11. Sports; 12. Entertainment; 13. Personalities (not politicians); 14. Human interest, odd happenings, animals, sex; 15. Student matters; 16. Ecology, energy conservation, pollution; 17. Natural disasters (extended in the present study to include accidents); and 18. Other.

f. "Focus": Following Dominick, 1977, each story was coded by the location about which it contained the most information, an approximation of its dateline. While the Dominick study, however, coded only national news and thus excluded all commentary and international news, every story in the current study was coded for focus; domestically, each story was coded either by state, as Washington, D.C., as "locationless U.S.-international," as a U.S. possession, protectorate or trust territory, or as "U.S. national-no appropriate location," the latter designation, following Dominick, being applied to news that was "essentially 'locationless' or had the whole country as a focus" (Dominick, 1977, p. 95). Stories from Canada, Mexico, the Soviet Union, the Falklands and the United Nations were coded for each, and for stories from other nations, each was assigned to a region (e.g., Central America and Caribbean, Africa, Indian subcontinent).

g. Sources: Each source, up to six per newscast,[3] was coded on three dimensions: First was according to a structural source code which employed ten categories for assigning non-U.S. sources, 42 categories for U.S. governmental and political sources, 21 for representatives of business and other institutional sources and "personalities" and 15 for "unknowns," or other private individuals. In Table 6, below, these categories have been collapsed somewhat. Sources were also

coded for the "official" standing into one of three categories. The first was used for sources speaking as designated or authorized representatives of formal organizations or generally recognized political/social/ structural entities; the second was for past or former representatives of the same (such as a former U.S. President), and the third was for sources who were neither of the above, i.e., for "unofficial" sources. Finally, sources were coded as to whether they were female or male, or whether this was not ascertainable from content, the latter category also being applied to nonhuman sources such as animals and aggregates.[4]

One caveat about the source coding needs to be noted: information available in the Television News Index makes it possible only to code sources for which there are sound bites or film clips. Thus we are unable to code sources quoted only by reporters and anchors, and only those sources whose voices and/or faces appear on news programs are included. We do not believe this seriously misrepresents the presentation of human sources on network television news and in fact, may better represents them than a full coding of all sources might, for what we are able to code is just those sources that the networks themselves gathered and reported sound and film accounts from.

Reliability: Intercoder reliability was assessed by having the first author recode all items from one randomly selected newscast for each student coder. Intercoder reliability is computed as coder agreement on decisions divided by total number of coding decisions for each category. Overall intercoder reliability across all categories and coders was 89.5%. Intercoder reliabilities within categories and across coders is listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

IV. Findings:

A. In general:

As noted, a sample of two years' worth of ABC, CBS and NBC weekday evening newscasts were analyzed. Included were 5,190 news items which were, as expected, evenly distributed across networks (ABC = 34.7%, CBS = 33.1%, NBC = 32.1%). News stories accounted for 98.2% of all newscast items, with commentary accounting for the rest. Within news, "pure" national/domestic news accounted for about two-thirds of all items (66.4%), with international news in which a U.S. interest was articulated (19.2%) and "pure" international news (14.4%) well behind. Newscasts averaged 15 items, with only seven newscasts having ten or fewer items and only four had 20. Newscast items averaged almost exactly 90 seconds in length ($\bar{X}$ = 90.1, s.d. = 89.6). There were no significant differences between any of the networks on the foregoing variables (by chi-square or t-test), nor were there any in the content categories below, and in most places in this paper, networks are thus not treated separately.

Content: It will be recalled that content was coded by main topic and by up to two subsidiary content categories. Some 85% of stories could be coded using a single category, and only four percent required two subsidiary categories. Table II, below, reports main and total content classifications for network news 1982-1984:

TABLE 2: Main topic/content categorizations and total topic/content, network weekday newscasts May 1982-April 1984: (In percents; total adds to more than 100%)

	Main	Total
Economic Matters	20%	26%
Domestic Politics	15	20
Crime, judicial, legal	14	15
Military and defense	13	18
Accidents and disasters	7	7
Science and medical	5	6

Social services	4	6
Human interest	3	5
Sports	3	3
Personalities	2	3
International aid	1	1
Culture and arts	1	2
Religion	1	2
Entertainment	1	2
Ecology, pollution	1	2
Other	1	1
Student affairs	-	1
Total	102%*	138%

*More than 100% due to rounding.

As Table 2 indicates, the news is dominated by a handful of content categories, led by economic matters,[5] domestic and international politics, military and defense stories, and crime and vice. These five categories account for almost three-quarters of the main content categories for network news, and among the other categories, only accidents and disasters account for more than a twentieth of such news.

"Focus": A more detailed treatment of news item locations is below. For present purposes, we might note that three-quarters of network news was focused on the United States. Of the quarter that did not, the Mideast (428 stories) was the next most frequent focus, followed by Western Europe (274), Central America (136), the Soviet Union (127), and Central Europe (largely Poland, 80). During the two years, Canada accounted for only 14 of 5,190 stories, Mexico for 12, all of South America for only 33 (excluding 43 stories on the Falklands crisis) and all of Africa for only 37, while India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan among them totaled 13 stories and Japan, China and Taiwan among them totaled 42. Thus nations accounting for more than half the world's population garnered just over one percent of network evening newscast stories during the sampled dates.

Sources: Again, a more extensive treatment is below. We note here that 2,200 of the 5,190 stories (42.4%) had one or more source by our definition of a source as being one in which the newscast item includes a sound or visual representation of a person. Some 31% had two sources, 19% had three, 11% had four, 6% had five, and 3% had six.

B. Findings on Geographic News Bias:

As earlier noted, one initial impetus for the present study was Dominick's 1977 work noting geographic imbalances in network evening newscasts. In that study, Dominick reported that about two-thirds of domestic news minutes emsnated from just three places--Washington, D.C., California, and New York, and that almost half came from Washington, D.C. When the District of Columbia and news emanating from "no appropriate location" (see above) is excluded, moreover, there are substantial regional variations in coverage. The Northeast and particularly the Pacific regions receive far more coverage than they were due by virtue of population and the Middle Atlantic and particularly the Southwest get far less attention than they were due. On the latter, Dominick points also to an "eclipse" effect in looking at states within regions: within several regions, one state tends to dominate attention, while other states in the region get far less than might be expected given uniform coverage by population.

Dominick's method was relatively straightforward: news minutes were calculated by region and state of "focus" for stories; these were then converted into percentages of domestic news coverage and compared with the percentage of U.S. population within each state or region; an "attention index" subtracting the percentage of population from the percentage of news time was then computed. For the present study, we replicated this completely, with two revisions. First was that estimated 1982 U.S. population replaced Dominick's

use of 1970 census figures. Second, and more importantly, in addition to computing Dominick's "attention index," we also computed an "attention ratio" which indexes news time divided by population. This latter measure may be expressed as a percentage of over- or under-coverage and offers a less-biased estimate, since it corrects for wide variations of population by state and region. Attention ratios were also recomputed for Dominick's regional data. We now turn to findings from the present study.

For the purposes of replicating the Dominick findings, we must note that only a fraction of our data are used: The Dominick study excludes all commentary, all non-U.S. news, and all domestic news from "no appropriate location." While some 72% of our news and commentary in the 1982-1984 study period had a U.S. focus, apparent differences in coding instructions led to substantial differences between Dominick's findings and ours on news from some places. Dominick, for example, found that roughly half of news time (excluding foreign news and commentary) emanated from Washington, and only five percent was from the U.S. but with "no appropriate location." In the present study, however, we find that only 18% of non-foreign-focused news stories emanate from Washington, while another 36% are domestic "no appropriate location" stories.[6] Summing across these figures, however, introduces more directly comparable numbers: Dominick found roughly 55% of domestic news did not come from identifiable states and regions other than Washington, D.C. The present study finds that 54% did not.

As noted, Washington, D.C. news accounted for 18% of domestic news stories, when "no appropriate location" stories are included. When we more strictly replicate the Dominick results by excluding commentary and foreign news and domestic "no appropriate location," and change our unit of analysis from stories to minutes, we find that Washington stories account for 29% of domestic

news. Thus the District of Columbia, with three-tenths of one percent of the U.S. population, accounts for almost thirty percent of its news, an "attention ratio" of 100 times, or 10,000%. In the tables below, following Dominick, however, we exclude both District of Columbia population and D.C. news time.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

As Table 3 notes, there remain substantial deviations in time devoted to various regions of the country, and these generally follow the same patterns Dominick found for July 1973-June 1975 news. The Pacific and Northeast remain over-covered relative to the rest of the nation, the Northeast more so than in the early 1970s. Also relatively over-covered are the Mountain states and New England. Remaining under-covered are the Midwest, the proportionately least covered region in Dominick by his "attention index" measure, the Middle Atlantic states and the Southwest. One region, the Plains states, went from over-coverage in the Dominick study, to slight under-coverage in 1982-1984. As both the attention index and attention ratio data appear to indicate, deviations from the population norm, by region, are slightly less in 1982-1984 than they were in 1973-1975.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Table 4 shows state population, news time and attention indices and ratios for the 50 states for the 1982-1984 data. Several points may be made about these results. First, our findings are relatively consistent with those of Dominick: As Table 5, which charts over- and under-coverage of states by attention index and ratio shows, New York, California and Florida are at or near the top of the list of over-coverage in 1982-1984; these three states were also among the top five in 1973-1975. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana

and Wisconsin were likewise among the five most under-covered states in both studies.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

More generally the tables show that state-by-state, there is substantial over- and under-coverage. In fact, the top four states in total news time, New York, California, Illinois and Texas--all of which are over-covered by both indices--account for just over half (50.6%) of domestic evening news coverage, while they account for just 30% of U.S. population. The data on over-coverage lends credence to two interpretations. First deals with large-state over-coverage: Clearly, New York, California, and to a lesser extent Illinois are centers of news coverage in two senses. News occurs there because they are home to large cities (New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, Chicago) that are centers of political, economic and cultural power. They are also, we think not coincidentially, centers of news coverage because the networks have major newsgathering centers there, and have access to not only their own news staffs but to those of their owned-and-operated broadcast stations, as Epstein (1974) has also noted. Second, however, our attention ratio measure also notes several relatively small, by population, states that received over-coverage. Here, one or two running stories account for the bulk of coverage, and the state's small population leads to a large coverage ratio. In the study period, for example, Utah's coverage is largely accounted for by a single story--the Barney Clark heart transplant, while New Hampshire's is largely due to the 1984 Presidential primary there, and Rhode Island's stems from the Klaus von Bulow trial and the America's Cup races. We cannot account for North Dakota's over-coverage.

Under-coverage is likewise interesting. During the study period, the state

of Delaware and its 602,000 inhabitants got no news coverage, while the 2.6 million inhabitants of Oregon got almost none. As Table 4 shows, under-coverage is more the norm than over-coverage, as 37 of the 50 states got less than their population-proportionate share. In fact, 17 states got less than half as much as their population-proportionate share, including all four states in the Middle Atlantic region and three of five states in the Northeast. Most of the prominent examples of under-coverage occur in the "Frost Belt" and in the Mid-Atlantic, and these results are consistent with Dominick's interpretation of an "eclipse" effect, whereby one or two states in a region are over-covered and the rest are under-covered. In the present study, we see this in the Midwest, the Northeast, the South, the Southwest, the Pacific, New England (if we look only at attention index) and the Mountain regions. Arguably, the Middle Atlantic region would fit this pattern as well, for it is being eclipsed by Washington, D.C., which is absent from our data. We would, however, argue that it is not states "eclipsing" other states, but cities, by and large, which eclipse states: news, in other words, is made by and in cities, and states which do not have large cities (and news crews or easy airport access to them) or which stand in the shadow of states with large cities are not on the network evening news.

Sources in Network Evening Weekday Telecasts 1982-1984

Tabled below are results of our analysis of 5,483 sources from our 5,190 news stories. As noted, we coded only those sources on which there were film or sound bites in the newscast, in large part because these are the only sources for which the Television News Index provides sufficient information to allow source identification. Nonetheless, on 57 items (1.03%), there was insufficient information to allocate a source to our coding scheme, and these are eliminated.

We were less interested in foreign news sources than domestic ones, believing

that different and more widely varied constraints face journalists in obtaining film or tape abroad than at home. Hence, we do not wish to consider them in detail here; we would note, however, that they comprise 540 sources (9.95% of our total) and do in fact resemble our domestic sources in interesting ways. They are predominantly political and governmental: 43% are government sources, and an additional 13% are members of the political opposition. The remainder are divided between institutional representatives (of business, entertainment and culture, sports and organized interest groups--but not labor: no foreign labor leaders fell into the sample [7]) which totaled 10% of foreign sources, including private citizens and aggregates (including crowd reaction shots), which totaled 29%. In the remainder of this section, we consider domestic sources only.

In general, some of our major presuppositions were borne out among domestic sources. Official and institutional sources predominate over others: Some 72% of all sources were officials of government or politics or groups and institutions, and another 3% were former officials commenting on their areas of official status. Thus 25% of sources were "unaffiliated," a figure considerably larger than that found by Brown, et al., (1982) for newspaper and wire service news. Additionally, male sources predominate over female ones. After removing the 7.7% of our sources which were not sufficiently identified to be classified by gender, we find 86.4% of our news sources to be male and 13.6% to be female: thus fewer than one news source of seven is female.

Also as expected, government and institutional sources predominate over others. As Table 6 shows, government officials and political candidates and others (our sample covers the 1982 general elections and the 1984 early primary season) comprise two-fifths of all news sources, and federal sources are about

four times as frequent as state and local ones. The President, of course, emerges as the single most frequently appearing news source, and the President or his spokesperson constitutes about five percent of all news sources in the sample, a figure slightly lower than the 8.5% Gans found for 1967 television news.[8]

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Among institutional and group sources, as Table 6 also demonstrates, business spokespersons predominate, accounting for about one of eleven of all sources and just under a third of all institutional sources. "Other professionals," largely lawyers and medical doctors, are also important, but perhaps most striking in the overall category is the small representation of political/social/ women's/civil and human rights groups and spokespersons: even when combined with organized labor spokespersons, they account for only a sixth of all institutional sources and a twentieth of all sources.

We would, however, like to discuss the "Unknowns" in somewhat more detail. Guided by Gans (1979), we had constructed our coding categories with the following rationale in mind: The presentation of private individuals in news, as news sources, largely involves showing individuals either as "epitomizing cases," as when an out-of-work laborer is quoted to show the hardships of unemployment, or as a criminal victim or defendant or as another form of victim, or, finally, as a participant in some bizarre activity. Table 6 shows general support for this: Among "unknown" sources, some 22% are "epitomizing examples" (farmers, protestors, etc., labor, consumers, voters and grassroots political workers); 11% are crime-related; 26% are otherwise characterized as victims (disaster victims and witnesses, other victims); and 7% of private individuals are depicted as engaging in odd or unusual "newsmaking" activities.

Another 8% are identifiable individuals in "aggregates" or in crowd shots. We had, additionally, a residual category to allow for cases that did not fit the pattern suggested above. It contains all other private individual cases, and it was unexpectedly large, comprising 28% of all private-individual cases. People in this category are difficult to categorize; they include human-interest subjects such as those Charles Kuralt has made his reputation on, and any others who do not conform to the patterns we had expected. While this group is larger than we expected to find, we should recall that "ordinary people" not otherwise characterized still account for only about 7% of all network evening news sources.

Summary and Conclusions

Presented above are data from an analysis of two years of network evening news programs 1982-1984. They show that such news is biased, which we previously have defined merely as deviation from some standard of "reality" and have generally not attached any norm to, and that it is biased in two ways. First is a geographic bias, which operates both globally and nationally; we have paid greater attention to the latter and generally have confirmed earlier findings by Dominick (1977). Second is a social structural bias: News, when operationally defined as the presence of sources on which a television network had available sound, tape or film, tends strongly to favor established institutional sources, most especially governmental, military, political, business and professional ones. The network news is news of "knowns" in power centers; slightly more than six of seven such institutional sources are men. Where "unknowns" come into the news, they generally do so in a frame provided by the networks--as victims, examples of social groups or aggregates.

However, our data, particularly those in Table 6, do show some diversity in network-quoted sources, albeit a limited diversity. Few groups are completely

shut out--though political party officials other than Democrats and Republicans (data not tabled) account for only two sources in the study and women's groups account for only eight of 4,886 sources. What this analysis cannot show, however, is how and in what ways sources are treated in the air time they do get.

Two qualifications must be made. First is that, as previously noted, available data allowed us only to examine network news sources for which film or sound bites were used. We would suspect that were we able to examine all news sources articulated on the evening news, it would look even more "official" than this analysis suggests, for the presentation of data (almost always from official sources) and we would predict that indirect quotation is almost always from authoritative sources. Second, we are not here arguing for any system that would guarantee "representative" news in any strict head-counting sense: to do so would do violence to any definition of news we know of or can conceive of. However, at the same time, we can conceive of, and think the networks could as well, forms of news that would be more representative of the nation and world and their people than what we here have found.

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[1]It will be noted that we put "reality" in quotation marks. We do so to emphasize our doubt that television news--or anything else--could constitute a veridical account of life. Full discussion of the issue of whether any account can capture "reality" clearly is beyond the scope of this paper. Equally clearly, we would argue, television news under any circumstance will be no more than a created or socially constructed reality. When we speak of bias, then, we speak of deviations from some "objective" and measurable standard. In so doing, we are not implying that television news could be unbiased.

[2]Newscasts from one sampled day in 1982 were not available, and this data was not replaced; hence this study covers 357 newscasts from 119 days. Sampled dates are available from the authors.

[3]Only three percent of all news items had as many as six, and perhaps one percent had more than six (or about two news stories per week).

[4]In using the Vanderbilt Archives, demographic information about sources was limited by the brevity of the newscast descriptions. This prevented the study from considering source ages in addition to source sex.

[5]The rather surprisingly (to the authors) large number of business-and-economics stories is probably due in part to a coding decision that counted the pictoral presentation of Dow-Jones and NYSE Composite Index data as a ten-second story for each newscast. This alone does not account, however, for the larger proportion of sources representing business and economic interests by professional association.

[6]"No appropriate location" stories are of several kinds; most prominent are "roundup" stories giving no more weight to a particular state, such as weather and "reaction" stories to events, or purely "national" stories such as a political poll. We also need to note that our figures here include commentary as well as news, but commentary accounts for only 1.6% of identifiable content of all kinds and rarely focused on a particular state or included sources as we define them here.

[7]For this study, Lech Walesa was categorized as a dissident political leader rather than a labor leader.

[8]The 8.5% figure is recomputed from Gans' Table 2 (p. 10) and Table 3 (p. 13).

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TABLE 1: Intercoder reliabilities between check-coder and project coders, 1982-1984 network news content study.

	Story Type	Story Focus	Content	Source Code	Source Standing	Source Gender	Total n, Avg. pct.
Coder 1	100%	66%	90%	86%	93%	100%	64 / 91%
Coder 2	100	100	78	89	100	100	68 / 96%
Coder 3	83	83	91	78	78	78	50 / 82%
Coder 4	100	83	78	86	100	100	42 / 90%
Coder 5	100	50	83	75	100	100	42 / 86%
Avg. %	97%	77%	84%	83%	94%	96%	89.5%
n =	30	30	45	47	52	52	266

TABLE 3: U.S. Population (1982 Est.), percent of 1982-1984 news time, attention indices and ratios 1973-1975 (Dominick) and 1982-1984, by region (States in each region listed below). (Population and news time exclude D.C.)

Region	Percentage of 1982 Population	Percentage of 1982-1984 News Time	Attention Index 82-84	Attention Index 73-75	Attention Ratio 82-84	Attention Ratio 73-75
Midwest	23.2	18.7	-4.5	-6.5	.81	.74
Northeast	18.1	22.8	+4.7	+3.5	1.26	1.17
South	13.4	12.4	- .9	+ .2	.93	1.02
Southwest	10.9	8.7	-2.2	-4.2	.80	.58
Pacific	14.3	19.5	+5.2	+8.4	1.36	1.65
Middle Atlantic	7.2	2.3	-4.8	-2.2	.32	.69
New England	5.4	6.6	+1.2	+ .5	1.22	1.08
Mountain	5.2	7.1	+1.9	- .9	1.39	.78
Plains	2.3	1.7	- .6	+1.2	.74	1.60
Total:	100%	99.8%				

Total news minutes: 2,595

Midwest: Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Indiana.
Northeast: New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware.
South: Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee, Florida.
Southwest: Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana.
Pacific: California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawaii.
Middle Atlantic: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia.
New England: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island.
Mountain: Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico.
Plains: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas.

TABLE 4: Percentage state population, percentage news time, attention index and attention ratio, states by region, 1982-1984 weekday evening network news. (Washington, D.C. population and news, "no appropriate location" news excluded.)

	1982 Pop.	News Time	Attn. Index	Attn. Ratio
Midwest				
Illinois	4.96	8.02	+3.06	1.62
Iowa	1.26	1.11	- .15	.88
Missouri	2.14	1.85	- .29	.86
Michigan	3.94	2.67	-1.27	.68
Ohio	4.67	2.72	-1.95	.58
Minnesota	1.79	1.01	- .78	.56
Wisconsin	2.06	.79	-1.27	.38
Indiana	2.37	.50	-1.87	.21
Northeast				
New York	7.65	17.96	+10.31	2.34
Pennsylvania	5.14	3.30	-1.84	.64
Maryland	1.85	.64	-1.21	.35
New Jersey	3.22	.88	-2.34	.27
Delaware	.26	.00	- .26	.00
South				
Florida	4.51	6.70	+2.19	1.49
Tennessee	2.01	2.68	+ .67	1.33
Alabama	1.71	1.02	- .69	.60
Georgia	2.44	1.32	-1.12	.54
Kentucky	1.59	.42	-1.17	.26
Mississippi	1.10	.27	- .83	.25
Southwest				
Texas	6.62	7.07	+ .45	1.08
Louisiana	1.89	1.00	- .89	.52
Arkansas	.99	.41	- .58	.41
Oklahoma	1.38	.25	-1.13	.18
Pacific				
California	10.71	17.60	+6.89	1.64
Alaska	.19	.21	+ .02	1.11
Hawaii	.43	.33	- .10	.77
Washington	1.84	1.34	- .50	.43
Oregon	1.15	.04	-1.11	.03
Middle Atlantic				
West Virginia	.84	.38	- .46	.45
Virginia	2.38	1.02	-1.36	.43
South Carolina	1.39	.35	-1.04	.25
North Carolina	2.61	.62	-1.99	.24
New England				
Rhode Island	.41	.91	+ .50	2.22
New Hampshire	.41	.84	+ .43	2.05
Massachusetts	2.50	3.61	+1.11	1.44
Maine	.49	.60	+ .11	1.22
Vermont	.22	.12	- .10	.55
Connecticut	1.37	.55	- .82	.40
Mountain				
Utah	.67	2.71	+2.04	4.04
Arizona	1.24	1.74	+ .50	1.40
Nevada	.38	.53	+ .15	1.39
New Mexico	.59	.58	- .01	.98
Montana	.35	.32	- .03	.91
Wyoming	.22	.19	- .03	.86
Colorado	1.32	.94	- .38	.71
Idaho	.42	.12	- .30	.29
Plains				
North Dakota	.29	.60	+ .31	2.07
South Dakota	.30	.48	+ .18	1.60
Nebraska	.69	.39	- .30	.57
Kansas	1.04	.28	- .76	.27

TABLE 5: Five most over-covered and five most under-covered states, 1982-1984 network weekday evening news, by attention index and attention ratio.

A. Overcovered, by attention index:		C. Undercovered, by attention index:	
1. New York	+10.31	50. New Jersey	-2.34
2. California	6.89	49. Ohio	1.95
3. Illinois	3.06	48. Indiana	1.87
4. Florida	2.19	47. Pennsylvania	1.84
5. Utah	2.04	46. Wisconsin/Michigan	1.27

B. Overcovered, by attention ratio:		D. Undercovered, by attention ratio:	
1. Utah	4.04	50. Delaware	.00
2. New York	2.34	49. Oregon	.03
3. Rhode Island	2.22	48. Oklahoma	.18
4. North Dakota	2.07	47. Indiana	.21
5. New Hampshire	2.05	46. North Carolina	.24

TABLE 6: Domestic news sources, weekday network evening news 1982-1984

n=		
	1. Federal officials	Federal government: 28.2%
248	President or spokesman	
31	Other White House, incl. Vice President	
122	Cabinet official (except defense)	
137	Other U.S. agency head	
54	Senior defense, military, intelligence officials	
28	Senior uniformed military officers	
79	All other military	
26	Astronauts	
248	U.S. Senators and staff	
288	U.S. House of Representatives and staff	
16	Judicial officers, U.S. judges	
96	All other federal government	
1377		
	2. Other government: State and local	State/local government: 7.1%
35	Governors	
47	Other state government leadership	
36	Other state government	
54	Mayors	
59	Other city, county leadership	
117	Other city, county government	
348		
	3. Other government	Other government: 0.7%
6	Actual or alleged violator of law who is a government official	
26	Any other government, n.e.c.	Total government: 36.0%
32		
	4. Political	Political: 4.6%
121	Presidential candidates, other than incumbent President	
17	Presidential candidate staff	
56	All other political candidates, staff	
18	Political party officers	
3	Other political officer or official	Total government plus political: 40.6%
225		
	5. Group/institutional: A. Business	Business: 9.2%
217	C.E.O.s and corporate spokespersons	
104	Other business top management	
42	other business managerial employees	
86	Business analysts and "experts"	
449		

TABLE 6 (continued)

n=	6. Group/institutional: B: Political & social interest groups, labor	Interest groups/ labor: 5.2%
113	Political interest groups & lobbies	
8	Women's groups	
21	Civic and social groups	
32	Civil and human rights groups	
78	Labor leadership	
252		
	7. Group/institutional: C: Other	Group/institutional: Other: 19.3%
78	Religious organizations	
101	Academics and educators	
317	Other professionals	
105	Culture & entertainment: owners, managers, performers	
169	Sports: owners, managers, performers	
97	News and information media: owners, executives, reporters	
15	"Personalities" not elsewhere classified	
63	Other group/institutional, N.E.C.	
945		Total group/ institutional: 33.7%
1646	Total group/institutional	
	8. Private individuals/"Unknowns"	Private individuals: 25.7%
39	Farmers	
39	Protestors, "rioters," strikers, other mass action excluding sports	
85	Other labor	
53	Criminal victims or families of	
22	Crime witness	
62	Criminal defendant	
182	Disaster, accident victim	
22	Other accident, disaster witness	
122	Other victim, e.g., business/government/ social program failure	
87	Consumer	
19	Voter	
1	Grassroots political campaign worker	
13	Sports fan	
87	Participant in bizzarre, odd, unusual activity	
101	Aggregates, other unnamed groups, N.E.C.	
354	Any other private individual, N.E.C.	
1258		
4886	Total identifiable domestic sources	