

Jeffrey Friedman

THE BIAS ISSUE

The issues of academic and media bias raise more than the usual opportunities for misunderstanding and polemic. To preemptively set the record straight, then, let me clarify three points.

1. The “bias issues” investigated here do not involve journalists or scholars deliberately fobbing off one-sided opinions on their readers, viewers, or students. Rather, we are interested in “bias” in the sense of the perceptions of political reality that journalists and scholars take to be uncontroversial, and that therefore honestly, even undeliberately, inform their scholarship and journalism.

Such bias, to the extent that it occurs, is not fostered by any conspiracy, and it is neither avoidable nor objectionable. It simply reflects the prisms through which the people who produce news, scholarship, and other cultural products see the political world. Some such prism is inevitable, given that the world is complicated enough to overwhelm any human observer who tried to grasp it in its entirety. (The answer to such questions as whether supply- or demand-siders are right about marginal income taxes on the rich [Garfinkle below], or whether obscure provisions of federal housing policy have artificially stimulated suburban subdivision [MacCallum below], are hardly self-evident.) Some cognitive filter is needed, lest the world seem a “blooming, buzzing confusion”: such filters are what we are calling “biases.”

2. By implication, there is no unbiased way to perceive politics (or any other part of a complex world). But to recognize this is not to

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Jeffrey Friedman, edcritrev@gmail.com, a senior fellow at the Institute for the Advancement of the Social Sciences at Boston University, may be reached at the Critical Review Foundation, 9639 Requa Road, Helotes, TX 78023.

deny that some biases are false and others, true: the latter illuminate the way the world really is, while the former only seem to do so.

We each do our best to perceive the world accurately. That we disagree with each other about politics means that some (or all) of us must be wrong. But for “wrong” to be a coherent concept, there must be something that is “right”: the truth. Epistemology, then, is not ontology. The fact that perceptions of reality differ does not mean that there is no reality about which we disagree. That each of us has our own perceptions of truth does not relativize the concept, or the actuality, of truth itself.

On the contrary, it is those who object to bias as if it were scandalous who are the inadvertent relativists. The notion that bias is bad and that “balance” is good presupposes that all biases are equally valid opinions, and that the role of the media or of the academy is not to seek—and convey—truth, but to present a menu of opinion-options among which news or education consumers can choose. But choose, according to what criteria? Their uneducated “preferences”? What, then, is the point of education, or of media that are supposed to “inform”?

A bias that distorts the truth is simply a flawed lens on the world. If one thinks that the journalistic or professorial biases discussed here are erroneous, one is contending that the journalists or professors who hold these biases, being human, have erred. The prevalence of error may be lamentable, but that’s the way it is with people: they make mistakes, and that is hardly a scandal. It is certainly not an offense that should, for example, call forth bills of rights that would protect students from being taught what their professors think is true. Given that all professors, like all journalists, think that their opinions are true, they must think that alternative points of view are flawed. Therefore, attempts to force them to “balance” their opinions with those alternatives would simply make them produce biased accounts of “flawed opinions” with which they disagree. This form of bias occurs already, and should not be encouraged through the false notion that there is some way to get a “fair and balanced” view of the world that skips the hard part: listening to divergent viewpoints advocated by their best proponents, even if one must, oneself, come up with better arguments than the best proponents have made.

3. We take no position on the accuracy of the biases discussed in these pages. That is irrelevant to the descriptive question with which we are concerned: How are biases conveyed in modern mass democracies?

The (scarce) scholarship on the subject suggests that there is a division of labor in the production of biases, just as with most things modern. Roughly, the “belief systems” (well-organized biases) that are “transmitted” to the general public originate in acts of “creative synthesis characteristic of only a minuscule proportion of any population” (Converse 1964, 212, 211), so there must be bias transmitters who have somehow, themselves, been taught the biases they transmit.

In tracing the path from the creative synthesizer of an ideology to the transmitter of ideological biases, and thence to the general public, one needs at least a general idea of the content of the bias being transmitted in a given case. Hence the research published here, aimed at establishing the biases being transmitted in the contemporary United States. If our authors were studying a different culture, the biases might be different, but the overall path of their transmission might be similar.

With the preliminaries out of the way, what is it that our authors have discovered? Nothing very surprising. In the best tradition of social science that uses advanced statistical techniques to demonstrate what is already evident to anyone intimately familiar with a topic, our authors find that the biases of academic and news-media personnel in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century are overwhelmingly “liberal.” This should not shock anyone who has read or watched the American news and cultural media; or who has taught or been taught in American universities, attended faculty meetings at American universities, read American scholarship, or studied the list of academic books published each week in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. One of the most telling findings published below is that in universities, the only field in which the adherents of left-wing views seem to be outnumbered (at least using the imperfect measure of party affiliation) is “military/sports” (Cardiff and Klein below, 246).

Given the unsurprising nature of our findings, why is it that they have already, prior to publication, attracted such attention? Presumably it is because previous reports of liberal media and academic bias have tended to be anecdotal, and in our positivistic culture this is sometimes taken to mean that such reports are “unscientific” and therefore of no account.¹ This view is triply erroneous. It conflates what is true with what is scientific; it conflates what is scientific with what has been proven; and it conflates what has been proven with what has been demonstrated statistically. But many truths are not scientific, many scientific truths have not yet been “proven” (indeed, no truth is ever “definitively” proven), and there is nothing unscientific about truths that

are proved anecdotally. The truth is what is real, and what is real is not always perceivable, let alone quantifiable.

In the case of academic and media biases, fortunately, the realities in question, being mental states, sometimes produce *observable* behavior. Still, the most important of such behaviors—the content of what is produced by journalists and professors—mightily resist statistical measurement, because they vary from individual to individual, as do most phenomena in the “human sciences.” The biased gestures, inflections, and phrasings (as well as the biased arguments and interpretations) that one can observe in a classroom or on a television screen can be reduced to statistics only by being drained of the peculiarities that often give them force—and that make them “biased” to begin with.² The very same words spoken by different newscasters or professors may convey very different messages.

Few of our writers directly confront the question of content, even though that is what really matters. The difficulty lies in how to “measure” content other than by repeating the anecdotes that are usually considered unscientific—and that are usually the province of partisans. (Even “content analysis” must be coded by someone, who is thereby homogenizing anecdotes into interchangeable statistics, and is doing so in a potentially biased fashion.) Thus, our statistical research should be interpreted as inviting the reader who does *not* have at hand a rich storehouse of anecdotal data to infer from numerical data the particular, variegated content of what is taught in the classroom and broadcast on television news. The recommended chain of inference starts from professorial and journalistic behavior that, drained of particularity, is therefore amenable to statistical analysis: academics’ voter registration (Cardiff and Klein below); social scientists’ answers to questionnaires about their public-policy beliefs (Klein and Stern below); and journalists’ use of certain sources (Groseclose and Milyo below).

Such methods may help answer the positivist insistence that one “prove” bias, but our authors have their own acknowledged biases, which color their methods and their interpretation of the proper inferences. For example, Klein and Stern asked social scientists a series of questions about public-policy issues that are often of concern solely to libertarians, and they found (unsurprisingly) that the vast majority of academics do not share these concerns. Outside of economics departments, moreover, public-policy issues of any kind are rarely discussed in the classroom, so for these findings to matter to non-libertarian readers, the inference must go, say, from the professors’ non-libertarian eco-

conomic-policy views to broader attitudes about capitalism that would, in turn, probably be reflected in anticapitalist teaching that doesn't touch directly on public policy, and that thus might (by a further inference) produce students who will go into the world of policy debates biased to the left. Thus, the libertarian and public-policy lenses used by Klein and Stern do not deprive their results of interest, once it is recognized that statistics *never* speak for themselves. It is not unreasonable to infer³ from Klein and Stern's statistics that, for example, historians who favor the minimum wage will tend to portray its early twentieth-century enactment as a victory for working people, and that their students will go into the world with inferences of their own, derived from such teachings.

Would such teachings constitute an intrusion of the professors' politics (or of the similar convictions of journalists) into the classroom (or the newsroom)? Of course it would. Would this intrusion be unwarranted? Not according to the professors' (or the journalists') perceptions of the truth. In this light, Klein and Stern's (and Cardiff and Klein's) most interesting finding may be that *economists*, although still predominantly liberal, are far less so than are other social scientists. The explanation is not far to seek: economics has long been the home of doctrines—such as Adam Smith's—that tend to challenge such “obvious” ideas as remedying poverty with minimum wages. Or, put differently: the ideas taught to economists may encourage different biases than do the ideas taught to historians—and, judging from Klein and Stern's data, economics may encourage different biases different than what is taught in all other fields.

Studies such as Klein and Stern's, therefore, should lead directly to research on the intellectual history of the ideas that dominate the various social-science disciplines, and of modern Western cross-disciplinary political culture. But recognizing the importance of ideas in determining people's political behavior is far from routine in social science, and intellectual history is deeply out of favor in departments of history. Thus, academics rarely perform even elementary research into the ideas broadcast to the public by the mass media—and even less research on the origins of their own biases. The possibility that the way anthropologists, economists, historians, political scientists, psychologists, and sociologists see the world is not simply an obvious reflection of the realities they study; that scholars in these fields *have* “worldviews,” let alone biases, let alone that these might have been transmitted to them by their formal education, or by their informal consumption of popular

culture—these possibilities do not seem to occur to them. Thus, the analysis of politics and other cultural phenomena is in such a primitive state that it falls to an underfunded, chronically late interdisciplinary journal with no institutional home to promote the analysis of such basic issues.

The Left-Right Consensus on the Conservative Revolution

Anyone familiar with the conventional wisdom about American politics in the postwar era may find reason to wonder how journalists' or academics' liberal biases could matter—regardless of their existence. After all, have we not now experienced for a quarter century a massive public “shift to the right,” suggesting that the public must be immune to the allegedly liberal biases of journalists (let alone the biases of those cloistered in the ivory tower)?

This conventional wisdom is comforting to both the left and the right, which have switched sides on the question of who is in the vanguard of history.

The left, which aims to liberate the oppressed, was never well suited to the twentieth-century claim that in the Communist countries, the oppressed had actually been liberated—and, indeed, had gained political power. After the fiasco of seeing regimes making this claim turn out, in every case, to be vast instruments of oppression, the left's opposition to “power” has returned with a vengeance. The left cannot tolerate political success, since the persistence of social problems after perceived success would imply that there might be something wrong with left-wing solutions to them. Therefore, what has been done is never enough, and “powerful forces” must be standing in the way of fundamental change. In a democracy, however, these forces must have the ability to fool the people into voting against their interests. In its own imagination this leaves the left, however temporarily, as an unpopular minority. (Pre-1917 Marxism was able to maintain both the image of beleaguered intellectual elite and that of tribune of popular revolt by projecting the revolt into the future, after the masses had woken up to the oppression the intellectuals had already noticed.)

Meanwhile, conservatives have eagerly abandoned the view that they were “standing athwart history and shouting Stop!” Starting in 1980, they seized the mantle of a popular movement that expresses the masses' electorally summoned “common sense.” The new left-right

consensus, then—at least in the United States⁴—is that liberalism is the ideology of the politically sophisticated elite. This is half of the truth: the other half is that the tenets of liberalism are, in the main, generally accepted by the mass public, too.

That simple fact was masked by the election and re-election of Ronald Reagan, and the subsequent elections of both Presidents Bush, which were taken to signify the popular triumph of conservatism. The overinterpretation of elections as ideological “mandates” is a chronic tendency in democracies, which rest on the assumption that the public knows what it is doing when it votes. Vast bodies of public-opinion research, however, have shown that this assumption is false. Indeed, only tiny fractions of the public (in any country) have the slightest familiarity with politics at all, let alone with belief systems of the complexity that a Ronald Reagan’s “conservatism” represents.⁵ Thus, opinion surveys reveal that neither in 1980 nor thereafter did the American public have any idea of Reagan’s radically anti-government agenda—and they reveal that if the public had known about Reagan’s positions on specific issues, it would have disagreed with most of them (Schwab 1991, ch. 1).

Far from voting according to ideological or policy agendas, most members of the public vote according to such criteria as blind party loyalty and the “nature of the times” (Converse 1964). The nature of the times in 1980 was perceived to be worse than it had been since the Great Depression. Unemployment, inflation, and interest rates—combined into what Reagan called “the misery index”—were all in double digits. The media harped relentlessly on the continued “hostage crisis” in Iran, and President Carter was blamed for an attempt to rescue the hostages that produced only a crash of U.S. aircraft in the Iranian desert.

Yet despite all of these advantages, Reagan won only a bare popular majority in 1980 (as so often occurs, the Electoral College exaggerated this victory into a “landslide”). It is true that in 1984 Reagan received 59 percent of the vote, but this genuine landslide followed a notably non-ideological “Morning in America” re-election campaign, in which Reagan’s advertisers contrasted the sunny nature of the times (the hostage crisis had ended, the economy had recovered) against the dark days of Carter—and his vice president, Walter Mondale, Reagan’s 1984 opponent. In 1988, George H. W. Bush, no conservative but a sitting vice president “presiding” over continued good times was elected, just

as Converse might have predicted. For similar reasons, Bush was deposed in 1992, when the media misreported a recession that had ended long before the election as persisting (Buell 1998, 220). In 2000, Bush's son received half a million votes fewer than the Democrat, and leftist Ralph Nader won an additional 3 million. Finally, in 2004, George W. Bush was re-elected as a wartime leader, not as a conservative. Thus, there is no more evidence in the election results than in the opinion surveys to suggest any right-wing revolution in public opinion.

Accordingly, U.S. domestic policy since 1980 has continued its leftward drift, with the size of government growing by every measure—regardless of who controls the White House or Congress. Republicans who tear out their hair at the complicity of Bush and the GOP Congress in responding to every problem with a government solution might consider that these are politicians doing their best to listen to their constituents—even if they fail to do so as eagerly or persuasively as the Democrats.

Any doubts about the liberal inclinations of the U.S. public should be dispelled by the current popular support for government action against oil companies, so reminiscent of the 1970s. When 60 percent of the public “finds oil companies responsible for rising gas prices” (Harwood 2006), how much of a free-market revolution in public opinion can there have been?⁶ What Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rodgers (1986, 43, 53) wrote twenty years ago is still true:

Americans are opposed to big government, and respond favorably to the myths and symbols of competitive capitalism in the abstract. When it comes to assessing specific government programs or the behavior of actual business enterprises, however, they support government spending in a variety of domestic areas and are profoundly suspicious of big business. . . .

Within this structure, moreover, the trend in public opinion over the past generation has been toward greater liberalism.

The Ferguson-Rogers view, which has been borne out by more scholarly analysts,⁷ is, if anything, all too consistent with the possibility that liberal media bias—if it exists—affects public opinion. The media would, in this model, be the literal “transmitters” of liberal ideas to the public. The small body of research on the topic⁸ has consistently shown news-media personnel to be overwhelmingly liberal, as confirmed by

(anecdotal) impressions of the content of the news, and by statistical exercises such as those discussed by Groseclose and Milyo below.

But if liberal media bias is real, and if it pushes public opinion to the left, then how is it that Republicans are ever elected? There is also a left/right consensus about the irrelevance of media bias, and it contains conflicting answers to this question.

The Left-Right Consensus on the Irrelevance of Media Bias

The few liberal scholars who discuss the matter tend to deny that liberal media bias is real—usually either because it hasn't been “statistically demonstrated”; or, as in the case of Herbert Gans, whose classic book is critically scrutinized by William G. Mayer below, because the content broadcast by the media is *less liberal than it could be* (which is necessarily true, but irrelevant to the question of whether the media pull the public leftward).

In stark contrast, media personnel themselves seem to realize how liberal they are (e.g., Lichter et al. 1986, 28), but they deny that their liberalism affects the content of their work. Journalists seem to think they can leave their biases at the newsroom door, as if—just as in the imaginings of some of their right-wing critics—bias is deliberate and can be removed at will, like a sweater. Meredith Vieira, the new co-host of the “Today” show—who once exclaimed on “The View” that “the entire pretext for war” was “built on lies,” and who marched in an anti-war protest because of how “upset” she was about it—has reassured her viewers that while “there's nobody that doesn't have biases one way or the other,” she can be counted upon “to put those aside” (Vieira 2004a, 2004b, 2006).

Conservatives, meanwhile, generally argue that while media bias does affect the content of “mainstream media” news, it has little effect on public attitudes: the people's common sense allows them to ignore media bias, or to turn for relief to conservative media such as Rush Limbaugh or Fox News Channel (which, conservatives fail to realize, have audiences that are dwarfed by those of the broadcast networks and National Public Radio). The conservatives thus tend to assume that liberal⁹ media bias is easily detectable by members of the public who, the survey research shows, generally don't even know what “liberalism” means (e.g., Converse 1964). As with the comforting conservative notion that the left-wing doctrines taught in American classrooms are so

obviously absurd that students see right through them, those on the right who scoff at the effect of media bias are guilty of underplaying the complexity of the political world, and thus its susceptibility to multiple, equally plausible interpretations. They fail to realize, for example, that their own conservatism is a bias that did not emanate directly from the world as a set of self-evident truths, but was taught to them by somebody. Had they been taught different biases, formally or informally, they would now have very different versions of “common sense”—as might college students and viewers of the “Today” show, had they been influenced by conservative professors and journalists instead of liberal ones. Note, however, how neatly the conservative view fits with the democratic pretense that the people, not “elites,” are in charge.

A less epistemologically naive reconciliation of Republican electoral victories with liberal media bias would try to take account of the scholarly findings about public ignorance of politics in general, and of ideology in particular. We might, for example, accept that journalists are sufficiently more liberal than most members of the public that they will often disagree with the public’s electoral decisions—but not because the public is immune to journalistic infusions of liberalism. Rather, liberal news-media bias may be real and effective, *to the extent that the public pays attention to the news*. But in most cases, the public is so inattentive that it takes years of media pounding for media biases to shape public attitudes on any given issue or office holder. Were the public more attentive, it would catch up to the media’s most recent version of liberalism faster.

This theory would account for the public’s slow drift to the left over time (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1992)—and to the Republican party’s ability to win public approval only by following this drift. Media bias (in whatever ideological direction) matters, then, but more subtly than can be detected in election results alone.

In future issues of this journal, we will publish and debate empirical research that tries to test this (and other) theories about media bias and “media effects”—the scholars’ term for the ability of the media to shape public opinion. For now, I will make a purely philosophical argument in favor of both media bias and media effects, in the form of two rhetorical questions. *How else would people learn about the political world, if not through the media? And how can a mediated version of a complicated world fail to convey a selective (biased) picture of it?*

Only if politics were graspable in all its detail—meaning, given the

scope of modern politics, only if the entirety of human existence were simple—would we escape the need for the political world’s *mediation* to us by other people. Anything short of complete comprehension entails that somebody will transmit a partial picture of the political world to us: a picture that highlights whatever is, according to some tacit or explicit criterion, more important than what the picture leaves out. The selection criterion is the transmitter’s “bias.”

Bringing in Academic Bias

Nothing about the model just presented dictates that media bias will be liberal, or even that the carriers of bias will be the “mass” media: parish priests used to mediate the world to their parishioners. The form taken by the media, and the outlines of the picture they paint, are contingent, historical matters. But regardless of whether the media are conservative, liberal, or libertarian; whether the mediator is a parent, a teacher, a newscaster, a writer, a filmmaker, or a preacher; whether “the news” is delivered by gossip, newspaper, radio, television, or Internet—the general theory is that the biases of those who mediate the world to us shape our perceptions of it.

The *differences* among the biases displayed by those in economics versus those in other academic disciplines put paid to psychological explanations of academic liberalism—such as Robert Nozick’s (1997) claim that academic liberalism amounts to the adult residue of smart kids’ resentment that intelligence is not rewarded by capitalism as handsomely as it was in school. Likewise, the differences in the biases of, say, Fox and Al Jazeera should make us doubt pat explanations of liberal media bias as stemming from journalists’ innate inquisitiveness or their inherent desire to stand up for the little guy, rather than from cultural sources that vary with time and place. A striking fact about American journalists, for example, is that since World War II, they have virtually all been college graduates (Hess 1991, 60). It is safe to assume that in college, they received an education far different from that of most Arab journalists, and different from that of most prewar American journalists as well. If our authors are right about the direction of *academic* bias, is it so far-fetched to think that journalists who were required by their professors to read a steady diet of left-wing texts may have come away from the experience with left-wing views?

The only barrier to accepting such a model is the academic’s convic-

tion that his is a lonely voice that could not possibly find an echo in his students or readers. What power could a mere professor have when compared to that of “the state” and “the corporations”? But corporations can sell things only to ready buyers. And the state, in a democracy, is constrained (when the public is paying attention) by the voting public’s views—over which the state itself has no influence that is unfiltered by cultural media.

Who, then, shapes public opinion if not those who run those media? And who more powerfully shapes the views of media personnel than academics if, to a man and woman, media personnel are college graduates? Nobody but the most extraordinarily inept teacher can have failed to notice that teaching works. Students learn the theories they are taught. If those students go on to become journalists, the theories they have learned will stand ready to guide their selection of which aspects of the world are worth mediating to a mass audience, and how those aspects should be framed.

If this model is correct, then the academic study of politics would have to be radically reconstituted, with the media more important than any other institution.

Murray Edelman was, as Stephen Bennett points out below, a rare bird in calling attention to the autonomy of cultural mediations of politics. His view differed from the model offered here only in suggesting that politicians and public officials directly manipulate public opinion—without mediation. The “mass society” framework that Mark Fenster shows Edelman to have used makes little allowance for intellectual elites to be causally aligned with the anti-intellectual masses, and Edelman’s left-wing ideological framework, emphasized by Bennett and DeCanio below, seems to have predisposed him to overlook the role in symbol generation of anyone but, broadly speaking, government officials and business interests. Still, Bennett and Fenster point out that in Edelman’s most recent work, both elites and masses are ultimately the playthings of symbols that have a life of their own. This opens the door to mapping the history of the ideas that exercise a trickle-down influence on public opinion by way of the beliefs transmitted from belief synthesizers to educators, from educators to media personnel, and from the media to the masses.

Liberal and conservative ideological resistance to this model will probably be as stubborn as positivist, sociological, and democratic biases against it. There is no getting around the ideological touchiness of the bias issue, given the deep hold of the left- and right-wing variants of

populist disregard for the influence of *ideological* elites. But if, as Edelman (1964, 172) had it, “direct knowledge of the facts” of politics is inaccessible, then people’s political beliefs *must* be mediated to them by ideas about politics that come from somewhere other than the facts themselves. Even if one ends one’s study of the issue by concluding that in the modern world, this somewhere is not the realm of ideological elites who shape public opinion, there would be good reason to focus attention on the issue of elite political bias—if only to guard against the possibility that one’s own biases may have predetermined that conclusion.

NOTES

1. One of our authors, Mayer, enunciates the same view. But fortunately, he not only complains about the “anecdotal” nature of the writers he criticizes, Ben Bagdikian and Herbert Gans; he subjects the anecdotes to withering scrutiny, showing that Bagdikian and Gans tendentiously interpreted or misreported their evidence. The process of conjecture and refutation in which Mayer is engaged is just as scientific when it takes place at the anecdotal level as when it involves statistics; indeed, statistics are simply compilations of anecdotes.
2. In twenty years of teaching in history and political science departments at Barnard, Berkeley, Dartmouth, Harvard, and Yale, I was only twice privy to colleagues’ teaching of “conservative” texts. These incidents illustrate the danger of non-anecdotal research in this area.

Once, in a course on the history of political thought, Burke was defended; but the defense was inept (due in large part to Burke). And once, in a course on social-science methodology, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* was required reading, but the lectures and discussion sections, conducted by left-wing scholars, emphasized (so as to ridicule) Smith’s naive notion of a natural “propensity to truck and barter,” skipping over (what I consider to be) his far more profound explication of the inadvertently “altruistic” consequences of the butcher, baker, and brewer’s pursuit of self-interest. Had these two anecdotes been caught in a statistical net, they would have counted as “conservative,” but they had the actual effect (in the first case, unintended) of making the students in the courses more liberal.

Similarly, statistical analysis of course syllabi would surely reveal tens of thousands of courses in which such authors as Marx or Foucault are required reading. But I myself have frequently taught Marx and Foucault—in order to point out fundamental logical errors and unwarranted assumptions in the texts. Statistical analysis alone could not tell *how* I teach Marx and Foucault, so innocent analysts might misconstrue my courses as cases in which these authors are presented as discoverers of great truths. The multitude of courses in which such authors are taught might, for all the statistics tell us, likewise be

debunking exercises. (That, at least, is a logical possibility—although in my experience it is far from what actually happens.) One’s interpretation of such statistics will be filtered through the lens of anecdotal experience, and that is as it should be: reality must be interpreted, and one is properly suspicious of interpretations that fly in the face of (what seems to be) one’s own experience.

3. Or so my experience, filtered through my biases, suggests.
4. The overinterpretation of electoral results also produced the conventional wisdom that the (non-majority) election and re-election of Margaret Thatcher in Britain, and the later adoption of “neoliberal” policies worldwide, heralded a global popular embrace of free markets. The scholarship never supported this view. For instance, Borchert 1996 showed that European neoliberalism was the province of state elites, not the masses. Stokes 1998 demonstrated the same thing about South American neoliberalism (only by normative assumption concluding that the masses must have retroactively endorsed neoliberal reforms).

The recent popular rejection of elite attempts to impose genuine neoliberal reform in Europe, and the leftist sweep through South America in reaction to the myth that neoliberal reforms were actually implemented there, should not have been necessary to expose the implausibility of the notion that the masses of either continent had suddenly become readers of Smith, Milton Friedman, and F. A. Hayek. But the clear-headed analysis of politics is difficult given the cultural pressure, in democratic societies, to interpret electorates’ and governments’ behavior as being aligned with each other, in accordance with democratic norms.

5. The modern originator of this line of research was Philip E. Converse, whose “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics” (1964) will be republished, with extensive commentary and his own reflections, in the next issue of *Critical Review*.
6. “Conservatism” also has cultural and foreign-policy dimensions, of course, but readers are invited to reflect on whether the last quarter-century has not in fact seen a growing tolerance of personal freedom and a diminished appetite for foreign intervention, contrary to the usual conservative positions. On the other hand, it is true that Reagan’s 1980 election was preceded by a huge spike in public support for “doing more on defense” (Shapiro 1998, Fig. 6)—presumably due to the U.S. military’s inability to end the Iranian “hostage crisis.”
7. On the increasing de facto liberalism of American public opinion over time, see, *inter alia*, McCloskey and Zaller 1986, Bennett and Bennett 1991, Stimson 1991, and Page and Shapiro 1992.
8. The best study of news-media liberalism, covering journalists’ beliefs, the effect of these beliefs on journalists’ work process, and the content of the work itself, remains Lichter et al. 1986—long since out of print, and never accorded the academic attention it should have received.
9. Partisan bias may be a different matter. People are not so blind that they can-

not detect Katie Couric beaming at the Democrats she interviews, and snarling at the Republicans. They may perceive this as “liberal bias” by equating liberalism with Democratic partisanship. But even an awareness of partisan bias will leave all but the most ideological viewers (a tiny proportion, which Converse put at less than 3 percent of the public in the 1950s) vulnerable to persuasion by less recognizable forms of bias in the selection and presentation of stories and interviews that have no partisan content.

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