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MC 101

## **Bias in the News: A Comparative Analysis of Winter Storm Blair Coverage**

In the first week of January 2025, Winter Storm Blair swept across the United States, causing significant disruption, widespread power outages, travel delays, and multiple fatalities. This event was covered by several national media outlets within days of each other. While the core facts of the storm remained consistent across reports, the presentation, emphasis, and framing varied notably depending on the source. This paper examines the differences in coverage by The Weather Channel, CBS News, and ABC News to identify any ideological or editorial biases. In this paper, I will argue that while none of the articles exhibit overt political bias, they do reflect subtle editorial biases in tone, focus, and source usage, which shape public perception of the event.

The Weather Channel article, published on January 7, 2025, used a headline that immediately stressed the storm's severity: "Winter Storm: Widespread Power Outages, Travel Delays, Multiple Dead." The language is sharp and impactful, with words like "widespread," "multiple dead," and "delays" creating a sense of crisis. The report emphasizes the extent of the damage, particularly focusing on infrastructure failures and emergency response. "At least 10 deaths were blamed on the storm that shut down interstates, caused thousands of airport delays

and racked up more than 350,000 power outages from Kansas, Missouri and Illinois into Virginia, Washington and Maryland" (The Weather Channel Winter Storm hits D.C., Maryland, Virginia). Sources used include meteorological data, utility companies, and emergency officials. There is little focus on individual experiences or community-level stories. The framing is data-driven and institutionally authoritative, reflecting a top-down perspective. While this approach helps convey the gravity of the situation, it prioritizes structural impact over human narratives. There is no clear ideological bias, but the editorial focus leans toward dramatizing the storm to underscore the need for preparedness and urgency.

CBS News published its article on January 3, 2025, titled: "Powerful winter storm to bring snowy, icy conditions to Midwest, Mid-Atlantic." The tone is predictive and measured. Unlike The Weather Channel, CBS avoids emotive language, instead opting for phrases like "powerful" and "icy conditions." The purpose here is not to alarm but to inform and prepare. CBS News relies heavily on institutional sources such as the National Weather Service and professional meteorologists." As the storm moves out on Monday, hundreds of millions of people in the eastern two-thirds of the nation will be plunged into dangerous bone-chilling air and wind chills all week, government and private forecasters said" (Powerful winter storm to bring Snowy, icy conditions to Midwest, Mid-Atlantic). The framing is entirely focused on future risk and precaution. There is an implicit trust in government and expert agencies, which reflects a broader editorial trend in mainstream journalism that favors expert authority. This article does not show

ideological bias in a political sense. However, its deference to institutional sources and focus on pre-storm readiness indicate an editorial bias that values stability and official narratives. The storm is presented as a manageable threat, emphasizing individual and community preparedness.

ABC News reported on January 6, 2025, with a story titled: "Major winter storm slams mid-Atlantic, closing schools and canceling flights: Latest." The word "slams" immediately sets a tone of chaotic disruption, particularly daily routines. Unlike CBS and The Weather Channel, ABC's article focuses less on weather patterns or infrastructure and more on real-life impacts, such as delayed flights and disrupted commutes. ABC News quotes school officials, airport authorities, and affected travelers. The framing is grounded in personal experience and localized inconvenience. While the article is less technical, it is more relatable. It allows readers to empathize with those affected and imagine themselves in similar situations. This people-first approach reflects a form of soft editorial bias. ABC News prioritizes human interest stories and day-to-day relevance over macro-level impacts or technical assessments. The report assumes that audience engagement comes from seeing themselves in the story rather than understanding meteorological data. "Although federal offices are closed, Congress gathered on Monday for a joint session to certify the results of the 2024 election, the final step before President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration on January 20" (Golembo et al. Major winter storm slams mid-Atlantic, closing schools and canceling flights: Latest). Though not ideological in the political

sense, this editorial perspective aligns with contemporary trends in journalism that emphasize connection over abstraction.

Although none of the three outlets display partisan ideological bias, their coverage differs significantly in editorial tone and emphasis. The Weather Channel emphasizes severity and disaster, adopting an urgent and institutionally driven tone. CBS News focuses on forecasting and official guidance, stressing preparation and expert authority. ABC News highlights real-life disruption and human experience, leaning into relatability and accessibility. These differences influence public perception. A reader of The Weather Channel might feel a heightened sense of danger. A CBS reader may focus on logistical preparedness. An ABC reader might empathize with travelers and commuters. Each framing subtly prioritizes a different value: institutional trust (CBS), immediate survival (TWC), or daily continuity (ABC). These editorial biases are important to recognize, as they shape how audiences interpret information and assess risk. While not overtly political, they can influence public opinion on related issues such as infrastructure investment, emergency funding, or government effectiveness in crisis response.

In analyzing the January 2025 coverage of the winter storm, it is clear that media outlets choose different angles even when reporting the same facts. The Weather Channel emphasizes urgency and damage; CBS emphasizes preparedness through institutional authority; ABC emphasizes human experience and relatability. These distinctions illustrate how editorial

priorities, even without political intent, shape the tone and impact of news reporting.

Recognizing these differences enhances media literacy and encourages readers to critically engage with how stories are presented—not just what is reported but how and why.

## Works Cited

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