

# “Balance as Bias” Revisited: Harnessing the Power of Text-Mining to Understand Media Coverage of Climate Change

Constantine Boussalis and Travis G. Coan\*

Harvard Law School

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## Abstract

Climate scientists resoundingly agree that the Earth is getting warmer and that the rise in average temperature is predominantly due to human activity. Yet, survey data suggest that public perceptions on the science of climate change diverge from the consensus view (Gallup, 2008). While most Americans display general awareness of the threats posed by climate change, concern has precipitated in recent years. One prominent explanation of this divergence is the role of “balanced reporting” in mass media coverage of global warming—that is, reporting which offers a voice to skeptical opinions. However, empirical evidence in support of this explanation relies on a limited number of cases due in large part to dependence on content analysis of news articles via human coding (e.g. Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004; Boykoff, 2011). This paper seeks to expand the scope of previous analyses on global warming media coverage by implementing automated text analytic techniques to determine: (1) levels of information bias; and (2) the emotional tone of all climate change related “prestige press” articles in the United States and Great Britain over the period 1988-2012. We hope to contribute to the literature by offering a set of algorithms which can be used to analyze press reports on climate science in real-time.

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\* *Contact:* 410 Areeda Hall, Harvard Law School, 1545 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138. tcoan@law.harvard.edu