Ben Zauzmer, Daniel Taylor, Jonathan Marks, and Michael Suo present: Media Bias in the 2012 Presidential Election: Did the Media Really Help Obama Win?

After Obama’s reelection on November 6, 2012, Fox News published an article titled ["Five ways the mainstream media tipped the scales in favor of Obama."](http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2012/11/07/five-ways-mainstream-media-tipped-scales-in-favor-obama/)

Everyone seems to know that the mainstream media is biased, but is it really?

We gathered over 30,000 news articles from 2011 and 2012 from a dozen of the top newspapers in the country. After splitting them by candidate, we vectorized the data and used a Naive Bayes classifier to categorize the articles as positive or negative, subjective or objective, and in support or against the candidate.

To optimize the poor fit seen here, we used cross validation to optimize the model in a six dimensional parameter space which resulted in the much improved fit seen here.

As it turns out, this media bias doesn’t exist. There’s very little difference between Obama’s and Romney’s positivity scores.

Furthermore, contrary to the hyperbolic claims of media bias following the 2012 election, we found no consistent differences between the positivity scores across different newspapers.

However, Granger causality scores indicate that there is a relationship between polling and positivity. Instead of the media changing what voters think, it appears to be the other way around. As one candidate rises in the polls, so does the positivity of his media coverage.

One thing that does change as Election Day gets closer is subjectivity – with more opinion articles published overall, the media may appear more biased, but in the end the bias for each candidate cancels out.

The outpouring of media coverage concerning media bias and the effect that differential coverage had on the election's results seems to be overblown. While one can easily point at particularly devisive or slanted pieces, looking at newspaper coverage as a whole there does not seem to be a large difference between the media's coverage of Barack Obama or Mitt Romney.