

UNMASKING THE MYTHS BEHIND THE FAIRNESS DOCTRINE



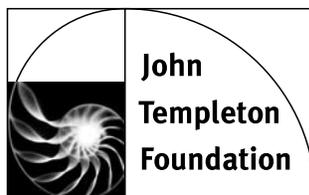
A Special Report from the Media Research Center



Unmasking the Myths Behind the Fairness Doctrine

SPECIAL REPORT





Supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

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Unmasking the Myths Behind the Fairness Doctrine

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

Voltaire

Political activists and even certain U.S. senators have argued that the federal government should reinstitute the Fairness Doctrine, which would require broadcasters to air both sides of controversial issues. Opponents charge that Fairness Doctrine advocates are trying to reduce the impact of conservative talk radio.

Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.) has introduced The Broadcaster Freedom Act (HR 2905), which would bar the Federal Communications Commission from reinstating the Fairness Doctrine.

The controversy touches on America's most fundamental civic values. Do we still cherish freedom of speech, or are some of us succumbing to the tyrannical impulse to stifle the speech of political adversaries? Do our leaders trust us to accept responsibility to govern ourselves, or do they wish to control which information we receive?

Three principal arguments support resurrecting the Fairness Doctrine. First, the **"scarcity" argument** holds that the airwaves are public property with a limited number of broadcast frequencies, so government can and should intervene if the public debate is out of balance. Second, the **"censorship" argument** holds that major corporations are muzzling liberal opinion on the radio, so Americans are not hearing both sides of issues. Third, the **"public interest" argument** holds that the Fairness Doctrine would increase the amount and variety of opinions available to the public.

Are these arguments valid? They are myths.

1. The scarcity argument. Is conservative dominance of commercial talk radio distorting the national debate about public policy issues?

- **Americans have never enjoyed so many professional sources of news and opinion.** Americans can choose from a dozen or more daily network television news shows, 10 separate 24/7 cable news and public affairs channels, 1,400 daily newspapers, and more than 2,200 radio stations airing news/talk
- **The Internet has exponentially increased the availability of news sources.** Thanks to the Internet, Americans are no longer limited to local media. Any St. Louis resident with a modem can read the *Sacramento Bee* and listen to political talk radio stations in Washington, D.C. The World Wide Web has pushed the number of daily news sources available well into the thousands for anybody with Internet access, and 70 percent or more of Americans are on line.
- **Only 7 percent of American adults consider radio to be their main source for news and information.** Fifty-five percent rely primarily on television news, a ratio of nearly 8 to 1. The Newspaper Association of America says 57 percent of American adults read a newspaper every day.

2. The censorship argument. Are Americans hearing both sides of debates about controversial public policy issues, or are liberal voices being shut out?

- **Liberal voices are well represented in talk radio, and are available to anyone with a modem or an FM radio.** Six of the top 25 commercial talk radio hosts are liberals. The commercial Air America network, created to spread liberal ideas, has 55 stations broadcasting over the air. Twenty-six of these stations also stream over the Internet, as do hundreds of public radio stations. Noncommercial public radio has more than 800 stations with a total weekly news/talk audience of 14 million. At least 850 of the nation's 2,200 talk stations air mostly liberal programming.
- **Radio is only one slice of the pie. Major liberal-leaning sources of news and opinion reach a far greater audience than conservative-leaning sources.** Audience reach and circulation statistics illustrate the liberal domination of the five major information media, two of which have no conservative sources:
 - Broadcast TV news, millions/day Liberal 42.1 Conservative 0
 - Top 25 newspapers, millions/day Liberal 11.7 Conservative 1.3
 - Cable TV news, millions/month Liberal 182.8 Conservative 61.6
 - Top talk radio, millions/week Liberal 24.5 Conservative 87.0
 - Newsweeklies, millions/week Liberal 8.5 Conservative 0

3. The public interest argument. Would the Fairness Doctrine increase or reduce discussion about public policy issues? History says speech would be curtailed.

- **When the Fairness Doctrine was in effect, talk radio avoided controversial topics.** Most stations programmed only general talk and advice.
- **Politicians repeatedly have used the Fairness Doctrine to chill speech.** John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson both used the Fairness Doctrine to stifle criticism, suppress the speech of political adversaries, and force radio stations to provide free air time.

Conclusion

Efforts by liberal politicians to restore the Fairness Doctrine bring to mind the worst moment of Israel's King David. David was not satisfied with his many wives and concubines; he also had to have the beautiful Bathsheba, the only wife of one of his soldiers. American liberals already dominate four of the five most important news and information media, and they are determined to take over the fifth medium as well.

America has so many sources of news and information available that no federal regulation of broadcasting content can possibly be justified on the grounds of public interest. The Fairness Doctrine has an ugly history of political abuse directly intended to restrict the free exchange of ideas. As liberals propose and agitate for a resumption of the Fairness Doctrine, history may repeat itself.

Unmasking the Myths Behind the Fairness Doctrine

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Introduction

The mood was sour on Capitol Hill in June 2007. Powerful members of the Senate were humiliated when they were forced to withdraw a wildly unpopular immigration bill that would have provided de facto amnesty to illegal aliens.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) quickly blamed conservative talk radio hosts for the embarrassing defeat. On CNN's *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, Feinstein said, "I listened to talk show hosts drumming up the opposition by using this word 'amnesty' over and over and over again and essentially raising the roil of Americans to the extent that in my 15 years I've never received more hate, or more racist phone calls and threats."

Talk show hosts frequently express opinions that rankle prominent politicians, and occasionally they even whip up inconvenient public outcries that torpedo deals cut in Congressional cloakrooms. But isn't talk radio in effect the national conversation about public policy? Don't our leaders trust us to accept responsibility for governing ourselves by choosing our own sources of information? Aren't radio talkers protected by freedom of speech and freedom of the press? Maybe so, but Constitutional principles won't prevent unscrupulous politicians from seeking a way to punish their political enemies.

Freedom of speech may be a central pillar upholding American culture, but that didn't prevent recently retired U.S. Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), then a member of the Senate Republican leadership, from casting down the gauntlet: "Talk radio is running America, and we have to deal with that problem."¹

So how could the Senate deal with those troublesome talkers? A group of senators started speaking publicly about reviving the so-called Fairness Doctrine, an FCC

regulation suspended by the Reagan administration in 1987. The Fairness Doctrine, first established in 1949, required broadcasters who expressed opinions about controversial issues to give air time to the other side. While its stated intent was to provide balance and increase the amount of opinion available to the public, in practice the Fairness Doctrine stifled free speech by intimidating broadcasters and driving up the cost of broadcasting editorials, and it served as a handy weapon against political opponents.

Efforts to re-implement the Fairness Doctrine were already underway when the immigration debate brought the topic to the surface in June 2007. In fact, such efforts had begun as soon as the FCC ceased enforcing the doctrine in 1987, when the Democrat-controlled Congress passed a bill to reinstate it. President Reagan vetoed the measure. In 1993, Sens. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.), Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) and John Danforth (R-Mo.) introduced the unsuccessful Fairness in Broadcasting Act. In 2003, Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) vowed to pursue legislation to “reestablish the public’s control of its airwaves.”² Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) says that in 2004, he overheard, in a Senate elevator, Sens. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) discussing the need for a “legislative fix” to rein in conservative talk radio. Boxer and Clinton deny the account. However, there’s no denying that in January 2007, as soon as the newly Democrat-controlled Congress was seated, 16 Democratic congressmen led by Hinchey, along with far-left Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), introduced the Media Ownership Reform Act, which would reinstate the Fairness Doctrine. As of May 2008, Hinchey’s official Web site says the U.S. representative is planning to introduce an updated version of MORA “in the coming weeks.”

On the heels of the June 2007 immigration controversy, a report appeared in Washington, D.C. that offered a pretext for restoring the Fairness Doctrine. Written by two liberal advocacy groups, the Center for American Progress and the Free Press, the June 21 paper *The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio* concluded that commercial talk radio is heavily biased in favor of conservatives principally because major corporations, rather than local owners, women and minorities, own the radio stations. The CAP report was clearly designed to provide a rationale for bringing back the Fairness Doctrine.

Efforts to reinstitute the Fairness Doctrine have historically been founded on three arguments:

- **The scarcity argument.** The airwaves are public property and only a limited number of broadcast frequencies exist. Federal intervention in radio content is justified because conservatives dominate the limited radio spectrum and are presumably distorting the outcome of public policy debates. As Lott said, “talk radio is running America.”
- **The censorship argument.** In the words of Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, conservatives have managed to “squeeze down and squeeze out opinion of

opposing views,” thereby preventing Americans from hearing the liberal side on public policy controversies.³

- **The “public interest” argument.** Reviving the Fairness Doctrine would improve the amount and balance of information available to the public. As California’s Feinstein put it, “I remember when there was a Fairness Doctrine, and I think there was much more serious, correct reporting to people.”⁴

Are these arguments valid, or are they myths? We will test the scarcity argument by determining how many news sources are available to Americans, and identifying where Americans turn for their news. We will test the censorship argument by determining the availability of liberal-leaning and conservative-leaning talk show hosts and talk radio stations. We’ll also place the argument about talk radio in the context of the media as a whole, by revealing the audience reach of the principal liberal-leaning and conservative-leaning sources in the five major news media: radio, broadcast television, cable television, newspapers and news magazines. While no single talker, radio station, newspaper or broadcast network is 100 percent liberal or conservative, almost every source leans distinctly in one direction or the other. Finally, we will test the public interest argument by reviewing the history of the Fairness Doctrine in practice.

Myth 1: The Scarcity Argument

Does conservative talk radio really dominate the political landscape? That could be true only if talk radio is the prevailing source of news and information in the United States, a doubtful proposition on its face. Given that the liberal party took control of Congress and many state governments in 2006, the notion that conservative talk show hosts are calling the shots in the United States seems dubious.

The original justification for the Fairness Doctrine, which became public policy in 1949, was the “scarcity” argument. The idea was that the airwaves are public property, and the number of wavelengths available on the public airwaves was limited, so the number of radio stations was also limited. Therefore, the government was obligated to make sure broadcasters provided the public with both sides of controversial issues.

Were Americans really deprived of information in 1949? Given that 2,881 radio stations and 98 television stations existed at the time,⁵ this argument was questionable from the beginning.

In 2008, the number of news sources has increased exponentially. Americans can choose from at least five major forms of news media: radio, broadcast television, cable television, newspapers and news magazines. These sources are multiplied by the gigantic new factor, the Internet, which makes newspapers, magazines and broadcasting stations, wherever they are located, available to every American with a

modem. The World Wide Web itself is home to a tremendous variety of news sources of every political stripe, including news sites, opinion sites, political blogs, news portals, and political activist sites. Alexa, the self-described “Web Information Company,” lists 8,693 news sites as of May 21, 2008,⁶ including 3,723 newspaper Web sites.⁷ In addition, Alexa lists 3,829 “politics” Web sites.⁸

With the advent of the Internet, the number of news sources available to every individual with a modem has soared well into the thousands. So how many Americans have modems? According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism’s annual State of the News Media report for 2008, 75 percent of American adults are using the Internet as of December 2007, up from 70 percent in December 2006.⁹ And how many people with modems are turning to the Net for news? According to comScore Networks, a global Internet information provider, “half of all U.S. Internet users visited news sites” during the month of June 2006.¹⁰ The Internet has profoundly expanded the availability of news media.

Still, the biggest news players on the Internet are the traditional news providers. According to several sources, the Internet’s most popular news destinations are the Web sites of newspapers, television stations, and radio stations, or portals that lead to the sites of these news organizations.^{11, 12, 13} Therefore, we will focus on television, radio, newspapers, and news magazines, rather than Internet political sites and blogs.

Major News Sources Available to Americans

Americans can choose from thousands of news sources available around the clock. While the Fairness Doctrine did not apply to non-broadcast media listed here, and presumably would not in the future, our purpose is to establish that an unprecedented number of news and opinion sources are available to the public.

1. Broadcast Television

Broadcast television offers seven national news shows per weekday, plus local news shows. The three major commercial networks, ABC, CBS and NBC, each broadcast morning and evening news shows, and PBS airs an evening news show. ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox also have affiliated stations throughout the nation broadcasting one or more local evening news shows. Not even counting TV news magazines and overnight and weekend shows, the typical American can choose from 12 to 15 broadcast television news shows every day.

2. Cable Television

Cable television offers 10 national news and public affairs channels available all day long. The typical American cable subscriber can choose from four major cable news and opinion networks, Fox News, CNN, CNN Headline News and MSNBC, which provide

virtually continuous news and opinion programming. CNBC, Fox Business Network and Bloomberg offer business news. In addition, C-SPAN broadcasts three channels with separate schedules of live or recorded news events.

3. Newspapers and News Magazines

1,437 daily newspapers were published in America in 2006.¹⁴ Three major weekly news magazines are available throughout the nation.

Newspaper circulation has been dropping for years, but the newspaper remains a vital source of news in America. Many people who once subscribed to newspapers now read them online. According to the Newspaper Association of America, 57 percent of American adults, or 124 million people, read a newspaper on any given day.¹⁵

4. Radio

Americans can choose from 10,000 commercial radio stations and 2,500 noncommercial stations, according to Music Biz Academy.¹⁶ Inside Radio reports that 2,026 of these stations run a news/talk format, including 1,366 commercial stations and 660 noncommercial stations.¹⁷

Internet radio broadcasting has made more than 1,000 talk radio stations available. Web Radio lists 991 U.S. news/talk stations available on the Internet, along with 54 international stations.¹⁸ According to Arbitron, 21 percent of the public over the age of 12 - 52 million people - have listened to radio on the Internet in the past month, and 12 percent - 30 million - in the past week.¹⁹

With All These Choices, Where Do Americans Turn for News?

According to the National Cultural Values Survey conducted for CMI in December 2006, most Americans say they rely on either cable or broadcast television as their principal source of news and information. Talk radio, while popular, is not a *principal* source of news.

Question: What would you say is your main source for news and information?

Cable TV news	29 percent
Broadcast TV news	26 percent
Newspapers	16 percent
Online Web sites and blogs	14 percent
Talk radio programs	7 percent
Other radio programs	3 percent
Magazines	1 percent

The Project for Excellence in Journalism reports similar results:

Time Spent with the News "Yesterday," ²⁰ 2006 results, average number of minutes		Most Popular News Destinations²¹	
Watching TV news	30	News Source	Percentage of Public
Listening to radio	16	Local TV News	65.5
Reading a newspaper	15	Local Newspaper	28.4
Getting news online	6	National Network TV News	28.3
		Local Radio News	14.7
		Internet	11.2
		National Newspaper	3.8
		Someplace Else	1.3

Is Talk Radio Really Running America?

In sum, traditional news sources – newspapers, news magazines and broadcast television – provide the typical American dozens of news broadcasts and publications to choose from every day. Cable networks and radio news/talk stations provide news and opinion programming around the clock. The Internet pushes the number of news sources available every day well into the thousands. Even the most badly addicted news junkie could not possibly watch, read or listen to every source of news available to the typical American.

Only a small fraction of Americans say they count on talk radio as their primary source of news, so the notion that talk radio is running America is difficult to justify.

The scarcity myth simply doesn't hold water. Nobody can possibly justify re-imposing the Fairness Doctrine on the grounds that Americans have limited access to news, or because conservative talk radio, in consequence, is running the country.

Myth 2: The Censorship Argument

Are Americans being deprived of access to liberal points of view? Any examination of the talk radio universe will reveal that liberal voices are very well represented on the airwaves. Moreover, talk radio is only one slice of the media pie. Within the "elite media," the major television and cable networks, the leading news magazines, the most circulated newspapers, and most popular news/talk radio programming, liberal news and opinion sources reach a far greater audience than conservative sources.

Have Liberals Been Squeezed Out of Talk Radio?

One linchpin in the effort to restore the Fairness Doctrine is the June 2007 joint report by the Center for American Progress and the Free Press, *The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio*. The CAP report analyzes “political talk radio programming on the 257 news/talk stations owned by the five largest commercial station owners,” and concludes that 91 percent of their programming is conservative, and nine percent “progressive.” In an additional analysis of all news/talk stations in the top 10 markets, the CAP report finds that 76 percent of the programming is conservative and 24 percent is progressive.

The CAP report suffers from a number of structural flaws of its own. For example, its principal study reviews only the five biggest radio station owners, who together own only 18.8 percent of the 1,366 commercial news/talk stations counted by Inside Radio. Also, the report overlooks Air America, a 55-station commercial network created deliberately to spread liberal ideas, and at least 800 noncommercial public radio stations that broadcast liberal news/talk programming.

The CAP report fails completely to document any effort by radio broadcasting companies to “squeeze out” liberal opinion. Readers of the CAP report will search in vain for a single example of a broadcaster canceling a liberal talk show or shutting down a liberal station on ideological grounds.

If liberals were being squeezed out of talk radio, then liberal talkers should be difficult to find on the radio dial, especially in the AM commercial wavelengths. The evidence says otherwise.

1. Commercial Talk: Anybody who wants to hear liberal talk radio can find it on the airwaves or over the Internet.

Without a doubt, commercial talk radio is dominated by conservatives, but commercial talk is not an exclusively conservative domain. According to *Talkers Magazine's* March 2008 list of the top commercial issues-oriented talk radio shows, 19 of the nation's top 25 shows are hosted by conservatives or libertarians and 6 are hosted by liberals.²²

Air America's Ed Schultz, America's most popular liberal talker, appears on more than 100 talk stations, including stations in nine of the top 10 markets, according to his Web site.²³ In addition to broadcasting over the airwaves, 26 of Air America's 55 stations stream over the Internet, making commercial liberal talk radio available 24/7 to anybody with a modem.

Internet streaming of broadcasts has expanded the radio landscape dramatically. Broadband connections make it easy to listen to radio on the Internet, and Americans have proven they know how to use their computers as tuners. According to the Pew

Internet & American Life Project, as of March 2006, broadband had expanded into 42 percent of American homes.²⁴ Bridge Ratings & Research reported that as of January 2007, the number of weekly Internet radio listeners was 57 million, or 26 percent of all persons aged 12 and older.²⁵

2. Noncommercial Talk: Liberal programming is available throughout the nation on the “public” airwaves.

The CAP report’s greatest flaw is ignoring noncommercial talk radio. Public radio offers consistently liberal news/talk programming produced by four separate networks. The biggest single player in noncommercial issues-oriented radio broadcasting is the government-supported National Public Radio network.

The Center for Media Research describes National Public Radio as “an oft unreported, but formidable airwaves presence,” the “fourth most listened to radio format,” with “an adult audience 75 percent as large as News/Talk, the largest format in the nation.”²⁶ NPR’s network provides news and talk programming to at least 860 stations.²⁷

A second publicly supported network, far-left Pacifica Radio, owns five noncommercial stations, and is broadcast on more than 100 affiliated stations.²⁸ All five Pacifica stations and at least 300 NPR stations stream over the Internet, making their programming available to the entire nation all day, every day.

A third noncommercial public radio network, American Public Media, claims 15 million weekly listeners and lists 10 news/talk shows on its Web site.²⁹ Rounding out the major public radio networks is Public Radio International, which lists 13 news/talk shows on its Web site. According to PRI, the network’s programming is broadcast or streamed online by 827 affiliated radio stations across the nation.³⁰ Citing Arbitron figures, Wikipedia reports that as long ago as 2002, PRI reached 15.2 million people per week.³¹

Audiences Reached by Major Liberal and Conservative Media

While the biggest voices in radio lean conservative, liberal-leaning news sources in broadcast television, cable television, newspapers and news magazines reach far more people than conservative-leaning sources.

1. Broadcast Television News Audience Reach in 2006

Liberal-leaning sources:	42.1 million/day
Conservative-leaning sources:	0

The biggest news medium in the United States is broadcast television, and every major broadcasting network leans to the left. In 2006, ABC, NBC and CBS news

programs reached 26.1 million people every evening.³² The network morning news shows collectively reached 13.6 million per day, and the liberal-leaning PBS evening news show reached a daily audience of 2.4 million.³³

No major conservative-leaning broadcast television network exists, so conservative-leaning broadcast audience reach is 0.

Audience reach statistics for the morning and evening news programs are not “additive” in a strict statistical sense because the audiences overlap. However, audiences overlap for newspapers, news magazines, talk radio and cable news as well. For simplicity’s sake, we combine the morning and evening numbers in this paper.

Daily Audience Reach, Network Evening News (millions per day)³⁴		
	Liberal	Conservative
NBC	9.5	
ABC	8.8	
CBS	7.8	
PBS	2.4	
Total	28.5	0

Daily Audience Reach, Network Morning News (millions per day)		
	Liberal	Conservative
NBC	5.8	
ABC	5.1	
CBS	2.7	
Total	13.6	0

2. Cable Television News Audience Reach in 2006

Liberal-leaning sources: 182.8 million/month
Conservative-leaning sources: 61.6 million/month

“Wait a minute!” you cry. Am I really saying the three liberal-leaning cable news networks, CNN, CNN Headline News and MSNBC, together draw three times as many people as the single conservative-leaning network, Fox News Channel? Doesn’t Fox have nine of the 10 highest rated shows?

The answers are Yes and Yes. Cable TV ratings are based on the average number of viewers watching at any given moment during the daytime or evening. Fox News

Cable News Average Prime Time Audience³⁵		
Conservative-leaning network in bold		
	Liberal	Conservative
Fox News		1,400,000
CNN	739,000	
MSNBC	378,000	
CNN Headline News	302,000	
Totals:	1.4 million	1.4 million

Cable News Daytime Audience³⁶		
Conservative-leaning network in bold		
	Liberal	Conservative
Fox News		824,000
CNN	472,000	
MSNBC	244,000	
CNN Headline News	218,000	
Totals:	0.9 million	0.8 million

Channel viewers tend to stay with Fox shows for longer periods of time, while the liberal networks' viewers are more likely to watch for a just few minutes at a time, so Fox programs have more eyes glued to the screen at any given moment and Fox shows generate higher ratings. Far more sets of eyes, however, visit the liberal cable networks.

Cable ratings are not unimportant, but measuring average audience at any given moment doesn't tell us what we want to know. Because we're assessing the audience reach of liberal and conservative news sources, we're more interested in the total number of viewers who watch each network.

Cable TV measures total audience on a monthly basis – and the monthly “cumes” tell a different story from the averages. As a group, the liberal-leaning cable networks reach about three times more viewers per month than conservative-leaning Fox News.

Cable Television Monthly Cumulative Audience in Millions³⁷		
Conservative-leaning network in bold		
	Liberal	Conservative
CNN	71.8	
Fox News Channel		61.6
CNN Headline News	57.2	
MSNBC	53.8	
Totals:	182.8	61.6

3. Top 25 Newspapers by Circulation in 2006

Liberal-leaning newspapers	11.7 million/day
Conservative-leaning papers	1.3 million/day
Mixed liberal/conservative paper	2.1 million/day

America's leading newspapers overwhelmingly tilt to the left. Twenty-one of the 25 newspapers with the highest daily circulation lean liberal, three lean conservative, and one paper fits in neither category. The paper with the second greatest circulation, *The Wall Street Journal*, has a famously conservative editorial page, but the *Journal's* news pages are among the nation's most liberal, so we list the WSJ as “mixed.”

Circulation numbers, which emphasize subscriptions, may significantly understate the true newspaper audience. Readership, an attempt to count the actual number of people who read the newspapers either in hard copy form or on line, may double or treble circulation. Readership figures are far less exact, however, so we use circulation figures instead.

CMI's list of top circulation newspapers comes from BurrellesLuce March 2007.³⁸

Top 25 Newspapers by Daily Circulation			
Conservative papers in bold. Mixed Liberal/conservative paper in italics.			
	Liberal	Mixed	Conservative
1. USA Today	2,278,000		
2. <i>Wall Street Journal</i>		2,062,000	
3. New York Times	1,120,000		
4. Los Angeles Times	816,000		
5. New York Post			725,000
6. New York Daily News	718,000		
7. Washington Post	699,000		
8. Chicago Tribune	567,000		
9. Houston Chronicle	503,000		
10. Arizona Republic	434,000		
11. Dallas Morning News	412,000		
12. Newsday	398,000		
13. San Francisco Chronicle	387,000		
14. Boston Globe	383,000		
15. Star-Ledger of Newark	373,000		
16. Atlanta Journal-Constitution	357,000		
17. Philadelphia Inquirer	353,000		
18. Star Tribune of Minneapolis	345,000		
19. Cleveland Plain Dealer	345,000		
20. Detroit Free Press	330,000		
21. St. Petersburg Times	323,000		
22. The Oregonian	320,000		
23. San Diego Union Tribune			296,000
24. Orange County Register			285,000
25. The Sacramento Bee	279,000		
	Liberal	Mixed	Conservative
Totals:	11,740,000	2,062,000	1,306,000

4. Talk Radio Audience Reach in 2007 (estimates)

Liberal-leaning sources	24.5 million/week
Conservative-leaning	87 million/week

No solid, publicly available numbers exist for talk radio audience reach. Only *Talkers Magazine* compiles a list of the top commercial talk shows by size of audience, and many people in the radio industry passionately dispute *Talkers'* numbers and rankings.

For example, *Talkers* estimates Rush Limbaugh's audience at 14 million per week, while the corporation behind Limbaugh's show, Premiere Radio Networks, asserts that Limbaugh reaches 20 million. Some hosts told CMI they accept their *Talkers* estimate, and others say they're undercounted. One company actually said one of its shows is overcounted. For the sake of argument we will use *Talkers'* data, which fall somewhere in the middle of the range of estimated audience figures.

No complete picture of talk radio’s audience reach can ignore the noncommercial side of the equation – public radio. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), the news/talk shows of the four major public radio networks collectively reach 14 million people per week, an audience that rivals the biggest commercial talk shows. The noncommercial public radio networks, unfortunately, do not provide comprehensive audience reach statistics for their shows. Therefore, we are considering public radio as a whole alongside our list of the top 25 talk show hosts. Even factoring in public radio, conservative dominance of news/talk radio is clear: the leading conservative and libertarian-leaning sources reach about 3.6 times more people per week than the leading liberal-leaning sources.

CMI compiled the following list of the top 25 hosts in issues-driven talk radio from *Talkers Magazine’s* 2008 list of top talk radio audiences³⁹ and added data on public radio from PEJ’s *The State of the News Media 2008*.⁴⁰

Top 25 Talk Radio Hosts by Audience Reach, Millions per Week, plus Public Radio

Conservatives are in bold type. Again, please note that some programs adamantly dispute some of these figures as undercounting. Hosts with the same Talkers audience reach estimates are tied in the ratings, but are listed alphabetically and numbered sequentially.

	Liberal	Conservative
1 Rush Limbaugh		14.0* (Limbaugh claims 20)
2 Sean Hannity		13.0
3 Michael Savage		8.25
4 Glenn Beck		6.5
5 Laura Ingraham		5.25
6 Mark Levin		5.25
7 Neal Boortz		4.25
8 Mike Gallagher		4.0
9 Michael Medved		4.0
10 Jim Bohannon		3.25
11 Bill O’Reilly		3.25
12 Bill Bennett		3.0
13 Jerry Doyle		3.0
14 Ed Schultz	3.0	
15 Rusty Humphries		2.25
16 Lars Larson		2.25
17 Alan Colmes	1.5	
18 Thom Hartmann	1.5	
19 Hugh Hewitt		1.5
20 Lionel	1.5	
21 G. Gordon Liddy		1.5
22 Dennis Miller		1.5
23 Stephanie Miller	1.5	
24 Randi Rhodes	1.5	
25 Michael Reagan		1.0* (Reagan claims 3.5)
Public Radio	14.0	
Totals:	Liberal 24.5	Conservative 87.0

5. Weekly News Magazine Circulation in 2007

Liberal-leaning sources: 8.5 million/week
Conservative-leaning: 0

The weekly news magazine medium is dominated by the Big Three: *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*. Like the biggest medium, broadcast television, the news world's smallest major medium is composed exclusively of liberal-leaning sources.

	Liberal	Conservative
Time	3.4	
Newsweek	3.1	
U.S. News	2.0	
Total	8.5	0

Are Americans Really Deprived of Liberal News and Opinion?

After examining the audience reach of major liberal- and conservative-leaning news media sources, the "Squeezed Out" myth – that liberal voices are being squeezed out of radio, so Americans aren't hearing one side of the debate – doesn't hold water.

News/talk radio reaches about 110 million people per week, and the leading conservative-leaning sources lead in audience reach by a ratio of 3.6 to 1. Talk radio, however, is not the only, or even the biggest, news medium.

Liberal-leaning news and opinion sources have no conservative rivals in the biggest medium, broadcast television, which reaches about 42 million people per day. Liberal-leaning sources dominate the circulation of the leading newspapers, about 13 million per day, by a ratio of 9 to 1.

News magazines have a circulation of about 9 million people per week, and all of the big three news magazines lean liberal.

Cable television reaches about 244 million people per month, and liberal-leaning sources dominate cable television audience reach by a ratio of 3 to 1.

Liberal-leaning news and opinion sources dominate four of the five major information media. Though we cannot precisely compare total audience reach because the numbers are calculated for some media by million per day, others by millions per week, and one by millions per month, we can confidently assert that liberal-leaning news and opinion sources reach a far greater audience than conservative-leaning sources.

Myth 3: The Public Interest Argument

At first blush the Fairness Doctrine seems very sensible, even obvious. Who wouldn't want broadcasters to provide both sides of controversial issues? Wouldn't the public benefit from hearing even more opinions?

The historical record, however, belies the assertion that the so-called Fairness Doctrine facilitates more speech. Broadcasters, intimidated by the potential difficulties and expense of providing alternative views whenever they aired a controversial opinion, often chose simply to avoid controversial topics altogether. The Project for Excellence in Journalism, in its report *The State of the News Media 2007*, asserts that the result of the Fairness Doctrine "was that radio talk programs consisted primarily of general (non-political) talk and advice. The big names were people like Michael Jackson in Los Angeles, whose program included interviews with celebrities, authors, and civic leaders."⁴² PEJ observes that "the modern era in talk radio effectively began with the Federal Communications Commission's repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987."⁴³

It's no wonder many broadcasters apparently were intimidated by the Fairness Doctrine, given the ugly history of politically inspired infringement on broadcasters' freedom of speech when the Fairness Doctrine was in force.

- 1963: President Kennedy used the Fairness Doctrine to stifle opposition to a major foreign policy initiative. During the debate over the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the FCC determined that if one side of a controversial issue was presented in a sponsored program, the other side had to be given an opportunity, even if nobody was willing to pay for the time. According to Lucas Powe, Jr., the "Citizens Committee for a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty took as one of its functions the need to counter attacks on radio by the ultra right wing, using as its vehicle the FCC's fairness doctrine..."⁴⁴ The committee requested response time whenever opponents attacked the treaty on the radio. Under Kennedy, the Democratic National Committee became "determined to use the fairness doctrine to counter the radical right."⁴⁵
- 1963: President Johnson initiated monitoring of conservative radio stations, and "the DNC prepared a do-it-yourself kit to enable friends of the DNC to use the fairness doctrine against offending stations."⁴⁶
- 1964: following the GOP nomination of Barry Goldwater for president, former Kennedy administration official Bill Ruder said, "Our massive strategy was to use the Fairness Doctrine to challenge and harass right-wing broadcasters and hope the challenges would be so costly to them that they would be inhibited and decide it was too expensive to continue."⁴⁷ Another former Kennedy staffer, former *New York Times* reporter Wayne Phillips, said, "Even more

important than the free radio time (1,700 minutes) was the effectiveness of this operation in inhibiting the political activity of these right-wing broadcasts.”⁴⁸

- 1969: President Nixon, in an effort to counter hostile press coverage, dispatched FCC Chairman Dean Burch to request transcripts of network commentaries on a Nixon speech, a veiled threat against the broadcasting license renewals of ABC, NBC and CBS.⁴⁹

The Fairness Doctrine has been used repeatedly as a weapon to chill the speech of political opponents. Do the current proponents of the doctrine plan to use it the same way? Statements by the politicians who want to bring it back – for example, Sen. Lott declaring, “Talk radio is running America, and we have to deal with that problem” – strongly suggest that their purpose is to use it again as a weapon. Leading Democrats in the House of Representatives plan to restore the Fairness Doctrine strictly to deny Republicans a perceived advantage in the 2008 election, according to a May 2007 article in *The American Spectator*, “Her Royal Fairness.”⁵⁰ The *Spectator* quotes a senior adviser to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi:

“First, [Democrats] failed on the radio airwaves with Air America, no one wanted to listen. Conservative radio is a huge threat and political advantage for Republicans and we have had to find a way to limit it. Second, it looks like the Republicans are going to have someone in the presidential race who has access to media in ways our folks don’t want, so we want to make sure the GOP has no advantages going into 2008.”

The *Spectator* quotes a second “Democrat leadership aide” saying Pelosi has targeted Rush Limbaugh and the Salem Radio Network, and that Ohio Democratic Rep. Dennis Kucinich’s Government Reform committee staff has begun to investigate Salem. “‘They are identifying senior employees, their political activities and their political giving,’ says a Government Reform committee staffer. ‘Salem is a big target, but the big one is going to be Limbaugh. We know we can’t shut him up, but we want to make life a bit more difficult for him.’” Pelosi and other Democratic leaders have since denied having such a plan.

Conclusion

America does not need the so-called Fairness Doctrine.

Americans enjoy overwhelming, unprecedented access to news and opinion from a practically unlimited number of sources representing every conceivable value system and school of thought. While no individual news medium is perfectly balanced in the variety of opinions it provides to the public, the sheer volume of information provided by the news media, increased exponentially by the Internet, guarantees that anybody can find liberal or conservative takes on public policy issues at any time of day or night. We do not need government to dictate to radio broadcasters, or anybody else, that they must counter their own opinions by subsidizing the presentation of opinions they disbelieve.

Thomas Jefferson said "To compel a man to subsidize with his taxes the propagation of ideas which he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical." Government compulsion of speech is a form of taxation for commercial broadcasters, and for all of us it's a threat to one of our most cherished civil liberties, freedom of speech.

America enjoys such an embarrassment of riches in news and information that Fairness Doctrine advocates on Capitol Hill have opened their motives to question. Is it really conceivable that they are trying to make Americans better informed? Or is it more likely that they want to bring the monster back from the grave in order to hush Rush and his colleagues in talk radio, as Presidents Kennedy and Johnson did to political opponents? Don't they believe the American people, who dictate what succeeds in the market, can be trusted to choose their own information sources?

These politicians need a refresher course in the Constitution, in particular the First Amendment, and in basic democratic principles such as respecting the right of others to oppose you. As Voltaire said, "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it." Greater dedication to free speech would be welcome on Capitol Hill.

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About the Culture and Media Institute

The Culture and Media Institute's mission is to advance, preserve, and help restore America's culture, character, traditional values, and morals against the assault of the liberal media elite. Founded in October 2006 with a challenge grant from the Templeton Foundation, CMI has already attracted attention from the Rush Limbaugh Show, Fox News Channel, CNN and many other news outlets.

Using the unique resources at Media Research Center, CMI is exposing media campaigns against the traditional values of faith, self-reliance, patriotism, marriage, decency, civic pride, gratitude, industriousness and good manners. CMI staffers regularly appear on TV, radio and in print, and publish periodic reports as well as articles for outside publications.

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About the MRC

Founded in 1987, the Media Research Center (MRC) is America's largest and most respected media watchdog group. Its mission is to create a media culture where truth and liberty flourish in America.

The Alexandria, Virginia-based organization brings balance and responsibility to the news media through its News Analysis Division, which documents, exposes and neutralizes liberal media bias; the Business & Media Institute, which audits the media's coverage of economic issues; TimesWatch.org, which monitors the New York Times; and Newsbusters.org, the MRC blog, which exposes liberal media bias 24 hours a day.

The MRC is also home to the Cybercast News Service (CNSNews.com), an Internet news outlet that is dedicated to providing unbiased coverage of the news of the day.

In 2006, the MRC launched the Culture and Media Institute with a mission to advance and help restore America's culture, character, traditional values and morals against the assault of the liberal media elite.

Former CBS reporter and now best-selling author Bernard Goldberg says of the MRC, "The Media Research Center folks don't give the media hell; they just tell the truth and the media thinks it's hell."

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