

UNDERSTANDING MEDIA BIAS OF WIND
ENERGY IN TODAY'S MEDIA: AN
ANALYSIS OF THE WALL STREET
JOURNAL & THE ATLANTIC'S
COVERAGE OF WIND POWER

CRE-402

Wind Energy

October 20, 2014

Instructor: Ian Sinclair

Adam Johnston

Word Count: 949 Words

INTRODUCTION

Media bias from political ideology can distort how society views wind energy as a solution to the climate change and energy crises. Conservatives (centre-right) hold more negative views on wind technology. Meanwhile, progressives (centre-left) paint a rosier description. This analysis will look how two articles from the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Atlantic* succumb to media bias, to please their targeted readers.

BACKGROUND SUMMARY OF ARTICLES

Wall Street Journal (WSJ) author Robert Bryce's "Wind Power Brought to Justice" (2013) makes the case wind technology is evil. Bryce suggests green energy will lose public support, thanks to wind turbines killing birds at two Duke Energy Wyoming wind farms, "expensive" subsidies, and other concerns.

Set in the backdrop of Walnut, Iowa's wind farm, *The Atlantic*'s Christina Davidson's "Wind Power: A New Shade of Green Dominates Iowa Landscape" (2009) showcases how wind technology is right. Davidson envisions the US Great Plains being similar to oil-rich Middle Eastern countries, without the geopolitical concerns and boosting Iowa's economy.

ANALYZING WSJ'S AND THE ATLANTIC'S SPIN ON WIND ENERGY

Media watchdogs have reprehended News Corp. subsidiary WSJ on ignoring environmental events, including September 2014's People's Climate March (Robbins, 2014).

Atlantic Media's *The Atlantic* is more receptive to climate change and renewable energy issues. It's collaborated with other like-minded publications (Climate Desk, 2014) to tell stories on the societal effects of climate change.

According to McCarthy, K.J., and Dolfsma, W. (2014), media uses their political leanings to promote their world social and economic views. Based on McCarthy and Dolfsma's ideas, *WSJ* and *The Atlantic* use their inclinations in rallying their camps.

"Wind Power is Brought to Justice," has many flaws, highlighting dubious claims to rally fossil fuel supporters.

Bryce suggests Duke Energy's guilty plea from two Wyoming wind farms killing wildlife in 2013, is the downfall of green energy across the US, suggesting, "the bubble is about to burst."

However, recent US public opinion research suggests otherwise.

According to a March 2014 Gallop Poll (Moore & Nichols, 2014), 64% of Americans would prefer alternative energy development (wind, solar, biofuels) over fossil fuels. Gallop also said younger demographics (Generation X and Y) showed more support for renewable energy development (80% and 65%) than Baby boomers who are 55 and over (49%).

Bryce, also inaccurately asserts the US wind energy industry receives massive subsidies thanks to the \$0.023/kWh Production Tax Credit, which encourages investment.

However, fossil fuel companies also receive excessive government assistance. According to Oil Change International (2014), US federal and state governments gave \$21.6 billion to oil and gas companies for exploration and development in 2013.

Meanwhile, University of Harvard Economics Professor Joseph Aldy (Levis, 2014) said slashing yearly oil and gas tax incentives, would cut the US deficit by \$41 billion in the next ten years, decrease carbon emissions and put renewable energy on an equal playing field with fossil fuels.

Bryce lastly makes a questionable claim, suggesting substantial avian losses come from wind turbines.

Statistically, this is not the case. Approximately 1 to 2 birds from every 10,000 are killed by wind turbines (Erickson, W.P. & Johnson G.D, 2001). According to Gipe (2004), avian wind turbine killings from a biological standpoint is minimal. Gipe also said environmentalists favor wind energy, and better planning between wind farm planners and conservationists is needed to avoid future conflicts (p. 301).

Bryce's unwillingness to carefully look at facts, solid public opinion research, and making questionable claims discredit any ethos the author has on balanced energy views.

On the other side of the political spectrum, "Wind Power: A New Shade of Green Dominates Iowa Landscape" (2009) from Christina Davidson offers a happier view of wind

power. While not on the same level as Bryce's incorrect analysis, the author does leave some half makes some half-truths about wind power's current potential.

For example, Davidson suggests a Harvard University study where the US Great Plains from North Dakota to Texas can provide “16 times the average amount of electricity consumed by the country,” noting the current grid could not handle that type of power.

However, Davidson does not address directly wind intermittency challenges. Zhang, Y., Wang, J., Wang, X. (2014) suggest it's the biggest problem when adding wind energy into a modern grid. Randomness and intermittency effect all sides of wind power operations (i.e., power quality, ancillary services, and system stability) (p. 256). Zhang, Wang, et al. also argue accurate wind forecasting can increase understanding of intermittency issues, and improve wind market potential.

Henrik Stiesdal of Siemens Energy said in the *Global Wind Report Annual Market Update 2013* (GWEC, 2014) “wind power can’t be a stand-alone solution as it needs balancing energy. For this purpose, gas power remains the most competitive solution.” (p. 9). GWEC also acknowledged transitioning to 100% renewables will take 50 years, requiring fossil fuels in declining amounts along the way (p.11).

Anderson provides a more rose-colored view of wind compared to Bryce while omitting some critical concerns in moving wind energy forward.

CONCLUSION

Both pieces from *WSJ* and *The Atlantic* offer two distinct, political views on wind technology to rally their audiences. Bryce succumbs to falsely suggesting wind energy is terrible on many levels, including future falling public support, high subsidies, and death of wildlife.

Anderson falls short, on not fully addressing wind power’s intermittency concerns, while not acknowledging moving globally to a fossil free world will take decades to complete.

A balanced wind energy article would provide correct truths (creating clean electricity, protecting wildlife, job creation) while addressing some short-term realities (intermittency problems) wind energy has in moving towards a zero carbon powered world.

REFERENCES

- Bryce, R. (2013, November 28). Wind Power Is Brought To Justice. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved October 10, 2014, from <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304465604579218260583305226>
- Climate Desk (2014). About Climate Desk. *Climate Desk*. Retrieved October 12, 2014, from <http://climatedesk.org/about-climate-desk>.
- Davidson, C. (2009, August 10 & 11). Wind Power: A New Shade of Green Dominates Iowa Landscape. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved October 11, 2014, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2009/08/wind-power-new-shade-of-green-dominates-iowa-landscape/23008/> & <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2009/08/wind-power-new-shade-of-green-dominates-iowa-landscape-part-2/23089/>
- Erickson, W.P., Johnson, G.D. (2001). Avian Collisions with Wind Turbines: A Summary of Existing Studies and Comparisons to Other Sources of Avian Collision Mortality in the United States. *National Wind Coordinating Committee*. Retrieved October 20, 2014, from <http://www.osti.gov/scitech/servlets/purl/822418>
- Gipe, P. (2004). *Wind Power: Renewable Energy for Home, Farm, and Business*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Global Wind Energy Council (2014). *Global Wind Report 2013: The Global Status of Wind Power in 2013 and Market Forecast for 2013-2018*. Retrieved October 18, 2014, from http://www.gwec.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/GWEC-Global-Wind-Report_9-April-2014.pdf

Levis, L. (2014, January & February). The Fix is in. *Harvard Magazine*. Retrieved October 12, 2014, from <http://harvardmagazine.com/2014/01/the-fix-in-fossil-fuels>.

McCarthy, K.J. & Dolfsma, W. (2014). Neutral Media? Evidence of Media Bias and Its Economic Impact. *Review of Social Economy* 72(1). 42-54.

Moore, B., Nicholas, S. (2014). Americans Still Favor Energy Conservation over Production. *Gallup Politics*. Retrieved October 12, 2014, from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/168176/americans-favor-energy-conservation-production.aspx>

Oil Change International. (2014). *Cashing in on All of the Above: U.S. Fossil Fuel Production Subsidies under Obama*. Retrieved October 12, 2014, from <http://priceofoil.org/2014/07/09/cashing-in-on-all-of-the-above-u-s-fossil-fuel-production-subsidies-under-obama/>

Robbins, D. (2014, September 22). WSJ's Noxious Climate Coverage Surrounding March. *Media Matters*. Retrieved October 18, 2014, from <http://mediamatters.org/blog/2014/09/22/wsjs-noxious-climate-coverage-surrounding-histo/200842>

Zhang, Y., Wang, J. & Wang, X. (2014). Review of Probabilistic Forecasting of Wind Power Generation. *Renewable & Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 32. 255-270.