

## **Letter to the Editor: Serious Flaws in NewsGuard 'Study' by Media Research Center**

Greetings -- I'm the General Manager of NewsGuard, about which NewsBusters has written recently. Please see below and attached a letter to the editor responding to NewsBusters' recent "study" of NewsGuard's ratings, which we believe is highly flawed. We welcome debate and discussion about our ratings and always try our best to respond in detail to any criticisms.

You may publish the letter on your website if you would like, provided that you agree to publish it in full. (We reserve the right to publish it elsewhere if you choose not to do so, but hope that you will do so.) I personally have a lot of respect for the role NewsBusters and MRC play in the conversation about media bias and credibility, so was surprised to see the study featured--especially without any attempt from anyone at NewsBusters to get our comments in advance of publication.

From: Matt Skibinski, General Manager, NewsGuard

To: Brent Bozell, President of the Media Research Center, and Tim Graham, Executive Editor of NewsBusters.org

### **Re: Flaws in NewsGuard 'Study' by Media Research Center**

Dear Editor,

The Media Research Center recently published what it called a "study" of NewsGuard's rating system in an article on NewsBusters.org titled, "STUDY: NewsGuard Ratings System Heavily Skews in Favor of Left-Wing Outlets." When I first saw this headline, I was alarmed—NewsGuard aims to avoid any kind of political bias by using apolitical journalistic criteria to assess sites. Had we somehow failed to do so?

However, after looking even briefly at the methodology on which MRC's article was based, it became clear that the so-called study was fundamentally flawed, based on a tiny sample of cherry-picked data.

NewsGuard has rated more than 7,500 news and information websites, but the NewsBusters analysis looked only at ratings of 24 websites it defines as right-leaning and 31 websites it defines as left-leaning—meaning the study examined a cherry-picked sample of just 0.7% of the websites we've rated.

Among the most extreme claims in the study is that NewsGuard only has issued perfect 100-point credibility ratings to two conservative websites—Reason Magazine and the Deseret News, the latter of which can hardly be called conservative-leaning to begin with. That claim is simply false and undermines the credibility of the entire study. Dozens of sites on both the right and the left have achieved perfect NewsGuard scores—to take just one example, the Heritage Foundation's DailySignal.com, which has a Green rating and a 100-point score, apparently was not included in the cherry-picked list of sites MRC

reviewed.

In fact, NewsGuard has rated many conservative-leaning websites as highly credible—including the Newsbusters.org site itself, which receives a high Green score of 92.5 out of 100 points. DailyCaller.com, which was founded by Fox News' Tucker Carlson, also has a score of 92.5 out of 100. The Post Millennial has a score of 82 out of 100. Were any of those sites included in the 24 conservative-leaning sites the MRC study analyzed? We don't know, because the MRC article did not include the list of sources it examined.

Conversely, we cannot know if liberal-leaning sites like DailyKos.com, which has a Red rating and a 37.5 score and has complained publicly about its rating, or the Red-rated Courier Newsroom chain of liberal PAC-financed local news sites, were included.

NewsGuard's rating process is designed to be strictly apolitical and to review every site using the same standards. We do that by assessing each site using nine basic criteria that have nothing to do with politics. There is no conservative or liberal way to disclose a site's ownership and financing, to transparently correct mistakes, to label news and opinion articles, or to avoid factual errors--these are basic journalistic standards that have nothing to do with politics. This apolitical approach has led us to rate sites from across the political spectrum as trustworthy, again, including MRC's own website. Similarly, there are sites with poor ratings from NewsGuard on all sides of the political spectrum.

One of the reasons NewsGuard was founded was to create an alternative for consumers in the marketplace to the three entities that also rate the trustworthiness of news publishers: Facebook, Google/YouTube and Twitter. These platforms use secret algorithms with undisclosed criteria to rate news publishers. Neither publishers nor their readers have any idea how each site rates or why. In contrast, NewsGuard criteria are fully disclosed, and the ratings are transparent about why each site passed or failed each criterion.

We may disagree with NewsBusters' article but we think debate about our process is healthy and keeps us accountable. If only NewsBusters could spark a debate about these tech giants' ratings!

I should add that, unlike the tech giants, NewsGuard contacts websites for comment and feedback if it looks like they will fail any criteria. Many websites have improved their journalistic practices after engaging with our analysts; unlike Silicon Valley algorithms, NewsGuard hopes publishers will "game our system" by meeting standards for credibility and transparency.

Sincerely,

Matt Skibinski  
General Manager  
NewsGuard