



[Well, what a shock:](#)

To gauge how accurately [cable news] networks inform their audiences about climate change, the Union of Concerned Scientists analyzed the networks' climate science coverage in 2013 and found that each network treated climate science very differently. Fox News was the least accurate; 72 percent of its 2013 climate science-related segments contained misleading statements. CNN was in the middle, with about a third of segments featuring misleading statements. MSNBC was the most accurate, with only eight percent of segments containing misleading statements. ([h/t Political Wire](#)).

An estimated three people nationwide were surprised.

But I was curious about the way that UCS did its work, because in fairness, it is not an organization that has a great reputation for being, well, fair and balanced. It's a liberal group: I recall in the 1980's that UCS took the lead on fighting for the nuclear freeze. You could favor that or oppose it (I opposed it), but it is a policy choice where scientists did not have an particular expertise to add to the debate.

So I checked the technical appendix for a look at how UCS did the coding, because that is the key. [Here is what it says:](#)

Analysis of the data set-aside for scientific review was blinded and all identifying

information regarding program hosts, guests, and network was removed in order to avoid potential bias. Full blinding of all segments before initial coding could have removed other sources of potential bias; however, the vast majority of non-blinded segments either clearly did not touch on science or were obviously accurate or misleading because the statements were straightforward affirmations or rejections of established science and therefore would not have benefitted as strongly from blinding as more nuanced discussions. A climate scientist reviewed and coded the set-aside segments. When the scientist disagreed with the researchers on how to code a segment or when the researchers and scientist could not agree on how to interpret a discussion of climate change, those segment were coded as “not science” and not further reviewed. These included only a few segments, most of which used humor or satire, which would have been inappropriate to interpret literally. Four segments were reviewed by specialists in agriculture and marine ecosystems for appropriate coding.

I’d give that a B+. Ideally, you want to have people coding the data who are oblivious to the purposes of the study and initial full blinding, I think. Otherwise, you could have bias in the sources and segments presented to the blind scientific reviewers. But UCS’ explanation for its methods is nevertheless credible. And the burden is now on Fox News to explain how and why UCS got it wrong. I’m not holding my breath.

There is a cottage industry growing in the climate politics of people who gravely wring their hands and bemoan the supposed fact that “both sides” distort the climate debate and to same extent. It’s a nice little racket for people who can say that, and a useful way to confuse the public. The only problem is that it’s just not true.