

# Truth, Bias, and Neutrality

Rodrigo Zamith

University of Massachusetts Amherst

# Truth is central to journalism

But it can be a messy, complex thing!

# Realism Perspective

- Realism perspective: Truth is **a judgment** that accurately describes, or corresponds with, the way the world is, **distinct from subjective human perspectives**
  - Dominant perspective among journalists in the United States
  - U.S. journalists typically contend that “facts” exist, and conveying facts is an important aspect of journalism and getting at truth

# Unemployment Rate as Fact



Source

# Facts Can Be Tricky

- When audiences say they “just want the facts,” the question becomes: Which facts?
- There are multiple ways to measure complex facts
- Journalists have to work within confines of time and space
- Journalism isn’t just about listing facts; it’s about making sense of them



# Beware of “Alternative Facts”



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Journalistic bias can be defined as  
prejudice toward certain ideas, issues,  
perspectives, or groups or individuals in  
the production and distribution of  
journalistic content

# Types of Journalistic Bias

- Issue bias
  - Proclivity toward certain kinds of issues
- Framing bias
  - Propensity to frame issues through particular prisms
- Source bias
  - Differential treatment of a story depending on who the main actors are, or proclivity to give certain kinds of sources a larger voice
- Visibility bias
  - Amount of attention or prominence given to certain kinds of issues, frames, or sources



# Neutrality and Balance

- Journalists may combat allegations of bias by claiming to be neutral
  - Claim enacted by capturing and broadcasting oppositional viewpoints and giving them equal weight
  - This is, itself, a bias within journalism (especially in U.S.)

# False Balance and Working the Refs



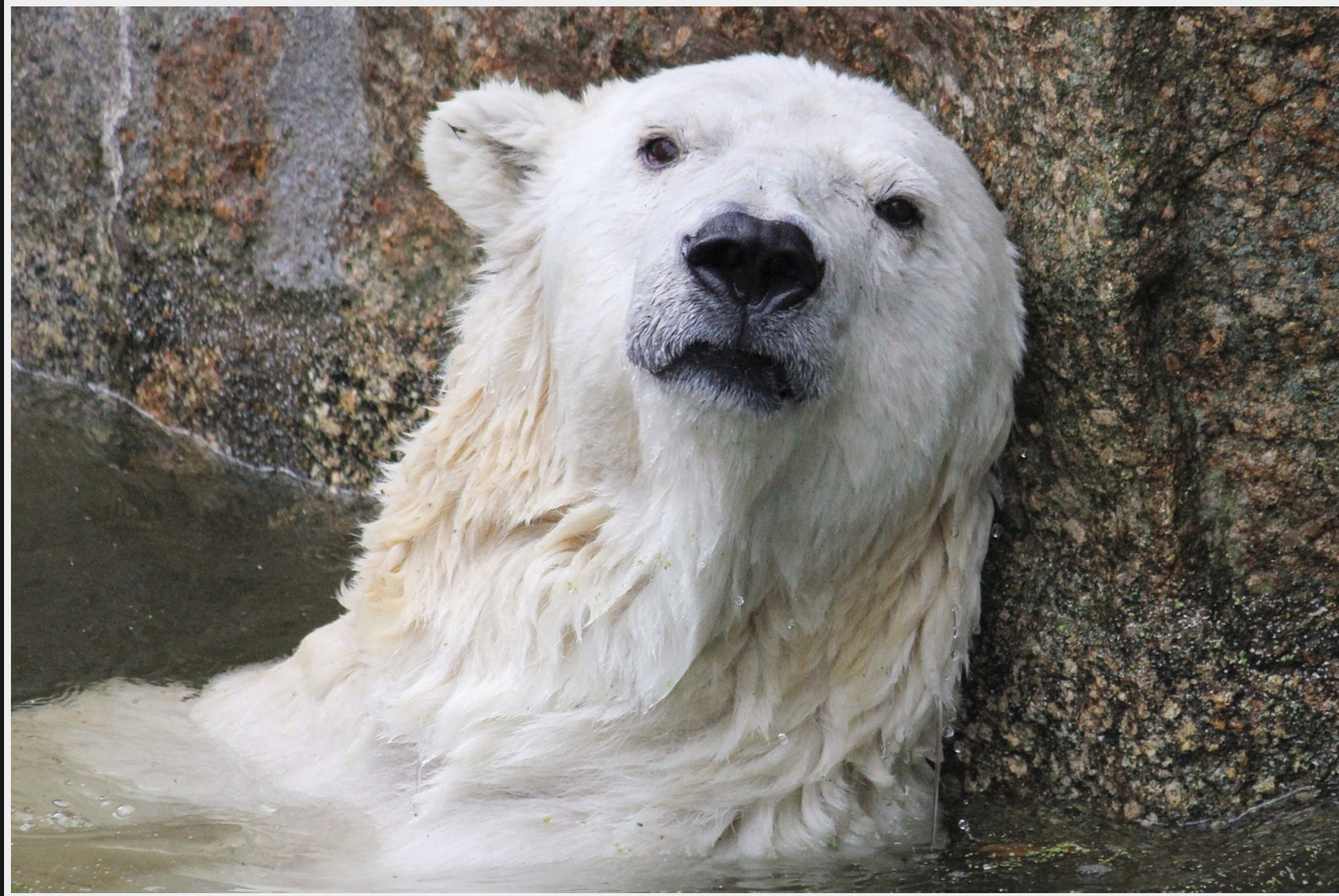
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Accuracy is central to doing journalism

but accuracy is not enough for satisfying the truth



# Accuracy $\neq$ Truth



Source



Accuracy must be supplemented by  
commitment to truth

We can call that commitment truth-seeking

# Truth-Seeking

- Involves an objective approach to journalism
  - Journalists systematically observe and record developments
  - Interview sources with intimate knowledge
  - Verify claims by seeking out generally accepted facts
  - Produce the most plausible representation of the development
- Process does not claim there is no bias; instead, it tries to **mitigate it**
- This process is common in the U.S., but there are other approaches journalists believe allows them to get at truth



# Key Takeaways

- Facts should be considered critically
- There are multiple forms of journalistic bias, such as issue bias, framing bias, and source bias
- In the U.S., journalists typically strive to appear neutral and to offer balanced accounts
- Accuracy is an essential component of truth, but it is not equivalent to truth
- Journalists will typically strive for truth-seeking by systematically using best practices in journalism