



Texas Center for Justice & Equity

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Analysis Exposes Racially Biased Bond Coverage in Houston-Area TV Media

New Report Evaluating Six English- and Spanish-Language Stations Finds Misrepresentation Of the Impact of Bond Reform, Recommends Changes to Transform Local Crime Coverage

(HOUSTON, TX) – A new analysis of Houston-area TV stations’ coverage of crime and bond reform finds that local outlets frequently misrepresent the realities of the criminal legal system in ways that perpetuate negative stereotypes. The [report](#), “The Real ‘Bond Pandemic’: Misinformation, False Narratives, and Bias in the Media,” was produced by the Texas Center for Justice and Equity (TCJE, formerly the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition); its authors are Elaine Hennig, TCJE’s Harris County Project Associate, and Benjamin Greaves, Harris County Project Fellow. The report is the first in a two-part series examining media coverage of bond reform in Harris County to better understand the media’s role in shaping the narrative around changes to the misdemeanor bond process.

“Many local media stations disproportionately publish biased articles in their reporting on bond,” the report reads. “The media consistently provide a platform for opponents of bond reform to represent bond release as a threat to public safety, while frequently failing to contextualize opponents’ claims or feature an alternative view. In cherry-picking and sensationalizing stories about defendants who are arrested while out on bond, media outlets construct a distorted narrative of dangerous releasees, in effect exaggerating the risks of bond reform and minimizing its positive impact. These efforts continually undermine bond reform, serving only to generate fear of people released on bond pretrial.”

The report draws on a content analysis of 226 news articles run by six Houston-area television stations between January 2015 and June 2021. Stories qualified for selection if they discussed bond reform, bond debates, and/or people who allegedly committed crimes while out on bond. While bias in coverage was the primary focus of this analysis, the report’s authors also reviewed 15 other key variables, such as referenced “experts” – like law enforcement, the Harris County District Attorney’s Office, and Crime Stoppers – and the defendant’s race or ethnicity.

“When the local news prominently features opponents of bond reform and the narratives they promote without fair coverage of reform efforts, the public suffers,” said **Jay Jenkins, Harris County Project Attorney with TCJE**. “When local media participates in one-sided coverage of these vital issues rather than sharing unbiased information with their viewers, they are complicit in propagating false narratives and exploiting race-based disparities. Instead of exploring the various failures of the criminal legal system, bond reform is used as a scapegoat that ultimately allows law enforcement and other system actors to avoid accountability.”

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The report features reviews of each station analyzed, offering statistics across stations for comparison. The report also includes case studies, in which the authors conduct a line reading of articles to explore potentially biased coverage. Additionally, the report provides a set of recommendations for media outlets, including upholding the presumption of innocence, providing context when a person is arrested, and featuring community voices to balance coverage.

In early 2022, this series will continue with an analysis of local print media coverage of the same issues, focusing on the *Houston Chronicle*.

“The Real ‘Bond Pandemic’” is available in both [PDF](#) and [web-based](#) versions. Station reports include: [KPRC](#) (NBC affiliate), [KTRK](#) (ABC affiliate), [KHOU](#) (CBS affiliate), [KRIV](#) (FOX affiliate), [KXLN](#) (Univision affiliate), and [KTMD](#) (Telemundo affiliate). The annotated case studies are available [here](#), and the report’s recommendations are available [here](#).

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The Texas Center for Justice and Equity (formerly the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition) advances solutions and builds coalitions to end mass incarceration and foster safer Texas communities.