



## Coverage Of Biden & Trump's Mishandled Classified Documents Reveals Media Double Standard

### Description

#### **Most everything the media reported last week turned out to be wrong**

A man holding a sign that reads Fake News is CNN stands next to Michael Williams, an anchor of Channel 5 WPTV (NBC affiliated) as he waits to go live outside the home of former President Donald Trump at Mar-A-Lago on August 8, 2022 in Palm Beach, Florida. The FBI raided the home to retrieve classified White House documents. (Photo by Eva Marie Uzcategui/Getty Images)

Over the last week, journalists at [most](#) major [news](#) outlets wrote long “explainers” claiming President Donald Trump’s mishandling of classified documents was far worse than President Joe Biden’s. But now, as the White House announces the discovery of additional classified documents, journalists are furiously backpedaling.

For example, *The Washington Post* late yesterday published a long, defensive article about how its reporters did their best to be fair and balanced against critics on both sides.

But what was known when reporters wrote their explainers did not warrant the news media’s rush to judgment.

We still don’t know how many classified documents Biden had or has. This morning, the White House announced that Biden aides had, earlier this week, found five more pages of classified material at Biden’s personal residence in Wilmington, Delaware. This is the third announcement of classified material. Given the pattern of events, it would be inappropriate to assume this will be the last classified document found.

As such, the claim that Trump had roughly 30 times more classified documents than Biden rested on false assumptions. What’s more, nobody is in a position to say whether Trump’s apparent mishandling

of classified documents was more of a threat to national security or a violation of the rules than Biden's because we don't know what exactly was revealed in the documents.

Another frequently-repeated claim — that Biden's behavior, in terms of publicly revealing the documents, was exemplary, while Trump's was mendacious — is also not supported by the evidence.

It turns out that Biden knew about the mishandled documents as early as November 2, 2022, a week before the election, and kept it secret [until a news organization asked about it](#).

And while the White House notified the National Archives and Records Administration of their discovery on November 2, "consistent with statutory requirements," they did not notify the Justice Department. Notes *The New York Times*, "some critics have said the Biden team ought to have told the Justice Department itself earlier."

While it's true that Trump apparently resisted efforts by the federal government to retrieve the documents in question, it's also because he thought — rightly or wrongly — that he had a right to the documents in question.

To make matters even more complex, it's no longer clear that the Vice President has the legal authority to declassify documents. A 2003 executive order signed by then-President George W. Bush does *not*, in fact, say whether vice presidents have the "supervisory authority" over departments and agencies that they would, apparently, need in order to declassify information legally.

Whatever the case, what is clear is that Trump *has* claimed that he declassified the documents, whereas Biden has not claimed such privilege.

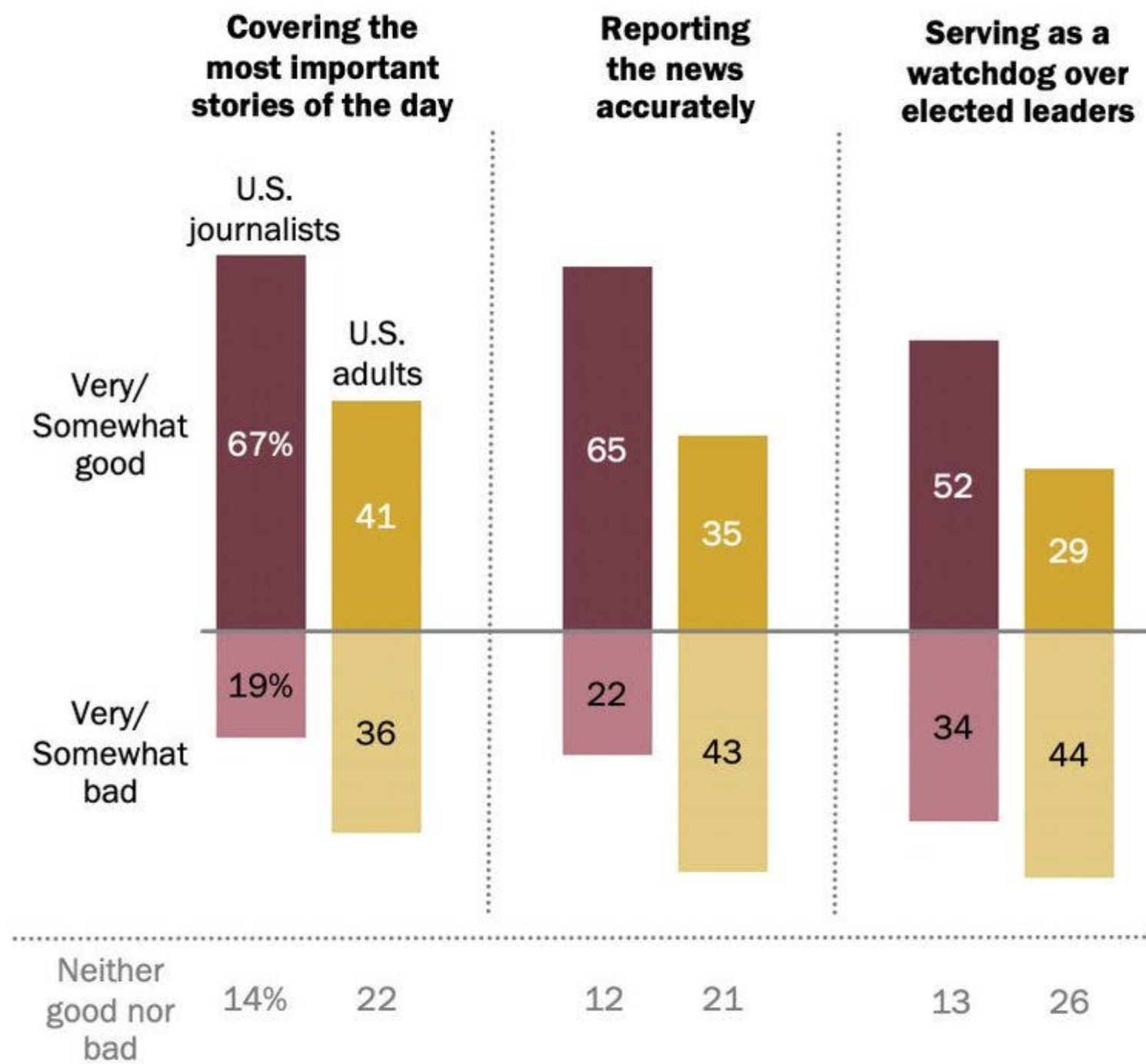
And even those who claim Trump's mishandling was worse than Biden's [note](#) that "when classified documents are located in multiple non-governmental locations," as they were for Biden, "that deserves serious attention."

None of this means that the two cases are equivalent or that Biden's behavior was "worse" or "more illegal" than Trump's. But it does mean that almost everything the news media confidently reported as the core facts of their case against Trump and for Biden was either wrong or unknowable.

Why is that? Why is it that the media rushed to judgment in the way that it did?

# Journalists and the American public stand far apart on what news outlets do in many of their core functions

% who say news organizations do a good or bad job at ...



Note: Respondents who did not answer not shown.  
Source: Survey of U.S. journalists conducted Feb. 16-March 17, 2022. Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 17-21, 2022. “Journalists Sense Turmoil in Their Industry Amid Continued Passion for Their Work”

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