

TOOLKIT FOR NEWS READERS

# Who Really Owns the News?

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A Guide to Critical Engagement for Consumers in the  
**United States & The Gambia**

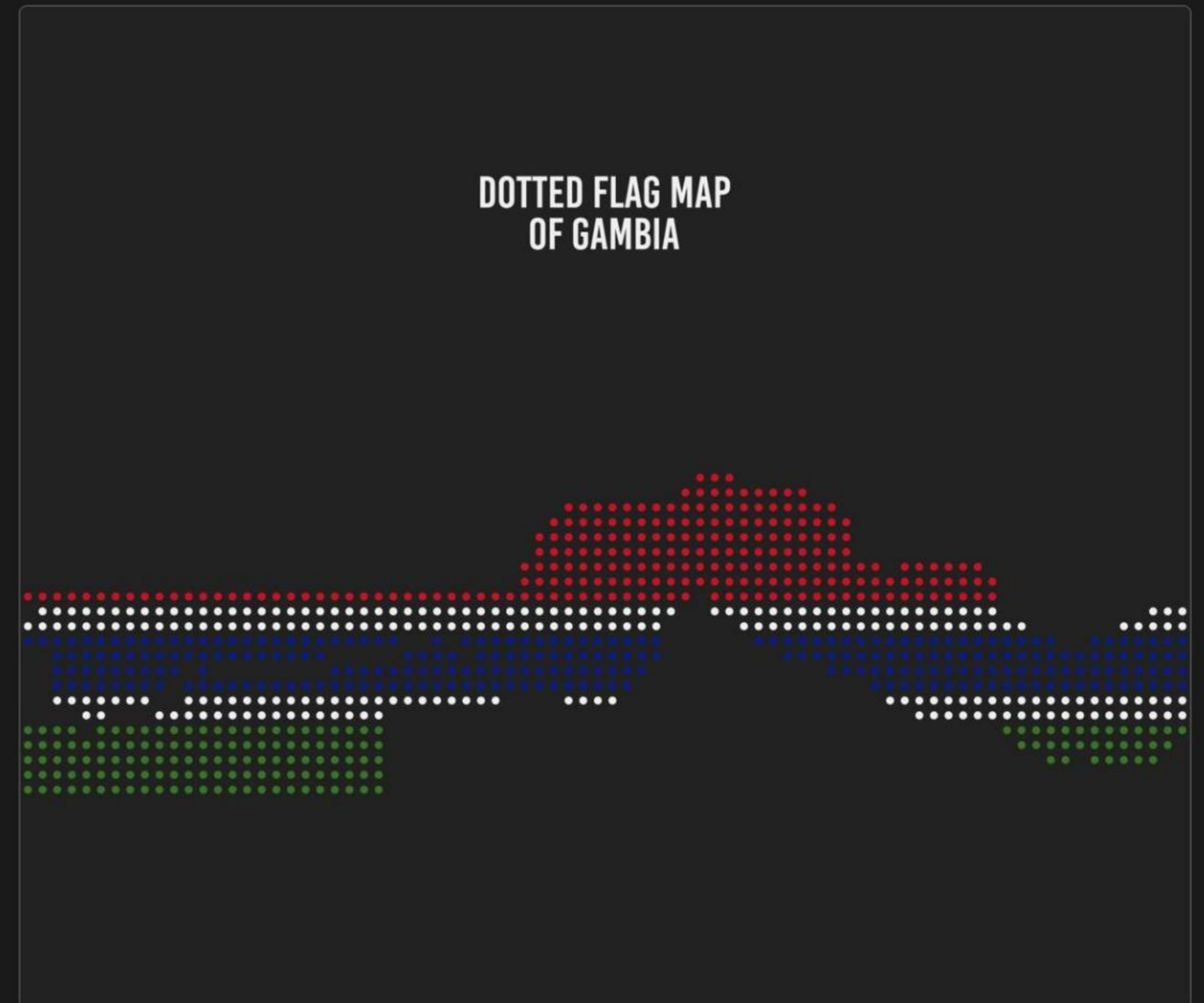
# A Tale of Two Media Landscapes

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## One Shared Threat

Despite the distance, news consumers in both the U.S. and The Gambia face a common adversary: **Financial Influence.**

Whether it is corporate consolidation in America or a mix of private-sector and state influence in The Gambia, the result is the same: Economic pressures often dictate what news is published, how it is framed, and what is kept in the dark.



# The Landscape of Influence

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## United States

**Corporate Consolidation:** A few mega-corporations own the vast majority of media, creating "Access Journalism" where reporters fear losing access to powerful figures.

**Advertiser Power:** Newsrooms may avoid criticizing major corporate advertisers to protect revenue streams.

## The Gambia

**"Soft Censorship":** Reliance on advertising from a few large companies (like GSMs) allows businesses to dictate coverage.

**State Legacy:** A history of state control still influences public media, creating a culture of self-censorship among journalists.

# Decoding Ownership: The 3 W's

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## WHO owns it?

Check the parent company or key shareholders. Is it a publicly traded corporation or a government entity?

**Concentration limits diversity.**



## WHAT interests?

Do the owners have stakes in banking, tech, or politics? Watch for **Conflict of Interest** where stories harming these interests are buried.



## WHY now?

Analyze the timing. Is this story a distraction? Is it **Agenda Setting** to benefit a political ally or distract from a scandal?

# Follow the Money: Red Flags

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## **Native Advertising**


Look for "Sponsored Content" or "Partner Post." This is paid marketing disguised as news.

## **The Clickbait Trap**

Highly emotional headlines are designed for clicks, not truth. If it makes you angry instantly, pause.

## **Advertising Bias**

When outlets rely on a few big advertisers, they often ignore stories that might offend those sponsors.

 Smartphone screen displaying sensational clickbait headlines

# Action Plan: The S.I.F.T. Method

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## STOP

Pause before you react. If a story sparks intense emotion, your critical thinking is being bypassed.



## INVESTIGATE

Don't just read the article. Search the publication's name. What is their reputation and funding source?



## FIND

Look for better coverage. Find the same story from a different outlet with a different viewpoint.



## TRACE

Trace claims to the original source. Is the quote taken out of context? Is the study current?

# The Narrative Decoder

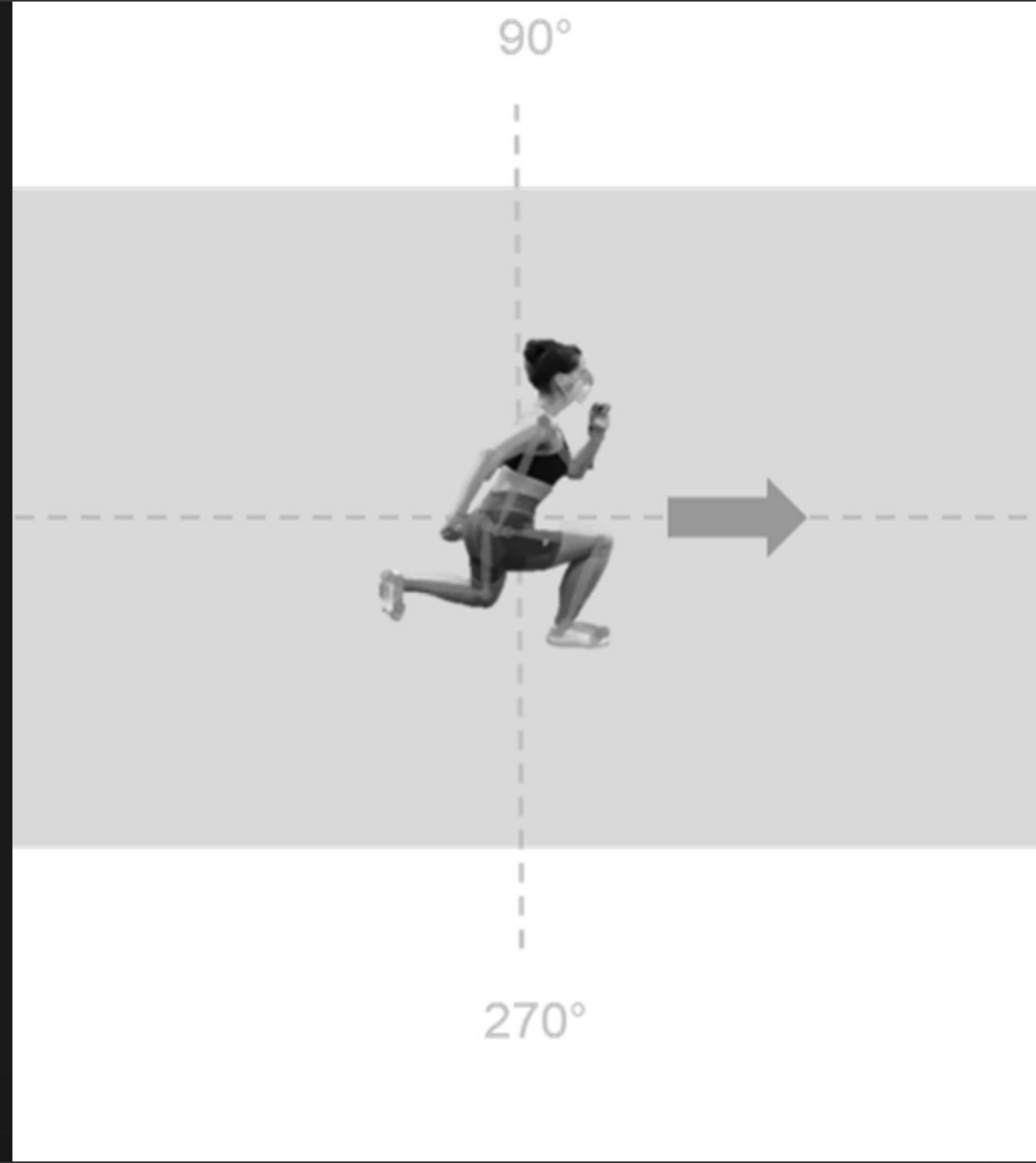
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## 1. Loaded Words

Are terms like *"tyrant," "heroic,"* or *"radical"* used? This is **Bias by Language**, designed to sway emotion rather than inform.

## 2. Visual Framing

Is the imagery flattering or unflattering? A low-angle shot can make someone look powerful; a bad lighting shot can make them look sinister.



# The Silent Bias: What's Left Unsaid?

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## Checklist Question

Did the report give **all sides** of the issue a fair chance to make their best argument?

## If NO, it indicates...

**One-Sided Argumentation**

Did the report include essential **historical or political context**?

**Narrative Simplification**

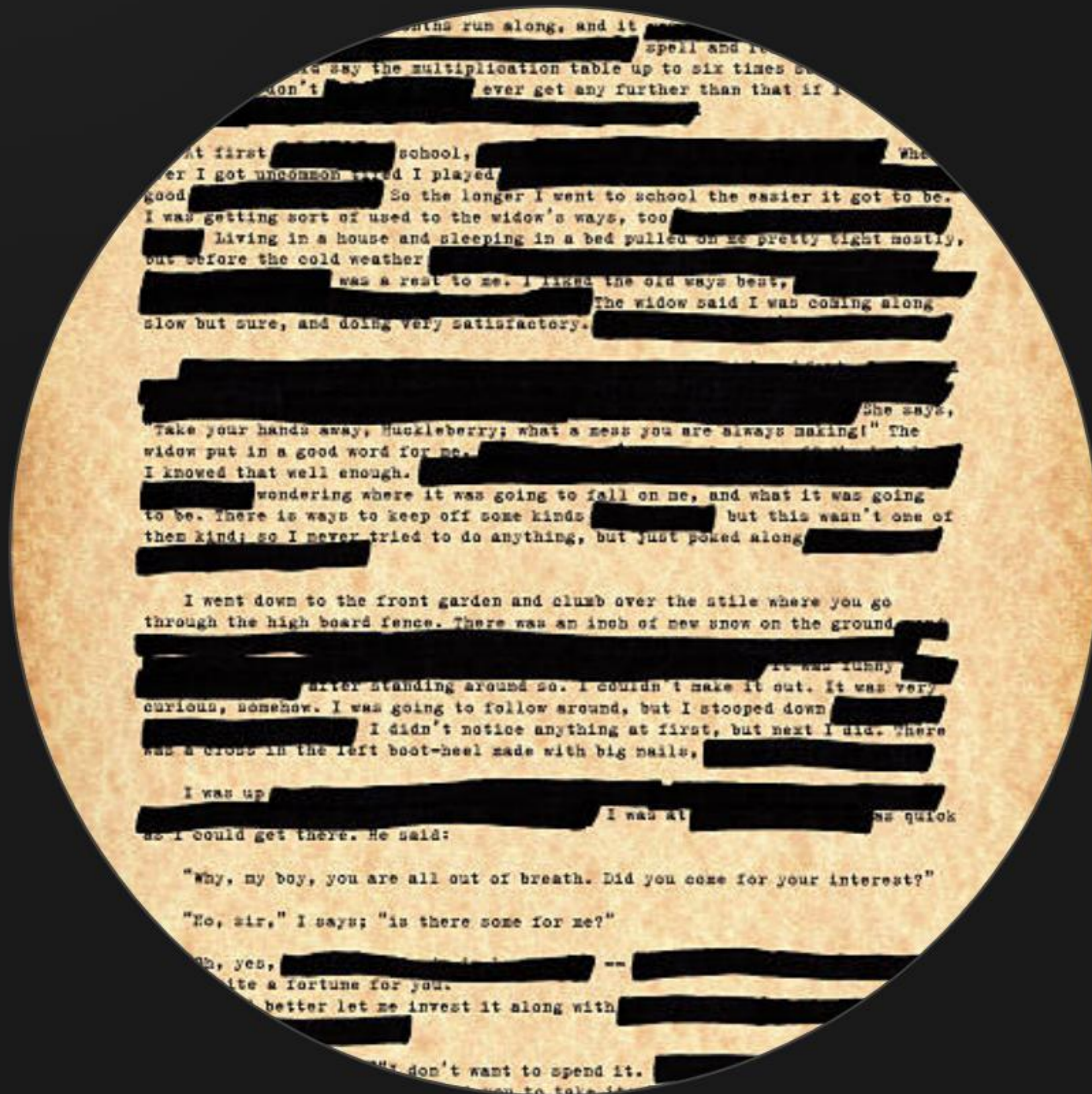
Are the sources quoted reliable, first-hand, and **not solely supportive** of the outlet's agenda?

**Confirmation Bias**

*"The most powerful bias is often what the news organization chooses to leave out."*

# The Cost of Controlled News

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## Echo Chambers & Eroded Trust

In the U.S., algorithmic curation creates ideological bubbles. In The Gambia, a legacy of state-filtered messaging has narrowed public discourse.

**The Result:** Citizens lose access to essential information, and trust in the media crumbles. When news is shaped by profit or politics, the public is the one who pays the price.



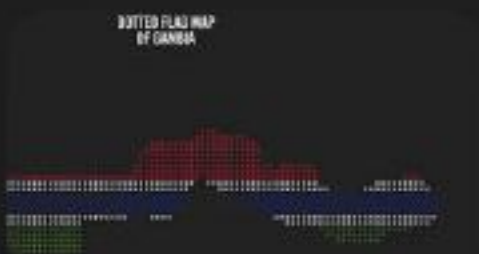
# Be The Watchdog

The health of the press depends on an active, critical public.

- ✓ Diversify your news diet across ownership structures.
- ✓ Use the S.I.F.T. method to verify claims.
- ✓ Demand independence and support non-profit media.

# Image Sources

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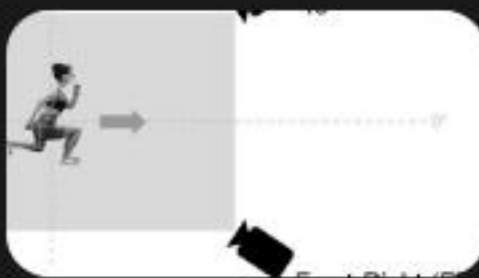
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