

GROUND NEWS

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Ground News was founded by siblings Harleen Kaur and Sukh Singh, out of the University of Waterloo's Velocity incubator. Kaur previously worked at NASA on the New Horizons mission before becoming the first female VP of Sales at Rolls-Royce Jet Engines. She started Ground News with the mission to break readers out of their media bubbles by exposing bias, in the stories they read and in the news industry itself.

When they came to us, the mission was clear and the product already worked as an aggregator, pulling nearly 60,000 articles daily from over 50,000 sources. What hadn't been figured out yet was how that mission actually showed up in the product. I joined as an embedded design partner, working inside their product, engineering, and marketing teams.

Problem

Ground News had already won people over on the idea. People downloaded it because they wanted out of their media bubbles. The issue was how that showed up, once they were actually inside the app. People were using it like any other news site. Scroll, tap a headline, read, leave.

The tools that let you compare a story's coverage across the spectrum existed but were easy to miss. So there was nothing on the page pulling people toward the behavior the whole product was supposed to encourage which is exploring other perspectives.



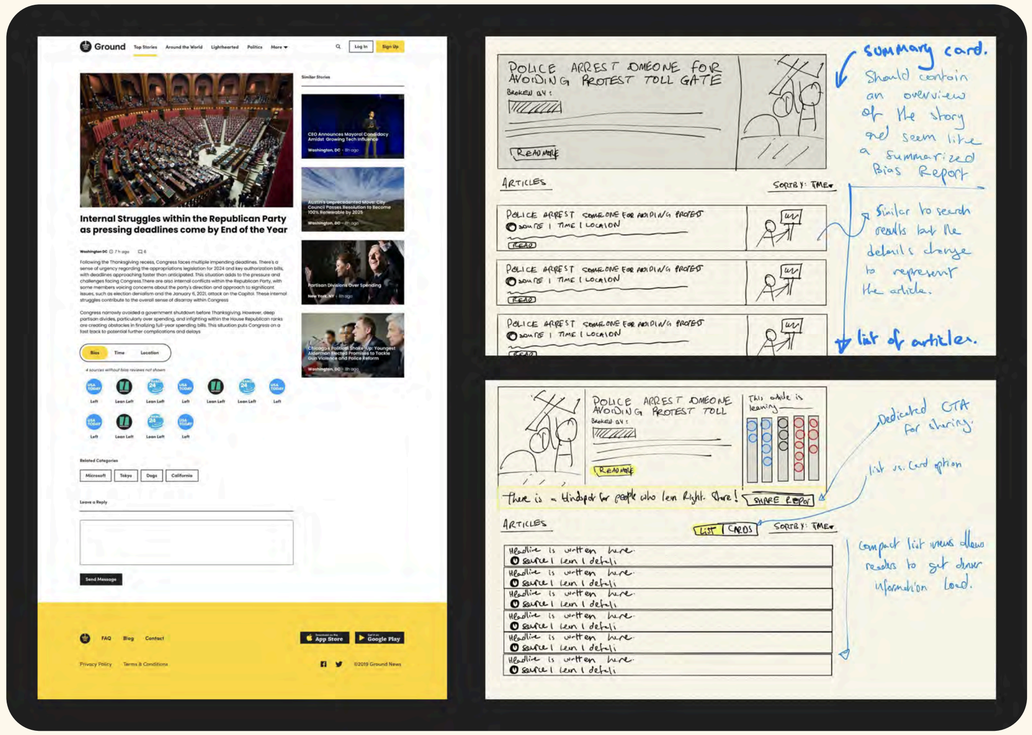


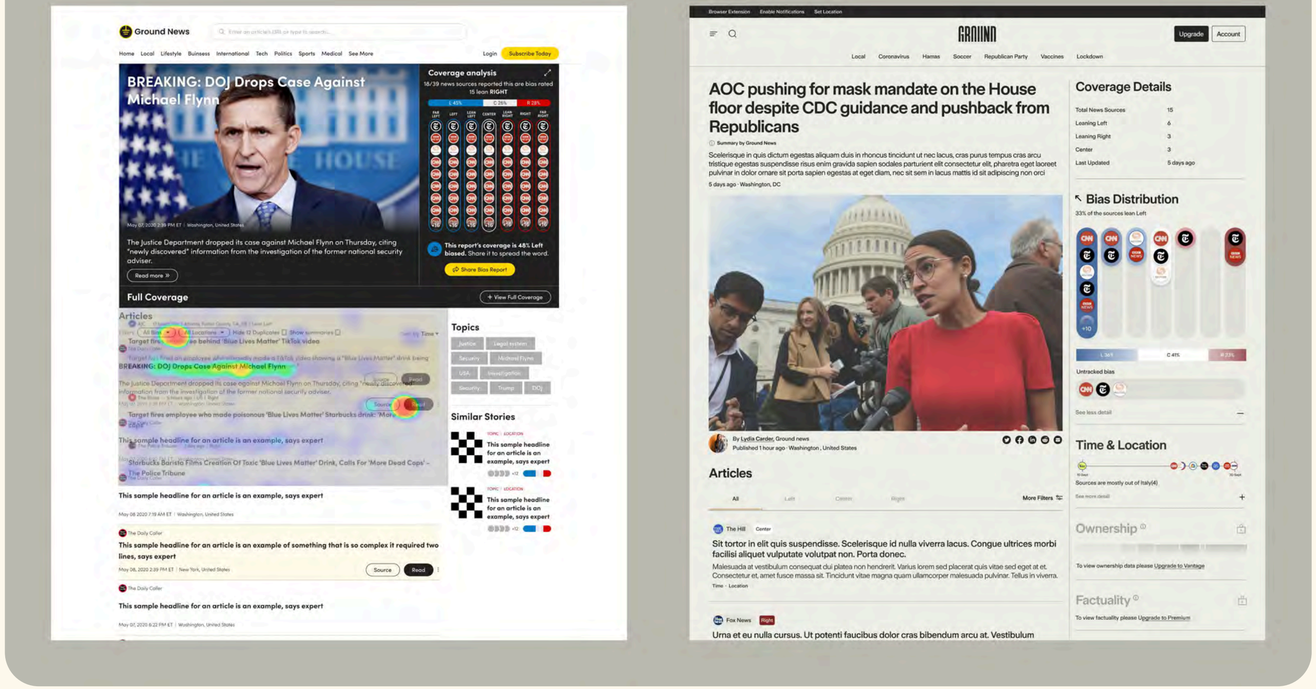
Process

We started with heatmaps to see how people actually moved through the page, not how we assumed they did. Two things showed up fast.

First, the stories themselves sat below the fold. Basic, but worth confirming rather than guessing at.

Second, and more useful: people were interested in the left, right, center filter buttons. They clicked them. Then they dropped off before doing anything with what those buttons revealed. The intent to compare was there. The path to actually seeing a comparison wasn't.





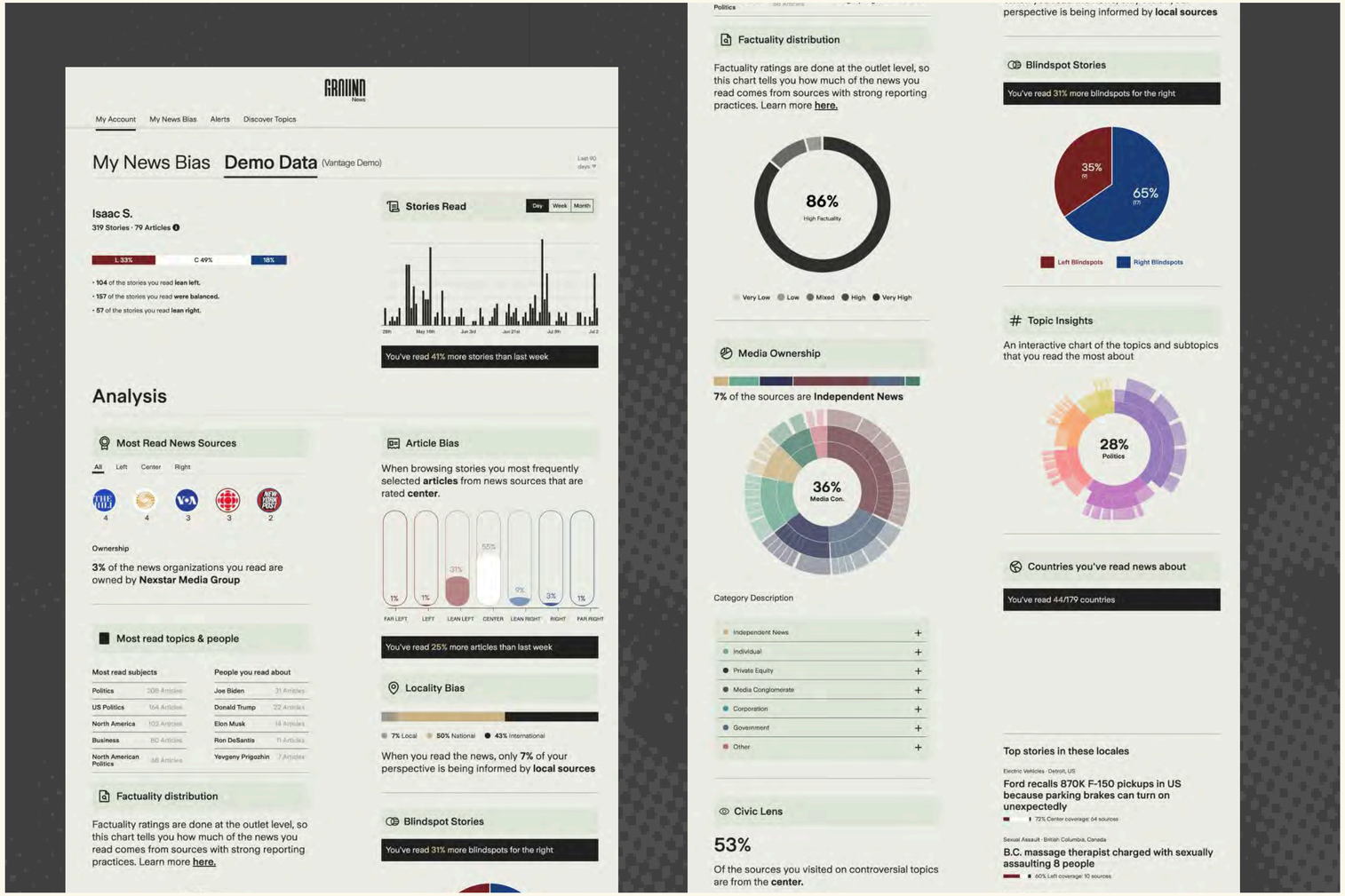
The fix followed directly from what the heatmap showed. If people wanted to compare coverage across the spectrum but gave up before getting there, the answer was to put that comparison in front of them immediately, not bury it behind a click they'd already shown they wouldn't take. We exposed the filter directly on the story view, so switching between left, right, and center coverage happened in place, in real time, instead of requiring someone to dig for it.

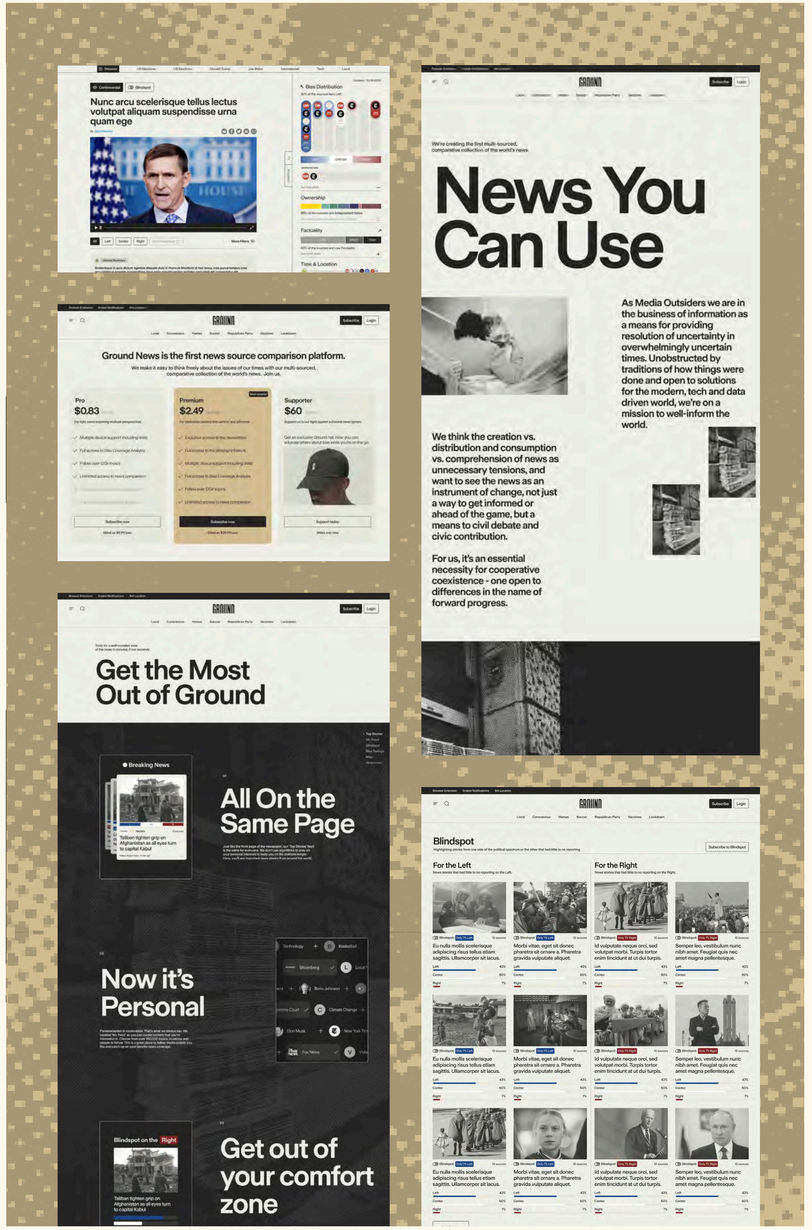
Alongside that, we designed the source comparison from scratch, a piece of UI that gave people a way to see a given outlet's bias track record, not just a single story's slant. Where the exposed filter solved the article-level problem, this gave people a reason to trust, or question, the source itself.

Process

The other major piece of this was My News Bias, the super-user feature I designed to go a level deeper: an informational dashboard that tracked a reader's own media diet over time and showed them their own bias patterns, not just a single story's.

Where the filter and the source comparison worked at the article and outlet level, this worked at the level of the reader's habits, giving people a reason to come back and actually diversify what they read, rather than making the same choice on autopilot every day.





Outcome

The web platform drove 10x subscriber growth and scaled to 150,000 daily active users. Ground News went on to be featured in Apple's "New and Notable" showcase, hit #1 on Product Hunt, and was personally recognized by Apple CEO Tim Cook at a developer roundtable. A 2024 academic study found that the Blindspotter measurably reduced political polarization among readers. 2.2 million downloads, a 4.71 star rating.

