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"Domestic terrorism" or "political protest?": Partisan cable news framing of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol

Alexandra M. Stover
James Madison University

"Domestic Terrorism" or "Political Protest?": Partisan Cable News Framing of the

January 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol

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FACULTY COMMITTEE: HONORS COLLEGE APPROVAL:

Project Advisor: Dan K. Schill, Ph.D.,   Bethany Blackstone, Ph.D.
Professor, Communication Studies   Dean of the Honors College

Reader: Matthew P. Brigham, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor, Communication
Studies

Reader: Ryan Alessi, M.F.A.,
Assistant Professor, Media Arts and Design

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Abstract

The attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, was a historical event that received widespread media attention in the days and weeks that followed. This study focuses on the differential framing techniques used by Fox News and CNN, specifically, in their coverage of January 6. Additionally, this study addresses the differential framing techniques used across different shows on the same network: "commentary-based" shows and "information-based" shows. In doing so, this research builds upon the vast body of pre-existing news media framing research. This study finds that the differences in framing are more pronounced between Fox News and CNN than across the different shows on each network, thus providing an explanation for why Americans are so polarized about the events of January 6. Notably, Fox News highlights the peaceful aspects of January 6, labeling it a protest, whereas CNN stresses the idea of January 6 as an act of domestic terror. On a less significant level, the commentary-based shows utilized different framing techniques from their information-based counterparts. The commentary-based shows presented their audiences with a more emotional depiction of the news that more heavily relied on the anchor's opinion.

Introduction

On November 3, 2020, Joseph R. Biden Jr. was elected the 46th president of the United States. Amidst a year of turmoil that saw the outbreak of a global pandemic and a racial reckoning in America, Joe Biden, a former senator and vice president of the United States, challenged Donald J. Trump in his bid for re-election. Both before the election and after his defeat, Donald Trump bred populist ideals among his base. His 2020 campaign began by establishing an "us vs. them" dichotomy of clearly favoring white Americans while alienating and scapegoating other minority groups (Barlow, 2021). Throughout the campaign, he fomented widespread, anti-institutional distrust about the integrity of the 2020 Election amongst his base, which he had cultivated over the prior four years to follow him with unwavering support (Barlow, 2021). For instance, in a December 19, 2020, tweet, Trump said it was statistically impossible for him to have lost the election and called his supporters to protest the joint session of Congress certifying Joe Biden's electoral vote win, writing: "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!"

These efforts came to a head 64 days after the 2020 Election (Feuer et al., n. d.), on January 6, 2021, when a "Stop the Steal" rally led by Donald Trump and his followers became violent and deadly (Feuer et al., n.d.). This rally in Washington meant to protest the ceremonial confirmation of the states' election results, began around the White House in the Ellipse. Although this rally earlier in the day remained largely peaceful, a group marched to the U.S. Capitol where some became violent as they breached the Capitol in an attempt to halt the ceremonial certification of the 2020 Presidential election results (Feuer et al., n.d.). As a result of the violence, five people died including a Capitol Police Officer (Viala-Gaudefroy, 2021). A week later on January 13, 2021, the Democratic House Majority, along with 10 House

Republicans, voted to impeach the outgoing president for his role in egging on the attack on the Capitol. The impeachment article accused Donald Trump of "inciting violence against the government of the United States" (Fandos, 2021).

The Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, which was the first time since 1814 that the U.S. Capitol building had been breached (Holpuch, 2021), sparked extensive media coverage (Bhutada, 2021). The novelty and exceptionality of the Capitol riot on January 6, however, did not lead to a widespread agreement among the American people regarding how much media attention should be paid to the riot or how it should be covered in the media. As of January 2022, Americans continued to be almost evenly divided into thirds among those who said that there has been either too much, too little, or the right amount of coverage of the riot at the U.S. Capitol (Jones, 2022).

Coverage of the riot was widespread on cable television news. Partisan cable news networks that make up the 24-hour news cycle have become increasingly influential in American political culture as they have risen to the levels of the major legacy broadcasts in terms of being a useful source of news (Sanders, 2022). In general, both Democrats and Republicans see the media holistically growing in influence (Gottfried & Forman-Katz, 2021). The two groups do, however, diverge in terms of which specific news programs they trust to get their information from. Research finds that during a media event, Republicans and Democrats turn to different sources for news and information (Sanders, 2022). According to data from Sanders (2022), for instance, 62% of Democrats view CNN's Wolf Blitzer as a trustworthy source of news whereas only 29% of Democrats view Fox News' Bret Baier as a trustworthy news source. Relatedly, 54% of Republicans view Bret Baier as a trustworthy news source while only 21% of Republicans trust Wolf Blitzer to give them their news (Sanders, 2022).

Partisan cable news coverage of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol and the events that followed provide one of the clearest examples of recent media framing differences (Bhutada, 2021). The divergence of partisans away from one another in terms of the media they consume, along with the extensive media coverage of the U.S. Capitol riot have had many implications, one of which being the lack of consensus surrounding what exactly transpired at the U.S. Capitol on that January 6 (Lange, 2022). As of July 2021, most Americans called what happened at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 an "insurrection" (Salvanto, 2021). However, a partisan split persists, and there remains a passionate and large group of people who are more skeptical about what occurred. Democrats and most independents have always considered what occurred to be an insurrection and a threat to Democracy. Republicans, however, are far more likely to view the events as a political protest, protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Montanaro, 2022). Not only are partisans divided on the facts of the riot, but they are also in widespread disagreement regarding the role that Donald Trump and his proliferation of election conspiracies played in the riot that ultimately ensued (Galston, 2023; Jones, 2022).

The purpose of this research is to analyze media coverage of the January 6, 2021, riot on four cable news shows: CNN's *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer* and *Cuomo Primetime* and Fox News' *Special Report with Bret Baier* and *Tucker Carlson Tonight.* Specifically, this study will apply framing theory to these four shows to determine how the events surrounding the January 6 attack on the Capitol were framed and how the coverage differed across the programs.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The following chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the extant literature related to this study. The review begins with a discussion of the vast research regarding news media framing generally, and then moves into news media framing of specific types of events related to January 6 including the framing of political protest in America and framing of Populist movements. Due to this study's emphasis on the impact and effects of opinionated or commentary-based news, the following literature review contains an overview of the pre-existing literature surrounding opinionated news. Finally, a brief review of the minimal extant literature surrounding January 6 itself provides some insight into how the present study fits into the pre-existing research.

News Media Framing

The pre-existing literature surrounding media issue framing and its implications is vast. Framing is an interdisciplinary concept (Druckman, 2001) that has been used across many different fields and subfields including but not limited to, political science, foreign policy decision-making, media effects, and campaigns. The study of news framing, specifically, is focused not on what is being said in the media about a certain event or issue but instead on *how* the event or issue is being presented in the media (Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017). Framing occurs when the media selectively rejects or selects competing "frames" (Entman, 1993), through which to view a certain issue or event (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Many pre-existing framing studies have been derived from Kahneman & Tversky's (1984) work on psychological decision-making, where they found that the way choices are framed will affect the likelihood that a particular option will be selected. By emphasizing the salience of a

particular aspect of a topic (de Vreese, 2005; Entman, 1993), the media has the capacity to reorient their audience's thinking about a topic or issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

The consequences of news media framing can be broken down into two overarching themes: individual-level and societal-level consequences (de Vreese, 2005). Both of these categories show how the media message (or frame) being presented can help determine what knowledge is activated in the viewer (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Whereas individual-level consequences of framing focus on the altered attitude of an individual based on exposure to a certain frame, societal-level consequences can consist of collective action and socialization on behalf of society as a whole (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019). Following the aforementioned landmark studies in framing as an overarching concept, there have been numerous subsequent studies performed that use news media framing to analyze specific issues or events (e.g., Bronstein, 2005; Kroon et al., 2016; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017; Rane et al., 2014).

Framing and coverage of political protest in America

Communications and media scholars have put forth the "Protest Paradigm" (Boyle et al., 2012; Lee, 2014; Weaver & Scacco, 2013), as a way to explain the media's tendency to frame protests as deviant or threatening. The utilization of the protest paradigm leads to the tendency for the media to marginalize protest movements by shifting attention from the substantive dimensions of the movement, thus harming the movement's legitimacy (Weaver & Scacco, 2013). According to Guardino and Snyder (2013), mainstream media coverage of protests is overwhelmingly focused on sensational dimensions of the movement including the group's appearances and behavior, the potential for violence, and bystander commentary.

Although the protest paradigm has been widely cited in the literature, there are also scholars (Kilgo & Harlow, 2019; Lee, 2014) who put forth research that questioned the validity

of the protest paradigm. Kilgo and Harlow (2019), instead posit a hierarchy of social struggle wherein certain protest topics are given precedence and legitimacy over others. Their findings suggest that certain partisan media outlets are likely to frame protests as legitimate or not based on the ideological background of the outlet and whether they hold congruent beliefs with the protest movement. Additionally, Boyle et al. (2012), diminished the all-encompassing power of the protest paradigm by finding that other factors, such as protest issues and location can indirectly affect coverage as well. The literature surrounding the media coverage and framing of political protest has grown from an overarching paradigm that had been used to describe all coverage of protests to a more nuanced understanding of coverage differences across different types of protests (Lee, 2014).

Framing and coverage of populist movements

Populist movements most often feature a disinterest in the institutionalization of politics as well as the tendency to ignore institutions in civil society (Peters & Pierre, 2020). Populist leaders construct an "Us vs. Them" dichotomy in which the movement's adherents place themselves as a blameless in-group of innocent people, wholly absolved of responsibility for a perceived crisis (Espenshade, 2020). The rise of populist movements (Moffitt, 2016) has led to an increased academic interest in the role that the media plays in framing and covering populist movements (Esser et al., 2016; Hameleers et al., 2019; Sauer & Pingaud, 2016; Wettstein et al., 2018).

Hameleers et al. (2019), found that populist actors are given disproportional media attention in their study examining the intersections between interpretive journalism and populist communication. Reinforcing this notion of abundant populist content in the news (Wettstein et al., 2018), scholars have put forth different explanations for the increasing news coverage of

populist movements. Wells et al. (2020), found that both the journalistic tradition of covering the novel, unusual, and conflictual, and the commercialization of the media have contributed to news organizations devoting increased attention to populist movements. Additionally, Nadler (2019), points toward the reduction in the power of institutional media gatekeepers as a possible explanation for the rising visibility of anti-establishment, populist movements in the media.

The increasing news coverage of populist movements can have vast implications for the movement itself. When referring specifically to right-wing populist groups, Kilgo and Harlow (2019), found that the perception of liberal media bias coupled with the presence of conservative media outlets in America benefits their mobilization. Studies have shown that when the media emphasizes the substantive dimensions of the populist movement instead of its sensational ones, it is more likely to give the movement a form of legitimacy for the American people (Guardino & Snyder, 2013). Therefore, media structures in America may have the power to constrain or enable the growth of populist movements (Nadler, 2019).

Opinionated News

The departure from objective reporting in American journalism during the mid-twentieth century has been examined by scholars (e.g., Feldman, 2011; Fink & Schudson, 2014) as an era of drastic change with many implications for the media today. Objective journalism, which rose to prominence alongside the professionalization of journalism and the development of industry norms and standards (Ryan, 2001), emphasized the strictly factual nature of reporting (Schudson, 2001). Deviating from this era of objective reporting, interpretive journalism, or opinionated news places the journalist in a more central position by allowing them to present the news in a manner that takes a clear stand on the issues (Feldman, 2011; Steele & Barnhurst, 1996). Reinforcing this notion of a journalist-centric style of reporting (Steele & Barnhurst, 1996), Fink

and Schudson (2014), found that in the evolution from an objective to an interpretive era of journalism, an individual journalist is more likely to advance their own analysis and less likely to enlist politicians or other officials to frame the story.

There has been limited scholarly consensus regarding the effects of opinionated news, however, the potential effects, or lack thereof, have received widespread attention in the literature (e.g., Arceneaux et al., 2012; Feldman, 2011; Prior, 2013; Smith & Searles, 2012). Smith and Searles (2012), focused their research on opinion shows during the 2008 presidential election and found that exposure to opinion resulted in audiences having less favorable views toward those with opposing ideas, as opinion shows devoted most of their attention to attacking opponents. These findings were consistent with the Partisan Polarization Thesis (Birdsong et al., 2014), which claims that individuals are more likely to seek out information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs. The Partisan Polarization Thesis also provides the grounds for understanding why partisan cable news audiences for networks such as CNN and Fox News are becoming increasingly polarized (Morris, 2005).

Conversely, there is research (Feldman, 2011) that runs counter to these findings and posits that there is no evidence of opinionated news intensifying attitude differences among partisans. Prior (2013), adopts a model of limited effects as opposed to finding no causal link as his research asserts that although partisan media can lead to some polarization amongst the most politically involved, there is no causal evidence that partisan media makes ordinary Americans more partisan.

There have also been findings that support evidence of a hostile media effect (Arceneaux et al., 2012) that occurs when partisans are exposed to counter-attitudinal news programs, and they see bias in what is actually balanced reporting about controversial issues. Exemplifying this

effect, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) found that demand for partisan news varies with the organization's affinity to the consumer's political preferences. Therefore, an individual who identified themself as a Republican preferred to receive their news from the pro-attitudinal Fox News as opposed to CNN or NPR (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Another finding that characterizes the effects of opinionated news comes from Steele and Barnhurst (1996), who assert that the focus on the journalist's opinion in news shows attracts larger audiences but those shows are also less likely to provide the audience with substantive information.

The January 6 U.S. Capitol Riot: A demonstration of American populism?

A common theme that runs through the literature on populism and populist movements is the ambiguity and lack of consensus surrounding the denotation of populism (Deiwiks, 2009; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013; Rooduijn, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The more recent research has, however, shown some agreement, particularly regarding two central characteristics of populism: a strong focus by the leaders on the *people* and an implicit or explicit reference to an *anti-group* which is often the political elite (Deiwiks, 2009). This *us vs. them* dichotomous construction has been extensively observed and analyzed in the case of Donald Trump.

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 brought about a resurgence of academic interest in the features of populism and what constitutes a populist leader (Pierson, 2017; Staufer, 2020; White, 2016;). These studies position Donald Trump, his rise to political prominence, and his rhetoric within the framework of populism. White (2016), describes the "scourge" of Donald Trump's populism as the fact that he blames the *other* for the failures of the American government which is in line with the second central characteristic of populism put forth by Deiwiks (2009). Donald Trump's populism is also not contained to domestic issues. Trump's foreign policy is used as a platform for producing populist and nationalist rhetoric that advances

Americans as the in-group inherently positioned against the non-American "others" (Wojczewski, 2019).

In more recent years scholars have examined the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, as a culmination of Donald Trump's populism (Crothers & Burgener, 2021; Heine, 2021). Heine (2021), put forth the question of what led to the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6 and ultimately came to the conclusion that the attack was a result of the "Big Lie," which is the falsehood perpetuated by Donald Trump that he was the true winner of the 2020 election. Other studies (Crothers & Burgener, 2021), focus on the micro-level motivations for the Capitol riot including the attitudes that were expressed by the individuals who were direct participants in the violence. Both studies (Crothers & Burgener, 2021; Heine, 2021) put forth the assertion that the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6 was a demonstration of American populism ignited by the politics and rhetoric of Donald Trump.

After this comprehensive review of the extant research was conducted, it became clear that although the literature on news media framing and opinionated news are both vast in their own right, a hole exists in comparing the two concepts. This study serves to extend prior news media framing research by adding the component of investigating the framing differences not only across different partisan platforms but also across different *types* of shows on each respective platform. The following three research questions were developed as a guide for the present study:

RQ1: How did information-based shows on Fox News and CNN differentially frame the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6th?

RQ2: How did primetime, commentary-based shows on Fox News and CNN differentially frame the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6th?

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RQ3: How did information-based cable news shows and commentary-based cable news shows on each respective channel differentially frame the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6th?

Chapter 2: Methodology

The present study is a grounded, qualitative textual analysis of the differential framing techniques used by two different partisan cable news networks when discussing the events surrounding the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. This chapter describes the methodologies that were employed in the present study including the data sources, the data collection methodology, and the analytical methodology.

Data Collection Methodology

All transcripts were obtained through the Access World News Database. Although the present study focuses on television programs, visual framing techniques were omitted due to the limitation of only having complete access to written transcripts.

To reach the full breadth of coverage and maximize the partisan differences in coverage of the January 6th Capitol riot, two cable news channels were selected for the present study: Fox News and CNN. These outlets were selected for their audience popularity as measured by viewership. Fox News and CNN were the most popular cable news platforms during the period under study. Specifically, in January 2021, Fox News saw an average monthly prime-time cable news audience of 2.46 million viewers and CNN saw 2.68 million viewers (Adgate, 2021). The decision to choose Fox News as the representative channel for the Republican perspective was straightforward, seeing how Fox News stood relatively alone in the spotlight of conservative cable news outlets. CNN, however, occupied a much more crowded media sphere of pro-Democratic news outlets. Therefore, the biggest methodological decision at this stage was whether to focus on CNN or MSNBC to best represent the Democratic-partisan perspective. Ultimately, CNN's viewership numbers were slightly higher than MSNBC's for January 2021

with 2.68 million average viewers to MSNBC's average of 2.55 million viewers (Adgate, 2021), so CNN was selected because of its greater reach.

Because this study is focused not only on the differences in coverage across the two networks but also across the type of shows on the networks, two shows were chosen from each network: one that embodied what is referred to as an information-based program and one that is considered a commentary-based program. An information-based show is one that occurs near the beginning of the primetime window and focuses more on presenting facts and news with minimal personal input or opinion from the anchor or guests. A commentary-based show is one that airs later at night and typically has higher viewership ratings. On these shows, the anchor is more of an active presence as their personality and opinions are evident throughout.

For the shows representing CNN, *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* which aired from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on weeknights, was chosen as the information-based program and *Cuomo Prime Time*, which has since gone off the air but aired weeknights from 9:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET, was selected as the commentary-based program. For the Fox News programs, *Special Report with Bret Baier*, which aired from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET on weeknights, was chosen as the information-based program and *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, which aired from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET on weeknights, was selected as the "commentary-based" program (see Figure 2.1 for a visual representation of the comparisons involved in the analysis).

Figure 2.1: Diagram of the Shows Being Compared
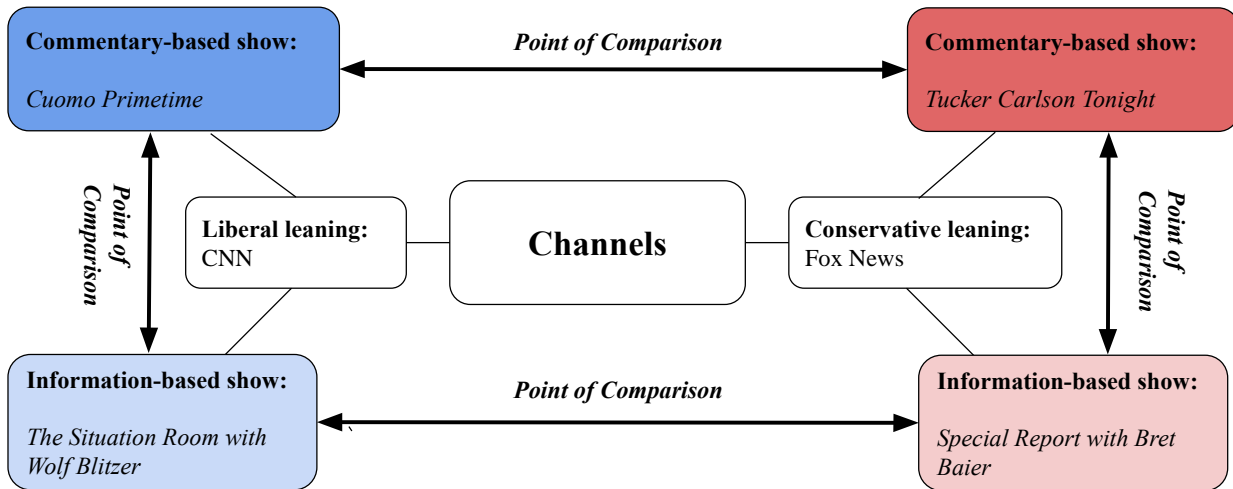
The decision to focus this research on the four aforementioned programs is grounded in their levels of viewership and the extent to which they embodied the information-based or commentary-based categories. A purposive sample of five transcripts from each of the four shows was chosen for a total of 20 transcripts ranging between the dates of January 6, 2021, and January 14, 2021. These parameters frame the time between the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, and the resulting second impeachment of Donald Trump on January 14, 2021.

Only news coverage related to the January 6th U.S. Capitol riot was included in this analysis. Stories that specifically discussed the attack or the events surrounding the riot such as what led up to and what followed the violence at the Capitol were included. Table 2.2 shows the percent of each episode's total coverage that focused on the events surrounding the January 6th U.S. Capitol riot.

Figure 2.2: Percentage of Each Episode's Total January 6 Coverage

Show	% of total coverage focused on the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021
Special Report with Bret Baier (1/6/21)	100.0%
Special Report with Bret Baier (1/7/21)	71.03%
Special Report with Bret Baier (1/8/21)	70.77%
Special Report with Bret Baier (1/12/21)	44.21%
Special Report with Bret Baier (1/14/21)	69.30%
The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer (1/7/21)	98.25%
The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer (1/8/21)	90.28%
The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer (1/9/21)	89.09%
The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer (1/11/21)	92.10%
The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer (1/13/21)	100.0%
Tucker Carlson Tonight (1/6/21)	100.0%
Tucker Carlson Tonight (1/7/21)	76.30%
Tucker Carlson Tonight (1/11/21)	67.75%
Tucker Carlson Tonight (1/13/21)	61.74%
Tucker Carlson Tonight (1/14/21)	64.80%
Cuomo Prime Time (1/6/21)	100.0%
Cuomo Prime Time (1/7/21)	100.0%
Cuomo Prime Time (1/8/21)	100.0%
Cuomo Prime Time (1/11/21)	100.0%
Cuomo Prime Time (1/13/21)	100.0%

Analytical Methodology

Through the use of NVivo qualitative analysis data software, each of the 20 transcripts were thematically coded with both inductive and deductive coding measures. Through this process, key similarities and differences were identified and compared using the constant-comparative method across the four sampled shows regarding their coverage of the January 6 events. Originally, a set of coding categories (see Figure 2.3) were developed a priori and set forth based on the research questions and review of the literature.

Figure 2.3: Deductive coding categories

Code	Description
Anchor opinion	Instances of the show's anchor sharing an opinion about the content of the news. Includes both the anchor's monologue and their conversations with guests and correspondents.
Interviews with lawmakers	Any direct, live conversation between the anchor and a lawmaker.
Pundit input	Instances of experts being brought on to the show to provide commentary and perspective to the events that are occurring.
Trump mentions (negative)	Any phrase or comment, regardless of who it comes from, that mentions Donald Trump in an overtly negative way.
Trump mentions (positive)	Any phrase or comment, regardless of who it comes from, that mentions Donald Trump in an overtly positive way.
Anti-impeachment	Any phrase or comment, regardless of who it comes from, that promotes an overtly anti-impeachment sentiment.
Pro-impeachment	Any phrase or comment, regardless of who it comes from, that promotes an overtly pro-impeachment sentiment.

These categories, however, were not inclusive and additional categories were inductively developed through the analysis as the deductive coding categories were not sufficient to explain the differential framing measures used. The transcripts were analyzed until full saturation of the data was achieved. The following two chapters showcase and analyze the findings that were

derived from these two coding measures: the technical coverage differences based on the deductive coding categories, and the thematic framing differences that were discovered through inductively coding the transcripts.

Chapter 3: Findings Part I – Technical Coverage Differences

The first portion of findings derived from this research come from observation of technical coverage differences across the four shows sampled. In this instance, technical coverage differences consist of quantitative, numerical values that represent different elements, segments, or features in each show. This chapter begins with a presentation, analysis, and comparison of the total air-time that each show gave to January 6 coverage. The January 6 content is then broken down further into four main categories: anchor opinion sharing, the inclusion of interviews with lawmakers, and the presence of pundit input.

Total January 6th coverage

This research suggests that the differences across these four shows can be first observed in how much total airtime was given to content surrounding the Capitol riot on January 6 itself. Before addressing the differences that were present across these shows, it is important to acknowledge two key similarities in each show's January 6 coverage. Each show[1] spent 100% of its airtime on January 6, 2021, discussing the U.S. Capitol riot that had occurred that day. It is evident, through this discovery, that January 6, 2021, marked the only time throughout the sample where coverage of January 6 on each show converged. Additionally, each show saw an increase in total January 6 coverage near the end of the sampling frame, largely due to Donald Trump's second impeachment that occurred on January 13, 2021, and sparked widespread media coverage.

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[1] Excluding *The Situation Room* which did not air on January 6, 2021, in its normal format due to CNN focusing on the breaking news coverage of the Capitol riot.

The similarities found in the coverage of January 6 across all four shows are exclusive to the coverage peak on January 6 and the coverage rise surrounding the impeachment. However, there are many notable similarities and differences found when comparing two shows at a time.

Both Fox News shows, *Special Report with Bret Baier* and *Tucker Carlson Tonight* devoted significantly less of their airtime over the sampling frame to January 6 coverage than their CNN counterparts. Both shows' coverage of the event peaked on January 6 itself and steadily declined over the course of the sample until the aforementioned increase in content surrounding the impeachment of Donald Trump (see Figure 3.1). Although the two shows share many commonalities, it can be observed in Figure 3.1 that their coverage varied slightly. Whereas Baier's total coverage dipped below 50%, the lowest that Carlson's coverage of January 6th ever got was 61%. Additionally, there was a more sizable increase in coverage surrounding the impeachment on *Special Report with Bret Baier* than there was on *Tucker Carlson Tonight.* This increase signified a return of greater January 6 coverage after a decrease in coverage on January 11th, 12th, and 13th.

Figure 3.1: Comparison of total Jan. 6 coverage for Fox News shows
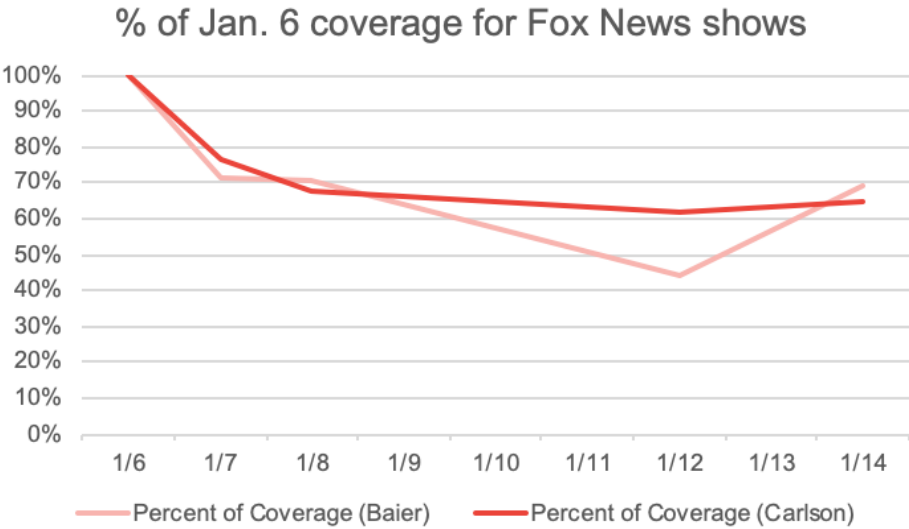
Turning now to a comparison of the two CNN shows, Figure 3.2 displays the finding that 100% of the coverage on *Cuomo Primetime* over this sample discussed the events of January 6 and the aftermath. This is notable as it can provide some insight into how salient the events of January 6 were for audiences of Democratic-leaning commentary news shows such as *Cuomo Primetime.* Although the coverage on *The Situation Room* varied more than *Cuomo Primetime* its total January 6 coverage barely dipped below 90% over the course of the sample. It is clear, when analyzing the differences between Figures 3.1 and 3.2, that the CNN shows maintained both greater amounts of coverage and more consistent rates of coverage across the sampling frame than the Fox News shows.

Figure 3.2: Comparison of total Jan. 6 coverage for CNN shows
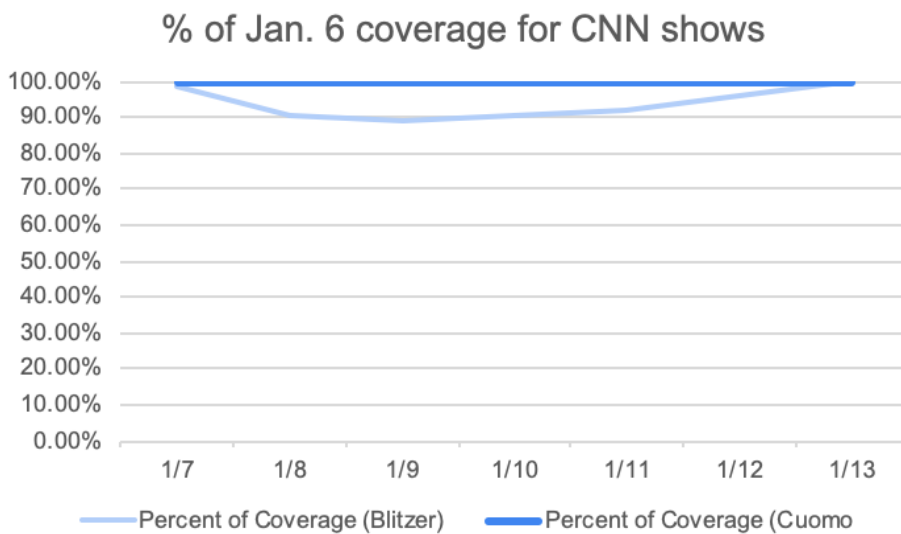
For the purposes of this research, it is important to not only show the coverage differences across the information-based and commentary-based shows (i.e., Baier v. Carlson and Blitzer v. Cuomo) on each respective channel but to also examine how the information-based shows differed from one another and how the commentary-based shows differed from one another (i.e., Baier v. Blitzer and Carlson v. Cuomo). As Figures 3.3 and 3.4 show, each CNN show, in their respective category, surpassed their Fox News counterpart by relatively similar

margins. This finding supports the notion that the information-based shows and commentary-based shows, while still maintaining their partisanship, followed relatively similar patterns in terms of the amount of coverage in this case.

Figure 3.3: Comparison of total Jan. 6 coverage for information-based shows

% of Jan. 6 coverage for information-based shows
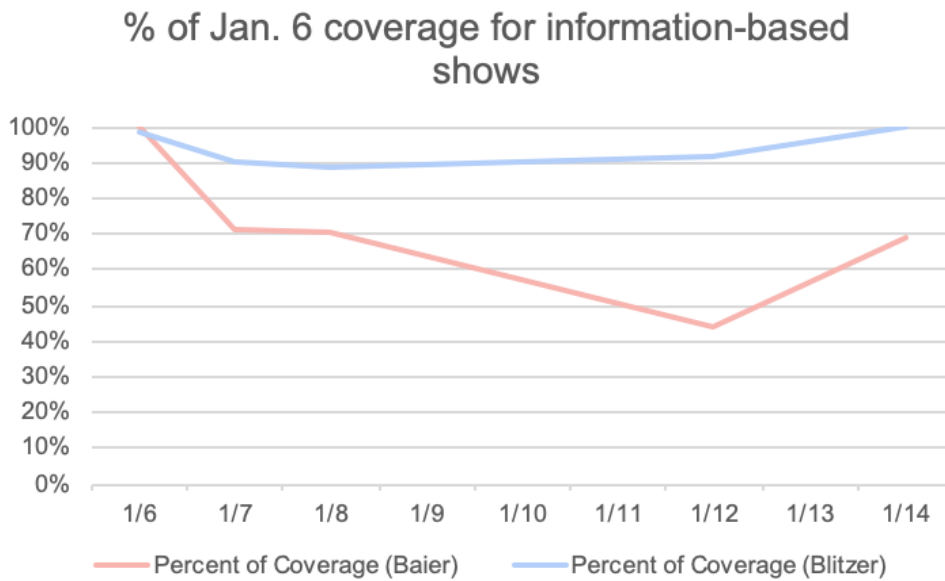
Figure 3.4: Comparison of total Jan. 6 coverage for commentary-based shows

% of Jan. 6 coverage for commentary-based shows
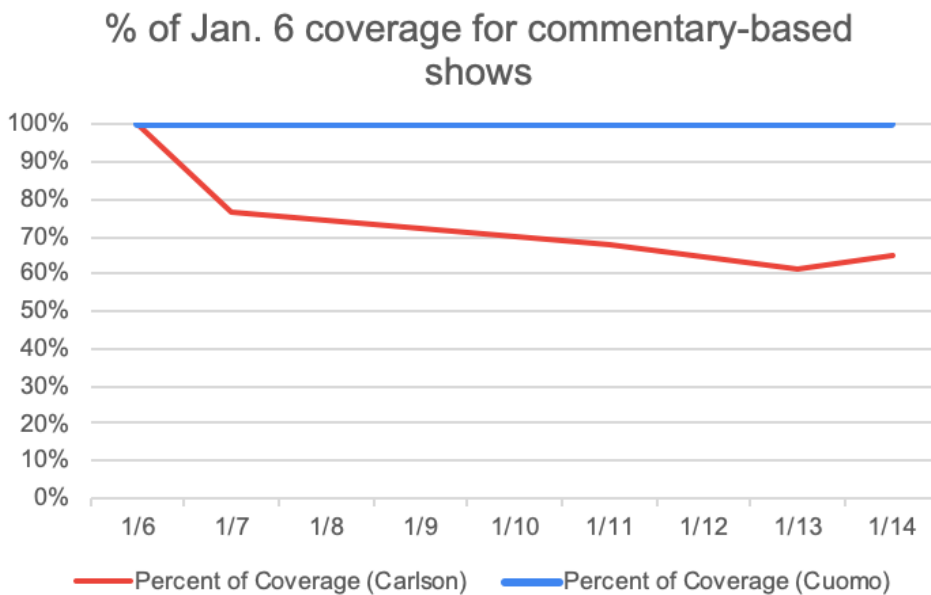
Anchor Opinion Sharing

Figure 3.5: Coding Frequency of "Anchor Opinion"
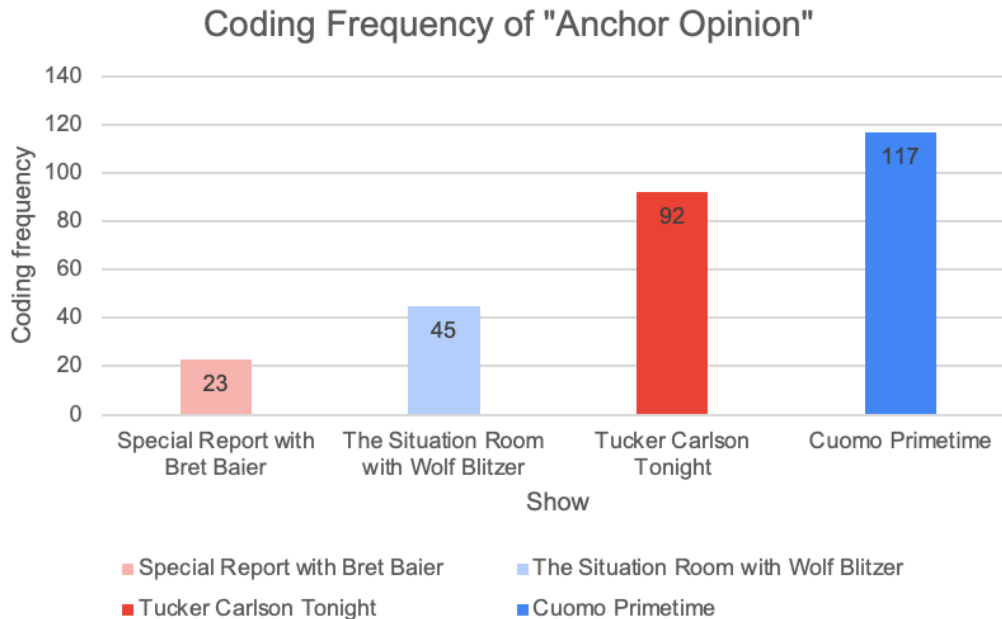
The code "anchor opinion" specifies an instance where the anchor of the show (i.e., Bret Baier, Wolf Blitzer, Tucker Carlson, or Chris Cuomo) shared an explicit opinion about the content they are discussing (see Figure 3.6 for specific examples of anchor opinion-sharing). As evident in Figure 3.5, both commentary-based shows had over double the references coded as "anchor opinion" than their information-based counterparts. This finding reinforces the literature on opinionated news which recognizes the more prominent role of the anchor in the storytelling of commentary-based news shows.

Figure 3.6: Textual examples of "anchor opinion"

- BAIER: "The things that happened on the Capitol today, the mob that got in. I call them the mob, we said protesters earlier, but that's not accurate for the folks who went inside and did damage inside the capitol. Those are extremists" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021a).

- BLITZER: "President Trump gravely endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of government. That's a powerful indictment of a sitting president. Even though he only has seven days left in office" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021e)

- BLITZER: "Hopefully, we will never hear an American president once again accusing us [news media] of being the enemy of the American people. It was so disgusting over four years hearing that all the time, coming from a president of the United States. That simply has to stop" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021a).

- CARLSON: "People who had nothing to do with the violence in the U.S. Capitol are being punished for that violence, and that is repugnant and immoral and anti-American. It should shock our sensibilities" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021c).

- CARLSON: "I think a lot of Republicans on the Hill and other places and I'm among them, are really bothered by T rump's reckless behavior last week and horrified by what the mob did to the Capitol" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021d).

- CUOMO: "So, who will stand up for America now? How about the President? He could do a public event. He could threaten to bring holy hell down on anyone who interrupts the Inauguration. But he doesn't. Why? Now you know why. Donald John Trump likes those extremists and would-be terrorists want to advance his cause, apparently" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021d).

- CUOMO: "We are in a horrible place. Look at where we are. Look at our Capitol. Look at Washington. It looks like a war zone" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021e).

Another interesting note is that the Fox News shows trailed behind their CNN counterparts in both categories. In terms of the information-based shows, *Bret Baier* had the lowest coding frequency of "anchor opinion" with a total of 23 references compared to *The Situation Room's* 45 references. The show that featured the most "anchor opinion" was *Cuomo Primetime* with a total of 117 whereas its Fox News commentary-based counterpart *Tucker Carlson Tonight* had a coding frequency of 92.

Inclusion of Interviews with Lawmakers

Figure 3.7: Coding Frequency of "Interviews with Lawmakers"
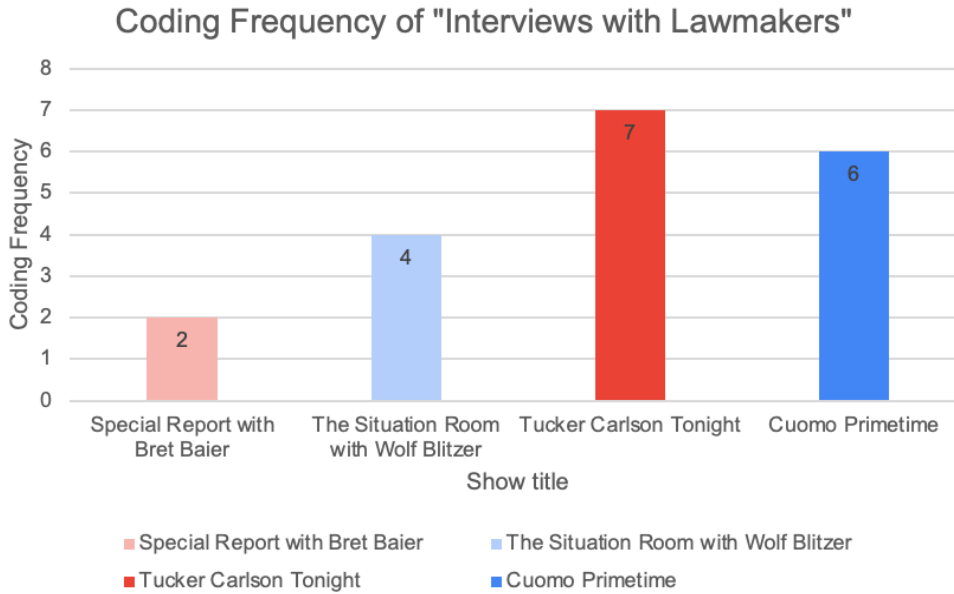
Each of the four shows sampled included segments that featured the anchor directly

interviewing a lawmaker. The range of the coding frequency of interviews with lawmakers was

significantly smaller than the coding frequency of anchor opinion (see Figure 3.7). The content

of these interviews ranged from discussions about what it was like being inside the Capitol

amidst the violence to questions about potential impeachment proceedings. Of the nine

lawmakers interviewed on Fox News, all were members of the Republican Party. In other words,

Baier and Carlson both only interviewed Republican lawmakers (see Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8: List of lawmakers interviewed on Fox News shows

Lawmakers interviewed on Baier	Lawmakers interviewed on Carlson
Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY)	Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO)
Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX)	Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI)
---	Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL)
---	Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN)
---	Rep. Ken Buck (R-CO)

--	Rep. Dan Bishop (R-NC)
--	Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR)

Notably, both lawmakers that were interviewed by Baier, Reps. Liz Cheney and Dan Crenshaw, discussed their discontent with Donald Trump. For example, Liz Cheney stated: "There's no question that the President [Trump] formed the mob, the President invited the mob the President addressed the mob, he lit the flame" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021a). On the other hand, Carlson interviewed lawmakers such as Rep. Dan Bishop who remained committed to Donald Trump and his claims of election fraud stating:

"There are millions of Americans. That's a big number, tens of millions of Americans who believe something went wrong with this election and they're not dumb people. They don't believe it just because they've been told that by the President" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021a).

Similarly, Figure 3.9 demonstrates that the CNN shows, *The Situation Room* and *Cuomo Primetime,* overwhelmingly featured interviews with Democratic lawmakers, reflecting an ideological slant. Specifically, nine of the ten lawmakers interviewed on CNN were members of the Democratic Party. Cuomo was the only anchor who interviewed a lawmaker from the other party. On his January 8, 2021, show, Cuomo interviewed Rep. Adam Kinzinger, a Republican and vocal opponent of Donald Trump. Although it is notable that this is the only instance where we see a viewpoint being given from the opposing party to the network and its viewers, Kinzinger largely echoed the narrative being put forth by Cuomo, thus not providing a truly alternative viewpoint (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021c). Other than this outlier, both Cuomo and Blitzer mirrored their Fox News counterparts by strictly interviewing Democratic lawmakers.

Figure 3.9: List of lawmakers interviewed on CNN shows

Lawmakers interviewed on Blitzer	Lawmakers interviewed on Cuomo
Rep. Jason Crow (D-CO)	Rep. James Clyburn (D-SC)
Rep. Cedric Richmond (D-LA)	Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR)
Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA)	Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA)
Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA)	Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)
—--	Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)
—--	Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL)

Presence of Pundit Input

Figure 3.10: Coding Frequency of "Pundit Input"
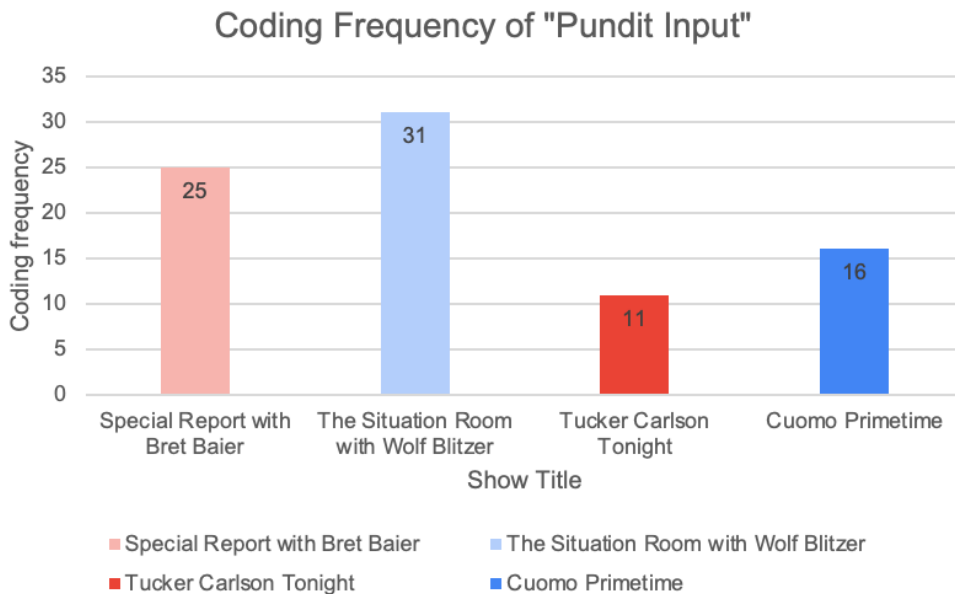
For the purposes of this research, "pundits" are considered to be any professional or expert who was brought on the show to give their expertise or input on the present situation. These individuals were not limited to official network contributors employed by either Fox News or CNN (see Figures 3.11-3.14 for a breakdown of the pundits on each show). Although most of these individuals are individuals who have been traditionally thought of as pundits, this definition also acknowledges pundits as anyone with outside expertise on the subject matter that

is brought in for discussion. These include journalists, former lawmakers, and other political and media professionals.

Both information-based shows featured more pundits in their coverage than their opinion-based counterparts. *Special Report* had a "Pundit input" coding frequency of 25 relative to *Tucker Carlson Tonight's* coding frequency of 11 and *The Situation Room* had a coding frequency of 31 compared to *Cuomo Primetime's* frequency of 16 (see Figure 3.10). It is notable that the information-based shows included pundits more often than the opinion-based shows. This finding may be attributed to the fact that the opinion-based shows devoted more of their screen time to the anchor monologuing or sharing their opinions, whereas the information-based shows gave more airtime to outside sources. Pundits had the smallest presence on *Tucker Carlson Tonight* with only 11 instances coded of pundits sharing their input.

Figure 3.11: List of Pundits Featured on *Special Report with Bret Baier*

Pundits on Baier	Role/Occupation of the Pundit
Marc Thiessen	Fox News Contributor, Columnist, "Washington Post"
Harold Ford Jr.	Fox News Contributor, Former Democratic Representative from TN
Katie Pavlich	Fox News Contributor, News Editor, "Townhall.com"
Charles Hurt	Opinion Editor, "Washington Times"
Susan Ferrechio	Chief Congressional Correspondent, "Washington Examiner"
Mo Elleithee	Executive Director, Georgetown Institute of Politics
Jonathan Swan	National Politics Reporter, "Axios"
Kimberley Strassel	Fox News Contributor, "Wall Street Journal" Columnist
Charles Lane	Opinion writer, "Washington Post"
Lisa Boothe	Fox News Contributor
Matthew Continetti	Editor in Chief, "Washington Free Beacon"
Brit Hume	Fox News Senior Political Analyst
Matt Schlapp	Chairman, American Conservative Union

| Byron York | Fox News Contributor |
| Amy Walter | National Editor, "Cook Political Report" |

Of the 15 pundits featured on *Special Report,* nine have jobs as journalists outside of their work on Fox News. These news organizations consist of several that are explicitly conservative, including "Townhall.com," "The Washington Times," "The Washington Examiner," and "The Washington Free Beacon." It is notable, however, that these pundits also came from mainstream non-partisan news sources, such as "The Washington Post," "Axios," and "The Wall Street Journal." This finding is crucial as it shows that Baier makes somewhat of an attempt to provide his audience with a more fact-based analysis whereas Carlson does not do so as frequently. On the other hand, Baier did include Matt Schlapp on his show, the chairman of the American Conservative Union who used his time on air to perpetuate claims of election fraud. On the January 6, 2021, episode of *Special Report,* Schlapp stated:

> "I was shocked to find tens of thousands of votes that we could prove should not have legally been in the count. By the end it was over 100,000 votes. And all those exhibits were sent to the judges, each step in the legal process. And the judges really had no desire to look at any of the evidence because they viewed it as a political question" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021a).

Although Schlapp was making these claims, Baier made it clear that he did not agree and attempted to shut him down, which was evidence of Baier's commitment to fact-based reporting relative to his commentary-based counterpart, Carlson.

Figure 3.12: List of Pundits featured on *Tucker Carlson Tonight*

Pundits on Carlson	**Role/Occupation of the Pundit**
Jeanine Pirro	Fox News Host
Ned Ryun	Founder and CEO, American Majority

Mark Steyn	Author, Commentator
David Marcus	Columnist
Victor Davis Hanson	Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution
Miranda Devine	Fox News Contributor, Columnist, "The New York Post"
Matt Walsh	Columnist, "The Daily Wire"
Steve Krakauer	Founder, "Fourth Watch"

Carlson, on the other hand, featured far fewer pundits than Baier (see Figure 3.12), and those that were on the show served primarily to bolster the arguments of the host. It is noteworthy that several of the pundits on *Tucker Carlson Tonight* are more well-known figures in conservative political media, such as fellow Fox News host Jeanine Pirro and "The Daily Wire's" Matt Walsh. These individuals are far more overtly partisan than many of the pundits on *Special Report.* These prominent and opinionated media figures have the potential to be seen as more credible in the eyes of their supporters, therefore they could be more prone to believe their arguments with minimal evidence.

Figure 3.13: List of Pundits featured on *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*

Pundits on Blitzer	Role/Occupation of the Pundit
Gloria Borger	CNN Chief Political Analyst
Dana Bash	CNN Chief Political Correspondent
Abby Phillip	CNN Political Correspondent
Shan Wu	CNN Legal Analyst
John King	CNN Chief National Correspondent
Jake Tapper	CNN Host
Jamie Gangel	CNN Special Correspondent
David Axelrod	CNN Senior Political Commentator, Former Obama Senior Adviser
Norm Eisen	Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

Elie Honig	Former Federal Prosecutor
Laura Coates	CNN Legal Analyst
Carrie Cordero	CNN Legal Analyst
Michael Smerconish	CNN Political Commentator
Brian Stelter	CNN Chief Media Correspondent
Jeff Flake	Former Republic Senator from AZ, CNN Political Commentator

The most notable finding surrounding the pundits featured on both the CNN shows, *The Situation Room* and *Cuomo Primetime,* is that CNN employees made up an overwhelming number of the contributors. In fact, every pundit featured on *Cuomo* was either an analyst or commentator regularly featured on CNN. Figure 3.13 shows the slightly more diverse list of pundits featured on *The Situation Room,* however only two out of the 15 total pundits were not employed by CNN. Additionally, the input from Jeff Flake, the former Republican senator from Arizona, was significant as he lent greater credibility to the arguments against Trump, specifically regarding impeachment. As someone who was both recently in office and is a member of the other party, he provided Blitzer's audience with a different perspective.

Figure 3.14: List of Pundits featured on *Cuomo Primetime*

Pundits on Cuomo	Role/Occupation of the Pundit
Phil Mudd	CNN Counterterrorism Analyst, Former CIA Counterterrorism Official, Former FBI Senior Intelligence Adviser
Michael Smerconish	CNN Political Commentator
David Gregory	CNN Political Analyst
David Axelrod	CNN Senior Political Commentator, Former Obama Senior Advisor
Van Jones	CNN Political Commentator, Former Obama Administration Official
John Harwood	CNN White House Correspondent

Asha Rangappa	CNN Legal & National Security Analyst, Former FBI Special Agent

A key difference between the pundits on Fox News and the pundits on CNN is that both CNN shows included input from some of the same individuals (e.g., David Axelrod and Michael Smerconish), whereas there were no instances of a pundit on *Special Report* also being featured on *Tucker Carlson Tonight.* This could be due to organizational factors within each company which could also explain why CNN utilizes so many more internal pundits and Fox News seems to prefer commentators from outside the Fox News organization.

Chapter 4: Findings Part II – Thematic Framing Differences

The findings presented in the following chapter are derived from observation of the thematic framing differences across the four shows sampled. These findings have been grouped into three overarching categories: Labeling and Description of January 6, Culpability for January 6, and the Aftermath and Fallout from January 6. Each of these three categories is then broken down into common themes in order to find and present similarities and differences across the four shows in their presentation of January 6.

Labeling and Description of January 6

In the months and years that have followed the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, there has been widespread discussion about what exactly occurred and how it should be referenced in the media and other public discourse. The findings presented in this section show that the portrayal and labeling of the events at the Capitol on January 6 have varied since they occurred. Partisan framing began during the event and continued in the days following the attack.

January 6 as a Threat to Democracy

All four shows sampled included some degree of labeling January 6 as a threat to democracy (see Figure 4.1). Each show referred to the U.S. Capitol as being home to or the center of democracy in both America and around the world. Specifically referring to the assault on American democracy, both *Special Report* and *Cuomo Primetime* cited January 6 as an attack on the U.S. Constitution stating that January 6 was "an ignominious day for democracy, especially on an important constitutional day, the certification of the electoral college" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021a) and that "[January 6] was an attack on the Constitution, on separate and coequal branches of governments, on the American way of life" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021c). Similar attack-on-America language was common on all four programs.

Whereas the information-based shows had similar coding frequencies of January 6 as a threat to democracy, the commentary-based shows differed significantly. The "threat to democracy" frame was particularly prominent on *Cuomo Primetime,* which used this framing 19 times, nearly four times as many as its commentary-based counterpart, *Tucker Carlson Tonight* where only 5 instances were found (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Coding Frequency of "January 6 as a Threat to Democracy"
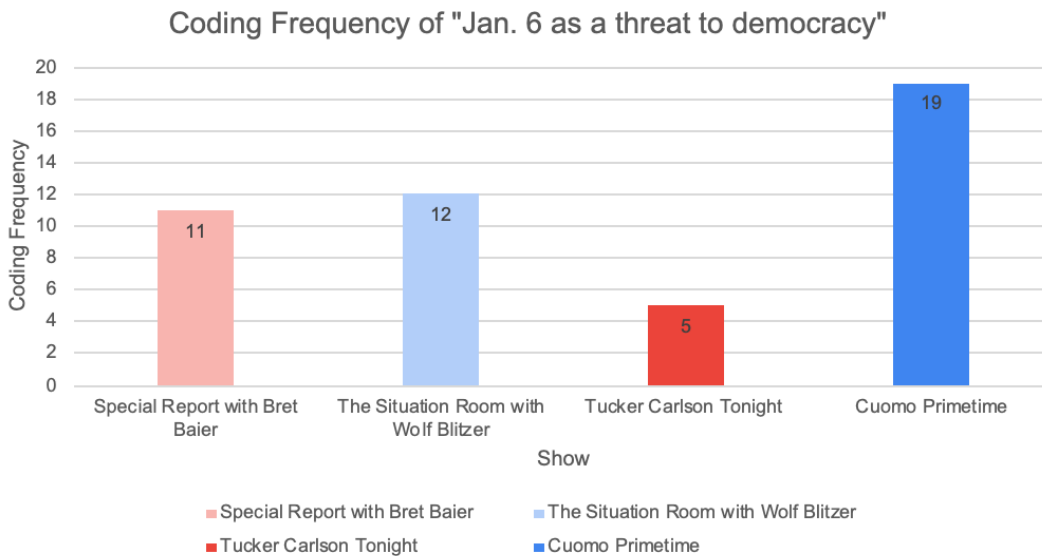
Although each show presented the idea of January 6 as a threat to democracy, there were key differences in the way that they explained this idea. For instance, Carlson puts forth the notion that the events at the Capitol on January 6 undermined democracy, not due to the attempt to stop the certification of the election but because it was a display of illegal activity and incivility which is inherently anti-democratic as American democracy hinges on law and order. Blitzer, on the other hand, directly tied what occurred on January 6 to Donald Trump's "Little regard for the norms of democracy" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021e), stating: "[Trump] would be very happy to undermine democracy" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021e). Unlike Carlson's assertion that January 6 was undemocratic for the same reasons other

violent protests were undemocratic: the infliction of violence and unrest; Blitzer gave his audience a specific scapegoat on which to place the blame for January 6: Donald Trump.

January 6 as a Peaceful Protest/Mostly Peaceful Crowd

Turning now to a discussion of where the labeling of January 6 fractured across partisan lines, both Fox News shows – *Special Report* and *Tucker Carlson Tonight* – referred to January 6 as a peaceful protest during which a few individuals turned violent or highlighted the experiences of those who attended the rally but did not participate in the violence. For instance, on January 6, 2021, Baier separated those who peacefully attended the Stop the Steal Rally from those who stormed the Capitol, stating: "Despite the fact that there is a large portion of that Trump crowd out there that may have just been showing up to be peaceful, the people who stormed the Capitol were extremists and dangerous" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021a). Due to the widespread belief among Republicans and Fox News viewers that the 2020 Election had been stolen from Trump, this quote provided those individuals with a view of the riot that was sensitive to people like them who were peacefully engaging in what they believed was a noteworthy cause. Because of this portrayal, Fox News viewers were less likely to see what happened on January 6 through a violent lens.

Carlson also focused the lens on the January 6 protest's non-violent elements and actors. Specifically, Carlson repeatedly referred to the musician Ariel Pink, a Trump supporter who attended the President's rally on January 6, as an example of someone who was there in a non-violent capacity. On his January 14, 2021, show, for instance, Carlson stated:

"Ariel Pink is a musician from Los Angeles and a Trump voter. On January 6,

he attended the President's speech in Washington and then he went back to his hotel room

and took a nap. He did not go to the Capitol. He participated in no violence whatsoever"

(*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021e).

By portraying the attendees of Trump's January 6 rally as peaceful protesters who were

exercising their First Amendment rights, Baier and Carlson positioned those who have been

persecuted for their attendance as inherent victims. Baier, specifically, addressed the fact that

individuals who were at the Capitol on January 6 were losing their jobs, citing: "The digital firm

Cogensia has put its CEO Brad Rukstales on leave after he was arrested at the Capitol" (*Special*

Report with Bret Baier, 2021c).

Although Baier mentioned the victimization of January 6 attendees, Carlson extended this

notion to anyone who publicly supported Donald Trump stating:

> "I think the rest of us know in our gut that if you supported Trump that they're going to
>
> try and hurt you over the coming four years, and I wonder what Congress can do to
>
> protect the basic freedoms that we were promised when we arrived here by birth in this
>
> country" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021a).

The fearmongering that is present in the previous quote serves as evidence of Carlson's attempts

to make his viewers feel like their victimization and persecution for supporting Trump is

inevitable. Therefore, if viewers of Fox News believed that those in positions of power would

inevitably strip them of their rights as Americans, then party polarization will persist in

American political culture.

Populist Ideals

Tucker Carlson consistently appealed to Populist ideas, such as framing Republicans,

specifically Trump supporters, as victims while simultaneously positioning elites in society as

the ever-present enemy that was out to get them. For example, Carlson labelled the ruling class

and elites as the devil and separated Trump supporters from "Country Club Republicans" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021b) who look down on them. Building on this theme, Carlson claimed that "The new money class despises [Trump voters]" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021b). For additional examples of Populist ideals on *Tucker Carlson Tonight,* see Figure 4.2, noting that many overarching themes fall under the Populism umbrella.

Figure 4.2: Examples of Populist ideals on *Tucker Carlson Tonight*

- "The one guy [Trump] who has clearly stood up in the last four years and said I'm actually going to champion your cause, right, this is about -- supposed to be about the American people, of, by and for the people. I'm going to champion your cause. The ruling class, the establishment decides to go out and impeach him twice in 13 months" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021d).

- "Donald Trump thinks almost exclusively about Donald Trump, but so does almost every single Democrat in Congress as well as every single Republican. All of them, every one of them is Trump obsessed. Who is you obsessed? Who has got your concerns top of mind? Who wakes up in the middle of the night worried about your family? As far as we can tell, no one, and that's the main thing we need to change. It won't be easy, but the themes are pretty clear" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021b).

- "Trump brought the [Republican] party's ranks noticeably downscale from the country club to the trailer park as they often sneer, and this horrifies them. Many Republicans in Washington now despise the people they're supposed to represent and protect" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021b).

- "If you want to understand the hatred, the real hatred, not just disagreement, but gut-level loathing and fear of Trump, in say, New York or Washington or LA, you've got to understand that first, it's not really Trump, it's his voters. The new money class despises them" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021b).

January 6 as an Act of Domestic Terrorism

Whereas the Fox News shows emphasized peaceful aspects of January 6, the CNN shows differed drastically as they emphasized January 6 as an act of domestic terrorism, which included a comparison to the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. Blitzer stated: "[January 6] was an act of domestic terrorism. These were terrorists. Not even rioters, terrorists" (*The Situation Room*

with Wolf Blitzer, 2021a). Cuomo echoed the thoughts of Blitzer by stating that "we could not let the domestic terrorists win" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021b).

Blitzer explicitly compared January 6 to 9-11 in an attempt to demonstrate the American bravery and unity that was put on display in the face of terrorism on 9-11 and how it directly contrasted with the domestic terror threat on January 6. Specifically, Blitzer stated:

"It was on 9-11 when brave Americans on Flight 93 chose to sacrifice themselves rather than see the heart of democracy attacked and yet on the 6th, what we saw were our fellow Americans displeased with the results of an election, spun up by conspiracy theories, lied to by people who grift and shame and benefit frankly from these lies including the president" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021c).

This comparison was particularly significant as it's widely assumed that on 9-11, Flight 93 which crashed in Pennsylvania, was headed for the United States Capitol: the same location of the violence on January 6. The dichotomy that Blitzer presented goes beyond showcasing the violent aspects of January 6 by comparing it to one of the most deadly events in recent history on American soil. Additionally, by labeling those who breached the Capitol as terrorists, Blitzer focused on the criminal behavior of individuals, whereas Carlson and Baier showed them as victims.

The partisan argument over labeling the violence on January 6 has persisted, specifically over the course of 2022 as the United States House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack began holding hearings to investigate the events. Beliefs and attitudes regarding January 6 remain varied amongst both elected officials and American citizens, leading to the details of January 6 being held in contentious debate. These findings help to understand the origins of this debate over what exactly occurred on January 6. The following section illuminates another key

framing difference across the shows, which is how they compared what happened on January 6 with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in Washington during the summer of 2020.

January 6 Compared to the Black Lives Matter Protests in 2020

All four of the sampled shows compared the violence on January 6 to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that occurred in Washington the previous summer (see Figure 4.3). Carlson made 19 comparisons to BLM in his January 6 coverage, more than double the seven references to BLM on *Cuomo Primetime.* Additionally, is it notable that both of the commentary-based shows made more BLM comparisons than their information-based counterparts. Although the four shows shared this common code, the ways in which they connected the two events differed drastically.

Figure 4.3: Coding Frequency of "BLM Comparison"
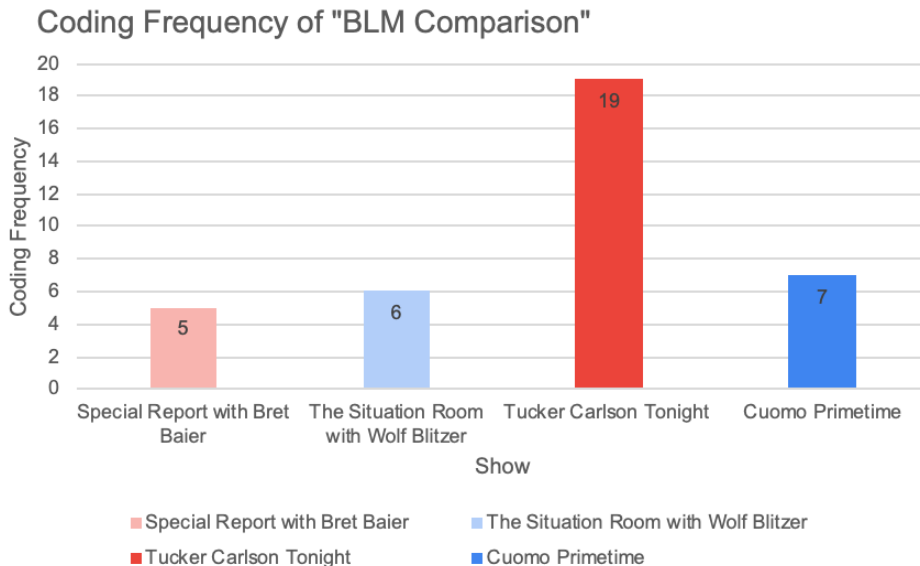
Notably, both CNN shows referred to the fact that the BLM protests, which featured predominately people of color, were met with disproportionately more police force than the protesters on January 6, who were mostly white. Blitzer stated: "During last summer's demonstrations against racial injustice here in our country, protesters were met immediately with

tear gas, rubber bullets, batons, and mass arrests" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021a). Cuomo critiqued the force that was used at the BLM protests in comparison with what was used on January 6 by stating: "When Black Lives Matter came this summer to D.C., they had military out there. It looked like ninja squads and all kinds of stuff for a peaceful protest. And then nobody for this" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021b)? Here, both Blitzer and Cuomo are calling out the lack of police force in relation to the BLM protests. This dichotomy between the BLM protests and January 6 shows how the partisan news networks differentially view the concept of a peaceful protest. Whereas the Fox News hosts were more likely to describe January 6 as a demonstration of people exercising their First Amendment rights that became violent, CNN compared January 6 to the BLM demonstrations, which they described as people exercising *their* First Amendment rights, which happened to escalate to violence.

Carlson also compared the crowds at the BLM protests to the crowd on January 6. However, Carlson focused more on the physical appearance differences between the two crowds. For instance, when referring to the rioter who was killed in the Capitol, Carlson stated "She bore no resemblance to the angry children we have seen again and again wrecking our cities: pasty, entitled nihilists dressed in black, setting fire, spray painting slogans on statues. She didn't look like that" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021a). In this quote, Carlson taps into his recurring frame that the people who were at the Capitol on January 6 were doing so for moral and valiant reasons. Therefore, he distinguished them from the stereotype commonly put forth on Fox News of young, Leftist protesters who attended some of the BLM protests.

Baier, on the other hand, took a more objective approach by comparing the two more than contrasting them. Baier put forth the belief that both January 6 and the BLM protests were well-intended but overshadowed by "the actions of a few bad people" (*Special Report with Bret*

Baier, 2021b). This quote re-enforced the narrative that January 6 was not planned to be a violent attack on the U.S. government the way it was being perceived by left-leaning news sources such as CNN.

Although the details and descriptions of what occurred on January 6 are still heavily contested among partisans, these findings, specifically the fact that there are many different labels for January 6, provide some insight into why there is so much discontent surrounding the event.

Culpability for January 6

Not only did the labeling and description of the January 6 events vary across the four shows sampled, but each show also varied in terms of who or what was deemed to be the culprit for the violence. The most common themes that were acquired from the transcripts regarding the culpability for January 6 were the Capitol Police, Donald Trump, and Republican lawmakers.

Capitol Police

The critiques of the Capitol Police and their ill-preparedness came from all four shows; However, the CNN shows directly questioned the integrity of the Capitol Police. For instance, Blitzer claimed that "one of the Capitol Police officers was seen taking selfies with some of the rioters, and another Capitol Police officer was seen wearing a MAGA hat and actually directing some of the rioters through the Capitol during the insurrection" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021d). Although it is unclear if these claims were true, they were also repeated by Cuomo, who took them a step further to insinuate that there were "White Nationalist elements, in law enforcement, and in that crowd cooperating" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021b).

Criticism of the Capitol Police and their lack of preparedness for January 6 was one of the common threads found across all four shows. Each show referred to the fact that there were

various warning signs leading up to January 6, including "violent and threatening online posts and online call to arms" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021b). Carlson, instead of blaming the online chatter like Cuomo and Blitzer, stated that he believed Capitol Police should have been prepared because "they knew there was a major rally and they knew that Trump supporters were really mad because they thought the election was stolen from their candidate, so it really is strange" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021b).

Donald Trump

Another prime culprit suggested for inciting violence on January 6 was Donald Trump. Donald Trump had refused to accept that he lost the 2020 Election, and the original purpose of the rally was to protest the certification of the votes. Each of the four shows sampled included references to Trump's refusal to accept the 2020 election results (see Figure 4.4). In each category, information- and commentary-based, the CNN show coded roughly three times more instances of Trump refusing to accept the 2020 Election results than their Fox News counterparts. In doing so, Blitzer and Cuomo perpetuate the frustrations that many of their viewers already had regarding Trump and his election denialism.

Figure 4.4: Coding Frequency of "Trump's Refusal to Accept the Election Results"

Coding Frequency of "Trump's refusal to accept 2020 election results"
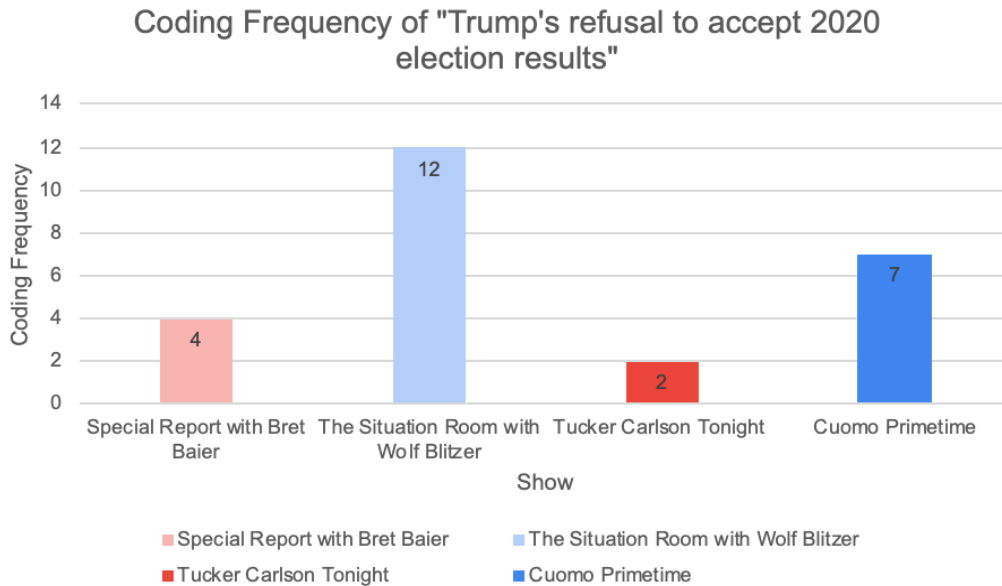
Although the belief in Trump's culpability for January 6 was more prevalent among the CNN shows, it is notable that this belief was present in the Fox News shows as well. Specifically, Baier cited Trump's refusal to accept the 2020 Election results as being a motivator for the violence:

> "[January 6] was a day that was really weeks in the making as President Trump kept up a constant stream of criticisms and accusations, complaints about the November 3rd election, really escalating the passions and anger of his most devout supporters. It all came to a head today when thousands of those supporters came to Washington to back President Trump's final try for a second term" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021a).

Whereas Baier focused on Trump being responsible due to his election denialism, Blitzer focused more on Trump's actions on January 6, specifically his speech prior to the Capitol breach. Referencing this speech Blitzer stated, "Key word incitement because clearly, that is what the President was doing in those remarks just before all of the rioters left [...] and walked up to the U.S. Capitol" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021b). Cuomo also spoke to

Trump's culpability during the event itself by stating: "While [the insurrection] was happening, [Trump] asked people, Senators, who were in hiding, to use the riot, to derail the vote" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021c). The inclusion of both quotes builds upon the narrative of making Donald Trump culpable for what occurred on January 6. It is notable that Cuomo included the anecdote that Trump was refusing to stop the violence in the Capitol, a point that was not found in any of the Fox News transcripts, therefore, providing evidence that Fox News is far more likely to shield its viewers from particularly unpleasing stories about Trump, while CNN is more likely to bolster them.

Republican Lawmakers

A common narrative put forth by the CNN shows was that although Trump was ultimately to blame for what occurred on January 6, his Republican allies in Congress allowed it to happen. For example, Blitzer stated, "Many [Republicans] enabled [Trump] the last four years. They have ignored the facts. They have ignored the truth" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021e). Additionally, Baier was the only Fox News show to mention complacency of Trump's supporters in Congress which is evidence of *Special Report's* more fact based approach to news presentation.

Cuomo Primetime had the highest coding frequency of "complacency of Trump Republicans" with 44 total references coded across the sample. On his January 6, 2021, episode, Cuomo put forth the phrase "Re-Trump-lican" (for a list of examples of Cuomo's use of the term "Re-Trump-lican" see Figure 4.5). According to Cuomo, "Re-Trump-licans" are those who "have abandoned what they're supposed to be about, as members of the GOP, in fealty to Trump" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021a). That Cuomo came up with a term to address these individuals speaks to the frequency with which he refers to them on *Cuomo Primetime.* While

Cuomo clearly does not absolve Trump of guilt by repeatedly referring to his supporters in

Congress, he does spread the guilt around in a sense. Additionally, Cuomo includes many of the

phrases in Figure 4.5 to share with his viewers, who may be constituents of these individuals,

that a threat remains once Trump is out of office – as long as these individuals are still allowed to

govern.

Figure 4.5: Examples of the Complacency of "Re-Trump-licans" on *Cuomo Primetime*
• "Every day that all those Re-Trump-licans fail to own that their fealty was wrong, that they reject these groups, that these people are not patriots, every day they fail to do that, the threat grows" (*Cuomo Primetime*, 2021d).
• "Re-Trumplicans say "Biden should be giving unity?" No, that was on you, to talk to Donald Trump, about unity, to stop the poison that was coming out of his purse on a daily, hourly basis" (*Cuomo Primetime*, 2021e).
• "The bad feelings, the bad practices don't go away because Trump will soon be gone. These crazy fringe groups remain rabid, and so do the Re-Trump-licans, who torched old glory, and pledged allegiance to the MAGA flag" (*Cuomo Primetime*, 2021b).
• "Trump didn't do this alone. He put the message out there, but he didn't start this fire. He blew on it. And too many Re-Trump-licans, who are still in office, who will remain, have to answer for that. They listened. They looked on. And they did nothing. What you ignore you empower" (*Cuomo Primetime*, 2021b).

**Aftermath and Fallout from January 6**

The final main category addressed in this study analyzes how each show framed different

aspects of the aftermath and fallout from January 6. These subcategories include how the

resulting deaths were framed, the subsequent resignations of Trump officials, the media

restriction of Trump, the response from corporate America, and the prosecution of the

insurrectionists.

Deaths

The analysis of how the deaths on January 6 were framed began with an understanding that the predominate narratives centered around Ashli Babbitt, the rioter who was shot and killed inside the Capitol by police, and Brian Sicknick, the Capitol Police Officer who died as a result of injuries sustained on January 6. Figure 4.6 demonstrates the coding frequencies for mentions of the deaths of Babbitt and Sicknick across each of the four shows sampled.

Figure 4.6: Comparison of the Coding Frequencies "Babbitt Shooting" and "Police Officer Death"
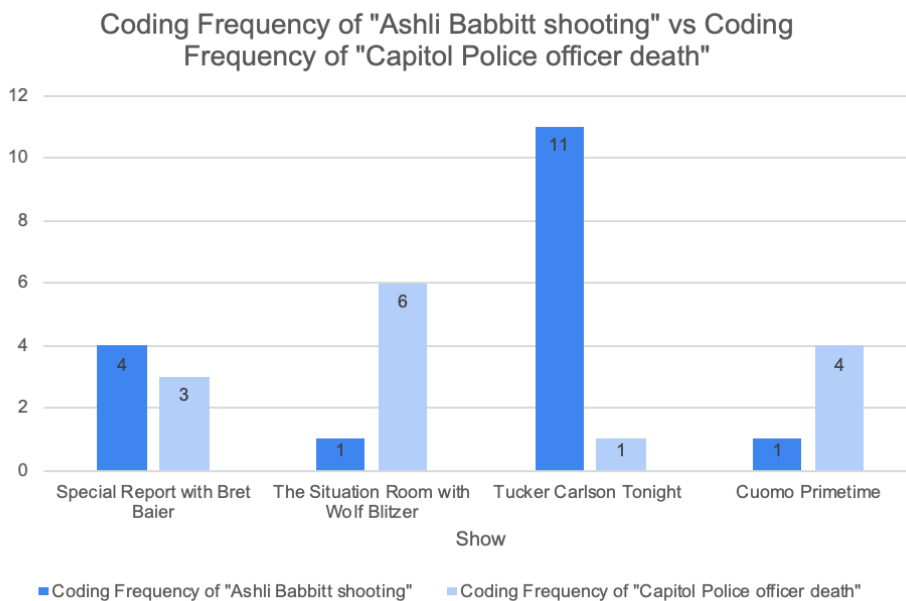
As is evident from Figure 4.6, Carlson mentioned the death of Ashli Babbitt, whom Capitol Police shot as she attempted to break into the U.S. House chamber, substantially more than the rest of the shows in the sample. Notably, 11 references to the shooting of Ashli Babbitt were presented on *Tucker Carlson Tonight,* whereas Carlson included only one reference to the death of Officer Brian Sicknick. On the other hand, both *The Situation Room* and *Cuomo Primetime* only included one reference each to the shooting of Babbitt. However, each of these shows referenced the death of Officer Sicknick six and four times, respectively.

Not only did Carlson more frequently mention Babbitt's death, but in his monologue on January 6, 2021, Carlson included a graphically detailed and dramatic depiction of how she was killed:

"In the footage,[...] the woman is standing in a hallway right off the House floor at the center of the Capitol building. She's got an American flag tied around her neck. [...] Suddenly, with no warning, there was gunfire. You hear a shot and the woman falls. She has been hit with a bullet. It seems like the neck; it could be the chest. Apparently, it was fired by someone in law enforcement. People in the hallway scream. The camera closes in on the woman's face. She looks stunned. She is staring straight ahead, unblinking. In her eyes, you can see that she knows she's about to die, which in the end she did. The woman died a couple of hours ago at a local hospital" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021a).

The language Carlson used in the previous quote is indicative of his belief in and perpetuation of Ashli Babbitt as a type of martyr, who died protesting what she was passionate about. This detailed description of her death stands in stark contrast with the singular mention of Babbitt's death on *Cuomo Primetime,* in which he plainly stated, "A female rioter is dead, a veteran" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021b).

Baier also deviated from Carlson in his description of Babbitt's death referring to her in a less sympathetic way as someone who "broke through barriers and illegally entered the Capitol" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021b). On the other hand, almost all mentions of Brian Sicknick contained sympathies for his family and expressions that this should not have happened. For instance, Baier stated: "Officer Brian Sicknick has been called a hero for his efforts to defend the Capitol on Wednesday. The 42-year-old Iraq war veteran, died from his injuries late last night as a result of the mayhem" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021c).

Baier's coverage of the deaths on January 6 is notable as it is the most consistent between coverage of Babbitt's death and Sicknick's death. There was only a one reference difference between the two codes for Baier; However, for the other three shows sampled, there was a much greater discrepancy.

A comparison in the coverage of these two occurrences revealed that the CNN shows chose to focus their coverage on the death of the Capitol Police Officer, as opposed to the woman shot while breaking into the Capitol. Additionally, it is notable that although Carlson mentioned the death of Babbitt at least twice as many times as any other show, he only mentioned the death of Officer Sicknick once. This is a deviation from Carlson's vast history of supporting the police and condemning violence against the police.

Trump Administration Officials Resigning

In the wake of January 6, some of Trump's most fervent supporters felt they could no longer support him and resigned their positions. There were many differences in the presentation of these resignations across the four shows sampled. One of the more partisan slants came from Cuomo who said: "Trumpers are running off the ship like rats" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021d) and: "People are resigning because the man they worked for is disgusting and an embarrassment to his office" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021c). Here, Cuomo conveyed feelings of negative partisanship to his viewers.

Similar to the way Cuomo stated that Republican lawmakers or "Re-Trump-licans" shared the blame for January 6, he also condemned and demeaned Trump officials for their previous complacency, even once they had left the administration and publicly come out against Trump.

It is notable that there were no mentions of Trump officials resigning on *Tucker Carlson Tonight,* while the other three shows had relatively similar coding frequencies of Trump officials resigning. Although Baier did include discussions about resignations, it should be noted that he did not mention the resignation of acting Homeland Security Chief Chad Wolfe while Blitzer and Cuomo both did as a way to cast doubt on the security of America post-January 6.

Media Restriction of Trump

In the wake of January 6, several technology and media companies came out to publicly condemn Donald Trump for what they viewed as the incitement of violence and several social media services banned the former president from their platforms. All four shows referenced the media's restriction of Trump post-January 6 (see Figure 4.7); However, the Fox News shows cited Trump's media restriction more than the CNN shows. Baier had the highest coding frequency of "media restriction of Trump" with 13 total references coded, while Blitzer, his information-based counterpart, had eight total references. By emphasizing the media's restriction of Trump, the Fox News hosts were increasing the issue salience of their viewers regarding media corporate overreach and stoking a sense of fear that their freedom could soon be in jeopardy as well.

Figure 4.7: Coding Frequency of "Media Restriction of Trump"
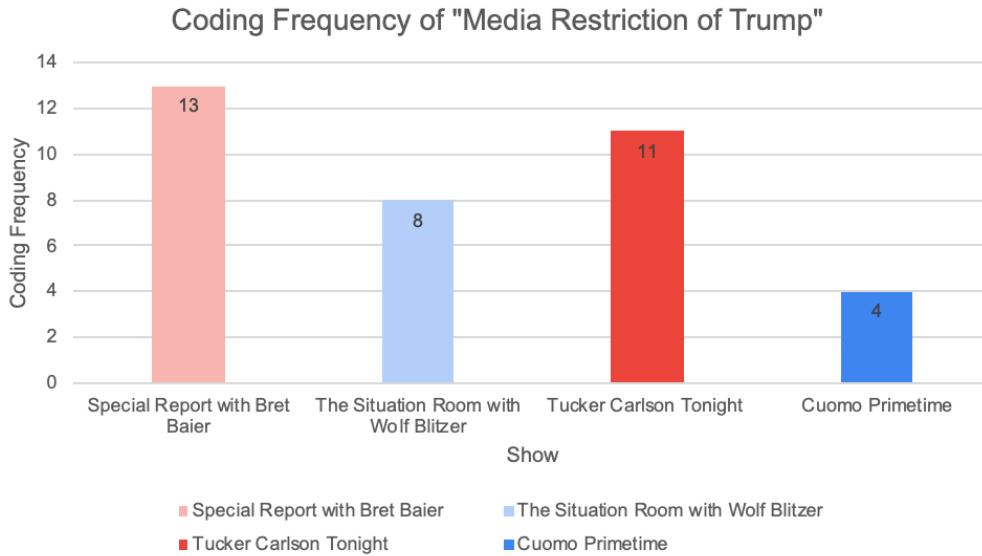
Both CNN shows referenced the ban on Trump's Twitter account by putting it in the context of hindering the spread of misinformation. According to Blitzer, Trump's ban on Twitter "left him without the avenue that he has had to vent and also to misinform his legions of supporters across the country" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021c). As has been seen across many of the other themes, Cuomo tended to mirror the content from *The Situation Room.* Cuomo's presentation, however, differed as he used more colorful language and more often allowed his emotions to come across in his news presentation. For instance, Cuomo stated: "Trump won't be Tweeting dangerous bile anymore" (*Cuomo Primetime,* 2021c), in reference to Trump's comments on January 6. Although the two quotes are saying virtually the same message, their tones differ which was a common thread found when comparing *The Situation Room* to *Cuomo Primetime.*

On the other hand, the Fox News shows focused not only on the media restriction of Trump but also on the media restriction of Trump's supporters, notably, online media companies blocking access to Parler. Baier referred to Parler as the "free-speech equivalent and competitor

to Twitter" (*Special Report with Bret Baier,* 2021c). While Baier discussed the shutting out of

Parler by media giants, he didn't give a direct spin on this action the way Carlson did. Carlson

clearly believed that there was no need or reason to block Parler stating, "On what grounds did

they do this to Parler? What did Parler do wrong? Well, we still don't know. No one has

bothered to explain that [...] Parler committed no crimes" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021c).

Additionally, Carlson re-affirmed his backing of Parler by inviting its CEO to the show for an

interview. By linking Trump's de-platforming to broader concerns over silencing conservatives

on social media, Carlson perpetuated the Populist frame aimed at painting conservatives as

victims.

Prosecution of Insurrectionists

Due to the amount of surveillance that was present in and around the Capitol, it was

relatively easy to identify and prosecute the individuals seen illegally entering the Capitol. All

four sampled shows referenced the prosecution of these individuals to some degree (see Figure

4.8). Notably, the prosecution of "insurrectionists" or those that were captured or recorded in the

Capitol on January 6, was a more common theme across the CNN shows than the Fox News

shows in both categories. Both Blitzer and Cuomo referenced the prosecution of these

individuals 15 times, but there is a greater discrepancy between Baier and Carlson. Baier had

more than double the prosecution references as Carlson, re-affirming the finding that Baier's

coverage was more closely in-line with the CNN shows in terms of the content covered across

the sample than Carlson.

Figure 4.8: Coding Frequency of "Prosecution of Insurrectionists"

Coding Frequency of "Prosecution of Insurrectionists"
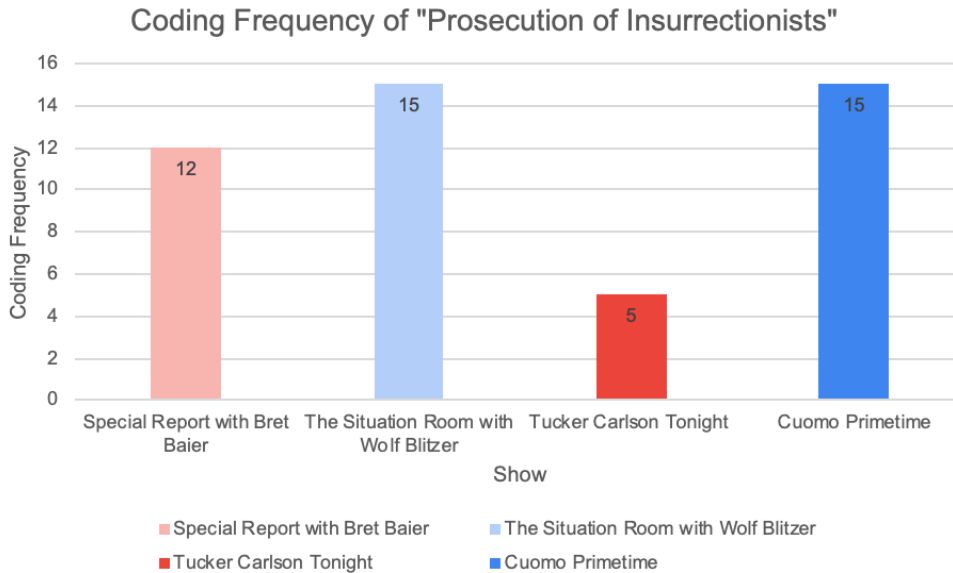
Carlson, in particular, discussed the prosecution of these people in a way that

downplayed their crimes in comparison to how Blitzer addressed it. Whereas Carlson stated:

"Vandalize a building, hurt a cop – go to jail" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021c), Blitzer framed

their crimes more seriously stating: "The FBI is vowing to track down and charge more domestic

terrorists who stormed the U.S. Capitol" (*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,* 2021a). Once

again, Cuomo took it a step further to personally attack the people involved on January 6 stating,

"They put their names and photos everywhere, they gave interviews because they thought they

were better than other thugs, terrorists, and rioters. They were wrong" (*Cuomo Primetime,*

2021d). Whereas Cuomo demonized January 6 attendees, Carlson positioned them as the victims

who were at risk of losing their rights stating: "What happened [January 6] will be used [...] to

justify stripping you of your right to assemble, to not be spied upon, to make a living, to defend

yourself" (*Tucker Carlson Tonight,* 2021a).

Chapter 5: Discussion

All four of the shows included in this study: *Special Report with Bret Baier, The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer, Tucker Carlson Tonight, and Cuomo Primetime* brought their own narrative to the news of the events of January 6. If you only understood January 6 through Fox News' coverage, you would view the events as a largely peaceful protest that were only made violent by a small group of individuals who did not represent the vast majority of the people in attendance. Additionally, Fox News reinforces for its audience, that those who were at the Capitol on January 6 or, more broadly, those who question the integrity of the 2020 Election, are exercising their rights as Americans. On the other hand, if only exposed to CNN, the viewers would see January 6 as a more violent event that threatened the institution of American democracy. This selection and minimization of different aspects of January 6 by CNN and Fox News is consistent with the existing literature surrounding news media framing which focuses on how an issue or event is being presented in the media.

The purpose of this research was to understand not only how two ideologically-polarized cable news networks, CNN and Fox News, framed January 6 but also how the information-based shows on each network, *Special Report* and *The Situation Room,* differed from their commentary-based counterparts, *Tucker Carlson Tonight* and *Cuomo Primetime*. The following chapter presents a discussion of the similarities and differences that were found across these two dimensions, starting with a discussion of the differential framing techniques used by CNN and Fox News generally, and then moving to how the information-based shows on Fox News and CNN differentially framed January 6 relative to their commentary-based counterparts. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations to this study and an elaboration upon future research that could be conducted relative to this study.

Implications of the General Framing Differences between CNN and Fox News

According to the research, there was less overall coverage surrounding January 6 on Fox News than on CNN. This finding provides insight into the incongruity of beliefs among the American people surrounding the significance of what occurred at the U.S. Capitol on January 6. For instance, all the episodes sampled from *Cuomo Primetime* had 100% of their coverage devoted to January 6 content. According to framing theory, which asserts that by emphasizing the salience of a particular topic, the media has the capacity to reorient their audience's thinking about a topic or issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Therefore, the implication can be made that Cuomo's viewers would be the most concerned about what happened on January 6 and the most invested in the aftermath (e.g., impeachment, prosecutions, etc.) relative to viewers of the other shows in the sample.

Another way that Fox News and CNN reaffirmed their ideologically partisan slant was their inclusion of interviews almost exclusively with ideologically-consistent lawmakers (e.g. Fox News interviewing Republicans and CNN interviewing Democrats). These lawmakers bolstered the framing differences between Fox News and CNN by providing legitimacy to back up arguments being put forth on the shows. These interviews also served to reinforce the viewers' partisan beliefs by neglecting to give them an alternative perspective to the dominant narrative being put forth by the anchor. By only including input from ideologically-congruent lawmakers, both CNN and Fox News contributed to the growth of partisan echo chambers which decreased the likelihood of partisans reaching a consensus with one another about January 6. This finding is consistent with Entman (1993)'s quote: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text." As described by

Entman, viewers of Fox News are likely to be presented with a vastly different "perceived reality" regarding January 6 than CNN viewers.

Thematically, there were minimal commonalities found across all four of the shows in the sample. This finding supports the fact that there has been a widespread lack of agreement amongst partisans in the months and years that have followed January 6 about what occurred at the U.S. Capitol and what should be done moving forward.

For instance, the Fox News shows more frequently referred to January 6 as a peaceful protest that turned violent due to a few bad actors whereas the CNN shows emphasized the more violent features of January 6 by referring to it as an act of domestic terrorism. This finding has vast implications for the American public and their opinion of January 6. Fox News viewers, who are predominately Republican, are more likely to believe that what occurred on January 6 was largely peaceful (Blake, 2022), particularly in comparison to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. Therefore, those punished for their attendance at the Capitol were being victimized as a result of their support of Donald Trump.

On the other hand, both CNN shows emphasized their framing of January 6 as an act of domestic terror. Because January 6 was labeled on one side as a peaceful political protest and on the other side as an act of terrorism, it was inevitable there would be vastly different conceptions about what occurred among the American public. This differential framing showed how the partisan news networks perpetuated their own narratives which differed from one another and, in turn, led to the polarization surrounding January 6. Whereas Fox News' framing of January 6 could easily lead their viewers to perceive the January 6 attendees as victims, CNN's viewers are much more likely to believe that January 6 was a violent insurrection on the U.S. Capitol and that those who were involved should be brought to justice. Additionally, CNN viewers are more

likely to believe that Trump's rhetoric and election denialism were the primary cause of January

6 (Quinnipiac University, 2022). This is important to note because it can provide some insight

into how CNN perpetuated anti-Trump sentiments and why there are such polarizing attitudes

regarding Trump.

Implications of the Framing Differences between Information-Based Shows and

Commentary-Based Shows on Each Network

Turning now to more specific framing comparisons of each Fox News show as well as

each CNN show against one another, many implications can be drawn for American political

culture and discourse surrounding January 6. As a result of this study, it was discovered that the

commentary-based shows on each respective channel offered significantly greater instances of

the host explicitly sharing their opinion on the content than their information-based counterparts.

Audiences of these shows, which on average got more viewership due to their primetime status,

were presented with more of a spin on the news. Due to the commentary-based hosts inserting

their own narrative and partisan voice into their coverage, audiences could be more likely to feel

a sense of identification with them than with the information-based anchor. Another important

implication regarding the framing differences between information-based shows and

commentary-based shows is that negative partisanship was much more frequently perpetuated on

commentary-based shows. Negative partisanship, which is the belief that the opposing political

party is the enemy and the tendency of partisans to distance themselves from those who disagree

with them politically, is a major facet of today's American political culture (*Pew Research*

Center, 2022). Both Cuomo and Carlson perpetuated negative stereotypes more than their

information-based counterparts and tapped into their audiences' pre-conceived negative

sentiments regarding their opposing political party. The remainder of this chapter focuses on

specific coverage differences that were found across shows on each network as well as their

implications for American political culture.

Fox News: Special Report with Bret Baier vs. Tucker Carlson Tonight

The findings of this research assert that Carlson was much more likely than Baier to

downplay what happened on January 6, implying that the issue salience of January 6 was much

lower for Carlson's viewers than Baier's viewers. As previously mentioned, Carlson routinely

received higher levels of viewership and therefore it can be gathered that people watching Fox

News were less likely to see January 6 as significant. Similarly, Carlson featured more

politically-extreme viewpoints than Baier when discussing similar content. This finding is

consistent with the fact that Carlson had some of the most unique themes with his narratives

often being different from the rest of the shows in the sample. This can help explain why

partisans, specifically Republicans in this example, have polarizing beliefs regarding January 6.

On the other hand, Baier maintained an ideological slant, however, he had much more in

common thematically with the CNN shows than Carlson.

CNN: The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer vs. Cuomo Primetime

Although there were many noticeable differences in the framing of January 6 between

The Situation Room and *Cuomo Primetime,* there were fewer than the aforementioned

differences between the two Fox News shows. The implication is that viewers of CNN

throughout the day were more likely than Fox News viewers to get a consistent narrative

surrounding January 6. Whereas the content differed more drastically across the Fox News

shows, the CNN shows differed primarily in terms of the news presentation, specifically with

notable tonal differences between Blitzer and Cuomo. Cuomo was more emotional and used

more blunt language that directly demonized the other side, whereas Blitzer shared the same

sentiments using less passion and anger. According to Warfield and Milka (2017), there is evidence that emotionally-intense journalism can lead to stronger levels of identification between the audience and presenter, as well as provide the audience with a more humanistic version of the news. The implications of this are two-fold: (1) Cuomo's emotional nature may have turned off viewers who were left-leaning but ultimately more moderate and (2) Cuomo's presentation may have led to the increased polarization of individuals with strongly-held Democratic viewpoints.

Both networks included in this study reaffirm the notion that commentary-based or opinion shows have more power to polarize their audiences due to their nature of interweaving a partisan agenda into their presentation. On the other hand, this study also demonstrates the polarizing power of information-based shows on partisan cable news networks. Although not to the extent of their commentary-based counterparts, both Baier and Blitzer frame the events of January 6 in a way that is consistent with their network's partisan leanings and most likely consistent with the beliefs of their viewers. Therefore, partisans in America, who are far more likely to seek out news that confirms their pre-existing beliefs (Mitchell et al., 2014), are not likely to reach common ground or find mutual agreement with their political opponents regarding January 6 as long as they remain in their echo chambers.

Limitations

This study has some limitations, most of which revolve around accessibility. Specifically, I was unable to obtain video versions of the shows under study due to a lack of accessibility. Although access was limited to the transcripts, sufficient framing differences were discovered. Therefore, this study was able to be conducted without having access to the video forms of the shows, although they would have been able to provide further insight into the differences

between the shows. Another potential limitation to this research was the fact that January 6 was a relatively recent occurrence. At the start of this study in the spring of 2022, the events at the U.S. Capitol were only slightly over a year old, thus making the pre-existing research surrounding the event minimal. If another event had been chosen that wasn't as recent there would have likely been greater extant research to guide this study.

Future Research

Moving forward from this study, I would suggest an analysis that builds upon the present study by identifying the differential framing techniques presented by the visuals as well. Additionally, a related study could be conducted that would analyze different shows on CNN and Fox. For example, instead of focusing on *Tucker Carlson Tonight,* the study could focus on *Hannity,* or *The Ingraham Angle* as the commentary-based show on Fox News or *Anderson Cooper 360,* or *Don Lemon Tonight.* There are many other events in recent American political culture that could also be analyzed in a similar way. For instance, a similar analysis could be done that addresses the coverage differences of the Black Lives Matter Protests in 2020 or the "Freedom Convoy" trucker protest in 2022 against COVID-19 vaccine mandates and restrictions.

Conclusion

The decision to focus this study on the framing differences of January 6 was grounded in the historical nature of the event itself. This event, which was the first time the U.S. Capitol had been breached since the 19th century, was unprecedented and captivated the minds of Americans across partisan lines. This study was undertaken in the hopes of gathering some insight into not only how different partisan cable news networks framed January 6, but also the differential framing techniques used by different types of shows within each network, to help explain the drastically different views of January 6 amongst the American public.

Not only did each partisan cable news network differentially frame January 6, but each information-based show's presentation of the news differed from their commentary-based counterparts, which provides evidence for the impact of opinionated news. The findings of this study are significant to American political culture as they help to provide some insight into the heavily contested details of January 6 amongst the American public. Finally, this research calls on American partisans to take a more critical lens to their news consumption. This research proves that as long as partisans continue to surround themselves with news that re-affirms their prior beliefs and convictions, there is little hope for political reconciliation and American unity across partisan lines.

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