A Brief Analysis of National News Shows on CNN & Fox News

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ABSTRACT

This essay, prepared for Study.com's Humanities 201: Critical Thinking Analysis course, is intended to examine two national news shows from different networks (e.g. CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, or other non-local news channels) for the purpose of analyzing bias in each. CNN's *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer* and Fox News' *Hannity* were chosen for this assignment. This paper summarizes the content of each show, comparing and contrasting the stories reported (or not reported) by each and differences in how the same stories were reported. A historical perspective is also provided for both CNN and Fox, explaining how they came to be in the positions they currently occupy as well as the generally understood biases of each. I explain my own perceptions of bias in each show, as well as explaining how a viewer of a different political perspective than my own might also perceive each show. The impact of this bias on the viewer is explored and discussed within the context of how it impacts increasing political polarization in the United States, as well as how bias could be reduced by each network.

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In the United States, media bias has become a more significant and overt concern as the age of 24-hour news has grown in the last 20-30 years, especially with the Trump administration bringing more attention to the issue from 2016-2020. To ascertain the biases of both CNN and Fox News, as well as to examine how these biases may impact viewers of each channel, I tuned into an hour of news programming for each channel on 1 Dec 2021. The CNN product was *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, and the Fox News product was Hannity. After watching both shows, I did some research on the history of both networks and provided both my analysis of what I saw observed on each show and how my experiences might differ from the experience of someone with a different political perspective.

1 Dec 2021: CNN's *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*

I tuned in to the 1 Dec 2021 edition of CNN's *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, via an illegal restream provided by livenewsworld.com. There were 5 main stories covered, three of which had a report followed by a panel discussion and two more which consisted of a relatively straightforward report with little discussion between Blitzer and the reporter providing the update.

The first story on *The Situation Room* was about the first confirmed case in the United States of the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 coronavirus. This case was found on a fully vaccinated person (with no booster shot) returning from South Africa to San Francisco. The person had mild symptoms and was soon confirmed to have Covid-19, which scientists later determined was this new variant. After the report concluded, Blitzer hosted a short panel with

Dr. Sanjay Gupta, CNN medical correspondent, and Dr. Ashish Jha, the Dean of Brown University's School of Public Health. The two discussed that the Omicron variant situation in South Africa may not necessarily be the same situation in the US because of differences in the coronavirus variants and their prevalence in each country, as well as the difference in seasons (it being spring right now in South Africa) and how the approaching winter (US) and summer (South Africa) temperatures could come into play. Both panelists encouraged viewers to go get their Covid-19 booster shots.

The Situation Room continued with a story reported in The Guardian, quoting excerpts from a new book written by President Donald Trump's former Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows. The book excerpts state that Trump had actually tested positive for Covid-19 several days earlier than was previously known. The report explains that Trump tested positive on 26 Sep 2020, and after testing positive with one of the more reliable tests, a less reliable test that the CDC recommends not be used was administered and provided a negative result. Having received the desired negative result, Trump then participated in several public events, including an event with military families, an event celebrating Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barret in the Rose Garden of the White House which was later deemed to be a "superspreader" event, and the debate with Joe Biden on 29 Sep. Trump then took another test on 1 Oct 2020, when he tested positive again and was eventually hospitalized due to his bout with Covid-19.

After this report, a panel discussion again ensued with multiple CNN correspondents. One correspondent dropped several quality sound bites, stating that Trump "was Patient Zero in our pandemic of misinformation" about the Covid-19 virus. This correspondent also later stated that "the man who was the president of the United States endangered the man who is currently the president of the United States" and that he should be held accountable for this. The next

correspondent explained that at the time leading up to the debates, she had been told that Trump

had tested positive for Covid-19, but she could not substantiate this to report it at the time. The

correspondent also noted that Trump had responded to this news report, calling it "fake news"

and stating that he had tested negative. She pointed out that it was telling that Trump neither

denied the existence of the positive test, nor disputed Meadows' version of events. The final

panelist had been on Air Force One with Trump along with several other reporters around that

time, and he had suspected at the time that he contracted Covid-19 from Trump on that flight.

The panelist discussed his interactions with Trump on the flight and his observations of how

Trump did not handle the situation seriously. Blitzer also brought up to the panel that there were

supposed to be Covid-19 tests before the debate. The female correspondent stated that Trump

was not tested before the debate because he had arrived late, which could have been deliberate.

The final story on *The Situation Room* to receive a panel discussion was regarding the

story of the school shooting at Oxford High School, MI that occurred the day prior. A report was

provided that a fourth victim had died of their wounds this morning and that 15 year old Ethan

Crumbley had been charged as an adult with charges including 4 counts of first-degree murder

and 1 count of terrorism resulting in death under Michigan state law. A CNN legal correspondent

and global terrorism respondent were brought on to discuss the issue. The legal analyst explained

that the terrorism charge is very unusual in this situation but explained the elements of the crime

under state law of commission of a felony and intimidating a community through violence and

terroristic behavior. The global terrorism correspondent went on a bizarre and very loud rant

about how this isn't about the federal authorities or Silicon Valley but instead about the parents.

After Blitzer reined him in, the correspondent explained that this situation did not meet the

federal statute for terrorism, explaining the elements of the federal statute. The legal analyst also

spoke about the potential of criminal charges for the parents, as the weapon used was a handgun bought by the father a few days prior to the shooting.

The final stories presented on *The Situation Room* did not have any panels and were instead more straightforward reports provided by on-set reporters to Blitzer. The first concerned issues regarding aides to President Trump and their varying compliance with the committee investigating the attempted insurrection on Jan 6 2021 and the US Capitol. The report explained that some aides were refusing to speak, while one aide who had previously spoken was now trying to retroactively invoke his 5th Amendment right against self-incrimination. The final report was on the Mississippi abortion law currently being argued before the Supreme Court. The report included several audio clips from Supreme Court Justices, as well as the US and Mississippi Solicitors arguing the case. The report concluded that it appeared likely the 6-3 conservative majority on the court would uphold the law, but that it was unclear if they would go further to overturn *Roe v Wade (1973).*

1 Dec 2021: Fox News' *Hannity*

After watching Wolf Blitzer at 1600 MST, I watched *Hannity* on Fox News at 1900 MST. I tuned in on an illegal stream just as *Tucker Carlson Tonight* was ending and he was throwing over to Sean Hannity. Sean Hannity said "Thanks, Tucker. This is Hannity." and a graphic of soldiers in battle and an American Flag appeared on screen with an ominous voiceover reading the title: "AMERICANS HELD HOSTAGE, ABANDONED BEHIND ENEMY LINES: DAY 109", referring to President Biden's tenure. *Hannity* did not proceed in a particularly ordered fashion, veering very quickly between topics and between actual reporting or explanation of a story and Sean Hannity's commentary on the story. Frankly, I had a difficult time keeping up while trying to take notes despite the fact that I type at 90 wpm. I would be very

curious if the word count on an hour of *Hannity* is simply that much higher than an hour of *The Situation Room*, or if it just felt this way because of the rapid jumps between topics.

Hannity started discussing how supply chain issues were impacting Christmas shopping for many families, and he played a clip of Biden comparing current supply chain issues to previous toy shortages involving Cabbage Patch Kids, Beanie Babies, etc. Hannity then said that Biden says that the supply chain issues are Santa Claus' fault, or maybe it's Trump's fault, but it's definitely not Biden's fault. This was followed by several short clips of White House statements regarding supply chain issues, which led into Hannity accusing everyone of passing the buck. As he did so, Hannity brought up a tweet that was briefly shown on screen from someone stating that Covid-19 measures are good for the economy. I did not immediately recognize who the tweet was from or why they were relevant.

This did, however, launch Hannity into a very angry rant about these "draconian" measures and how everyone is sick of it. Hannity mentions that the Biden administration has imposed some travel bans with African countries today, but then talks about how when Trump imposed travel bans, Biden called it "hysterical, xenophobic, and racist". Hannity says that Dr. Fauci couldn't explain these travel bans, and cuts to a clip of Fauci offering a weak and incomplete answer when questioned about the travel bans at a press conference that day. Hannity again comments that Trump was called a racist for travel bans, before calling him "Flip Flop Fauci" and claims that illegal immigrants don't have to get Covid-19 tested when entering the country, only citizens. A clip then aired of Dr. Fauci being asked about if the restrictions placed on travelers flying into the US applied to travelers entering the US on foot as well. When Fauci explains that this is "a different issue", Hannity says "there you have it" and explains that "the illegals have more rights than you do".

Hannity moves into the next segment by stating "We all know Fauci, Biden, and Jen Psaki are all liars, and they all hate Donald Trump too". After making several more similar statements, especially about Jen Psaki, Hannity then introduces Fox News correspondent Peter Doocy, who was the member of the press pool asking the questions in the clips that had been played. Hannity praises Doocy for annoying Psaki, suggesting that he could get his own show of him annoying Psaki. They briefly discuss the issue of requirements for travelers entering the country by plane and foot, and Hannity keeps bringing up a statement attributed to Psaki that illegal immigrants only come to the US for a few days, though this clip is not shown. Hannity asks about new Covid-19 measures, asking "We're told these are going to be more draconian?", a phrase he'd been using throughout the segment. Doocy explains that there is supposed to be more directions coming up about handling of travelers on foot or in cars, bringing up some potential options. As he does so, I noticed Doocy avoided using the word "draconian" and just kept calling the potential measures "more strict".

From here, the program moved directly into an interview with Donald Trump Jr about a new book being released from The Trump Organization. Trump Jr talks at length about putting this book together to detail the entire presidency and everything that the Trumps and America accomplished, focusing on "the things that you know the mainstream media won't report". In discussing how the Trumps and America accomplished so much together, he also comments that "America recognizes how badly they've been lied to by the mainstream media". Hannity brings up the newest Covid-19 death statistics and states that more people have died from Covid-19 in 2021 under Biden than had in 2020 under Trump. Hannity then starts talking about how Biden is inviting illegal immigrants to come into our country without Covid testing and that his administration is trying to give them all checks for $450,000 when they get here.

Trump Jr starts explaining that "The Democrats have the advantage, marketing departments in the form of the mainstream media, social media, and big tech". Trump Jr continues, saying that "Democrats are lying to the face of the American people" and that "The Democrats are making heroes of convicted pedophiles, you saw this in the Rittenhouse trial". Trump Jr complains that the Democrats have cast Kyle Rittenhouse as a terrorist when he was a medic trying to help people. Trump Jr also comments that parents are being told that they have no business knowing what their kids are being taught in school. Trump Jr concludes by saying that Democrats need to be replaced with Republicans who will defend America, our kids, etc.

Hannity praises this monologue and tells Trump Jr to make sure he runs for office somewhere. Hannity then claims that not a single barrel of oil was imported into the United States from overseas during the Trump presidency. Hannity also mentions that inflation has made things more expensive this year, and that it seems like Biden is going to have to enact Trump policies to mitigate inflation. He asks Trump Jr if that's correct, and Trump Jr agrees and explains that if his father does it, it's racist, but that if Biden does it, it's fine. He then starts talking about "that elf with a Napoleonic bureaucratic complex, Dr. Fauci". Trump Jr states that Fauci is employing new variants and draconian measures to keep getting 15 more minutes of fame. Trump Jr states that this will continue until someone steps up and stands up for the American people. Hannity asks Trump Jr if his father will run again in 2024, and Trump Jr says that he hopes so before again reiterating that people know the Democrats are lying to them and someone needs to stand up for them.

At this point, 20 minutes in, *Hannity* finally went to its first commercial break, and the show began to slow down somewhat. Returning from break, the show moved on to a discussion of potential international sanctions towards Russia. Throughout the discussion, Hannity

repeatedly referred to Biden as being weak and ineffectual, explaining that Vladimir Putin and Russia aren't scared of the US or anyone else. As he explains this, Hannity also states that Russia is seeing "exactly what we've been telling you" about the "Biden family syndicate". Hannity also worked in several comments on Biden's stance on oil pipelines and how Americans are becoming more concerned about China and "Joe Biden, the cognitive mess, and his 'America Last' policies". Hannity then welcomed Mike Pompeo to the program to discuss these issues.

The two discussed why Biden has different stances and approaches to dealing with both Russia and China, which largely involved discussing how Biden's son, Hunter Biden, has been compromised. They listed a number of "compromises" of Biden, including that he was paid 1.5 billion by one government and given "shopping sprees" of hundreds of thousands of dollars by other governments. Hannity also brought up several times that Libya has a dossier on Hunter Biden and the Biden family. Pompeo responded to this by stating that Biden hasn't followed through on the things that he said he would do, and that America needs a strong president to stand up for the things that Americans believe are most important.

Hannity then again brought up China giving Hunter Biden 1.5 billion dollars to be an "advisor" and asked Pompeo why China would give Hunter Biden that much money to advise them instead of giving it to a company that knows what they're doing. Pompeo responded by saying that "if something like this happened to the previous administration, the media would've exploded… They don't wanna touch the Hunter Biden story." Hannity concluded the segment with his own monologue, stating that "Every instinct in my body tells me that the Biden family is compromised by these entities, and that needs to be investigated as a threat to national security."

The next segment was about the announcement by Democrat Stacey Abrams that she was again running for governor of Georgia, having lost in a close race against Brian Kemp in 2018.

Throughout the show to this point, this segment had been teased by Hannity as Abrams declaring that she was running for "reelection" and that she had been claiming to be the governor for the last several years, but that she was actually a "loser" who didn't know what she was talking about. This also commonly tied into comments about Trump and the 2020 presidential election. When the segment began, this particular line noticeably stopped, as Hannity simply explained that Abrams had announced a plan to run again for governor in 2022, and that she had lost to Kemp in 2018, before explaining that Kemp was a very bad candidate who should be replaced. Hannity brought on Kellyanne Conway and Mike Huckabee to discuss this, primarily focused on Kemp.

Hannity again explained that Kemp was a very bad Republican candidate and that he should be replaced for the 2022 election with a better candidate. He asked Conway if she agreed with him. Conway agreed, stating that Trump had to "put Kemp on his back" to carry him to a win. Conway speculated that Trump might be willing to do so again in 2022, and she seemed to imply that this was Kemp's only hope at winning a gubernatorial race. Conway also discussed how Abrams has been given so much money and given the celebrity treatment, explaining that Trump had to go up against the Obamas, Oprah, and other black celebrities to help Kemp beat Abrams, who is black.

Hannity then brought up issues regarding election security (Voter ID laws, etc.) and proceeded to list off a number of his ideas and beliefs regarding election security, before asking Huckabee if he agrees with his beliefs there. Huckabee agrees with Hannity, and then says "I thought that (Abrams) *was* the governor of Georgia, the Democrats have been saying that she was the governor, I guess I shouldn't believe what they say on CNN". Huckabee then spoke at length about Abrams and Hillary Clinton "crying" about stolen elections and complaining that

Trump cannot do the same. Hannity then talked again about election security members, stating that "those who don't want it are up to no good".

The final segment on *Hannity* was regarding an interview with Alec Baldwin from ABC news airing later that evening. Hannity explains that Baldwin sat down with "Georgie Stephanopoulos" and that Baldwin is now claiming that he never pulled the trigger on the gun that killed a member of the production crew for Baldwin's upcoming movie, Rust. Hannity repeatedly stated that guns don't shoot themselves, and he played some clips from the interview in which Baldwin states that he would never point a gun at someone, did not know the gun was loaded, and that he never pulled the trigger. Hannity reiterated that guns don't go off by themselves, referred to himself as a marksman, and pointed out that the Sheriff's Office report on the shooting specifies that Baldwin fired the gun. Hannity then brought on Bryan Carpenter, an armorer, and Gregg Jarrett, a Fox legal analyst for a short panel discussion.

Hannity asked Carpenter if there could be any validity to Baldwin's story that the gun went off by itself, and Carpenter provided a very informative explanation of how certain single- and double-action weapons work. Hannity again brought up the issue of Baldwin denying that he pulled the trigger, and Jarrett explained that from a legal perspective, the intent to pull the trigger isn't necessarily relevant for the crimes that Baldwin may likely be charged with. Jarrett provided a good explanation of the concept of gross negligence and how Baldwin's intent would not necessarily matter where a crime involving such negligence was concerned. Jarrett also explained the union requirements for the handling of firearms on set, and pointed out that Baldwin's statements regarding not knowing that the gun was loaded indicate that he was not following these requirements. Hannity concluded the segment, and the program, by stating that in his opinion, he believes Baldwin might've just gotten himself into more legal trouble.

Historical Perspectives and Bias at CNN & Fox News

From a historical perspective, CNN is much older than Fox News, having launched in 1980 as the first 24-hour news channel (Pasley, 2019). Over the next 15 years, CNN was largely unchallenged in the area of handling breaking news, as networks like CBS, ABC, and NBC aired their own local and national news shows in the mornings and evenings around other programming. CNN was generally acknowledged to be clear of overt political bias and operating relatively "down the middle" (Pasley). Rupert Murdoch, the owner of Fox News, had long been involved in a rivalry with the owner of CNN, Ted Turner, and the launch of Fox News in 1996 was an opportunity for Murdoch to beat (and eventually discredit) Turner's product (Hemmer, 2019).

Murdoch was able to convince New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani to push Time Warner into airing the fledgling network in the biggest US media market (Landler, 1996), and Roger Ailes, his co-founder, helped create the strategy that would lead Fox News to consistently outperform CNN in viewership and ad revenue for much of the last 20 years (Pasley). Where CNN had been concentrating primarily in providing "straight news" with minimal focus on the people providing those stories, Fox differentiated itself by using personalities like Bill O'Reilly to provide their "takes" or opinions on the news, in a form of editorial content under the banner "Fair & Balanced" (Pasley).

Fox News specifically catered to a conservative audience and criticized CNN as "the Clinton News Network" after coming on air in the late 90's, the second term of Bill Clinton's presidency (Hemmer). Fox became close to the George W Bush campaign in 2000, with Bush's cousin working Fox News' election night coverage in 2000 (Hemmer). With the Bush presidency lasting 8 years and Fox specifically working to cater to a conservative audience, Fox became

something of an institution amongst the conservative portion of the United States. While CNN had a much larger pool of resources, including a larger editorial staff, viewers did not tune into CNN with the regularity and consistency that they tuned into Fox News (Pasley).

By the early 2010's, CNN was clearly well behind even MSNBC, which was intended as a liberal alternative to Fox News (Pasley). Meanwhile, Fox News continued to grow in ratings and revenue by serving those opposed to the Obama administration. Political polarization was threatening to leave CNN an irrelevant middle ground. A new president, Jeff Zucker, attempted to rebuild and strengthen CNN's identity, while working to be more of an entertainment product. CNN started to gain back some ground, while Fox News started to get perceived by the far-right as being "too moderate" themselves (Pasley). This was the lay of the land when Donald Trump ran for and then became president.

As a candidate for president, Trump faced tough questions from one of Fox News' stars, Megyn Kelly, regarding past sexist comments. Trump was upset with his treatment and his influence led to the network apologizing for asking legitimate questions of a presidential candidate (Pasley). Fox News also subsequently quashed stories on Trump's reported affair with porn actress Stormy Daniels (Pasley). When Trump was elected, Fox was very clearly tied to Trump and serving his base. At the same time that Trump was being catered to by Fox News, he refused to grant interviews to CNN and decried them as being "fake news", a concept that hadn't been in the zeitgeist until Trump put it there. In addition to the accusations of being "anti-Trump", "pro-liberal", and "fake news" from the right, CNN was simultaneously criticized by the left for having given Trump sufficient coverage to make him a legitimate candidate (Pasley).

As Fox News became more entwined with the Trump presidency, chasing off several of its more moderate personalities, CNN attempted to grapple with perceptions of being a partisan

news source. President Jeff Zucker at one point commented that "We're pro-truth, and I understand that pro-truth in this day and age can come off as anti-Trump" (Pasley). With Fox News having become the more prominent media outlet and declaring that news which did not feature a conservative bias was itself biased "fake news" and being backed up by the President of the United States and his entire political party, CNN was in a very awkward position. Defending itself against those accusations would prove itself guilty of being "fake news", while bringing on conservative voices would appear right-leaning and potentially alienate viewers in the center & middle who avoided Fox News. CNN attempted to hire more conservative voices to eliminate this perception, but the moves often went awry, as several such hires were also quickly fired due to controversial or inappropriate public comments (Pasley).

Where CNN had to deal with a perception of an anti-Trump and left-leaning bias, Trump's increasingly polarizing actions necessitated critical coverage. Trump's extremism even led to a deterioration of his relationship with Fox News in favor of more extremely right-wing niche news organizations like One America News (Hemmer). This occurred despite Fox News having already moved further right-wing in its coverage throughout his presidency. Yet, CNN's coverage of such extremism fed into the perception of CNN as the "anti-Trump network", commonly accused of "Trump Derangement Syndrome" by personalities like Fox News' Sean Hannity (Pasley).

Where CNN had attempted to (and generally succeeded) in maintaining themselves as a non-partisan outlet throughout the network's existence, coverage critical of Trump aligned with liberal politics and led to improved ratings & revenues for the struggling network, gradually pushing the network somewhat left of center. As mentioned by Emily Tamkin of Columbia Journalism Review in Oct 2019, "CNN is very good at focusing relentlessly on the screaming

dystopia of domestic politics" (Tamkin, 2019). That is a very apt description of where the

American civil discourse is, and the increasing polarization of American politics, especially on

the right over the last four years, has left CNN in a position of standing left of center, where

they'd intended to be standing directly in the center.

The following graphic from Ad Fontes Media from Sep 2021 helpfully demonstrates

where CNN and Fox News currently fall (each network's web and TV offerings circled in green)

relative to each other and to other news sources (Ad Fontes Media, 2021).
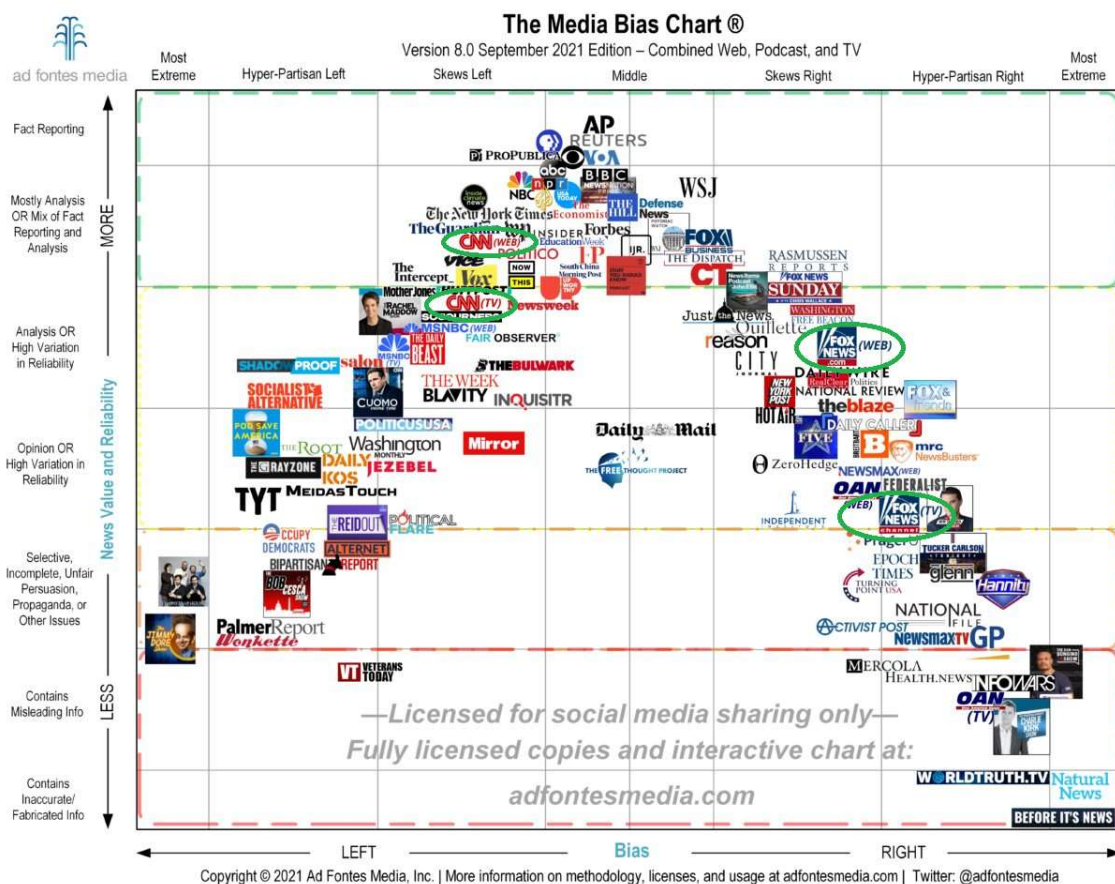
Assessment of *Hannity* & *The Situation Room* Regarding Biases

For any viewer tuning in to one source or the other, the biases that exist in each network's

presentation are going to significantly impact the viewer's perceptions of the news. As

referenced in the above image, networks with more significant biases tend towards being unreliable, presenting "news" which is selective, incomplete, or otherwise propagandized. In this regard, at some point the "news" stops being news entirely and becomes a propaganda arm of the government (or the "resistance"). As partisan programming increases and reporting deviates further from the objective story, the content of that programming begins to become unrecognizable to anyone except those who are already entrenched within that partisan programming, filtering the incoming information through their own cognitive biases.

Applying this to my own experience in working on this essay, I have to acknowledge that I'm generally left-leaning, though I often disagree with the more vigorously leftist positions. I consider myself to be generally well-informed, though I specifically avoid watching/reading the news as a regular practice because I value my sanity. In watching *Hannity* on Fox News, I was immediately caught off guard by the cadence of the broadcast, rapidly switching subjects with every single subject being touched on only briefly and with minimal explanation, followed by a non-sequitur or a rant from Sean Hannity. These rants were usually about President Biden being weak, the 2020 election, "Flip Flop Fauci", illegal immigration, or being angry about President Trump being called a racist. That's an inexhaustive list, and all of that came up within the first 15 minutes or so of the broadcast. The whole thing made for an extremely bizarre broadcast that was hard to follow or even take seriously, because it mostly served as a vehicle for Hannity to rant without explaining to me the news of the day. Even where I might agree with Hannity (I find Fauci's work during the pandemic to be woefully inadequate), his approach made it difficult to take him seriously or to feel like he was someone I would even *want* to find myself agreeing with.

I would expect that the experience of watching *Hannity* for someone with far-right (or even right-leaning) beliefs would be much different than my own. These viewers would likely agree with many of Hannity's non-sequiturs, each of these moments that had been repellant and strange to me would instead be an occasion to agree with Hannity. In this way, a bond is formed that engenders further belief or agreement with other things that Hannity might say about subjects that are actually new. With this commentary occurring interspersed throughout brief reports on the day's news, these news events being communicated to the viewer are being associated with these other topics that Hannity brings up, coloring perception of those events as well. In this way, a perception can be generated that separate events which do not have any significant relationship to each other are actually part of a larger whole, which Hannity joins together to describe a broader picture, a conspiracy by the "Biden family syndicate".

The rapid-fire nature of stating opinions without context on *Hannity* does not invite critical thought for the viewer. Context is often what cues us into whether a claim is reasonable or not, and in the absence of context, we can only infer reasonableness or accuracy based on the authority of the speaker, which comes back to whether or not the viewer agrees with Hannity and considers him an authority. Even if a viewer is not inclined to agree with Hannity on a particular issue, the difficulty of gathering context makes it hard to evaluate a given claim and assess one's agreement with it. Given the rapid-fire nature of claims being thrown to the viewer, the viewer can either tune out and go look into a given issue, or accept the claim and move on, likely based on whether you've agreed with Hannity on other claims. In this way, because any individual claim cannot be adequately evaluated, a situation is created where either all of Hannity's claims are accepted (and new, accepted claims are internalized) or all of his claims are rejected (in

which case, you're probably not watching). As you agree with more things that Hannity says, a feedback loop forms where its harder to question any individual claim.

Even as a left-leaning viewer who thinks that Biden had done a mostly poor job in his first year as president, Hannity's positions are so far out there that I can't find common ground with him, and likely not with those who would watch him regularly. At the same time, a regular *Hannity* viewer would probably say that I've been brainwashed by the "fake news" and that Hannity is simply waking me up to the grand conspiracies that the Democrats are enacting with the help of social media, big tech, Hollywood, etc. In this way, political polarization continues to get worse.

On the flip side, looking critically at CNN's broadcast of *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, I found the show to be relatively straightforward and reasonable in its presentation. The format of doing several minutes of reporting on a story (or updating on an existing story) provided more depth and context to an issue before moving onto several minutes of panel discussion. This allowed me the opportunity to develop my own thoughts or impressions on the story before the panel discussion started, which can veer between being editorial or analytical in nature.

The stories covered on *The Situation Room* were handled in a relatively neutral fashion, for the most part. The story regarding the Omicron variant being found in San Francisco was largely fact-based and the ensuing panel discussion was reasonably informative. The story on the school shooting in MI was well reported, though I did have a problem with the panel discussion. The legal analyst on hand was informative and I appreciated her knowledge of Michigan state statute. However, the global terrorism panelist came off very poorly and seemed to be there to attempt to manufacture outrage or something, with his yelling about how this wasn't about the

federal authorities or Silicon Valley but instead about the parents when he was asked if local authorities could've done more to prevent the shooting. While this reflects poorly on CNN's choices of personalities and panelists, it doesn't actually indicate a partisan bias. The final two stories handled on *The Situation Room* were almost entirely reports on evolving events, with minimal analysis and no panelist discussion.

The only story that struck me as having a partisan bias present was the story on Trump having tested positive for Covid sooner than was previously indicated last year. The reporting on this story was generally fact-based, but the panelist portion did stick out as being somewhat biased, particularly the two male panelists. The female panelist still brought reasonable analysis to the issue, noting the particulars of Trump's statement never said the story was wrong. While this panel discussion came off somewhat biased against Trump, it is also hard to say that this isn't the appropriate reaction to the story. If Trump did test positive for Covid and deliberately sought a less reliable test to try to get a negative, got the negative result he wanted, and then proceeded to participate in public events, that is objectively dangerous and irresponsible for anyone to do.

Had a viewer with right-leaning or far-right positions watched *The Situation Room*, I'm sure they would take more exception to the biases in the Trump/positive test story. This would likely be the case with any story which is critical of Trump, and there really isn't a way around it. Aside from that story, I'm not sure that they would have much problem with the content of the show itself. I suspect that objections to the CNN product would be centered around two things.

First, I would expect criticism of the style of the show itself, which might be called "boring" in relation to Hannity, with its focus on depth of fewer topics and the lack of sniping or snarky comments at the expense of the opposition. This is a particular selling point for Fox

News, which has made a deliberate effort to be entertaining throughout its existence. As Fox News' Tamara Holder told the Columbia Journalism Review about Anderson Cooper, "I think he's great, but he's boring". Holder continued, "Would you watch an old guy talk rationally about a topic? Bet you'd rather watch two hot chicks who are smart and who disagree yell at each other," referring to a recent 7-minute on-air argument between journalist Kirsten Powers and anchor Megyn Kelly (Sobel, 2014). The incident propelled Kelly into becoming a star at Fox News.

The second critique I would expect of CNN by someone on the far right would be the stories that CNN *didn't* report on, which would be viewed as bias. While CNN didn't report on Trump's new book, I'd argue that the matter is more public relations for the Trumps than actual news, especially relative to the news that was discussed on The Situation Room. CNN could report more critically of members of the Biden administration, and it would be reasonable to do so, though I again don't think that such criticism would merit coverage over the issues that were covered in *The Situation Room*, though there's certainly room for such criticisms to be made and covered on the network. The big problem that arises though is that if CNN not reporting on something the viewer believes demonstrates their bias, CNN simply can't win with that viewer. If a viewer believes that President Biden is actually a cunning Russian sleeper agent surgically altered to look like Joe Biden and sent to bring the downfall of the USA, the viewer will find CNN's failure to cover this as evidence of bias, despite that not being the case. In fact, any CNN attempt to cover this will add legitimacy to the belief and make the problem worse. In a post-truth society where we're constantly assaulted with misinformation and "alternative facts", this is a very complex and important problem, that no one has yet been able to adequately address.

Another important manifestation of bias in the news is in what stories are reported on. This is important because it presents a picture to the viewer of what is going on in the bigger picture. If every news story were about the Biden administration or the Covid-19 pandemic, then a viewer might conclude that nothing else newsworthy was happening elsewhere. Despite both shows that I watched airing on the evening of 1 Dec 2021, the stories appearing on both shows were noticeably different.

The Situation Room covered the Omicron variant being confirmed in the US, revelations that Trump had acted irresponsibly last year, updates on the Oxford High School shooting, and updated reports on other recent or developing stories. *Hannity* jumped around many more topics but gave very little depth to any of them. The stories that it did give significant time to were also pulled in many directions, but broadly speaking, they were inconsistencies in Biden & Fauci's response to the Omicron variant, the Trump Organization publishing a book about Trump's presidency & accomplishments, inconsistencies in Biden's approach to Russia and China, Stacey Abrams running for governor in Georgia, and Alec Baldwin's upcoming interview on ABC News regarding his accidentally shooting and killing someone on set.

Bias is visible just in the selection of these stories to air. Where CNN covered a news story on Trump acting in a way that endangered others last year, Fox instead covered a book release by the Trump Organization promoting their accomplishments in office. Given the networks' stances on Trump, this isn't a surprise, though I do think CNN's story was much more legitimately "news" than a book release. Another very obvious example is in CNN airing a story about a school shooting in Michigan that happened the day prior, where Fox covered an interview from another network about an accidental shooting from 21 Oct. Again, this makes sense given the prevailing liberal and conservative attitudes regarding gun control.

With regard to potentially reducing bias, both networks could stand to be mindful of the fact that there are reasonable criticisms of nearly everyone in the US government, and government officials should be criticized and held accountable for their actions. This would apply to both networks, but it largely covers the changes that CNN might reasonably make. Fox News would need to make several more changes. Chiefly, Fox News would need to focus on avoiding ad hominem attacks entirely, while also pivoting their coverage from a more editorial/opinion-based model to a more traditional newsroom model. I thought *The Situation Room*'s format of alternating between deep reports and panelist discussions was a good middle ground that could be used.

Fox News would also need to reassess its relationship with the Trump family and other conservative leaders who it must cover. As mentioned elsewhere in this essay, President Trump had a lot of control over Fox News, which is detailed much further in the references used for this essay. While Donald Trump Jr's appearance on *Hannity* for his book launch could reasonably be construed as a legitimate news story, the overly close relationship between Fox News and those it should be covering instead reasonably creates the perception that this "news story" was actually thinly veiled publicity and advertisement.

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