November 2017

Political Media Bias in the United States: Immigration and the Trump Administration

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by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
The Zimmerman School of Advertising and Mass Communications
with a concentration in Media Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
October 25, 2017

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ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at identifying political bias in mainstream media news channels. Specifically, this thesis focuses on political bias portrayed through the media following the inauguration of President Donald Trump. This analysis explores the media's coverage of the initial travel ban (enforced by executive order) during the first month of the Trump presidency. The content in this research explores specific frames, facts, statistics, wording, phrasing, and overall presentations of two primetime media hosts, Rachel Maddow and Sean Hannity. This research explores several presentations from each host, all pertaining to the Trump Administration's initial travel ban. Framing theory is used throughout the manuscript to emphasize the manner in which each host presents news and information, while also distinguishing the differences between each host due to their partisan agendas. Through this research, it was found that both media hosts presented news and information on the same issue (the travel ban) through completely different perspectives. Each host varied drastically in tone, phrasing, and facts of emphasis, while also presenting each issue in a manner that aligns with a specific partisan agenda. This research demonstrates that partisan agendas and perceived audience needs take priority over the reporting of objective facts and straightforward coverage on the issue of immigration in the United States.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The United States has several components that drive its social, political, and economic stances. One major component that can shape viewpoints and narrow the information gap is the mainstream media. The mainstream media is responsible for informing the public and holding government and corporations accountable for any relevant action that impacts the country. Each mainstream media outlet has an advantage in covering stories that it deems suitable and appropriate for the public, and often times these outlets are referred to as "the elite media" (Chomsky, 1997).

The mainstream media is able to dictate the manner in which news is presented, and can ultimately shape perceptions by prioritizing the importance of certain stories and headlines. "The elite media sets a framework within which others operate" (Chomsky, 1997, para. 6). By setting the framework for the public, the mainstream media can subtly push their own agenda through to the audience. These mainstream media outlets (such as the New York Times, CNN, Fox News, etc.…) operate with large audiences and powerful resources. The mainstream media not only impacts the way that the audience perceives certain issues or events, but also sets the tone for other outlets around the country. In relation to the content put out by the mainstream media, Chomsky (1997) explains that "if you're an editor of a newspaper in Dayton, Ohio and you don't have the resources to figure out what the news is, or you don't want to think

about it anyway, this tells you what the news is" (para. 6). This example is important to note because it demonstrates exactly how much power the mainstream media possesses. The mainstream media draws a national audience that also includes media outlets with lesser resources, which exemplifies the impact of the content distributed nationwide. Since mainstream media outlets have the ability to impact multiple audiences, it is a common trend among these conglomerates to frame the news in a way that matches their own agenda. Today, we refer to this as media bias (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006).

1.1: Defining Media Bias

Media bias is a common reference to a news outlet's preferences and agenda, and it is becoming increasingly apparent to audiences across the country, as "understanding the impact of the media is of interest not only for politics but also, more generally, for models of belief updating" (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2006, P.1) This indicates that the manner in which news is presented and distributed has been a critical issue in the United States in the past, and it has certainly been an issue in the current political climate. The agendas of certain outlets have become clear through the presentation of information, and certain viewpoints are often revealed "by selective omissions and differing emphasis. The different impressions created from an objective event by *slanting* information is what we call media bias" (Xiang & Sarvary, 2007, P.611). Different media sources often have ways of presenting information that are technically accurate and correct, yet skewed to a certain extent. Many reports exhibit these traits, and "while they are factually correct, they convey very different messages and stimulate radically different impressions about the events" (Xiang & Sarvary, 2007, P.611).

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Essentially, mainstream media outlets are looking to capture the interests of audiences by molding a story or event. Audiences resort to media sources that appeal to their own informational needs, as "the traditional view on news consumption is that people seek accurate and unbiased information" (Xiang & Sarvary, 2007, P.613).

While it is certainly true that audiences want valid and reliable reporting, there are certain aspects of media bias that draw audiences toward particular news sources. Xiang & Sarvary (2007) note that individuals seek media outlets that align with their own sense of social awareness, political viewpoints, and entertainment preferences. People rely on mainstream media outlets to provide information that would be unattainable through their own experiences, because "being aware of what is happening beyond people's direct experience engenders a sense of security, control, and confidence" (Xiang & Sarvary, 2007, P.613). Viewers turn to news outlets in order to gain a sense of certainty, stability, and knowledge that they wouldn't otherwise have. However, viewers also crave information that aligns with their own viewpoints and agendas, leaving them susceptible to biased presentations from particular mainstream media outlets.

1.2: Recognizing Bias

While bias in the mainstream media is becoming more prevalent than ever before, it is clear that the agenda of each outlet has impacted the political landscape in the United States. Television alone has had a major impact in shaping the way news is distributed throughout the country, as cable news has become a driving force in local regions throughout the United States. "The cable industry is a local natural monopoly. Once one company has paid the fixed cost to lay cables in a town, it is uncommon for a second company to pay the fixed costs as well and enter the local market" (DellaVigna

and Kaplan, 2006, P.4). As many established news sources compete and gain notoriety, it becomes more probable that audiences will grow accustomed to the agenda and political framework by which news stations operate. This research will focus on the trends of the mainstream media, and how mainstream media bias can influence the beliefs and attitudes of the American public. This study will examine mainstream media bias through media coverage of the first few weeks of the Trump presidency. Specifically, this research hones in on the topic of immigration, and how media coverage on this issue varies drastically on major political news channels. The sample of news stories explore whether mainstream media outlets present a biased impression of information and current events in the national spotlight.

RQ: To what extent did political cable networks portray a biased impression of Immigration issues in the two weeks after Trump announced the Muslim ban?

The issue of political bias is more prominent than ever in our current media climate. A plethora of controversy and scrutiny surrounding president Donald Trump, his policies, and his administration indicates that the presentation of correlating news and events is more critical than ever before.

President Trump has been stern on keeping his promises made during the 2016 election, and one immediate tactic that has been utilized is the executive order. "Executive orders are official documents, numbered consecutively, through which the President of the United States manages the operations of the Federal Government" (archives.gov, n.d., para. 1). President Trump signed a slew of executive orders shortly after his inauguration, many of which directly impact the day-to-day operations of the

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United States. The mainstream media has been persistent in covering news relevant to these actions, as they should be; however, the manner in which these issues have been presented to the public varies greatly from outlet to outlet. Executive orders relating to immigration, the economy, and healthcare have sparked significant controversy in the media, and amongst the American public. For example, President Trump signed an executive order on January 25th, 2017 for "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements", which "is aimed at fulfilling one of Trump's key campaign promises- enhancing border security- by directing federal funding to construction of a wall along the Mexico-U.S. border. It instructs the secretary of homeland security to prepare congressional budget requests for the wall and to 'end the abuse of parole and asylum provisions' that complicate the removal of undocumented immigrants" (Zoppo & Santos, 2017, para. 15). President Trump has clearly taken a firm stance on the issue of immigration, signing another executive order during the first week of his presidency "halting all refugee admissions and temporarily barring people from seven Muslim majority countries" (bbc.com, 2017, para. 1). Immigration has become one of the most controversial topics among the public, and the mainstream media.

This research will compare national media coverage of the Trump presidency amongst major political outlets in order to dissect and expose the biases that persist in today's news. The manner in which outlets such as FOX News and MSNBC present national stories and current events vary drastically. While each network has a duty to present honest and truthful news, it has been suggested that each network depicts political matters and issues in a manner that upholds a particular agenda (Xiang & Sarvary, 2007). The coverage of the travel ban in the 2 weeks following the executive

order by Fox News and MSNBC is presented in a manner that skews the issues and

events to match the narrative of each news station. This hypothesis will be examined by

closely examining the policies and issues surrounding immigration. Whether viewers are

cognitively aware of this or not, the distribution of objective, honest, and factual

information is steadily on the decline in the mainstream media's presentation of current

events and news.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1: Partisanship in Today's News Media

Mainstream media outlets serve a common general purpose, which is to inform and educate the public on critical events and news on a daily basis. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006) provide a basis for media operations through a model that assumes "media firms want to build a reputation as a provider of accurate information. If the quality of the information a given firm provides is difficult to observe directly, consumers beliefs about quality will be based largely on observations of past reports" (P. 282). The basis for this theory emphasizes the general purpose of all news outlets, to distribute informative and accurate information. However, the audience's observations determine whether or not they deem the source credible and suitable to their preferences. This is the point where media bias can take full effect, as media outlets must draw in the viewer based on the presentation of the product. Sources will often shape the content to suit the audience's beliefs and viewpoints, as "firms will have an incentive to shape these reports in whatever way will be most likely to improve their reputations and thus increase their future profits by expanding the demand for their products" (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006, P.282). This is a crucial point, because all media outlets are motivated to provide audiences with authentic and accurate information, but they must compete with other conglomerates and excel from a business perspective, which motivates news

sources to twist and skew stories and events in order to satisfy viewers' attitudes and beliefs (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006).

In the political realm, media bias is very relevant due to extremely divided political parties and crucial partisan issues that vastly impact the United States. In today's political media, the necessity to interject opinion over fact seems to be a huge issue amongst several major media outlets. Feldman (2011) notes, "the proliferation of opinion and overt partisanship in cable news raises questions about how audiences perceive this content" (P.409). Essentially there is a cycle subtly forming, in which audiences turn to major cable news sources to attain information, and in return, audiences are subjected to partisan analysis, creating the question of perception amongst viewers. The individual perception of the programming is arguably the most important component in determining media bias, as "the most crucial determinant of perceived news bias is the extent to which coverage is seen as being disagreeable to one's own views" (Feldman, 2011, P.410). This is exactly what major media outlets aim to avoid, an audience that disagrees with the viewpoints and framework of the programming. Essentially, the viewer's beliefs become the standard for rationality, as "most individuals-because they understand their own views as direct, unfiltered perceptions of the world as it really is- are inclined to judge those who see things differently from them as biased" (Feldman, 2011, P.410). This is unfortunately a valid normality in our society, as many individuals pessimistically judge other viewpoints that do not align with their own, and the mainstream media capitalizes on this behavior, as "opinionated news is characterized by the explicit expression of political news" (Feldman, 2011, P.408). Feldman (2011) lists a few examples of primetime

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personalities who have let their own political stances be known, ranging from "CNN's Lou Dobb's crusade against illegal immigration to MSNBC's Keith Olbermann's condemnation of the Iraq war, cable anchors have taken a clear stand on political issues while also delivering the news of the day" (P.408). Primetime media anchors have certainly allowed their personal views to intertwine with current events in the past, and this trend continues in today's media.

Mainstream media personalities on national television have a duty to separate their own personal beliefs from current events. The distinction between commentator and journalist is a crucial aspect in reporting, especially because the public may not be fully aware of the difference between the two. Hendrich (2013) notes "the primary division between us is that of reporters and commentators, which essentially splits us into the 'news' section of the newspaper, and the 'opinion' section. More often than not, the public treats both sections as if they are one and the same" (para. 3). The public needs to be able to distinguish when a commentator is giving an opinion on an issue, and when a news anchor is strictly reporting the news. This distinction is difficult to make, especially given the divisions in cable news. Hendrich (2013) explains that "people falsely equate news and opinion when they start complaining about bias in the media" (para. 8), and he notes examples of liberals complaining that "FOX news is biased because of people like Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity" while conservatives "complain that MSNBC is biased because of people like Rachel Maddow and Ed Schultz" (Hendrich, 2013, para. 8). However, the key issue here is the audience's ability to recognize that these personalities are not necessarily depicting news and current events objectively. It is the anchor's responsibility to clarify that they are issuing a

partisan outlook; otherwise these broadcasts can become irresponsible and potentially deceive to the audience (Hendrich, 2013). While there are some primetime television and radio personalities who let their personal beliefs and intentions be known, the bigger issue surrounds major media outlets and prominent anchors broadcasting the news without recognizing their own agendas and beliefs.

The mainstream media is prone to exhibit certain political tendencies, as several major channels have developed partisan reputations among national audiences. DellaVigna and Kaplan (2006) conducted research on the impact of Fox News on media bias and audience perceptions, with the understanding that Fox News tends to lean toward right-wing conservatism. "The introduction of Fox News into a cable market, therefore, is likely to have a systematic and significant effect on the available political information in that cable market. This is true whether Fox News represents the political center and the rest of the media the liberal wing, or Fox News represents the right and the rest of the media the middle" (p.2). This is an excellent point that must be considered when evaluating media bias, because as news outlets exhibit specific agendas in an attempt to normalize their partisan viewpoints, the audience is often left to determine the objectivity of the content. This specific example can lead audience members to ask; is this media source (Fox News) a baseline standard for objective news, while other outlets simply lean left? Or is Fox News simply more conservative than other outlets. While DellaVigna and Kaplan specifically make Fox News the culprit in their research, this same reasoning can apply to the mainstream outlets such as MSNBC and CNN. Audiences should not have to question the caliber of news coverage in an ideal situation, however it is becoming increasingly difficult for news seekers to

gather information without a partisan perspective. Media outlets must create a clear distinction between an objective news report and opinion-based commentary.

These partisan perspectives in the media can certainly have an impact on major events in the United States, including elections. DellaVigna and Kaplan (2006) conducted a study to measure the impact of Fox News' entrance onto the media scene, and the significance of Fox's emergence on the 2000 election. They found that "the entry of Fox News increased the Republican vote share in presidential elections by 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points" (P.2). Fox was able to contribute to the increase of vote share amongst conservatives, but the noteworthy statistic to bear in mind is the impact the channel had as a new media outlet, as "the impact of Fox News on the two-party vote share in 2000 is estimated to be 0.15 to 0.2 percentage points, 200,000 votes nation-wide" (Dellavigna and Kaplan, 2006, P.2). This is clearly a huge number of votes, and it is evident that the introduction of the Fox News channel successfully impacted the core issues surrounding the election in 2000. The mainstream media was as persuasive then as it is today, which indicates that mainstream media biases and agendas can be extremely influential in determining the political outlook of the United States.

2.2: Mainstream Media Coverage of Trump's Initial Actions

The 2016 presidential election in the United States was a feeding frenzy for the mainstream media, as every outlet was (and still is) competing to provide every piece of information on the polarizing and controversial personality of Donald Trump; as well as any information relating to Hillary Clinton and her campaign. However, the coverage by outlets varies, and with now President Trump in the Oval office, many critics are

dissecting the media coverage during the election period to get a better grip on the extent to which mainstream outlets played a role. Nate Silver of fivethirtyeight.com specifically addresses some of the general coverage from *The New York Times*, as he notes, "the polls didn't show a toss-up, as they had in Brexit. But the reporting was much more certain of Clinton's chances than it should have been based on the polls. Much of *The New York Times* coverage, for instance, implied that Clinton's odds were close to 100 percent" (Silver, 2017, para. 2). Clearly *The New York Times*, along with several other outlets, was completely dismissive of even the possibility that Trump could win the election. Silver (2017) notes that the New York Times "portrayed the race as being effectively over, the only question being whether Clinton should seek a landslide or instead assist down-ballot Democrats". The fact that *The New York Times* distributed content that portrayed a Trump victory as unthinkable invites the question: does political bias factor into reporting? More importantly, could this media coverage have motivated or discouraged voters on Election Day? These questions are crucial in exhibiting just how influential media reporting can be in the United States. In the midst of campaign season, Melody Kramer (2016) crucially pointed out the importance of accountability, as "much has been written about whether journalists created Trump, mishandled Trump coverage, are biased against Trump, should be blamed for Trump coverage, shouldn't be blamed for Trump coverage and/or helped cement Trump's primary campaign" (para. 5). These are important questions that could be asked about all mainstream media outlets, whether they have conservative tendencies, liberal tendencies, or claim to be bipartisan.

Perhaps one of the biggest questions that persist about media bias is: why does it exist? Childress (2016) suggests that it exists because of the journalistic need to provide an attention-grabbing story takes priority over personal preferences, stating "reporters like a good story. It's what their business is based on. And this year, Trump's narrative seemed more novel than that of Clinton or Sanders" (para. 6). During the 2016 election cycle, a large amount of time was spent discussing controversial issues amongst the candidates, and as Childress explains, Trump's background and controversial personality drew the most spotlight by far. However, the real issue lies in the time taken away from crucial policy discussion in order to cover the stories that would fetch ratings. In fact, "only 11 percent of the primary coverage focused on the candidates' policy positions, leadership abilities or personal and professional histories" (Childress, 2016, para. 11). This is an alarming statistic; clearly a national audience deserves to have more substantial reporting during a time as crucial as a presidential election cycle. The mainstream media has the ability to focus on specific details that relate to personal controversies and attention-grabbing headlines over topics of policy and regulations that impact the way the United States is governed, and this is essentially one of the biggest effects that mainstream media bias has on the country. For instance, *The Atlantic.com* conducted research to find out how many times each candidate was mentioned over a span of 100 days during the election cycle, and they found that Trump's name was mentioned 280,643 times, while Hillary Clinton was mentioned 14,247 times (Leetaru, 2015). Surely the media positioned themselves to cover every aspect of the controversy that was associated with Trump's campaign, even if it had minimal relevance to public policy or current issues in the United States. Each

media outlet has the ability to frame each story to match its own agenda, and unfortunately this has only led to division in the United States.

The first 100 days of the Trump presidency have been extremely active and tumultuous, both in the media and in the political realm. Trump's administration has taken several measures to change current policies and regulations, but President Trump himself has certainly created a media frenzy over his use of the executive order to fulfill his agenda; "one way President Trump is able to exercise political power is through unilateral executive orders and memoranda, which allow him to bypass the legislative process in Congress in certain policy areas" (bcc.com, 2017, para. 2). Skeptics and loyal supporters view the President's tactics differently, as skeptics argue that President Trump is abusing his presidential powers, while supporters state that he is attempting to fulfill his promises as quickly as possible. Regardless of personal outlook, it is clear that the use of executive orders under the current administration has impacted the policies and regulations of our country, which can ultimately impact our daily lives. President Trump's executive orders have also received extensive and varying coverage from the elite news media, as conservative, liberal, and "neutral" outlets cover these executive orders in a manner that fits their overall agenda. From the outset, Donald Trump and his administration have created news through the implementation of executive orders. "In his first three weeks alone, Trump signed a burst of orders to undo many of President Barrack Obama's policies" (nbcnews.com, 2017, para. 2). Each major news outlet presents the implementation of Trump's executive orders and the unraveling of President Obama's executive orders in different contexts, depending on the agenda of the station. Mainstream news presentations

certainly vary on the coverage of scandals and controversial topics, as seen with potential Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. For instance, Becket (2017) stated "as far as 2016-related 'hacking' is concerned, private individuals connected to failed presidential candidate Hillary Clinton had their emails stolen and leaked in batches during the election. That's it. The integrity of the election went unharmed, and the votes were counted fairly and accurately, the former president and intelligence officials have said on multiple occasions" (2017, para. 2-4). What is important to keep in mind is that each major political media outlet rarely emphasizes stories (such as Russian election interference) objectively; rather, these events are portrayed in a tone that matches the viewpoints of a particular agenda. This research will explore the agendas of the mainstream media. Sensitive issues, particularly surrounding immigration, healthcare, and the economy, have driven mainstream media outlets to expose biases that should otherwise be nonexistent in political journalism. Through issues and stories surrounding policy implementation and political controversy, this research is aimed at exploring whether objectivity in today's elite news media is declining in the name of partisanship.

CHAPTER THREE:

THEORY

3.1: The Role of Framing Theory in Media Bias

It is clear that many mainstream media outlets are successfully able and willing to present the news in a manner that matches the agenda they deem suitable for the audience. However, it is the way in which news outlets frame the events and stories that leads to an agenda-driven production. Thus, framing theory plays a substantial role in the development of mainstream media distributions. Framing theory revolves around the manner in which an event or phenomenon is presented to the public, as "framing research argues that news frames function to suggest how audiences can interpret an issue or event" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, P.19). Framing can also be very closely related to the goals that mainstream media outlets strive to achieve, as "news frames can exert a relatively substantial influence on citizens' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, P.19). As previously discussed, the ultimate goal for many mainstream news outlets in the United States is to appease the audience's viewpoints, while also influencing viewers with partisan analyses and outlooks on current events. Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) suggest, "frames are devices that build the associations between concepts; information in a news story can cement the link, but it relies on a frame to build the associations" (P.19). In other words, the significance of the story will garner attention on its own, but it is the manner in which

news outlets present the content that can truly make a difference in altering the viewers' opinions and beliefs on the subject. Interpretation is the key to successful framework, especially in the political media, as "a framing effect occurs when a phrase, image, or statement suggests a particular meaning or interpretation of an issue" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, P.20). We can use the term "fake news" as an example. Fake news can be interpreted in many different ways, and is often used in defense of an unfavorable story. While there are several "fake news" stories in the media, it is important to note how these stories gain prominence in the first place. "One reason for this persistence is the manner in which people make casual inferences based on available information about a given event or outcome. As a result, false information may continue to influence beliefs and attitudes even after being debunked if it is not replaced by an alternate explanation" (Nyhan & Reifler, 2015, P.1). This is valid in the sense that viewers often make assumptions based on the information available, and if false news is not firmly discredited or corrected, then viewers may be apt to accept stories that are skewed, and often times inaccurate. Framing plays a huge role in this respect, because if the perception of the news is skewed in favor of a political agenda, then the audience may be subject to inaccurate, or false information. This can be especially true in the case of political elections, as Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) note "that media coverage of candidates in presidential primaries, for instance, is often different from the way candidates frame their issue stances in press releases, and that candidates are only moderately successful in getting their frames across in election coverage" (P.23). In order for any political information to be portrayed accurately to the public, the framework (albeit critical) must be accurate and consistent with the original source.

Although framing can be understood as a basic concept, there is a process to the theory that makes it a successful tactic. "The potential of the framing concept lies in the focus on communicative *processes*. Communication is not static, but rather a dynamic process that involves frame-building (how frames emerge) and frame-setting (the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions)" (de Vreese, 2005, P.51). In the case of mainstream media bias, the way in which a frame emerges is through the presentation of a story or event, while that frame is intended to appease the audience's attitudes and viewpoints. De Vreese (2005) also explains "that frames have several locations, including the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture" (p.51). Specifically, there are multiple factors that determine the way a phenomenon is framed, such as the tone and presentation of the communicator, the formation of the message, the audience, and the cultural norms that determine the audience's beliefs and attitudes (de Vreese, 2005).

Starting with the auditor or source, "*frame building* refers to the factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames. Factors internal to journalism determine how journalists and news organizations frame issues" (de Vreese, 2005, P.52). The structural quality of the news is crucial because it sets the tone for the entire framing process, as the audience gain an instant impression of the content when first presented. Once the frame is solidified, there is a message ingrained in the presentation or text, which leads to frame-setting. "*Frame-setting* refers to the interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions. Frames in the news may affect learning, interpretation, and evaluation of issues and events" (de Vreese, 2005, P.52). Ultimately, the success of the frame depends on the audience's reception

of the message, and whether or not the frame influences the viewers' mindset. Frame settings work toward a "goal to explore the extent to which and under what circumstances audiences reflect and mirror frames made available to them" (de Vreese, 2005, P.52). If the frame is successful, the audience will accept and mirror the content put before them. If the frame is rejected, then the content will not influence the audience. In this study, it will become clear that news framing in our current political climate is more persistent than ever before.

Framing also involves linking ideas together in order to form a conclusion, as "frames may also create linkages between very familiar issues and existing beliefs, values and attitudes" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, P. 25). These values and beliefs often determine how an audience will evaluate the content. For instance, if the audience is linked to a framework that heavily emphasizes public order and free speech, then the viewers may be more tolerant of a controversial speaker or group (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). The beliefs and values associated with each framework are extremely important to the reception of the message.

The manner in which the message is received can have some lasting effects on the audience. Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) note "attitude formation or change-the most commonly studied outcome of frame setting" is often exhibited (p.26). If the framework distributed by the media outlet is convincing and persuasive enough, viewers are more likely to shape their attitudes based on the values and ideas embedded in the news content. Framing effects can also focus "on psychological processes other than applicability" (Tewksbury and Scheufele, 2009, p.26). Framing not only impacts the way an audience develops attitudes and beliefs, but also the cognitive processes that make

up these attitudes and beliefs. It is even common that "news about social problems can influence attributions of causal and treatment responsibility; an effect observed in both cognitive responses and evaluations of political leaders" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p.26). It's important to note that framing aids in the overall cognitive process, just to exemplify how much impact the mainstream media's framework can have on an audience. Media outlets that frame important issues and events to meet their own agenda are not only shaping attitudes and beliefs, but also the overall process through which we evaluate the news. Along with the impact that framing can have on our evaluations of current events, it is also important to note that framing is prevalent in all aspects of media and news, as it occurs "in the culture, in the minds of elites and professional political communicators, in the texts of communications, and in the minds of individual citizens" (Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano, 2009, P.176). Framing has clearly become a normalized process in our society, as it is prevalent not only in the political realm, but also in our everyday forms of communication.

There are different types of frames that are utilized throughout the media. Inclusion and exclusion are two major concepts in framing that vastly impact mainstream media presentations. Including and excluding certain details in a newscast can alter the way a current event or issue is perceived, and thus caters to the outlet's agenda. "Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to *select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text"* (Hallahan, 1999, P. 207). Inclusion and exclusion shape the presentation of information, which ultimately determines the framework for information distribution. Hallahan (1999) also notes the importance of word framing through script and thematic

structures. Script structures refer to "the orderly sequencing of events in a text in a predictable or expected pattern" (Hallahan, 1999, P.208) while thematic structures represent "the presence of propositions or hypotheses that explain the relations between elements within a text- including the presence of words such as 'because', 'since', and 'so'; and *rhetorical structures* that subtly suggest how a text should be interpreted" (Hallahan, 1999, P.208). It is clear that media outlets use specific wording structures to frame issues in ways that align with the outlet's agenda, because if news is explained in a logical way that relates to the audience's attitudes and beliefs, then the framework is likely to be accepted by the viewers (Hallahan, 1999). A successful frame often exhibits "the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman, 1993, P.52). These are the qualities and characteristics of framing that entice the audience to accept a particular premise or point of view. De 'Vreese (2005) notes that framing can be utilized through "headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts, and concluding statements and paragraphs" (P.54). The news media often uses these visual tools to frame issues and events, skewing stories and facts to match a particular agenda. Framing plays a huge role in molding the perception of events and issues in our society, and this research will explore the significance of the framing tactics commonly utilized by the mainstream media.

CHAPTER FOUR:

METHODOLOGY

4.1: Analyzing coverage of the Travel Ban

Since President Donald Trump took office in January of 2017 there have been several important political decisions on crucial issues that will dramatically impact the United States. The election period in 2016 was perhaps one of the most controversial races in American history. Both candidates (Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton) reached historic lows in favorability amongst Americans, as Trump and Clinton both went into election night in November of 2016 "with the worst election election-eve images of any major-party presidential candidates Gallup has measured back to 1956" (Saad, 2016). With several issues and controversial stories surrounding Clinton and Trump, Gallup found that both candidates' disapproval ratings exceeded 50 percent, as Saad (2016) noted on election night, "majorities of Americans now view each of them unfavorably on a 10-point favorability scale, a first for any presidential standard-bearer on this long-term Gallup trend. Trump's image is worse than Clinton's, however, with 61% viewing him negatively on the 10-point scale compared with 52% for her" (Saad, 2016). These are certainly alarming numbers for two leading presidential candidates, and regardless of the election result, many Americans (republican, democrat, and independent) would have been largely dissatisfied. Ultimately, Trump won the presidency despite losing the popular vote.

The mainstream media looks to capitalize on the attitudes and emotions of the American public, and because of the tension caused by political divide in the United States; there is a lack of purely objective information coming from political national news outlets. This analysis will dissect two major news outlets and their coverage of the Trump administration's initial executive order banning refugees from seven foreign countries. This research will attempt to determine whether mainstream media channels prioritize particular political agendas over purely objective content in order to mirror the attitudes and viewpoints of a target demographic. This analysis will examine the media's coverage of the travel ban signed into order by president Trump during the first week of the presidency. By closely examining the coverage of the travel ban during the two weeks following its introduction, this research will explore the agendas and biases displayed in the mainstream media.

A content analysis will be conducted in order to identify whether there was a lack of objectivity displayed in the reporting by the mainstream media during the first two weeks following the announcement of the travel ban. This research will analyze transcripts from two major political outlets: FOX news and MSNBC, to determine whether the commentary presented by these outlets has been skewed and biased. By closely analyzing the tone, dialogue, and presentation of facts portrayed by prominent media hosts from rivaling news outlets, there will be a clear understanding of the manner in which the Trump presidency is presented to the public. This research strives to determine whether there is a notable bias in content choice that is created between the media outlets, which might be created by each network's skewed presentation of stories and events surrounding the Trump administration.

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4.2: Background: Fox News and MSNBC

The media outlets that will be examined in this study have very distinct

backgrounds, which have contributed to each network's rise to prominence. Fox News

is one major cable news source that inundates viewers with political content on a daily

basis. Rupert Murdoch established the Fox News channel in 1996, and the channel

"originally operated under the umbrella of the Fox Entertainment Group, the film and

television division of Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox" (Ray, 2017, para.1).

Murdoch's news channel was actually a result of a failed attempt to purchase the Cable

News Network (CNN), and Murdoch instantly branded the network through the hiring of

conservative executives and pundits. "He enlisted television producer and former

Republican political consultant Roger Ailes to oversee the new network, and Ailes's

business acumen and political leanings became closely associated with its eventual

success" (Ray, 2017, para. 2). The network addressed media bias by "billing itself as

the 'fair and balanced' alternative to a media environment that it characterized as having

a liberal bias" (Ray, 2017, para. 2), despite developing a reputation for conservative

tendencies. This conservative favoritism is also evident through the network's analytic

contributions from known republicans such as Newt Gingrich, Mike Huckabee, and Rick

Santorum, to name a few (Ray, 2017). The channel has also thrived on a

"confrontational interviewing style" (Ray, 2017, para. 2), which was demonstrated

through Bill O'Reilly's show, *The O'Reilly Factor*. The channel gained a steady following

through other primetime shows starring personalities such as Sean Hannity and Megyn

Kelly. These hosts gained prominence in the early 2000s, as broadcasters such as

Megyn Kelly "joined the channel in 2004 as a legal pundit and was later given her own

show, the popular *The Kelly File* (2013-17)" (Ray, 2017, para. 2). Although the channel certainly favors conservative viewpoints on political issues, the network has built a massive base, as Fox News gained steam in the ratings in the early 2000s, and "built on its gains to surpass CNN for the first time in January 2002, a lead it would retain throughout the decade" (Ray, 2017, para. 3). The Fox News channel clearly has a massive influence on a large number of viewers across the country; therefore, the frames utilized by this network are crucial to this study.

Our second media outlet of focus for this study is MSNBC, which has an unusual background compared to that of Fox News and other news channels. Formed in 1996, MSNBC is the product of a merger between Microsoft and the National Broadcasting Company. The channel was not always politically based, as it initially "had technical and information technology leanings, obviously under the heavy influence of Microsoft" (successstory.com, 2017, para. 3). Once NBC and Microsoft were able to accomplish their technology-based goals, the channel began to focus more on rivaling other news channels such as Fox News and CNN. One edge that MSNBC had over both CNN and Fox was the integration of Internet news, as "the website had a powerful, steady presence since its inception. It had a near monopoly on content online and everyone else was slow to catch up" (successstory.com, 2017, para. 4). This was certainly a nice advantage for the network to have, as it instantly helped create credibility and a brand. However, MSNBC became a prominent news channel that "had started to slowly, almost unintentionally, present itself as an antithesis to Fox News' political agenda" (successstory.com, 2017, para. 6). This reputation grew as broadcasters and commentators began to favor liberal viewpoints, as "many of the channel's

programming were starting to take on a very liberal, left-wing, democratic tone" (successstory.com, 2017, para. 8). For instance, in the mid-2000s, *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* became popular and was heavily regarded as "a direct contrast to Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor*" (successstory.com, 2017, para. 9). Having built up notoriety for liberal-based viewpoints and presentations, MSNSBC now relies on primetime hosts such as Rachel Maddow and Chris Matthews to present the news in a manner that aligns with the network's reputation. "MSNBC is now firmly entrenched as one of the Big Three, giving CNN and Fox News a run for their money and gaining increasing popularity" (successstory.com, 2017, para. 10). MSNBC has built a strong reputation and a large following based on an array of popular primetime hosts and news presentations that cater to the agenda of their audience.

These two conglomerates (Fox News and MSNBC) have very different backgrounds and methods of delivering news. However, despite their differences, they are more relevant than ever, as each network is able to present and frame current events and news in a manner that meets a specific agenda. The travel ban was extremely controversial. Both networks were consumed with the issue, presenting the facts and events from drastically different perspectives. These media outlets have the power to mold and skew the events and stories that come from the White House, and this display of media bias can greatly impact the objectivity of news presentations. This thesis explores the presentation of news surrounding the announcement of the ban in the two weeks that followed by examining these distinctly different media outlets: one decisively conservative (Fox News), and the other decisively liberal (MSNBC).

4.3: Research Data

Data will be sorted and analyzed based on the news stories presented by the national media. Issues and topics surrounding the Trump administration, specifically related to immigration, will categorize the research. This analysis will closely examine each media outlet's presentation of this topic. This includes the facts and statistics that are presented, the injection of personal opinion from the commentators/broadcasters, and the overall presentation of the story (tone and phrasing). The transcripts of panel conversations, interviews, and monologues will provide an insight into media bias by the two major media outlets, particularly when these sources are examined and compared in looking at how the initial travel ban was covered. The facts and statistics are crucial, as many networks have the ability to display particular statistics that favor a specific partisan outlook, and this can be done without recognizing other relevant statistics that promote a favorable image for another political party. Personal opinion amongst commentators and broadcasters is another key component in recognizing media prejudice. Primetime broadcasters have shown extremely critical tendencies, and very defensive tendencies when tasked with covering major stories surrounding the initial months of the Trump administration. These tendencies to be overcritical or over-defensive become apparent when sources are compared and contrasted, as it will be evident when different media presentations on the same issue are examined side by side. Finally, the overall presentation of the content is essential. As this research has noted, through framing techniques, media broadcasters have the ability to prioritize the issues they deem crucial to the American public (Chomsky,1997), even if there are pressing stories that are more noteworthy (such as healthcare or the economy). The

manner in which news events and stories are phrased and emphasized can make a significant difference in how the content is perceived, and by comparing the difference in presentations on the same issue, the partisan gap that is created through the mainstream media can be seen more clearly.

On January 27th, seven days after taking office, President Trump announced the executive order banning the entry of refugees from seven countries. This research occurs within the context of the first 100 days of the presidency, during which President Trump's emphasis was on fulfilling certain goals and objectives within this time period. According to the White House website, "In his first 100 days, President Donald J. Trump has taken bold action to restore prosperity, keep Americans safe and secure, and hold government accountable. At an historic pace, this President has enacted more legislation and signed more executive orders than any other president in over half a century. With a focus on rebuilding the military, ending illegal immigration, and restoring confidence in our economy, the President is keeping his promises to the American people" (whitehouse.gov, n.d., para. 1). This is a statement from the Trump administration, clearly labeling the first 100 days of the presidency as a key time period to establish a slew of changes in the United States. The mainstream media also made President Trump's initial months in office the top priority in the news cycle. Among the first actions taken by Trump was the January 27th Executive Order, also known as the refugee travel ban.

Today's political climate is driven by pressing issues in our society, partisan viewpoints, and actions of the current presidential administration. The mainstream media has utilized the hostile environment that exists throughout the country to promote

and provide partisan viewpoints and agendas. It's been noted that the focus of this research will be on mainstream media coverage of the initial immigration ban set forth by the Trump administration. Specifically, this research will examine content from two primetime programs on Fox news and MSNBC, *The Sean Hannity Show* and *The Rachel Maddow Show*. Both programs were chosen based on their prominent influences in cable news, as each show has a primetime platform and millions of viewers on a nightly basis.

Sean Hannity is one of the most popular conservative television and radio show hosts in the country. Hannity, a Long Island native, began his career as a modest radio host in the late 1980's and early 1990's, but garnered significant attention for taking conservative stances on the airwaves at the University of California-Santa Barbara. "Every Tuesday at 9 a.m., Hannity, then 27, spent an hour figuring out how to build an audience, how to connect with the bedrock conservative Americans he knew were out there, even in a solidly liberal college town like Santa Barbara" (Fisher, 2016, para. 11). Hannity found himself promoting strong conservative stances that were unpopular amongst the University audience. He was ultimately taken off the air for broadcasting controversial opinions on homosexuality, and in response "the ACLU took his case and informed the university that he would sue, alleging discrimination against Hannity's conservative views" (Fisher, 2016, para. 26). Hannity ultimately won the case and was offered to be reinstated, but Hannity declined unless issued "a public apology and double his old airtime" (Fisher, 2016, para. 28). This was one instance that led Hannity to continue defending the conservative agenda. Years later, as Hannity's conservative voice grew in popularity, he was able to make the jump to television courtesy of Roger

Ailes, as his "big move up came courtesy of a fellow talk-radio fan, Roger Ailes, who created Fox News for owner Rupert Murdoch in 1996 and essentially translated conservative radio to a TV format" (Fisher, 2016, para. 57). Hannity's program on Fox News gained notoriety, as his audience gradually expanded over the past twenty years. Today, Hannity "is the nation's second-highest-rated radio host, behind only (Rush) Limbaugh. He's No. 1 in the key 25-54 audience among cable news shows" (Fisher, 2016, para. 51). Hannity's conservative tendencies have led to his success today, and like Hannity, Rachel Maddow has also built a reputation based on personality and political affiliations.

In 1999, Rachel Maddow gained popularity by contributing to liberal radio talk shows, as she "landed a job as co-host on WRNX Radio's *The Dave in the Morning Show.* Her next job was a two-year stint as host of WRSI's morning show *Big Breakfast*" (biography.com, 2017, para. 5). Maddow was heavily involved with left-wing media from the onset, and in 2004 "she auditioned for Air America, a newly founded liberal radio network, and held a co-host position until the show was cancelled in 2005" (biography.com, 2017, para. 5). Maddow landed her own nationally-syndicated radio show shortly thereafter, which grew rapidly in popularity, leading to her television program on MSNBC. Maddow made several regular appearances on MSNBC in 2006 before earning her own program in 2008. "In January 2008, Maddow signed an exclusive contract with MSNBC as the broadcasting station's political analyst. That September the launch of her nightly cable television program, also called *The Rachel Maddow Show,* marked MSNBC's most successful show debut to date" (biography, 2017, para. 6). The show has since been the staple for MSNBC and has led the network

in ratings. Maddow continues to be one of the strongest liberal voices in the media today.

The range of coverage for this study (two weeks) begins on January 30th and concludes on February 13th. This timeframe excludes weekends because neither program airs on Saturday or Sunday. By examining the coverage of the initial travel ban, this analysis will dissect the wide range of commentary, facts, presentations, and frames that make up the agendas of each outlet.

Immigration was one of the most controversial and sensitive issues for President Trump during his campaign, and now during his presidency. Immigration is certainly an issue that is addressed differently on each major political outlet, and that is evident through the details that are highlighted on each program. President Trump immediately took action during his first week of office (January 21-28), most notably signing "an executive order that severely restricts immigration from seven Muslim countries, suspends all refugee admission for 120 days, and bars all Syrian refugees indefinitely. The order has been widely criticized and praised- but it led to massive protests at several airports across the country" (Calamur, 2017, para.1). The original travel ban applied "only to non-U.S. citizens, so anyone with U.S. citizenship- whether that person in natural-born or naturalized- is not affected, but agents would have the 'discretionary authority' to question U.S. citizens coming from the seven countries" (Calamur, 2017, para 3). These seven countries included "Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen" (Almasy & Simon, 2017, para. 6). The executive order was a statement from the Trump administration, as the order was set to last for 4 months. In addition to the controversy and morality in question under this executive order, it was abruptly signed

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into action during the first week of the presidency, creating a frenzy among the public, and in the media. The travel ban was a significant issue which warranted full coverage from political media outlets, and the news broadcasts varied greatly from network to network.

4.4: Analysis of Sean Hannity's Travel Ban Coverage

Primetime news shows were engulfed in coverage on the travel ban. One mainstream program on Fox News, *Hannity*, was amongst many to prioritize this executive order while clearly implementing the viewpoint of a specific agenda (conservatism in this case). The first week following the installment of the travel ban (January 29th-Feb 4th) was surrounded by controversy and critical backlash from the executive order, resulting in extensive coverage from the national media. Hannity used his national platform to defend Trump's administration against the criticism and scrutiny that arose from the travel ban. On January 30th, Sean Hannity opened his show with a monologue seemingly tailored at defending the president: "Tonight, Democrats, the mainstream media, Hollywood elites are so out of touch when it comes to keeping you, the American people, safe from radical Islamic terrorism, and they are willing to gamble with your life" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 2). It should be noted that Hannity opened up his program with a line of defense, as if there was an obligation to villainize any criticism (fair or not) that came from other media outlets. He was clearly pandering to the audience, as he associated immigration with violent threats and radical Islamic terrorism. Hannity allowed his strongly conservative affiliations to dictate the manner in which the travel ban was presented. In addition, Hannity accompanied his defense of Trump's agenda by attempting to discredit any criticism or analysis that didn't align with

the conservative agenda: "So liberals, they spent the weekend freaking out and completely misrepresenting President Donald Trump's extreme vetting temporary travel ban for countries that have ties to radical Islamic terror" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 4). Hannity made it clear that he has very low tolerance for any criticism from the opposing viewpoint, and shows a trend of generalizing political stances. In this case, he painted liberals and democrats as being out of touch with the needs of the American people. And while this may be true for a select group of people on both sides of the aisle, it is inaccurate and dangerous to associate an entire political group as being completely out of touch with the rest of the country.

Hannity continued into the program, specifically attacking Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer for stating that President Trump's travel ban "was mean-spirited and un-American" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 6). Schumer made this statement during a press conference in a very emotional and tearful manner. After Hannity played this quote, he proceeded to criticize Schumer, stating "now, what Chucky Schumer didn't tell you: he supported a refugee pause back in 2015! And by the way, I don't remember Senator Schumer crying after the terror attacks in San Bernardino or the Chatanooga shootings which, combined, killed nearly 20 Americans and wounded dozens of others. Do you?" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 10). Instead of detailing Schumer's statements, and perhaps explaining the reasoning for his emotional response, Hannity simply deflected attention to previous disasters that are separate from the issue at hand. Hannity tends to attack the opposition, even if that means deflecting to previous events in order to discredit the opposition's viewpoint.

Hannity caters to his audience by talking about the opposition in a manner that his viewers can relate to. He intentionally framed the reputation of certain politicians (such as Chuck Schumer) by selecting facts that could place him in a negative light, and he chooses to deploy this tactic when describing other demographics as well. In the same episode of his primetime program on January 30th, Hannity went after prominent Hollywood actors who spoke out against President Trump and his administration during the "SAG" awards. After quoting actors Ashton Kutcher, Sarah Paulson, and Julia Louis-Dreyfus, who all spoke out against the travel ban at this award show, Hannity instantly chimed in, exclaiming: "You know, I see it all the time, these whiney Hollywood liberals, they're overpaid millionaires. They have armed bodyguards. They live in their gated mansions. They fly on their private jets. They're safe" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 25). Once again, Hannity framed these individuals who disagreed with the travel ban in a manner that appeals to his audience. By associating these Hollywood figures with millionaires, Hannity framed these actors as individuals who are out of touch with the needs of middle class Americans. By insinuating that all of these Hollywood figures have the luxury of bodyguards and extensive security, Hannity pushed the notion that these people oppose the ban because they simply do not care about the safety of the American public.

During this episode, Hannity also defended the immigration order by framing the context of the actual travel ban in a positive manner. On his January 30th show, Hannity explained that "this is not a Muslim ban. And if you look at the president's executive order, which I'm sure many liberals have not, there's no mention of the words Muslim or Islam. And there are over 40 different Muslim-majority countries around the world that

are not impacted or affected in any way by this executive order" (foxnews.com, 2017,

para. 31). Hannity used linguistics to justify the travel ban, specifically by emphasizing

that there is technically no official mention of any religious term in the ban. It should also

be noted that Hannity broadcasted under the illogical assumption that liberals had not

read the details of the ban, and therefore could not possibly understand his perspective.

This is once again a generalization made in order to appease the audience, and to

justify their political viewpoints.

Hannity added that "in fact, the list of seven countries impacted by this ban

comes from the Obama administration and Congress. Now, in 2015, the Terrorist Travel

Prevention Act, which Chuck Schumer voted for as part of a larger bill, placed U.S.

travel restrictions on some citizens from Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Syria, and on other

foreigners who previously traveled to those countries" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 31).

Hannity noted shortly after that "last year, President Obama's Department of Homeland

Security, they added Libya, Somalia and Yemen to the list. So, these countries were not

randomly chosen by the Trump administration" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 32). Hannity

once again deflected from the issue at hand (the morality and reasoning for the travel

ban) to place the blame on the Obama administration as the original approver of the

countries on the travel ban list, while further criticizing Senate Minority Leader Chuck

Schumer for his actions on a previous bill regarding immigration. Hannity deflected

attention from the issue at hand by asserting that the Obama Administration and Chuck

Schumer were responsible for the components of the travel ban. Hannity framed the

issue in a manner that levels partial responsibility for the ban on democratic officials,

thus essentially implying that Chuck Schumer's criticism is hypocritical.

The defense of Trump's travel ban continued in this January 30th broadcast of "The Hannity Show", as Hannity attempted to spin the rationale of the controversial order in a manner that people would understand, but, also in a manner that clearly advocates the conservative agenda, explaining that "what the president is doing is giving national security officials the time they need to strengthen vetting, which is what he's been saying he would do for months. It was a major part of this campaign. As President Obama once said, well, campaigns, elections, they have consequences" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 33). By using these words, Hannity clearly defended the ban as a step in the right direction for national security, but he did this without recognizing any other viewpoint (such as noting that the majority of refugees are only trying to make a better life and actually contribute positively to society). Instead, Hannity associated refugees with terrorist activities, and even emphasized past events on his program, explaining that "back in 2011 after it was discovered that two Iraqi refugees living here in America were trying to assist Al Qaeda, well, President Obama reacted by suspending travel for some people from Iraq for six months" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 34). Hannity once again deflected from the current travel ban in order to point his finger at a previous policy from the Obama administration, even though the circumstances are vastly different. By reverting back to policy from the previous administration that may be perceived as similar, Hannity framed the issue in a way that can be justified by the audience. Hannity asserted that public officials against the travel ban are merely gambling with the safety of everyday Americans, as Hannity explained: "Gambling with your life? The media won't tell you any of this. They'd rather be politically correct, push a flimsy narrative that preventing potentially dangerous people from entering the country

will somehow lead to more terror attacks" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 51). Hannity's propensity to insinuate that other media outlets and left-wing advocates disregard the needs and safety of everyday Americans is evident in nearly every one of his primetime broadcasts, and it is especially notable when discussing the travel ban.

Hannity repeatedly criticized any opposition, and it is evident in this episode, as Hannity noted "you know, what this really comes down to is very simple. Democrats, overpaid celebrities, the mainstream media that are so lazy, they are willing to endanger your lives, gamble with your life to try and score cheap political points" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 59). Hannity framed the travel ban as a necessary safety precaution, and any political figure who opposes the order is deemed out-of-touch, or willing to gamble with American lives. Hannity exclaimed during his program, "the next time a radical Islamist from abroad yells Allahu Akbar and kills innocent Americans, you will have blood on your hands! And yes, Chuck Schumer, I'm talking to you. And Ashton Kutcher—whatever your name is—I'm talking to you. Be warned" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 60). Hannity used his platform to rile up his conservative audience against prominent Hollywood figures and opposing politicians, instead of objectively focusing on the controversy surrounding the travel ban.

Hannity also spent a good amount of time on the defensive when discussing the travel ban. On February 2nd, Hannity spent a good portion of his program defending and attempting to justify the order in an interview with Vice President Mike Pence. Hannity started off by framing his opening question in this manner, "one of the big issues that has created a lot of controversies, the executive action on extreme vetting in seven particular countries. It's been misreported as a Muslim ban. Chuck Schumer said it was

mean-spirited and un-American. Now, there are some 40 other Muslim-majority nations that are not impacted. As a matter of fact, 90 percent of Muslims worldwide are not impacted by that. Yet the news media continues to say it's a Muslim ban. Is that fake news to you?" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 56) There are a few notable takeaways from this opening question. First is the leading and biased presentation of the question. Hannity was not simply asking the Vice President about the status of the executive order, but he is emphasizing his own opinion on the media's coverage of the ban, while also singling out Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer's criticism before even asking his question. The framing of this question was leading and clearly lacks objectivity, but once again, Hannity worded and phrased his inquiries in order to embed his political agenda into the minds of the audience.

The leading question by Hannity was unsurprisingly met with concurrence by Vice President Pence, as he responded "It really is (fake news). And any fair-minded person looking at the president's action knows that what President Trump has done is essentially impose a pause on countries that have been compromised by terrorism, so that we can evaluate the screening process and establish an extreme vetting so that people coming into this country don't represent a threat to our families and to our communities" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 57). Pence explained the conservative perspective without addressing the opposition view, and agreed with Hannity that many other reports on the executive order should be discredited as fake news. Pence continued to go on the defense for the executive order, stating that "it's not a Muslim ban. It's not in any way associated with religion. This—the president made it clear in this executive order that we are not going to compromise the safety and security of the

American people with regard to these seven countries that the Obama administration identified as comprised by terror, that the Congress has identified. We're taking a pause. We're going to step back and we're going to put safety and security of the American people first." (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 59). Pence was clearly on the defensive, and it's notable that the Vice President was not being challenged by any opposition viewpoint, which projects a one-sided argument to the audience. While attempting to discredit the notion that the executive order is a "Muslim ban", Pence also pointed to previous actions taken by the Obama administration in order to justify the order. The Vice President concluded his response by defending President Trump, stating that "President Trump has a lot of priorities, but his number one priority is the safety and security of the American people. And that's why this decisive action took place" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 63). Pence was completely unopposed in providing this narrative during his time on Hannity's primetime program, which created a lack of balance and objectivity in the discussion of the travel ban.

On Hannity's February 7th program, he continued to adamantly defend the travel ban and the agenda of the Trump administration in the wake of several challenges to the executive order. With critical backlash arising from prominent political officials and figures, Hannity resorted to attacking the opposition without any regard to their viewpoints. Hannity specifically targeted Elizabeth Warren (a democratic senator from Massachusetts) on this program. Elizabeth Warren has been on recording stating that she has Native American blood, however, she "has been unable to point to evidence of Native heritage except for an unsubstantiated thirdhand report that she might be 1/32 Cherokee" (Franke-Ruta, 2012, para. 5). Hannity clearly antagonizes Warren while

criticizing the opposition, exclaiming "now, let me be very clear to 'Pocahontas' and all of her leftist friends. If your obstruction, if your judge shopping results in terrorists gaining entrance to this country, and if Americans are killed, it will be all of you, not President Trump, that have blood on your hands. And it is you who are choosing to gamble with the lives of the American people over the slight inconvenience of a few visitors to this great country of ours" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 26). Warren (along with many other democratic officials) has been vocal in opposing the executive order, so Hannity once again pushed a narrative that these officials do not care about the safety of Americans, simply because of their choice to speak out against Trump's executive order. Hannity once again framed the opposition's stance against the travel ban as a stance against American safety, which can arouse critical emotions from the audience. This trend of villainizing those who oppose the conservative agenda is common on Hannity's program, as he stated on this same broadcast that the travel ban "has to do with the security of our country, which is so important. I think it's sad. I think it's a sad day. I think our security is at risk today. And it will be at risk until such time as we are entitled and get what we are entitled to as citizens of this country" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 25). Hannity subtly related national security to the executive order by repeatedly associating the safety of Americans with the travel ban. He framed the executive order as an essential component in maintaining safety in the United States, which would certainly resonate with his audience.

On his February 8th broadcast, Hannity interviewed Stephen Miller, who clearly favors the conservative agenda as a senior advisor to President Trump. As the two discussed the travel ban, Miller seems to take a page out of Hannity's book by reverting

to a few isolated incidents in order to generalize the issue and justify the travel ban, as Miller stated, "let's just look at the headlines in recent weeks and months. There was the attack at Ohio State University, the car and knife attack. We've seen example after example in the Somali refugee program of individuals becoming radicalized and joining terrorist groups, even the examples that you don't see" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 78). Miller continued by stating that this "could only happen because we let these individuals into our country in the first place! And then American lives are put at danger!" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 80). Miller mirrored and supported Hannity's analysis by isolating specific events and generalizing the results. The actions of these individuals do not represent the intentions of an entire refugee population. However, by emphasizing rogue individuals and associating them with an entire demographic, Miller framed the issue in a manner that can sway the audience toward the conservative agenda.

On February 9th, Hannity used his primetime platform to address the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which halted the Trump administration's temporary travel ban shortly after it was signed into order. Essentially, a "three-judge panel suggested that the ban did not advance national security, said the administration had shown 'no evidence' that anyone from the seven nations had committed terrorist acts in the United States" (Liptak, 2017, para. 2). This decision alone created a slew of controversy and attention.

Hannity was notably against the actions of the court, adamantly opening his show with a critical remark, stating "this is a Fox News Alert. The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals—well, has predictably ruled against the Trump administration by upholding the suspension of the president's temporary travel ban" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 1).

Hannity continued with guest attorney Jay Sekulow. Sekulow, a prominent figure in the media, is a dedicated "First Amendment advocate whom Mr. Trump recently hired to join his outside legal team" (Savage, 2017, para. 2). When speaking with Sekulow, Hannity addressed the issue with immediate criticism: "Jay, we have both been predicting for days now the 9th circuit, the most liberal court of appeals, the most overturned court in the country—it would act this way" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 7). Hannity reverted back to framing the culprit in a manner that would appeal to his audience. By labeling the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals as a left-wing system, along with listing an unfavorable general statistic on court decisions, Hannity framed the court as unreliable and biased without stating it outright. Hannity's question is also leading, and Sekulow concurred with Hannity on the situation, and went on to state that "the 9th circuit court of appeals decision I think is incorrect as a matter of law, clearly" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 8). Sekulow continued and eventually made a reference to an isolated attack on the Ohio State University campus, "the reality is, the Somali student at Ohio State University that committed those acts was from Somalia, one of the seven countries of concern that were listed in the executive order" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 11). While the terror attack committed on the Ohio State University campus was alarming, Sekulow clearly used this one incident to justify a travel ban including 7 different countries, and this faulty generalization went unchallenged by Hannity.

The concept of "judge shopping" was also emphasized during Hannity's February 9th program, as he once again started a guest interview, featuring Tom Fitton. Fitton is "the President of Judicial Watch, the public interest group that investigates and prosecutes government corruption" (docs.house.gov, n.d., para. 1). However, Fitton

clearly abides by a partisan agenda, as he operates "with nearly 25 years' experience in conservative public policy" (docs.house.gov, n.d., para. 2). With this in mind, Hannity began with a leading question, stating "you know, Tom, let's talk about the president. He has the constitutional statutory ability do what he did here. And is this a case where you believe the left went judge shopping by going to Seattle, knowing that any appeal would go to the 9th Circuit, the most liberal court in the country, appeals court in the country, for the very purpose of undermining the agenda?" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 14). Hannity began with a loaded question, clearly alleging that the 9th Circuit Court, which had struck down the travel ban, was not an objective institution, favoring left-wing policy due to the suspension of the Trump Administration's travel ban. Hannity did not lend any concrete evidence to support this accusation of "judge shopping", however, it was simply intended to stir the emotions of his audience. Hannity's guest, Fitton, fed into Hannity's narrative, as he responded by explaining "to be clear, the leftist infrastructure allowed them to go judge shopping all at once across the country. This is only one of many legal challenges. Obviously, they had the best chance in a sympathetic—ideologically sympathetic district out (ph) like in the 9th circuit" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 16). Fitton concurred with Hannity's assessment that the court went "judge shopping" in order to sway the ruling on the travel ban, yet there was no concrete evidence presented during the program to indicate that this was the case. However, regardless of the information provided, the narrative was intended to appease the audience's viewpoints. Hannity also emphasized an argument for the ban based on law, stating that "the law could not be clearer! It's not for a judge to make this decision! They do not have the constitutional authority to do this" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 33).

Hannity resorted to a pragmatic argument, simply based off law, as opposed to recognizing the any moral issue with the travel ban.

On Hannity's February 13th program, prominent anchor Jorge Ramos joined the broadcast to debate the immigration order. Ramos is an extremely prominent broadcaster, he is "one of the most respected journalists among the 50 million Hispanics in the United States and in the 13 Latin American countries where his newscast is seen every night" (jorgeramos.com, n.d., para. 11). Ramos is also an immigrant, "he came to the United States as a student in 1983. In November 1986, at age 28, he became one of the youngest national news anchors in the history of American television. Since then, he has been called "the voice of the voiceless" for other immigrants like him" (jorgeramos.com, n.d., para. 13). Ramos has a vastly different background compared to that of Sean Hannity.

Ramos opposed Hannity's conservative agenda, and it was evident throughout the interview. On this episode, Hannity continued his trend of beginning with a leading question, stating "all right, Jorge, are you at all concerned about Americans that have been killed by illegal immigrants? Are you at all concerned about the drugs that have come into this country? Are you all concerned about the money Americans have to pay for illegal immigrants as it relates to our educational system, our health care system, our criminal justice system?" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 26). Once again, Hannity posed a loaded question, instantly challenging Ramos to defend his stance on immigration. Ramos responded by stating "Absolutely. Absolutely. And no one here, Sean—and this is very important. No one here, including me, is defending criminals in this country. No one here is defending terrorists or rapists. No one is doing that. But the way you are

presenting this issue is absolutely wrong, completely biased, because you are presenting…" (foxnews.com, 2017. Para. 27). Ramos was cut off by Hannity before he could even finish making his statement challenging Hannity's presentation, as Hannity chimed in and stated "excuse me, Jorge. With all due respect, I'm not going to let you challenge my facts! These are all facts" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 28). Hannity was clearly trying to prevent Ramos from getting his point across to the audience, but Ramos was still able to clarify his statement, noting that "this is reality. The vast majority of immigrants in this country, the vast majority, Sean, are not criminals, are not terrorists and are not rapists. Checked report by the American Immigration Council. Immigrants are less likely to be criminals than those born in the United States" (foxnews.com, para. 32). After arguing back and forth on which facts are valid, Ramos eventually told Hannity that "the problem, Sean, is that you're criminalizing a whole population" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 79). Hannity instantly denied this accusation and refocused on his own preferred statistics on immigration.

Hannity continued his interview with Ramos by addressing his stance on extreme vetting, as he asked Ramos, "do you support extreme vetting to protect Americans and not gamble with their lives?" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 143). Once again, Hannity loaded his question by associating the issue with an assumed threat that immigrants pose to American lives, further cementing this notion with the audience. Ramos responded to Hannity by stating, "well, what I can't understand is that the same country that gave me all the opportunities that my country of origin couldn't give me now is treating other immigrants in these…" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 144). Ramos was cut off once again by Hannity, as he stated "so we should gamble with the lives of

Americans?" (foxnews.com, 2017, para. 145). As Hannity and Ramos bickered back and forth, it is clear that Hannity was unwilling to see Ramos' perspective. It is also clear that Ramos was merely attempting to point out that the majority of immigrants are not violent criminals.

Hannity clearly approaches every episode in a manner that suits the conservative agenda. In the wake of the travel ban, Hannity fully defended the Trump administration's decision by framing the executive order as an essential precaution to save American lives. Hannity emphasized this point, and refused to acknowledge or accept any other stance on the issue. This was evident through his repeated statements that suggest opposing the travel ban is in effect "gambling with American lives". Hannity frames the issue in a manner that suits the conservative agenda. This is done by utilizing favorable statistics, asking leading questions, omitting alternative viewpoints, and projecting the issues through the lens of the conservative agenda. Hannity was unwilling to cover the travel ban in an objective light, however, he is not the only primetime host who abides by a partisan motive.

Like Hannity, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow is a prominent primetime host who covers the political realm, but from an opposite perspective. Her program, *The Rachel Maddow Show,* extensively covered the travel ban. However, the difference in coverage is vast, as Maddow takes on the travel ban from a left-wing perspective, contradicting the viewpoints of the conservative agenda.

4.5: Analysis of Rachel Maddow's Travel Ban Coverage

On Maddow's program on February 3rd, 2017, Laurence Tribe, a well-renowned Harvard professor, joined Maddow to discuss the issues associated with the travel ban. Tribe has had a significant influence in the political realm, specifically aiding left-wing politicians. Professor Tribe "advised Al Gore in the 2000 Florida recount and has advised Obama's campaign organization" (Jacobs, 2016, para. 3). Tribe engaged with Maddow, as she asked, "what's your take on the legal status of this policy that the president tried to introduce last week?" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 18). Tribe instantly responded, "my take is that it's under a very dark constitutional cloud. This is clearly a Muslim ban. Not all Muslims, only Muslims from seven countries but then targeted Muslims with a preference for Christians, clearly a violation of the Establishment Clause" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 19). The Establishment clause "forbids the government from establishing an official religion, but also prohibits government actions that unduly favor one religion over another" (law.cornell.edu, n.d., para 3). Tribe clearly believed that this clause was being violated through Trump's executive order.

What is notable in this coverage is the reference to the executive order as a "Muslim ban" as opposed to a travel ban. Professor Tribe, unchallenged by Maddow, emphasized that this ban is based on religion, a premise that Sean Hannity repeatedly disavowed on his own program. Tribe continued, stating that it was "done in the dark. It's done without hearings. It's done in a way that is a violation of due process. There's even reason to believe that the picking of these seven countries that the Obama administration had originally targeted for what might be called extreme vetting are the very countries that didn't need anything more because we've had no terrorist attacks

from those countries given how effective the Obama program is and yet they picked those seven, perhaps coincidentally, but it's hard to believe" (msnnbc.com, 2017, para. 20). Maddow's guest was clearly critical of the executive order, and framing the issue in a manner that suggests that the ban is unnecessary due to the Obama administration's close watch over these seven countries. This is a perspective that would be favorable for the network's agenda. It's notable that Hannity emphasized the Obama administration's role in the executive order as well, mainly to implicate the Obama administration as culpable and complicit in the creation of the ban. Tribe, on the other hand, argues that the Obama administration played a role in decreasing the threat in the first place. These are two conflicting arguments that can create a major partisan gap of understanding between audiences based of the analysis provided. Professor Tribe, uncontradicted by Maddow, used the platform to clearly argue against the ban without recognizing the opposition viewpoint.

Throughout Maddow's coverage of the travel ban, she addressed issues that would otherwise be minimized on conservative outlets. On Maddow's February 6th program, she emphasized the outrage over the travel ban throughout the country, a point that was never covered on *The Sean Hannity Show*. Maddow stated in the opening of her program that "there's been so much visible protests. There's been such wide-scale civilian resistance and organizing against Trump, I think it's been easy to focus on that as the countervailing force against which the Trump administration is pushing, but this legal fight in the Ninth Circuit now, this is the first time that the judiciary has really given this new administration a shove and pushed it way back" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 19). Maddow emphasized the level of backlash against the Trump

administration, and the extent of the protests and outrage throughout the country caused by the travel ban, while also framing the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals as an advocate, noting that the court would not stand for the actions of the Trump administration. This analysis is the complete opposite of what we heard from Sean Hannity, as Hannity minimized (or completely ignored) the significance of any outrage felt around the country, while also criticizing the court for being extremely biased in its decision to halt the travel ban. The coverage, the emphasis on certain facts, and the perception of the issue could not be more different, leaving viewers on their own to determine which perspective is more accurate.

On Maddow's program on February 8th, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer made a guest appearance, and Maddow took the opportunity to address President Trump's criticisms of Schumer over the travel ban. Maddow explained to Schumer during their interview that Trump accused Schumer "of fake crying over the refugee ban" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 121). As stated previously, Schumer was visually emotional and tearful when discussing the ban during a press conference. Schumer used the platform to respond to that criticism, while also addressing the course of the Trump administration, explaining that "we're guided by our values. We have strong values. It's what America should be about. And what's happened is that Donald Trump's presidency has moved so far to the right that it's hard to see compromising with them on almost anything, because they are not what Donald Trump campaigned on" (msnnc.com, 2017, para. 122). Schumer used his platform on Maddow's show to emphasize his opinion that the Trump administration was essentially unwilling to compromise based on strong right-wing ideals. Whether or not Schumer is correct, he

was inadvertently creating a divisive narrative for the audience, further muddling the lack of objectivity in primetime news broadcasts.

In the wake of the 9th Circuit's decision to block aspects of the ban, Maddow spent her opening monologue on February 9th criticizing the Trump administration and its dealings with the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. In her opening, she blatantly states that "the nut of this ruling is that the Trump administration is wrong when they say the president has unreviewable authority to do whatever he wants on immigration. The court knocks that one's head off, right?" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 26). Maddow, like Hannity, spends a fair amount of time discussing the status of the court, however, while Hannity has repeatedly stated that Trump was well within his constitutional power, Maddow thoroughly disagrees with this position in her analysis. She continued by stating that "no president has unreviewable authority. No precedent in American laws says a president has unreviewable authority" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 28). The political viewpoints of each talk show host clearly impacted their analysis, as both have presented vastly different arguments based on the same events surrounding the executive order.

In this same episode on February 9th, Maddow reported a study that was clearly presented to invalidate the Trump administration and his supporters. She explained that "this is new national polling data from PPP. We've got this exclusively here tonight. But here is the on-the-nose part that I think is really important for what just happened this evening in the Ninth Circuit Court, and the angry response that the president has already had to this court, and to other multiple federal judges who have ruled against him on his refugee ban and Muslim ban so far. This is what you get if you ask

Americans as a whole, quote 'Do you think Donald Trump should be able to overturn decisions by judges that he disagrees with?" (Msnbc.com, 2017, para. 90). Maddow continued after building up the poll numbers, as she stated: "Asked the whole country, yes or no, the answer, resoundingly, by almost 40 points is no. No, of course not. We're Americans. We know how the Constitution works, right? The President should not be able to overturn decisions by judges just because he disagrees with those decisions. That's a national answer" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 91). Maddow was clearly suggesting that the statistic represented the general population, demonstrating a general sense of knowledge as she moved to the second portion of this poll. She continued, stating: "But now look at this. Ask that same question to Donald Trump supporters and this is what you get. Donald Trump voters, an actual majority of them, say that Donald Trump should be able to overturn decisions by judges that he disagrees with, 51 percent of Trump Supporters say, yeah, yeah, he should" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 91). Maddow was catering to her audience by presenting a statistic that generalizes an entire demographic, clearly attempting to insinuate that the majority of Trump supporters believe the president should be able to overturn a court ruling on the travel ban. The reliability of the poll Maddow was focusing on is unknown, but, similar to Hannity, she was presenting information that can spark the emotions of her audience. This is yet another example of objectivity diminishing in the name of partisanship. And before transitioning to her next topic, Maddow capped off her commentary by stating, "does that number among his supporters rise even further if he keeps attacking judges and he keeps attacking the courts that are now standing in his way? I think this is a benchmark moment here. This is important stuff" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 92). Maddow concluded

by building off the poll results, creating the generalization that Trump's supporters will become more enthused, the more Trump attacks court system.

Maddow goes as far as initiating discussions of impeachment based on the previously mentioned poll results, as Maddow stated: "I mean, you look at results of this poll, people not liking the new President, not liking his policies, not believing him, not trusting him. It's kind of interesting in a poll like this, the only question where he's not underwater is should he be impeached? That's interesting, right?" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 85). Before concluding her commentary on the topic, Maddow continued, stating: "Here's the black cloud inside that silver lining. I think the really bad news for the administration here is that this might be why we're getting that result on the impeachment question. Look, quote, 'Who would you rather was president? Mike Pence or Donald Trump?' Answer from the American public. Ooh, not sure" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 86). In this presentation, Maddow shifted from a poll relating to the travel ban to conversation of possible impeachment, an overreach as a topic to spend time on during a primetime news broadcast in February (not yet one month into the new presidency). However, this commentary has the potential to appeal to Maddow's audience, and therefore broadcasting commentary such as this takes priority over objective, factual news.

Before concluding this February 9th edition of her program, Maddow interviewed Anthony Romero, the executive director of the ACLU. While Romero has a prominent role in the national spotlight, he clearly opposed the Trump administration's conservative agenda, previously exclaiming that "Donald Trump's proposed policies, if carried out, would trigger a constitutional crisis. By our reckoning, a Trump

administration would violate the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Eight amendments if it tried to implement his most controversial plans" (Romero, 2016, para. 2). In discussing the country's reaction to the travel ban with Maddow, Romero stated that "we're winning in the court of public opinion. People are turning out in these protests, and they are still going on at the airports, the spontaneous protests at the courthouse when we won our case, the initial first stay, that Saturday after the first telling of the executive order. People are activated in a way that's remarkable, in a way I hadn't seen in the last 15,16 years" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 126). After Maddow concurred, Romero concluded with "I don't think they win this one" (msnbc.com, 2017, para. 127). Maddow and Romero put a positive emphasis on the protests and anger that swept the country following the travel ban, an emphasis that did not exist on Sean Hannity's program. But essentially, viewers are deprived of objective analyses on the facts, and are subjected to news presentations based on which partisan group is winning, and what would happen if President Trump were impeached. The state of journalism in the current political climate clearly relies upon material that will appeal to the audience and draw in viewers, as opposed to broadcasting pertinent facts and issues from a bi-partisan perspective. This analysis of both primetime programs proves that agenda-driven content and viewership takes priority over objective journalism.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

5.1: Main Findings from the Research

This analysis sheds light on the lack of objectivity in content focused on partisan agendas, ratings, and audience approval. When examining coverage of the travel ban, this research focuses on the facts, statistics, phrasing, and overall presentation of each program in relation to the initial travel ban. Sean Hannity had a clear propensity to defend President Donald Trump and his administration at all costs. Hannity often framed democrats, celebrities, and Hollywood elites as "out of touch" and unconcerned with the security of everyday Americans simply because they were outspoken in their condemnation of the executive order. Hannity also repeatedly associated immigration with terror threats and radical Islamic terrorists, framing the issue so that the audience perceives the issue in this skewed manner. Sean Hannity clearly took every opportunity to discredit the liberal viewpoint by generalizing these demographics, and this was done to villainize the opposition in an attempt to appease the audience. Instead of debating why celebrity figures and politicians such as Ashton Kutcher and Chuck Schumer were outraged over the travel ban, Hannity attacked the character of these individuals and insinuated that they simply cannot relate to middle-class Americans. In his criticism of Chuck Schumer's reaction to the travel ban, Hannity simply deflected back to legislation Schumer was involved with in 2015, instead of focusing on the issue at hand. Hannity

consistently stated that the Trump administration was within its constitutional jurisdiction in issuing the Executive Order, frivolously denying that the ban has anything to do with religion, and instead only emphasized the ban as a staple for national security, noting that the majority of Muslims were not affected by the ban. Hannity spent little to no time on his program emphasizing the thousands of refugees who were only attempting to escape toxic environments, but instead viewed the ban as a slight inconvenience in the name of national security.

Hannity went on the offensive in his commentary about the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision by instantly labeling the court as biased, left-wing, and unreliable. He went as far as to accuse the system of intentionally picking liberal judges without presenting concrete evidence, but Hannity did this in order to spark the emotions of his audience, instead of presenting an objective analysis of the court's ruling. By repeatedly using phrases such as "gambling with American lives" and "judge shopping" when commenting on the travel ban, Hannity subtly engrained a skewed perception of the court and opposing officials.

Hannity also subjectively approached the manner in which interviews were conducted. Instead of outlining a general process, Hannity framed his questions to favor his conservative agenda. In discussing the travel ban with Vice President Mike Pence, Hannity tailored his questions to the Vice President, insinuating that the travel ban was not a Muslim ban, and that it was essential for our national security. Vice President fully agreed, going on to defend the status of the ban, the intentions of the ban, and the President's concern for the safety of Americans. Pence went unchallenged by Hannity, but this was certainly not the case when Hannity interviewed Jorge Ramos, who

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opposed the travel ban. Hannity aggressively questioned Ramos on his stances,

continuously interrupting Ramos while he was defending his viewpoints on immigration,

hounding him on why he wanted to "gamble with American lives". Hannity simply

refused to recognize the rationale of the opposing viewpoint, which created a huge

partisan gap in the information presented during his guest interviews.

While this research found that Sean Hannity presented his information and facts

in a manner that meets a particular agenda; a similar conclusion could be made after

analyzing content from *The Rachel Maddow Show* on MSNBC. Maddow had a polar

opposite view on the travel ban, and clearly echoed this perception on her primetime

program. Maddow presented the executive order as a ban that was based of religion,

and passed with the use of unconstitutional power. This was evident in Maddow's

interview with Professor Tribe, who went unchallenged in declaring that the ban was

based on deterring Muslims from entering the United States. Tribe went as far to say

that the seven countries listed in the ban had actually become lessened terrorist threats

due to the attention they previously received from the Obama administration. Maddow

and her guests continuously emphasized protests and outbreaks of anger in a positive

light, while also depicting the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals as an advocate for standing up

to the Trump administration, a vast difference from the coverage presented on *Hannity*.

Maddow, like Hannity, presents the content on her program to appease her

audience. This was evident as she presented a poll that was clearly intended to

diminish the credibility of Trump supporters, as she emphasized that the majority of the

President's supporters agree that Trump should be able to overturn court rules, as

opposed to a separate poll with a "general population" voting that he should not have

that ability. This creates a generalization that Trump supporters believe the president

should have unconstitutional power, which aligns with the perception of Maddow's

audience about Trump supporters. Furthermore, Maddow used her platform to bring up

the possibility of impeachment within three weeks of President Trump taking office.

Clearly, the topic of impeachment, especially this early in the presidency, was

premature at the least. Yet, Maddow was breaching a topic that she believed would

entice her audience. This only took away time that could have been used to debate the

issues surrounding the executive order. However, as with Hannity's program, Maddow

catered to the perceived agenda of her audience.

Maddow and Hannity reinforced their news presentations through guest

interviews. Hannity brought on conservative guests, such as Vice President Mike

Pence, Tom Fitton, Stephen Miller, and Jay Sekulow. Hannity understood that his

perspectives aligned with his conservative guests, and he used these interviews to

validate and bolster his right-wing viewpoints. However, when Hannity brought on Jorge

Ramos, who opposed Hannity's position on immigration, the tone and dialect was

drastically different. Hannity immediately challenged Ramos' viewpoints and disputed

many of his statements. Ramos was cut off several times before even finishing his

statements on the Hannity's program, whereas his conservative guests went completely

unchallenged during their interviews. Maddow, like Hannity, reinforced her viewpoints

by interviewing prominent guests that align with the liberal agenda. Maddow brought on

guests such as Chuck Schumer, Laurence Tribe, and Anthony Romero, who all

opposed the refugee ban, citing the use of prejudice and unconstitutional power.

Maddow concurred with her interviewees, and similar to Hannity's show, each guest

went unchallenged in their opinion of the travel ban, despite a partisan outlook.

Framing theory played a major role in determining the manner in which each host

broadcasted the topics surrounding the Trump administration's travel ban. Below is a

table summary comparing and contrasting the frames used by each host based on the

findings of this research.

5.2: Frames Identified Throughout the News Analysis

Table 1: Opposite Frames used by Sean Hannity and Rachel Maddow

Topic	Hannity	Maddow
Description of Ban	"Travel Ban"	"Muslim Ban"
Characterization of Ban	"Constitutional action by President for national security"	"Unconstitutional, unnecessary discriminatory Executive Order"
Protests against Ban	Avoids or minimizes any reference to protests or outrage	Emphasizes national outcry and protests across the country
Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals	Liberal, biased and most overturned court in history	Advocate for constitutional rights and the people's court

The first column represents the general description of the travel ban used by

Sean Hannity and Rachel Maddow. This is the most evident frame used by both hosts.

Hannity refrained from associating any religious terms with the executive order, which

reinforced his position that the travel ban is needed strictly for the safety of the United

States. Maddow, on the other hand, associated religion with the executive order, and deemed the ban prejudice and unwarranted. This stance aligned with the liberal agenda, which appealed to Maddow's audience.

The second column represents the characterization of the ban. Hannity did not associate religion in his reference to the executive order. He framed the ban as a pertinent action that must be taken in order to improve national security. Hannity was adamant that the President was within his constitutional jurisdiction by implementing the travel ban in order to prevent outside threats from entering the United States. Rachel Maddow opposed Hannity's logic, and viewed the executive order as a ban against people of the Muslim faith. She insinuated that the executive order was implemented based on a generalization that the Muslim population was a significant threat to the United States, thus labeling the ban as unconstitutional and discriminatory.

The third column indicates the level of coverage given to the protests and public outrage displayed due to the Trump administration's travel ban. As a conservative, Hannity portrayed the executive order in a positive light, and thus minimized (or avoided) the impact of protests across the country due to the travel ban. Maddow, on the other hand, played into the hand of her liberal audience, and emphasized and advocated the outrage and protests on her program as a sign of vigilant rebellion. Unlike Hannity, Maddow portrayed the protests and anger throughout the country in a positive light to appeal to her viewers.

The final column reflects the coverage pertaining to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision on the travel ban. Sean Hannity ruthlessly criticized the court based

on his conservative perspective. He repeatedly labeled the court as biased, liberal, and corrupt due to democratic tendencies and accusations of "judge shopping". Maddow presented the opposite perspective by portraying the 9th Circuit Court as an advocate of the people. Maddow emphasized that the 9th Circuit Court stood up to the Trump administration, and argued that the court was protecting the country from an unnecessary and unjust executive order.

Through this analysis of Sean Hannity's and Rachel Maddow's primetime presentations, we can see the partisan divide behind the outlets, but more importantly, this research has shown that the manner in which critical news and information is presented during these broadcasts relies almost completely on a partisan agenda and the perceived informational needs of the audience. Framing has proved to be a crucial step in broadcasting information on the Trump administration's travel ban, as both Hannity and Maddow have minimized and maximized specific stories and facts, while also generalizing and demonizing opposing demographics in order to appease to their audiences. Through their wording, phrasing, emphasis on preferred statistics, and marginalization of opposing viewpoints on this critical executive order, both Hannity and Maddow have demonstrated that objective journalism is no longer a priority in news broadcasts on MSNBC and Fox news.

5.3: Future Directions for Further Research

This research was conducted in order to pinpoint the significance of media bias during national news broadcasts. In this research, the topic of immigration (specifically the Trump administration's travel ban) was deemed suitable due to the magnitude of the

executive order, and the copious amount of coverage it drew in the national news. While media bias has been a persistent issue in the United States, this research is unique in that it compares the exact presentation of news and events side by side in order to identify the vast difference in coverage on the same issue. While this research had limitations due to the amount of news coverage that is broadcasted on a daily basis, a baseline has now been set for future research to examine mainstream media bias on prominent issues in our society. This research focused only on one issue, using content from two primetime broadcasters with opposing agendas in two opposing news stations in order to explore the level of objectivity in today's mainstream media. Admittedly, MSNBC and Fox news are on the two extreme ends of the political spectrum, and Sean Hannity and Rachel Maddow are two of the more extreme political hosts. Future research should explore other outlets such as ABC, CNN, and CBS to determine whether similar biases exist. Also, immigration is and has been a hot button issue dividing the two major political parties. Future research could examine other sensitive and controversial issues set in motion by the government to determine if such bias exists across the board, or if a lack of objectivity is specific to immigration. Future research should also examine sources such as newspapers and online journals to determine if other forms of coverage display similar bias when covering these issues. This research should be expanded on in order to grasp the significance of political media bias across several platforms.

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