

## MEMORANDUM

**To: Members of the Select Committee**  
**Fr: Select Committee Data Analysts**  
**Re: Legacy Media**  
**Dt: December 3, 2022**

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### Introduction

Cable and broadcast news dominate American news sources. According to a YouGov poll<sup>1</sup> broadcast news and cable news are used weekly by 39% of Americans. More Americans are likely to have watched broadcast news or cable news (or interacted with one of these channel's websites) each week than any other news source including social media, newspapers or their websites, YouTube, podcasts, or other websites.

National news sources focused heavily on the 2020 election in the months surrounding it. With national news touching so many Americans and having such potential to impact on Americans' beliefs and actions, understanding what the national news reported (or didn't report) and how it was communicated is impactful for understanding the cultural context that allowed the January 6th riots to happen.

### Analysis

Select Committee data analysts modeled the news between 2020-11-09, the Monday after the election, through 2021-01-05, the day before the January 6th riot. The staff gathered transcripts of primetime news programs from three of the major cable news networks: CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News. This only included weeknight programs aired from 6 pm to 10:59 pm ET. Using these transcripts, the staff built a topic model that identified 50 topics.<sup>2</sup> This approach used the statistical results of the model to identify broad trends over time and between networks, then identified top hits by network for each topic and provided a detailed analysis on how networks differ in their presentation of the news.

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<sup>1</sup> Linley Sanders, "Trust in Media 2022: Where Americans get their news and who they trust for information," YouGov America, (Apr. 5, 2022), available at <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/04/05/trust-media-2022-where-americans-get-news-poll>.

<sup>2</sup> Lin Liu, Lin Tang, Wen Dong, Shaowen Yao, and Wei Zhou, "An overview of topic modeling and its current applications in bioinformatics," SpringerPlus, Vol. 5.1, (2016), available at <https://springerplus.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40064-016-3252-8>.

## **Findings**

Overall, findings include:

- The election and Covid made up roughly 50% of each network's nightly programming in this time window,
- Networks cover the news differently and in statistically different proportions per topic,
- Fox News repeatedly hinted or outright claimed that Biden's election win was illegitimate via voter fraud or improper ballot counting. Discussions of voting methods directly made up ~50% of Fox News's election related programming and 10% of their total programming. Fox News continued to suggest there was concern to believe the election was illegitimate, even when the primary topic was not voter fraud or improper voting,
- CNN and MSNBC focused their election coverage on Trump's response to the results, discussing when and if Trump would concede and continually stating that Trump's claims the election was stolen were baseless. This made up ~40% of these network's election coverage and 9-10% of their total programming, and
- Fox News spent 15% of its nightly programming addressing Hunter Biden in the weeks following Hunter Biden's announcement that his tax affairs were under investigation. Fox News repeatedly hinted that Joe Biden was complicit in Hunter Biden's potential crimes. In contrast, this was a short news story for CNN and MSNBC only on the day it broke. CNN and MSNBC were explicit that Joe Biden was not implicated in any of Hunter Biden's investigations.

## **Conclusion**

This data provided no evidence that the right-wing or left-wing partisan media covered in this report directly incited the January 6th riot. However, Fox News's repeated claims of voter fraud, illegal vote counting, and general election conspiracy likely contributed to a political environment that allowed conspiracy, hysteria, and extremism to thrive. As the most watched cable news network in America in 2020 with roughly 20 times more hourly viewers than Newsmax, Fox News' potential cultural impact is significant.