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What does the Fox say?

A mixed-methods framing analysis of Fox News' coverage of
domestic terrorism, 2012-2022

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Abstract

This paper investigates Fox News' television coverage of domestic terrorism in the United States from 2012 to 2022. This period spans the terms of both Republican and Democratic Presidents, the COVID-19 pandemic, large-scale civil protests, and the emergence of rightwing extremism as the foremost domestic terror threat. The empirical analysis is based on 287 transcripts from 24 Fox News shows. The study engages a deductive, quantitative content analysis of four specific news frames: sourcing, contextualization, ideological labels, and definitional certainty. Five emphasis frames (attribution of blame, conservatives under attack, questioning intelligence agencies, radical Islam, and rightwing extremism is not a threat) are also investigated through an inductive, qualitative content analysis. Quantitative results indicate that the use of specific sources has shifted over time, the contextualization of domestic terror incidents has switched from references to other foreign terror to other domestic terror, ideological labels are applied to the left while there is hesitancy to apply rightwing labels, and that definitional certainty in coverage has increased over time. Qualitative results indicate that the network's coverage of Islamic and leftwing extremism is consistently thematic, while rightwing extremism is framed episodically and left as unconstructed terrorism despite the significant increase in incidences of rightwing domestic terror over the sample period. Further qualitative results indicate marked increases in the prevalence of three additional emphasis frames: attribution of blame to the left, conservatives are under attack, and questioning the integrity of intelligence agencies.

Keywords: Domestic terror, ontological security, framing, television, news media, rightwing extremism

Popular science summary

Rightwing domestic terrorism has become the paramount terror threat in the United States and as a result, media coverage of domestic terrorism has increased significantly. The inherently political nature of rightwing domestic terrorism poses a unique situation for the reporting and framing of the issue by rightwing media. This paper seeks to understand how Fox News, as a rightwing source of media, framed the topic of domestic terrorism in its cable television coverage from 2012-2022, across 287 transcripts from 24 different Fox News television programs. How the media frames certain issues plays an important role in facilitating public understanding of both the cause and solution to social issues, as well as the public's ability, or willingness, to identify and define events with specific labels. In this case, the framing used by Fox News is central in communicating to its audience what is terrorism, and what is not.

The quantitative portion of this research sought to understand how Fox News utilizes sources, contextualizes domestic terror, applies ideological labels, and how it uses definitional certainty. Results from this section show that the sources used by the network changed over time and became more partisan (rightwing) as rightwing terror incidents increased. The contextualization of the incidents also changed over the period of analysis, from being contextualized within the domain of foreign terror to domestic terror. Leftwing and radical ideological labels were used often, while rightwing ideological labels were rarely used by the network. The definitional certainty of the use of the term domestic terrorism also increased over the period of analysis.

The qualitative analysis set out to identify themes across the transcripts. The results showed that the network failed to frame rightwing domestic terror in the context of a widespread of social issue, and instead placed the blame almost entirely on radical Islamic terror and leftwing domestic terror. Other frameworks reinforced this finding. For example, the network commonly portrayed conservative figures, and rightwing extremists, as being unfairly targeted and framed the FBI, and other intelligence agencies, as being complicit in attacks against the American rightwing.

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1. Introduction

Domestic terrorism, in contrast to international terrorism, poses a unique set of circumstances for the media, as an agent of social control responsible for framing socio-political understanding. International terrorism fits neatly into a culturally predefined and understood framework of “us versus them,” where perpetrators can be placed outside of the ethos of the homeland as an Other with values and ideals existing in diametric opposition. The binary nature of the framework makes it easy for the public to consume and easy to situate other incidents neatly within the bounds of the framework. However, in the instance of homegrown domestic terror, this cultural narrative is subverted: the Other, no longer an outsider, is replaced by a member of the collective Self who is, in many ways, reflective of the shared beliefs, ideals, and values of the nation. As a result, media, as well as the government and other institutions, face a different set of challenges in defining and attributing responsibility for domestic acts of terror (Zulli, Coe, Isaacs, & Summers, 2021).

The question of how the media frames domestic terrorism takes on another level of complexity when the media outlets examined are explicitly partisan, and therefore, already deploy an “us versus them” framework. The partisan nature of domestic terror, especially within the two-party system of a country like the United States, means that domestic terrorists will often have either leftwing or rightwing motivations. Over the past decade there has been a steady uptick in the number of domestic terror incidents each year in the US, the majority of which have been perpetrated by rightwing extremists (Doxsee, Jones, Thompson, Halstead, & Hwang, 2022). Since 1993, 85% of all rightwing terror incidents have been perpetrated by white supremacists (referred to as racially motivated violent extremists (RMVE)) and antigovernment extremists (referred to as militia violent extremists (MVE)) (Anti-Defamation League, 2022; FBI, DHS, CTCT, 2022).

The increase in frequency during this time period has been followed by an increase in coverage, and mention of domestic terrorism across the media. Zulli, et al., (2022) found that three of the big four television news networks in the US, ABC, CBS, and NBC have all had surges in news stories referencing domestic terror/ism over the past thirty years. Although the trio of television

networks have exhibited leftwing biases in their engagement with certain sources, they did not meet the threshold for the classification of “partisan” (i.e., they remained critical of the government independent of which party was in power) according to Bernhardt, Dewenter, and Thomas (2023), unlike the final member of the big four, Fox News (Groseclose and Milyo, 2005).

Not only is Fox News a partisan source of news, but it also has widespread and sustained popularity. In 2022, Fox News had nine of the top ten most widely viewed cable news network shows and the network finished as the top-rated basic cable channel for the seventh year in a row (Katz, 2023). The combined daily viewership of the top five programs alone exceeds 14.5 million viewers (Katz, 2023). The combination of partisan and popular makes Fox News an attractive network to analyze in terms of how domestic terrorism is framed.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The analytic goal of this research is to understand how a partisan news source, Fox News, frames its coverage of domestic terrorism, and, more specifically, how the emergent threat of rightwing extremism in the US is framed by the network. In order to achieve this, both quantitative and qualitative analyses and descriptive generalizations are used.

RQ1: How does Fox News frame the issue of domestic terror in the US?

Phase I coding will seek to address this question by answering the following sub-questions:

- 1.1 Which sources are the most prominent in news coverage of domestic terrorism by Fox News?
- 1.2 How does Fox News coverage contextualize domestic terrorism in reference to other attacks?
- 1.3 Does Fox News differentially apply ideological labels to individuals or groups associated with domestic terrorism?
- 1.4 How, and to what extent, is the “domestic terrorism” label questioned by Fox News coverage?

RQ2: How has Fox News framed domestic terror environment in the US over time?

Phase II coding will seek to answer this question by addressing the following sub-questions:

- 2.1 How does Fox News attribute blame for domestic terror incidents?
- 2.2 How does Fox News construct its threat narrative regarding domestic terror?
- 2.3 How does Fox News frame the contemporary domestic terror environment in the US?

1.2 Limitations of the study

The main limitation of this study is that it will only offer a glimpse into the bigger picture of domestic terror framing via Fox News coverage. The complete dataset (N=1289) is far too vast for one researcher to code and analyze alone. Additionally, as this study sought to investigate explicit instances in which commentators on Fox News programs were willing to use the phrase domestic terrorism, there are most certainly transcripts without mention of domestic terrorism that could be useful in building a fuller analysis of Fox News' framing. However, in order to manage the scope of this study and conduct and focus the research in an appropriate and meaningful way, random sampling of only Fox News programs with mentions of domestic terror were chosen.

2. Context

2.1 Domestic terror as an emergent threat in the media

The most impactful entry of “domestic terror” into the public lexicon, and media coverage in US history, occurred in April 1995 with the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The attack was carried out by a far-right, anti-government extremist, who “had come to see himself as a soldier in his own strange war against the United States” and was hoping to start a revolution, largely inspired by the racist dystopian novel *The Turner Diaries* (Kifner, 1995; Berger, 2016). Following the incident, federal investigators described the attacker as being part of a “culture, a milieu of militia literature, far-right computer networks and gun-toting, tax-refusing white supremacists” (Kifner, 1995). To this day, the attack remains the most deadly domestic terror incident in US history.

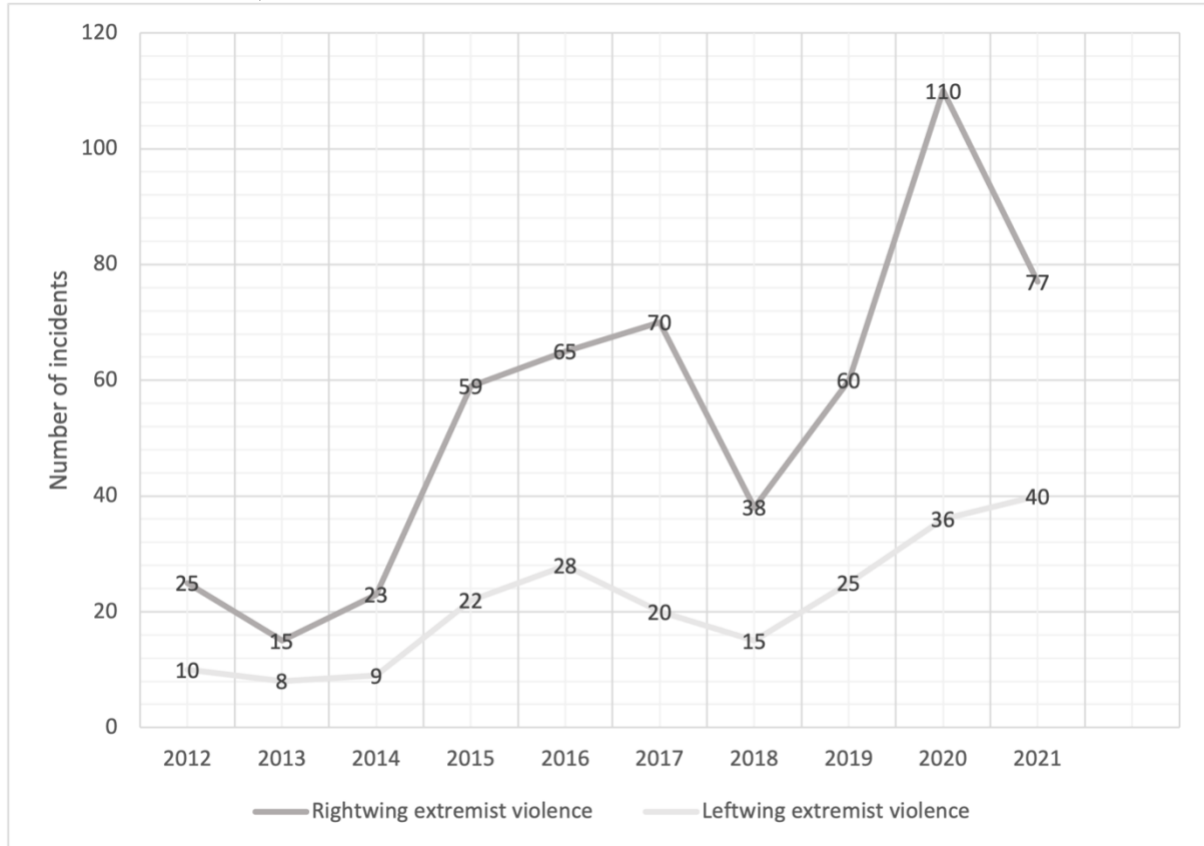
Until 1995, domestic terror took up relatively little space across news coverage in the United States. For example, Zulli, et al., (2022) found that from 1990 to 1994, there were nine total mentions of domestic terrorism across the three major broadcast television networks ABC, CBS, and NBC. In 1995, that number increased to 60 stories across the major networks (Zulli, et al., 2022, p.365).

This finding also holds true for newspaper coverage of domestic terrorism in the United States. For example, from 1980-1994, there were a total of 56 stories in the New York Times that mentioned domestic terrorism, with an average of 19 stories per five-year span. In 1995, there were 42 stories with reference to domestic terror, comprising half of all mentions between 1995-1999 (84 total references). Since 1999, each five-year span up to 2019 has averaged 167 stories with reference to domestic terror. References grew markedly in the three-year span between 2020 and 2022 to 310. The US is currently in a stage of heightened attention to domestic terrorism unlike any other point in history.

2.2 Institutional recognition of domestic terror

The identification of domestic terror as a threat, and the sustained attention given to it by the media has also been reflected across levels of government and corresponding agencies of control. Following the tumult of both the COVID-19 Pandemic and the insurrection at the Capitol, there has been a renewed urgency concerning domestic terror from The White House to local governments. Under the broad umbrella of domestic terrorism, it is right-wing extremism that has been singled out as the gravest domestic threat by The White House, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), among other regulatory or investigative institutions (Doxsee, et al., 2022; Office of Inspector General & Cuffari, J.V., 2022; The Executive Office of the President, 2021). Right-wing extremism makes up the majority of domestic terror incidents, as well as the majority of lethal incidents (Figure 1) (Doxsee, et al., 2022; Wray, 2021).

Figure 1: Number of domestic terror incidents perpetrated by rightwing and leftwing extremists in the United States, 2012-2021.



*Data from Doxsee, et al., 2022.

The *Domestic Terror Prevention Act of 2019, S.894*, a bill presented to the US Congress, begins with the following, “White supremacists and other far-right-wing extremists are the most significant domestic terrorism threat facing the United States” (S.894, 2019). The bill references an unclassified bulletin from the DHS and FBI from May 2017 which summarized the threat from white supremacist extremism as posing the most persistent threat of lethal violence in the United States. The joint bulletin goes on to state that white supremacist extremists were responsible for the most homicides of any domestic extremist group between the years 2000 to 2016, and references white supremacy 20 times (S.894, 2019). The bill, which remained a draft, took the instrumental first step in properly strategizing and assessing the threat, and how to combat it, by defining the scope, context, and framing of the domain of domestic terror.

Another report, requested by the US Congress from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), titled “Countering Violent Extremism,” noted that since the 12th of September 2001,

73% of all violent extremist incidents resulting in death in the United States were the result of right-wing violent extremist groups (GAO-17-300, 2019). Data for the report comes from the Extreme Crime Database (ECDB) which is maintained by the University of Maryland National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). START defines right-wing extremists as “motivated by a variety of far-right ideologies and beliefs, generally favoring social hierarchy, and seeking an idealized future favoring a particular group. Far right extremist groups include white supremacists and antigovernment militias, among others” (Jasko, LaFree, Piazza, & Becker 2022).

In 2020, the FBI and DHS continued to emphasize the gravest terror threat to the homeland as coming from far-right inspired lone actors and small cells who “become radicalized online and look to attack soft targets with easily accessible weapons” (Wray, 2021, p. 2). The threats were broken up into two distinct groups: domestic violent extremists (DVEs) and homegrown violent extremists (HVEs). Individuals who committed violent criminal acts in order to further social or political goals with domestic influences – including racial or ethnic bias, or anti-government or anti-authority sentiments – are described as DVEs, while HVEs are inspired by “global Jihad” but do not receive individualized direction of material support from foreign terrorist organizations (Wray, 2021, p. 2).

Rightwing DVEs with political grievances have posed the largest threat to the US each year between 2019 and 2022. The FBI threat assessment identified rightwing DVEs as the preeminent danger in the lead up to the 2020 elections and reported that “racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists, anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists, and other DVEs will very likely pose the greatest domestic terrorism threats in 2021, and likely into 2022” (Wray, 2021, p. 4).

Since 2019, there have been several proposed iterations of the *Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act of 2019*, in 2020, 2022, and 2023 respectively. White supremacy is mentioned 80 times in 2020 and 15 times in both 2022 and 2023 (H.526, 2020; H.350, 2022; S.1591, 2023). Leftwing extremism is mentioned one time in 2020, and zero times in 2022 and 2023. The US is in an era of heightened attention to rightwing domestic terrorism.

2.3 Rightwing extremism: Racially Motivated Violent Extremists (RMVE) and Militia Violent Extremists (MVE)

In an updated, joint domestic terror assessment from 2021, the FBI and DHS again emphasized the specific threat posed by racially motivated violent extremists (RMVE), noting that “RMVE, primarily those advocating the superiority of the white race, would continue to be the most lethal category of the domestic terror threat” to the US (Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism, 2022, p. 6). The broader definition used by the US Government considers RMVE to be,

“threats involving the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence, in violation of federal law, in furtherance of political or social agendas which are deemed to derive from bias, often related to race, held by the actor against others... [RMVE] use both political and religious justifications to support their racially- or ethnically-based ideological objectives and criminal activities” (FBI, DHS, NCTC, 2022, p. 4).

The lethal threat warning was also expanded to include militia violent extremists (MVE), who fall under the category of anti-authority and anti-government violent extremists (AVE). MVE are defined as those looking to further political or social agendas, through the unlawful use of threat of force or violence out of “anti-government or anti-authority sentiment, including opposition to perceived economic, social, or racial hierarchies, or perceived government overreach, negligence, or illegitimacy” (FBI, DHS, NCTC, 2022, p. 5). A majority of the right-wing DVE that stormed the Capitol Building on January 6th fall under this classification (p. 40). Both of these classifications, RMVE and MVE, matched the classification of the domestic terrorist that detonated the bomb in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1995, which resulted in 848 casualties.

Following the 2021 report from the FBI and DHS, a special analysis joint analytic cell report was produced by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), FBI, and DHS in June 2022. In the report, DVEs were noted to have,

“coalesced around anger at issues including perceived election fraud, as well as immigration, and government response to the COVID-19 pandemic... These factors, along with fluid conspiracy theories, have amplified longstanding DVE grievances, including government and law enforcement overreach or oppression and shifts in US demographics and cultural values” (FBI, DHS, NCTC, 2022, p. 37).

3. Previous Literature

Whereas international terrorism has a relative abundance of research literature dedicated to framing, there exists less literature focusing on framing and domestic terrorism (Zulli, et al., 2021; Walter, Billard, & Murphy, 2017; Morin, 2016; Crenshaw, 2014). Further, concerning the framing techniques utilized by partisan media outlets there exists even fewer research. Zulli, et al. (2021) examined the framing of domestic terrorism by three of the four major US newscasts, ABC, CBS, and NBC, which are all broadcast network channels. Their analysis excluded Fox News because it is a cable network, not broadcast, and because Fox was not incorporated as a network until 1996 (six years after the beginning of their dataset's point of departure). Adding Fox News to the existing pantheon of framing literature is critical to understanding the framing of domestic terror that millions of Americans are presented with daily.

3.1 The media and terror

The press plays an important role as the mediating presence between the public and the government. Through the use of frames, it can imprint on the public a sense of urgency regarding developing events that are of importance to the public's wellbeing. Crijns, Cauberghe, & Hudders (2017) found that when it comes to the threat of terrorism and subsequent information seeking behaviors, the majority of people seek out information from traditional news media (TV and Radio) in order to stay informed on the issue, as well as to alleviate concerns regarding terror. They found that a perception of high levels of governmental expert efficacy was able to increase levels of trust and simultaneously decrease levels of perceived governmental responsibility, directly benefitting governmental reputation (Crijns, et al., 2017, p. 251).

In order to position a story, or centralize an issue, the media uses news frames, which have an inherently selective function. News frames can affect an individual by thrusting certain aspects of reality into the foreground while strategically pushing others into the background. As such, these frames impact the reader's understanding and contextualization of simple and complex issues by suggesting certain issue attributes, judgements, and decisions. Put simply, frames are

the way in which “influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel – to that consciousness” (Entman, 1993, p52).

Schlesinger, Murdock, and Elliott (1984) found that the initial construction and subsequent management of terrorist crises depends entirely on who, within the media or government, does the defining and framing. Similarly, Jenkins’ (1999) analysis of anti-abortion violence as unconstructed terrorism highlighted that “social constructions of criminality and violence depend on the decisions of agencies of social control, and specifically upon their powers to apply labels...” (p. 321).

In contrast to the anti-abortion violence of the 1970s-1990s, which lacked the institutionalized definition of terrorism leading to the media categorizing it as “congeries of isolated and almost random phenomena...”, rightwing extremist violence has the definitional backing and classification of terrorism from agents of social control (Jenkins, 1999, p. 320). This distinction is crucial for ensuring the state’s ability to deny violent political dissidence its own ends, according to Schlesinger, et. al, (1984). Framing via the “terrorist” label, from the media and other institutional actors, also assists in creating a “frame of mind that allows greater freedom of action by the state” (Chomsky & Herman, 1979, p. 7).

3.2 Importance of frames

As such, the lack of framing via the “terrorist” label in the aftermath of violent, or criminal-terrorist activity can limit future judicial actions, as well as leave the general public, with the impression that the violence does not meet the threshold for terrorism and is therefore of lesser importance. For instance, Nancy Berns’ (1999) research on the framing of intimate partner violence showed that the most prominent framework utilized by the media in its coverage was the individual framework. A framework which Iyengar (1991) would consider episodic, due to its failure to contextualize the scope of the issue.

The individual framework failed to consider myriad other factors, such as social and cultural attitudes towards gender roles and structural inequality. It also placed an emphasis on intervention as opposed to prevention which complicated and stagnated appropriate efforts to combat the issue and placed additional onus on the victim to fix the issue, while obscuring the role of the abuser. All of these factors helped to ensure that intimate partner violence remained within the realm of the private for the victims, abusers, and the general public who lacked seeing the violence framed as part of a broader public health issue and not just an individual issue (Berns, 1999).

Widespread framing of terrorist acts as acts of terror, and the public acceptance of the terrorist designation plays a similarly significant role in ensuring that political terrorists have an increasingly difficult time attaining broader legitimacy (Schlesinger et. al, 1984). The research at hand seeks to conceptualize domestic terrorism in the same way that Jenkins (1999) and Berns (1999) conceptualized rightwing, anti-abortion terror and intimate partner violence, respectively.

3.2.01 Effects of framing

Over time, frames become akin to brand identity, or in the words of Scheufele (2004), “consistent patterns of expectations,” a “consistent bundle of schemata” (p. 404, 405). This consistency is engaged with by both the journalist and the audience. As the journalist constructs the story, they tend to use information that is consistent with the frames they become accustomed to, while paying less attention to other information. Meanwhile, the audience is able to categorize, frame, and make sense of the news more quickly over time as they come to expect certain information and frameworks (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019). Findings from Price, et al., (1997) and Scheufele (2004) point to the potential for consistent priming of certain frames to reduce the tendency of viewers to question the information they are presented with if it fits with their initial assessment. Other research has also shown that news frames affect public opinion, levels of support for public issues, and how individuals make sense of political issues (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004; Berinsky & Kinder, 2006).

Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson (1997) demonstrated the direct effect and impact of journalistic frames when they presented two groups of respondents with a local news story about a rally

being planned by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The first group was given a news story that framed the planned rally as a free-speech, First Amendment issue, and the second group was given a news story that framed the planned rally as a disruption to public order. Respondents who had read the news story with the free-speech-issue framework exhibited more tolerance for the KKK than those who had been presented with the public-order-disruption framework. The study showed that the frameworks selected and produced by journalists are consequential for the collective understanding of their viewership, and the broader public (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019; p1).

3.3 Placing Fox News within the literature

Jenkins' (1999, p. 320) research articulated the "subjective and ideological nature of the concept of terrorism," so how does a news organization frame domestic terror when its subjectivity and ideologies are in line with the terrorists themselves? This situation poses an increasingly more difficult set of circumstances than the situation of framing the topic of domestic terrorism for non-partisan news outlets. With Fox News, the media acts less as a mediator between the people and the government, and more as an extension of the Republican Party. For viewers, this eliminates cognitive dissonance and other potential incongruencies by making-partisan the relationship between information seeking behavior, attempts to alleviate terror-based concerns, and perceived levels of governmental expert efficacy. For Fox News, expressly partisan coverage ensures that levels of expert efficacy are strengthened along partisan boundaries reinforced through constant and consistent partisan framing across the network.

Findings from Bernhardt, Dewenter, & Thomas (2023), support this line of reasoning, in an analysis of partisan media biases in US newscasts from 2001-2012. The findings showed Fox News remained Democrat-critical, independent of which political party was in the Oval Office. It should be noted that Groseclose and Milyo (2005) found that all major US newscasts, except Fox News, exhibited a liberal bias after examining which think tanks and interest groups were cited by Republican and Democrat members of US Congress compared to how many times the same groups were cited by the media.

However, despite this leftwing sourcing bias exhibited by the other three major newscasts, Bernhardt, et al. (2023) found that in terms of overall partisan bias, CBS News and ABC News displayed a broader anti-government bias, not an anti-leftwing or anti-rightwing bias, and were actually more critical of President Obama while he was in power than they were of President Bush when he was in power, while Fox News specifically displayed an explicit and consistent anti-Democrat bias (Bernhardt, et al., 2023, p.2).

3.3.01 Effects of Fox News

Of particular interest in relation to this research and the importance of appropriate framing, is the work of DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) who found there is a significant effect of viewer exposure to Fox News on voting behavior. Four years after its inception as a network, regions with Fox News affiliate stations had a 0.4 to 0.7 percentage point higher Republican vote share in the 2000 presidential elections, compared to the 1996 elections when Fox was in its first year (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007, p. 1228). A similar relationship was also found concerning vote share in Senate elections, which are not covered by Fox News, but suggests that there is an effect on general political beliefs due to Fox News viewership.

Additionally, Prat (2018) developed a media power index for the United States, defining “the power of a media organization as its ability to induce voters to make electoral decisions they would not make if reporting were unbiased” (p. 1747). Findings from the study showed that a large share of the American electorate receives their political information from a small number of news sources, commonly television networks, and that the four most powerful US media organizations are television providers, of which Fox News is the most powerful (Prat, 2018).

4. Theoretical Frameworks

4.1 Framing theory

Framing theory will be relied upon to guide both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study. The theory will be able to help answer the broad question of how Fox News frames the issue of domestic terror in the United States through its use of sources, contextualization, application of ideological labels, and the definitional certainty of the term “domestic terror. By

shedding light on the frames that are used, the theory will also emphasize the absence of other frames and illuminate potential gaps in coverage.

In their analysis of framing, Lecheler and de Vreese (2019) highlight its usefulness when conducting news research, specifically the strength of journalistic frames. The duo departs from the definition of framing from Gamson and Modigliani (1987), who state that news frames are “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Within the context of news research, framing analysis offers four main purposes, as proposed by Entman (1993, p. 52): 1.) to define problems; 2.) to diagnose a course; 3.) to make value judgments; 4.) to suggest remedies (Entman 1993: 52).

This study utilizes the definition from Gamson and Modigliani (1987) to weave connections through the transcripts from Fox News, as well as Erving Goffman’s (1986) conceptualization of a frame as a culturally determined definition of reality that allows individuals to make sense of, and give meaning to objects and events, while serving as a simplifying mechanism.

4.1.01 Problem frames in American media

Frames, are not limited to being broad, explanatory mechanisms. Through the use of journalistic frames, journalists exercise agency in selecting the framing of a certain story. Journalistic news frames draw attention to specific characteristics of a given case, and push others to the background, allowing for the frame to highlight the active role of the journalist, and the newsroom, in constructing news stories (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019, p. 9). Journalistic agency, as the result of a news framing process, is consequential in terms of effects on the viewer and the viewer’s internalized understanding of events both local and global.

Altheide (2002), found that American media commonly centralize elements of fear as the focal point of crisis coverage through what he calls the problem frame. Such emphasis promotes a “discourse of fear that may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the effective environment” (Altheide,

2002, p. 41) Journalistic agency and the pervasive use of the problem frame will be key theoretical frameworks used to understand the framing of domestic terrorism by Fox News.

4.1.02 Issue interpretations, emphasis frames, & episodic versus thematic frameworks

Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1997) extended the core assumption of journalistic framing's ability to affect how recipients think in their research on issue interpretations as a type of news framing effect. Issue interpretations considers the potential effect of framing on "corresponding patterns in audience cognitions and feelings about that issue" (Price, et al., 1997, p. 483). Their findings suggest that through the activation of particular ideas and values, news can encourage certain trains of thought. They discovered there are at least two ways framing produces longer-term effects: first, framing effects can be maintained over time by repeated priming, and second, individuals tend to make an immediate evaluation "at the point of initial message processing (p. 503)." That information is what is stored in their memory for later activation when considering the same or similar topics.

Another way of contextualizing the positioning of specific frames and stimuli in the foreground and background is through the conceptualization of emphasis frames, which refer to the influence of the structure of the message in evoking a particular cognitive schema (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2015). For Nelson (2019), emphasis frames are most prevalent for news and social movement organizations, interest groups and leaders hoping to effect political change and facilitate audience understanding (p. 4).

In line with the importance of emphasis frames is the distinction between episodic and thematic frameworks devised by Iyengar (1991). Episodic frameworks, the dominant framework utilized by television media, offers focused coverage on the isolated, individual nature of a case, and fails to place it into a broader web of contextualization. While thematic frameworks focus on trends over time, locating specific cases within a broader web of meaning. The two frameworks have different effects on how audiences attribute the cause and solution to social problems.

4.2 Ontological security (OS)

This section will seek to articulate the theoretical congruencies between OS and framing literature, specifically those which make it appropriate for use in the study of partisan media framing. To do so, it is necessary to centralize Goffman's (1986) emphasis on the ability of frames to minimize the anxieties of everyday life, and to view the period of analysis (2012-2022) through the lens of high modernity, as presented by Anthony Giddens's (1991).

While OS is relevant to both phases of this study, the framework will be utilized in the latter half of the research, in tandem with the qualitative coding and analysis, as well as framing theory. As a co-theory for the exploration of the second phase, OS will be able to provide an additional layer of analysis and understanding regarding the frameworks used by Fox News. Moreover, investigating through the lens of OS and framing theory should offer insight into how the network manufactures security and anxiety for its viewers, how the viewers internalize those two concepts, and how the network seeks to situate the subject within the realm of subjectivity, social order, and desire and transgression.

4.2.01 An era of high modernity

High modernity is defined as an apocalyptic era where “the influences of distant happenings on proximate events, and on the intimacies of the self, become[s] more and more commonplace” (Giddens, 1991, p. 9). Whereas in previous eras, time and space were connected through the situatedness of place, high-modernity rather violently reorients this calibration through the aforementioned confluence of distant happenings on intimacies of the self and proximate events which sever the psychological ties that individuals construct between their own biography and the locales that are the settings of the time-space paths through which they move, resulting in high-levels of anxiety (Giddens, 1991). The rapid pace of globalization, specifically within economics, politics, and human affairs has aided in creating “a world devoid of certainty” (Kinnvall, 2014, p. 742). This new era is considered one of “perpetual anxiety,” where the individual's relationship with uncertainty is one of “not knowing the ends, instead of the traditional uncertainty of not knowing the means” (Bauman, 2000, p.61; Schulze, 1997, p.49). The era of high modernity, and the period of analysis existing within this era, can function as an explanatory mechanism for understanding and contextualizing the complex relationship between

Fox News and its audience in regard to the frameworks utilized by the network and the audience's collective mindset as an effect of said frames.

4.2.02 OS, minimizing anxiety, and routine

It was through the lens of chronic uncertainty that Giddens (1991) and RD Laing (1990) arrived at the concept of OS. For Giddens (1991), OS is a stable mental state, or sense of security, achieved through both a positive view of the self, the world, and the future, and bolstered by routines that situate the self comfortably within larger systems of potential risk. Individual levels of ontological in/security, have the potential to create social structures by stimulating behaviors, but also replicate patterns of action, and simplify otherwise complex and varying human behavior, in the same way that frames minimize complexities, and the effects of said frames can stimulate behaviors, action, and patterns.

When considering the framing of domestic terrorism via the news, the concept of OS has many parallels that strengthen the case for employing it as a theoretical lens. For example, the press is responsible for fluctuations in relative levels of OS within an audience; assigning frameworks that emphasize uncertainty, insecurity, and anxiety to certain issues, as opposed to others have effects on the feelings and viewpoints of the audience. OS also emphasizes security as constructed through routine; exactly what acts of terror, as extraordinary exceptions, seek to disrupt. The centrality of routine also coincides with the habitual, routine nature of news programs that occur at the same time daily, resulting in the audience making the show a part of their own routine. Further, OS also allows for instability (i.e., anxiety) to exist within and across multiple levels of analysis (micro to macro) simultaneously, and terrorism, whether as a concept lurking in the collective consciousness or an attack occurring in reality, affects the individual and the institutional, the micro and the macro.

4.2.03 Fantasy, conspiracy, and partisanship

Another element of OS that makes it attractive to the investigation of a partisan news source is its compatibility with the Lacanian conception of fantasy “as a type of desire-infused narrative through which subjects construct their social realities” (Eberle, 2017, p. 243). Through both the

inclusion and exclusion of certain frames, Fox News introduces ‘objects’ of desire and transgression, which Eberle (2017) states “allows us to trace the channeling of desire into discourse” (p. 243). Fantasies, in Eberle’s conception are “stories we tell ourselves and to one another to make sense of multifaceted and ambiguous world” (p. 245).

These fantasies fit into the broader context of US politics and mimic the behavior and effect of conspiracy theories which act less like markers of an alienated psychology and “more like associative partisan attitudes,” that help to construct partisan identities, and assist partisans in identifying opposing groups (Smallpage, Enders, & Uscinski, 2017, p. 6). For both Democrats and Republicans, conspiracy theories operate much like fantasy. For example, believing that climate change is a hoax is a part of the Republican identity, as much as believing that the war in Iraq was driven by oil companies is a part of the identity of democrats (Smallpage, et al., 2017, p. 6). Examples of the use of conspiracy are observable throughout the transcripts in this study. In one instance, from a Fox News Primetime broadcast from January 26, 2021, Senator Rand Paul says of the 2020 election:

“I think there might've been fraud. So, is it not okay to have an opinion in our country anymore? At the start it was the global warming extremists and now it's gone to election fraud, what is the next subject we are not allowed to have an opinion on that contradicts the liberals?”

Internalizing these conspiracies is a central marker of partisan identity and the drawing of “partisan battle lines” which create objects of desire and transgression, and can act as a rallying cries to mobilize partisans (Smallpage, et al., 2017, p. 6; FBI, DHS, NCTC, 2022, p. 37). Elements of desire and transgression are central to the partisan identity, which is constructed in opposition to the Other and constantly reinforced. These constructions are especially important on the far-right where there is a desire for “both exclusionary and impermeable” boundaries (Awad, Doerr, & Nissen, 2022).

Thus, fantasies in the words of Eberle (2017), and conspiracy theories in the words of Smallpage, et al., (2017) both capture the process of “connecting subjects (i.e., social actors, partisans, or viewers) to social orders arousing desire and channeling it to socially constructed ‘objects’ like commodities, partners, or ideological goals” (Eberle, 2017, p. 245). Similarly, this process allows for viewers to relate to and reproduce specific ideologically motivated social structures by ordering subjectivity, social order, and desire and transgression.

5. Methodology

5.1 Census

To understand the framing of domestic terrorism by Fox News, the focal point of this analysis is a census of Fox News cable network programs from January 1, 2012, to December 31, 2022, a period with both Democratic and Republican presidents and the most significant rise in frequency of domestic terror events in US history. As Fox News is considered to be a partisan source of news with a strong conservative or right bias (i.e., its coverage remains Democrat-critical independent of whom is in office) it was important to include years in which a Republican president was also in power in order to analyze the full breadth of its coverage and investigate the dynamic nature of coverage as the political party in power changed (Mediabiasfactcheck, 2023; Bernhardt, Dewenter, Thomas, 2013).

Transcripts included were those with references to iterations of the keyword “domestic terror,” including variations terror/s/ism/ist/ists, which resulted in specific instances where the network was willing to explicitly use the term. The census was conducted by searching the Internet Archive of Fox News West. The Internet Archive is a digital library, founded in 1996, with the mission to preserve as much of the public web as possible. The bulk of the information on the Internet Archive is compiled and indexed through the use of web crawlers, a type of internet bot that copies the webpages for processing by a search engine. The transcripts were then compiled and organized by program title and year of publication in a database with a population (N) of 1,289 transcripts spanning 63 different news programs.

Following the creation of the database, the population was refined to include only those news programs with a minimum of 15 transcripts with reference to domestic terrorism between 2012-2022. Doing so eliminated 162 transcripts across 39 programs and resulted in a final population (N) of 1,127 transcripts across 24 different news programs.

Refining the dataset in this way maximized both the quality and quantity represented within the data before engaging in any sampling. The programs that most consistently mentioned domestic terror are the most important for the analysis at hand as they make up the bulk of the framing that

Fox News engages in pertaining to domestic terror and as a result should lead to a richer analysis. Similarly, over the period of analysis there was turnover in the shows on air and therefore focusing on each individual year in order to refine the dataset would leave out shows that had more consistent year-to-year coverage of domestic terror, in favor of those that had higher individual coverage in a given year.

Additionally, each program has a host, or set of hosts, that are responsible for the direction of the news framing process. The audience also tends to follow certain programs, as opposed to random broadcasts at random times. Hence, the continual discussion and framing of domestic terrorism at the program-level establishes the program's viewpoint, and the viewpoint being internalized by the program's following. The emphasis at the program-level is also representative of the time period as a whole and follows the trendline within the total population making it appropriate to analyze both qualitatively and quantitatively in a longitudinal, time-analysis.

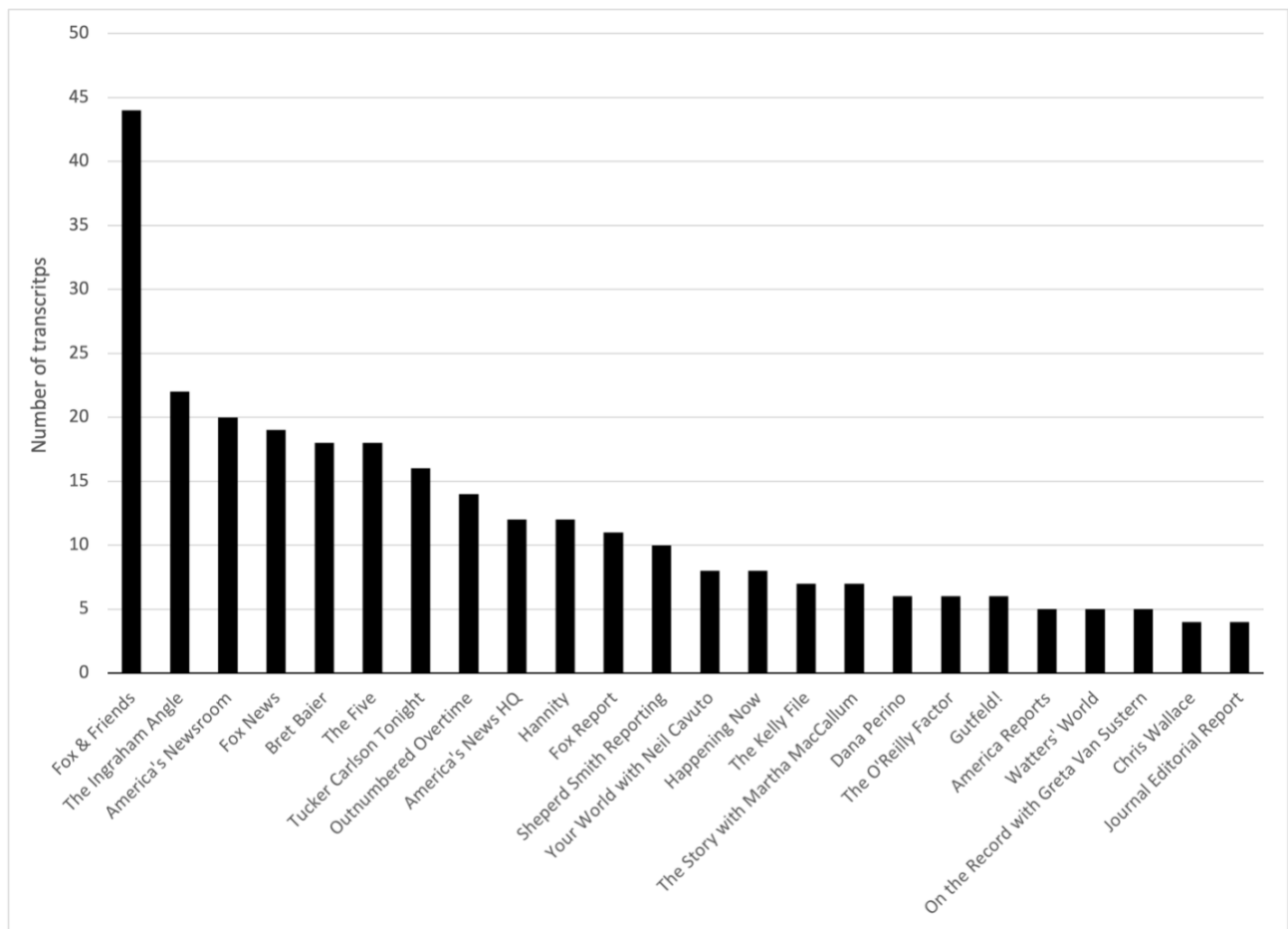
All programs were grouped by the title they use on the Fox Network, except for nightly news programs. These programs, consisting of Fox News at Night with Shannon Bream, Fox News Primetime, Fox News Live, Fox News Tonight, and Fox News Reporting which are listed under the broad title *Fox News* ($n=19$) because all of the shows are nightly productions, but on their own failed the minimum reference count threshold. Their inclusion is important as they are a source of breaking news and developing stories and air at a time when much of Fox News' audience are tuned in to their televisions.

5.2 Sampling

After removing the programs with less than 15 references to domestic terror, systematic sampling was used to create an appropriately sized sample for coding and analysis. The final sample was constructed via systematic random sampling and a skip logic occurring at intervals of 4 for each program. To ensure the sample was truly random the programs were arranged by title, randomly ordered in list form, and then assigned a randomized starting point within the list.

The random sampling methodology resulted in 287 transcripts across 24 different programs. Random sampling was conducted in order to have a more manageable final sample size and parameters were set to ensure that the final sample included the most consistent contributors across the time frame. Within the sample ($n=287$), the median number of years in which each program is present is 4.5 years, and the average is 5.3 years. For the total population ($N=1289$) the median is 3 years, and the average is 4 years. The complete breakdown of which programs were included in the final sample, as well as the number of total transcripts for each can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of transcripts from each Fox News program in final sample ($N= 287$)



5.3 Coding

Coding was completed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. When coding, an inductive approach produces findings that are more difficult to replicate and data that is harder to extrapolate, but it is also capable of producing a thematically deeper level of knowledge and

content compared to a strictly deductive approach that begins with operationalized and defined terms (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019). Taking this into account, the coding conducted in this study engaged both quantitative, deductive (Phase I) and qualitative, inductive (Phase II) techniques to produce results that were thematically rich and replicable.

5.3.01 Coding Phase I

Phase I used a deductive, quantitative coding approach in order to identify the frameworks utilized by Fox News when covering domestic terror. The codes in phase I were adapted from Dimitrova and Strömbäck’s (2009) cross-cultural comparison of Swedish and US newspaper coverage, and Zulli, et al. (2021) from their study of domestic terrorism framing by network television channels NBC, ABC, and CBS.

Codes in this phase were divided into four groups: Sourcing, Contextualization, Ideological Labels, and Definitional Uncertainty.

Table 1: Explanation of Phase I codes and sub-codes

Phase I Coding: Deductive, Quantitative Approach	
A. Sourcing	
Code	Description
1. Group Voice	person identified as a domestic terrorist or with an association to a domestic terrorist group
2. Group Association	a family member of the domestic terrorist or someone sympathetic to the terrorist group
3. Victim	a survivor of a domestic terror event or the survivor's family
4. President	President of the United States
5. Non-President Government	local, state, or federal government officials
6. Industry/Organization	persons in the private or corporate sector
7. Public	persons from the public or a witness
8. Experts	person with an expert capacity in relation to terrorism
9. Other Press	story, soundbite, or other information coming from a different publication
B. Contextualization	
1. Other Domestic Terror	incident tied to other similar domestic terror incidents, groups or movements
2. Other Foreign Terror	incident or individual tied to international terror groups and incidents or other domestic terror incidents in foreign countries
C. Ideological Labels	
1. Leftwing	domestic terrorism attributed to liberal or leftwing ideologies, movements, or individuals
2. Radical	suspected terror incidents or groups labeled as radical, fringe, or extremist
3. Rightwing	domestic terrorism attributed to rightwing ideologies, movements, or individuals
D. Definitional Uncertainty	
1. Definitional Certainty	incident was conclusively defined as domestic terrorism
2. Definitional Uncertainty	domestic terrorism was questioned in relation to the incident

Sourcing. This group comprised nine codes to track the sourcing utilized by the news program. *Group Voice* sourced a person who was identified as a domestic terrorist or who had an association with the terrorist group. *Group Association* indicated when a family member of a domestic terrorist, or someone identified as sympathetic to the terrorist group, was sourced. *Victim* indicated that the source was a survivor of a domestic terror event, or the survivor's family. *President* indicated when the President of the United States was sourced. *Non-President Government* identified local, state, or federal government officials as the source (e.g., a state governor, or members of congress or the senate, or police officials). *Industry/Organization* indicated when those in the private or corporate sector were sourced (e.g., business owners, representatives within corporate structures). *Public* identified someone from the public or a witness as the source. *Experts* indicated when someone in an expert capacity in relation to terrorism (e.g., the former head of the FBI counterterrorism task force, counter terrorism special agent) was sourced. *Other Press* identified when other media publications were sourced by the network (e.g., The New York Times, Washington Post, Business Week, etc.).

Contextualization. This code tracked the way in which the domestic terror incident was contextualized by the news program and consists of two codes. *Other Domestic Terror* specified that the news program tied the domestic terror incident to other similar domestic terror incidents, groups, or movements (e.g., "Yesterday's shooter was clearly influenced by the shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue where 11 people were killed...") *Other Foreign Terror* signified that the event, individual, or topic of domestic terrorism was mentioned in connection with international terror groups and incidents, or other domestic terror incidents in foreign countries (e.g., "I just know there's been a lot of problems with radicals here in Massachusetts, going back to 9/11.")

Ideological Labels. Three codes were used to identify ideological labels. *Leftwing* indicated that acts of domestic terrorism were clearly labeled as coming from liberal or leftwing political ideologies, movements, or individuals (e.g., "the democratic left has turned certifiably insane."). *Radical* denoted that suspected terror incidents or groups were labeled as radical, fringe, or extremists (e.g., "we have the reason to believe this was an act of terror... there is growing evidence that the seeds of Rahami's radicalization were sown overseas in Afghanistan..."). *Rightwing* was used to indicate when the acts of domestic terrorism were attributed to rightwing

political ideologies, movements, or individuals (e.g., “I think MAGA, and the domestic terror threat is much more worrisome than any foreign threat we could face.”)

Definitional Uncertainty. This code tracked the definitional certainty of the use of the term domestic terrorism. Two codes tracked this. *Definitional Certainty* indicated that the framing of the incident was conclusively defined as domestic terrorism (e.g., “This is an act of domestic terrorism. this is a man who has targeted those we entrust to protect the public,”). *Definitional Uncertainty* indicated that the term domestic terrorism was questioned in relation to the incident (e.g., “This is a mass murder but is it an act of terrorism? We need to know what the motive is. A lot of times that is political.”).

5.3.02 Coding Phase II

Phase II coding involved an inductive, qualitative approach that enabled themes to emerge from the transcripts through the course of multiple readings. The purpose of this phase was to inductively create categories and develop theoretical concepts that were not so rigidly bound to previously determined definitions. As a result, the coding scheme during this phase was more fluid and evolved over the course of the research (Allen, 2017).

This phase consisted of five distinct themes: Attribution of Blame, Conservatives Under Attack, Questioning Intelligence Agencies, Islamic Extremism, and Rightwing Extremism Not a Threat.

Table 2: Explanation of Phase II codes and sub-codes

Phase II Coding: Inductive, Qualitative Approach	
A. Attribution of Blame	
Code	Description
1. Institutional	blame placed on the media, government, or law enforcement agencies
2. to Leftwing	ideological labels referred to groups with leftwing or liberal affiliations
3. to Rightwing	ideological labels referred to groups with rightwing or conservative affiliations
4. Both sides	terror incident came as a result of partisan actors on each side of the political spectrum
B. Conservatives Under Attack	
1. Rightwing or conservative figures, institutions, and values were under attack	
C. Questioning Intelligence Agencies	
1. When motives of enforcement agencies (FBI, DOJ, DHS) or specific figures within the institution were called into question	
D. Islamic Extremism	
1. ISIS	link between perpetrator or incident was explicitly tied to ISIS
2. Islamic Terror	incident or perpetrator was tied into a larger web of Islamic extremism or terror
3. Radicalization	explicit mentions to radicalization processes, or labels perpetrator as radical
E. Rightwing Extremism is Not a Threat	
1. Blown Out of Proportion	framed right-wing extremist violence as being blown out of proportion
2. Not the Biggest Threat	framed right-wing extremist violence as a non-threat or a secondary threat
I. Immigration	indicated immigration is a greater threat than rightwing extremism
II. Islam	indicated Islam is a greater threat than rightwing extremism
III. The Left	indicated leftwing extremism is a greater threat than rightwing extremism
3. Political Ploy	signified that emphasizing rightwing extremism was a political tool

Attribution of Blame. Five codes were used to track the attribution of blame regarding domestic terror incidents. *Institutional* indicated that the blame for the incident was placed on the media, the government as a whole, or law enforcement agencies (e.g., “How did he get through the system?”) This code was utilized when there was an absence of ideological labels used to describe the institution. *To Leftwing* indicated that ideological labels were used when attributing blame for the domestic terror incident or when specific individuals or groups with leftwing or liberal ideological affiliations were named (e.g., “...in the letters referring to people who protest school boards as domestic terrorists, there's a lot that freestanding, individual citizens should fear the Biden administration.”). *To Rightwing* designated that ideological labels were used when attributing blame for the domestic terror incident or when specific individuals or groups with rightwing or conservative ideological affiliations were named (e.g., “The massive military presence in Washington is a stark reminder that was only two weeks ago the US capital was under siege and pro-Trump terrorists have threatened new attacks.”). *Both Sides* indicated that the blame for a domestic terror incident was the result of both leftwing and rightwing actors, or that the domestic terror incident in question was brought up in comparison with one from the opposite end of the political spectrum (e.g., “You can't go after one side of violence perpetuated by the right and ignore the left.”).

Conservatives Under Attack. This single code indicated that reporting on the domestic terror specified that rightwing or conservative figures, institutions, and conservatism as an ideology (e.g., traditional family values, Christianity, heterosexuality, etc.) was under attack (e.g., “If you raise questions on Facebook and you're conservative like John Craft, you get investigated. This is a problem throughout the federal government [...] your federal government is infested with far-left radicals and ideologues.”).

Questioning Intelligence Agencies. This single code indicated that a commentator, reporter, or source questioned the political motives or effectiveness of enforcement agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the Department of Homeland Security their ability to fight domestic terrorism (e.g., “I’ve known a lot of FBI agents, and I think the individual men and women in the FBI are doing the best they can, but it distracts from the mission when the people who are in charge of that seem to be more focused on acting like an umpire for political partisanship than they do in stopping the attacks.”).

Islamic Extremism. Three codes were used to track Fox News’ characterization of Islamic Extremism within the context of domestic terror. *ISIS* indicated that the domestic terror incident or perpetrator was explicitly linked to ISIS by the network (e.g., “ISIS has been saying as Ramadan was beginning that during the month of Ramadan the obligation for jihad is ten times as great. if you die in jihad the reward from Allah is ten times greater than it normally would be.”). *Islamic Terror* indicated that the perpetrator or incident was contextualized within the broader web of Islamic extremist violence and ideology (e.g., “This is an act of war committed in the name of Islam. That's how much we know.”). *Radicalization* signified that the perpetrator was labeled radical by the network or that the process of radicalization was discussed (e.g., “Where do they get the radicalization? Are there mosques or imam we should look at?”).

Rightwing Extremism is not a Threat. The final theme in Phase II was tracked by three parent codes, the second which had three child codes. *Blown out of Proportion* indicated that the commentator framed rightwing extremist violence as a non-issue, or a smaller issue than the media and the leftwing politicians were making it out to be (e.g., “Where exactly is all this

criminal white supremacy, this right-wing domestic terrorism that poses the most lethal terror threat in the homeland? Where is it? It doesn't exist. Many thousands of Americans are killed each year by violence, they are murdered. conservatives are not the ones who are murdering them, look it up.”).

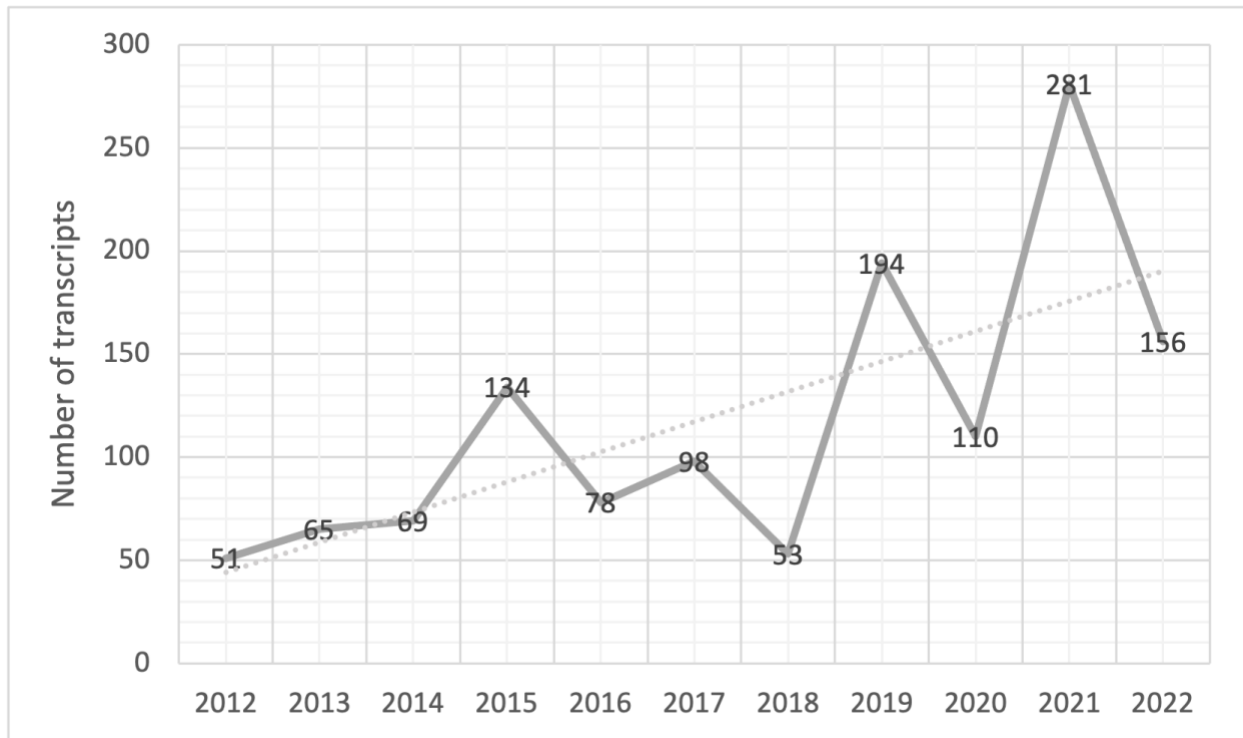
Not the Biggest Threat signified that another threat was brought up in juxtaposition to rightwing extremism and framed as more serious or harmful. Three child codes tracked these alternate threats: Immigration, Islam, and The Left. *Immigration* indicated that illegal immigrants, or the United States' shared border with Mexico was framed as posing a more substantial threat domestically (e.g., “You should be far more afraid of your fellow Americans than that millions of illegal aliens being buzzed and flown all over the country in the middle of the night. got it? [sarcasm]”). *Islam* signified that Islamic extremism was a more urgent issue than rightwing domestic terror (e.g., “Are democrats turning their attention away from taking on Islamic terrorism?”). *The Left* indicated that leftwing extremism was framed as the gravest domestic threat (e.g., “...but what I'm talking about is a volume of incidents of violence and threats to our establishment, that's not white supremacists, that is a tired fantasy. It's antifa...”).

Political Ploy denoted that raising the issue of rightwing terror was being used as a political tool by the leftwing to divert attention from other, larger issues, in hopes to maintain political power in the United States (e.g., “We're getting this political narrative that we've been hearing from the beginning of the Biden administration that this is all on the basis of violent extremism, which is Obama-Biden speak for terrorism which they want to attribute to white supremacy.”).

6. Results

The following section reports on the most significant trends across the sample. There are three periods of significance, 2015, 2019, and 2021, within the data and the overall trend points to the US having entered into an era of increased media attention to domestic terror (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Fox News transcripts with mention of domestic terror, 2012-2022



2015 represented the first spike in mentions of domestic terror for Fox News programs, with nearly two times as many as the year prior. Two events occurred that year that dominated the network’s coverage. The first incident, which comprised 29% of all transcripts in 2015, was the set of shootings at two military installments in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The perpetrator in the incident was Muslim and a naturalized US citizen. After concluding the investigation, FBI Director James Comey reported that the shooter was inspired and “motivated by foreign terror organizations” (Martinez, 2015). The second incident, which comprised 13% of the 2015 transcripts, was the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The perpetrator in this incident was a white supremacist who killed nine Black churchgoers in an attempt to spark a race war in the US.

The second significant peak occurred in 2019. This year was marred by a number of different incidents with the mass-shooting at a Wal-Mart in El Paso, Texas comprising 35% of the total number of broadcasts in 2019. In that incident, a White Nationalist motivated by anti-immigrant sentiments killed 23 and injured 23 others. The second-most prominent incident among the transcripts, comprising 22%, was the shooting in Dayton, Ohio where nine people were killed by a lone-wolf perpetrator who had an “enduring fascination with mass violence,” according to the

FBI (Lemos, 2021). Other incidents in 2019 included a number of antisemitic attacks in San Diego, New Jersey, Colorado, and New York committed by RMVE.

The most significant uptick in references to domestic terror occurred in 2021. 75% of transcripts for the year concerned the January 6th attack on the US Capitol Building where a mob of President Trump’s supporters tried to overturn the election results leading to five deaths, hundreds of injuries, and millions of dollars in damage. The second incident in 2021 focused on the Department of Justice (DOJ), under the command of US Attorney General Merrick Garland, who was appointed by Democratic President Joseph Biden. The story focused on an attempt by the DOJ to label conservative parents, who had been vocally pushing back against critical race theory and mask-mandates at school-board meetings, as domestic terrorists. 44% of transcripts focused on this story. Of the January 6 and school-board stories there were 19 (30%) transcripts with overlapping coverage of the two incidents.

6.1 Phase I Results

The following section reports on the most significant trends within the data for Phase 1. Trends are reported without statistical tests as the use of the census methodology eliminates the need for inferential statistics. Qualitative elaboration is also used throughout the analysis in order to improve upon both the descriptive utility of the analysis, and because “descriptive patterns are important, in and of themselves” (Gerring, 2012, p. 726).

6.1.01: Sourcing (direct and indirect)

The first of the research questions under RQ1 sought to understand how sources are utilized in the coverage of domestic terrorism by Fox News. In all, there were 650 individual sources coded across 74% of the transcripts, with 131 direct sources and 519 indirect sources.

Table 3a. Percentage of total sources (direct and indirect) used within each year of Fox News’ coverage of domestic terrorism.

Year:	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
	(8)	(10)	(14)	(38)	(12)	(25)	(9)	(43)	(29)	(64)	(34)
Expert	-	26.9	3.3	16.4	38.5	16.1	29.5	11.8	5.7	4.0	3.3

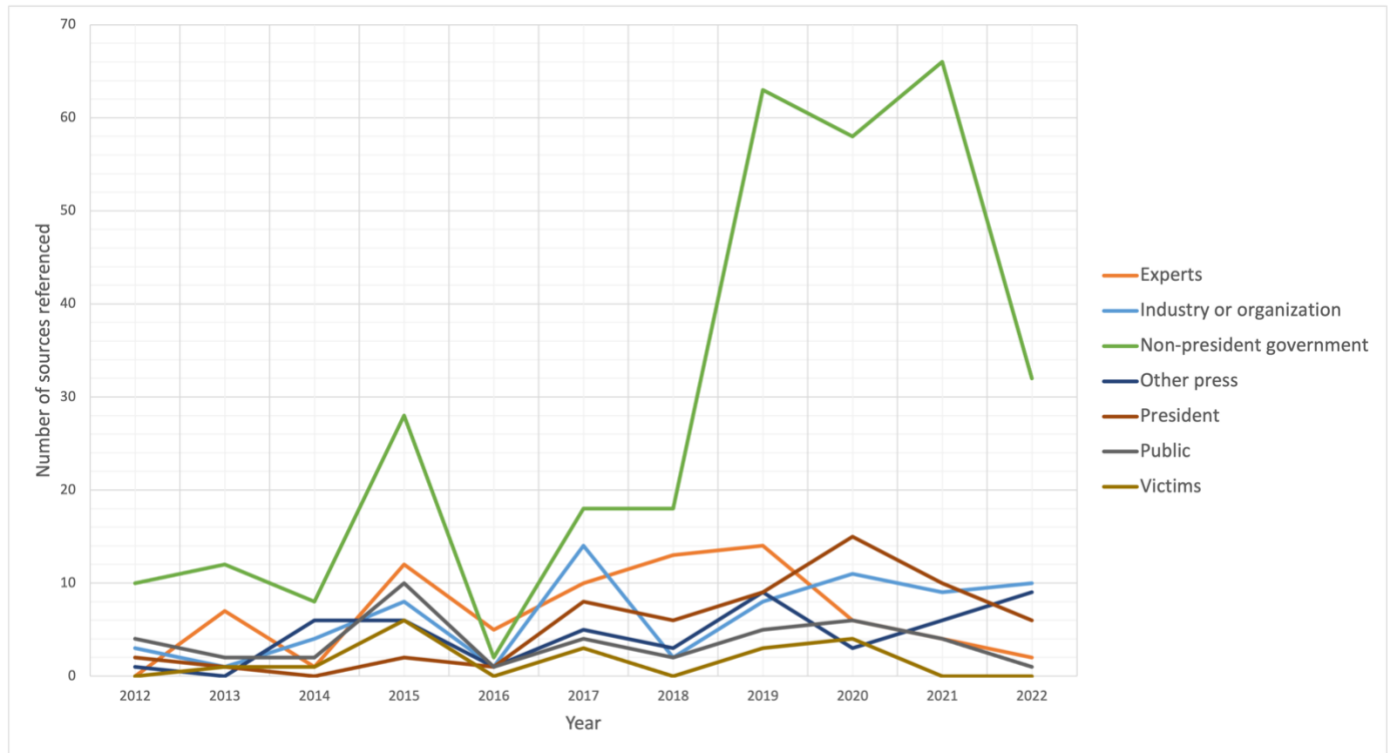
Group Association	-	-	3.3	-	15.4	-	-	5.8	1.0	-	-
Group Voice	-	7.7	23.3	1.4	-	-	-	0.8	-	-	-
Industry/ Organization	15.0	3.9	13.3	11.0	7.7	22.6	4.5	6.7	10.6	9.1	16.7
Non-Pres. Government	50.0	46.2	26.7	38.4	15.4	29.0	40.9	52.9	55.8	66.7	53.3
Other Press	5.0	-	20.0	8.2	7.7	8.1	6.8	7.6	2.9	6.1	15.0
President	10.0	3.9	-	2.7	7.7	13.0	13.6	7.6	14.4	10.1	10.0
Public	20.0	7.7	6.7	13.7	7.7	6.5	4.5	4.2	5.8	4.0	1.7
Victims	-	3.9	3.3	8.2	-	4.5	-	2.5	3.9	-	-

Table 3b. Percentage of total sources used, and average annual usage rate across sample of Fox News’ coverage of domestic terrorism, 2012-2022.

	Proportion of total % of sources	Avg. annual usage rate	Total # of codes (n= 650)
Expert	11.4	14.1	74
Group Association	1.7	2.3	11
Group Voice	1.7	3.0	11
Industry or Organization	10.9	10.7	71
Non-Pres. Government	48.5	43.2	315
Other Press	7.5	7.9	49
President	9.2	8.5	60
Public	6.3	7.5	41
Victims	2.7	2.1	18

Non-President Government sources were the most dominant source utilized by Fox News domestic terror coverage, comprising 48.5% of total sources and an average annual usage rate of 43.2%. The use of non-president government as a source saw an increase in usage between 2019 and 2022 (Figure 4), with an average usage rate during the four-year span of 57.2%. The second most utilized source was Experts, who had an annual usage rate of 21.8% between 2013-2018. However, from 2019 to 2022 their sourcing saw a steady decline, from 11.8% to 3.3% of total sources, and an annual average usage rate of 6.2%.

Figure 4: Sources used by Fox News in coverage of domestic terrorism, 2012-2022



*Without Group Voice or Group Association.

6.1.02 Direct sourcing

Of the 650 total sources present in the sample, 20.2% were direct sources (i.e., the source was physically present on the show, called in to offer their assessment, was directly interviewed by a Fox reporter, etc.). Despite the framing of domestic terrorism being contingent on both direct and indirect sources, as the transcripts were coded it became apparent that there was more dialogue and interaction with direct sources with influential positions. As a result, despite fewer direct sources than indirect, viewers were presented with more in-depth analyses and presumed expertise from direct sources.

Table 4. Percentage of total direct sources used for each year of Fox News’ coverage of domestic terrorism.

Year:	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>Overall</u>
<i>n</i>	(8)	(10)	(38)	(12)	(25)	(9)	(43)	(29)	(64)	(34)	(287)
Victims	-	-	17.8	-	6.3	-	4.4	20.0	-	-	6.7

Non-Pres. Government	60.0	37.5	14.3	25.0	18.8	50.0	34.8	10.0	66.7	77.8	36.4
Industry/Organization	10.0	-	17.9	-	6.3	-	8.7	20.0	14.3	11.1	11.4
Experts	-	50.0	32.1	50.0	62.5	50.0	43.5	40.0	19.0	11.1	34.1
Public	30.0	-	17.9	-	6.3	-	8.7	10.0	-	-	9.1

*Group Association (e.g., a family member of a terrorist, or someone sympathetic with a terrorist group) was not present in the sample. President and Group Voice (e.g., person identified as a terrorist or in association with terrorist group) are not included in Table 3 as the former was only sourced once in 2016, and the latter was sourced once in 2013 and once in 2014. Similarly, 2014 is excluded from the table because only one source was present in the sample ($n=15$).

In all, there were 131 sources coded and 45.6% of all transcripts featured a direct source. Overall trends show that Non-President Government and Experts made up the majority of direct sources in Fox News' coverage of domestic terrorism. Non-President Government accounted for 36.4% of total sources and was the most popular source in four of the 11 years, while Experts made up 34.1% of total sources and was the most often used source in seven of the 11 years.

Of particular interest is the shift which occurred in 2021 and 2022. This two-year span featured the highest number of mentions of domestic terror for Fox News and the most significant increase in rightwing extremist violence (Doxsee, et al., 2022). During this time, expert coverage, which had remained consistent over the previous seven years with an average yearly source rate of 46.9% dropped to 19.0% and 11.1% while Non-President Government sources were engaged at their highest rate ever; 66.7% in 2021 and 77.8% in 2022, more than double their pre-2021 average source rate.

Additionally, all but one of the Non-President Government sources between 2021 and 2022 were Republican, from senators to members of congress and former aides to President Trump. The sole Non-President Government source that was not Republican was convicted felon, self-proclaimed "Trump-ocrat", and former Democratic Governor of Illinois, Rod Blagojevich who was pardoned by President Trump in 2020 (Yin & Fry, 2020)

6.1.03: Contextualization

The second research question concerned the contextualization of domestic terror by Fox News, specifically whether the incident or commentary referenced Other Domestic Terror or Other Foreign Terror. 46.0% of transcripts contextualized the coverage of domestic terror in relation to either foreign terror, domestic terror, or both. The overall split between contextualization was nearly even; 51.2% in relation to Other Domestic Terror, while 48.8% were in relation to Other Foreign Terror.

Table 4. Total percentage of Contextualization in Fox News coverage of domestic terror.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Other Domestic Terror</u> (n=106)	<u>Other Foreign Terror</u> (n=101)	<u>Total percentage</u> (n=207)
2012	1.9	1.0	1.5
2013	1.9	8.9	5.3
2014	2.8	3.0	2.9
2015	16.0	33.7	24.6
2016	7.6	10.9	9.2
2017	9.4	14.9	12.1
2018	10.4	4.0	7.3
2019	16.0	5.0	10.6
2020	15.1	5.0	10.1
2021	15.1	10.9	13.0
2022	3.8	3.0	3.4
Total	51.2	48.8	

Overall, the strongest trend in the data is the inverse relationship between the codes. Over the period of analysis, Other Domestic Terror increased in frequency, while Other Foreign Terror decreased in frequency (Table 4). This trend sheds light on the evolving nature of domestic terrorism in Fox News' coverage. First, as a domestic phenomenon in relation to an established foreign enemy that was tied to a pivotal cultural moment in 9/11, and then as a newly identified partisan enemy tied to the emergence of a culture war of sorts.

From 2012-2017, domestic terror incidents were framed in the context of Other Foreign Terror 63.5% of the time, while other incidents were contextualized in terms of Other Domestic Terror 36.5% of the time. This was largely due to the spike in coverage in 2015, which accounted for

24.6% of all contextual references. The 2015 spike was the result of the San Bernadino terrorist attack and the dual attacks carried out in Chattanooga, Tennessee, both incidents were perpetrated by Muslim-Americans who were confirmed to be inspired by foreign terror groups. Due to the identities of the attackers in 2015 and in other incidents between 2012-2017, 86.3% of the coverage on Fox News during this period included references to mosques, Muslims, Jihad, 9/11, radicalization, ISIS, immigration, and Islamic lone wolve actors as a growing domestic threat. The reporting on incidents during this period was thematic, rather than episodic, clearly outlining the connections between attacks and emphasizing the overarching threat of Islam.

The other terror attack that dominated the news cycle in 2015 and accounted for 13% of transcripts was the mass shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, by an RMVE. However, this incident was only mentioned once in reference to Other Domestic Terror, and not at all in relation to Other Foreign Terror. The incident was mentioned in relation to the 16th Street Church Bombing that occurred in 1963 and was also perpetrated by white supremacists against Black Americans. Aside from this lone contextual reference, the attack was left largely within the realm of the episodic framework with coverage of the specific case as existing on its own (Iyengar, 1991).

From 2018-2022 the coverage of domestic terror incidents shifted, and incidents were more likely to be framed in the context of Other Domestic Terror; 69.6%, compared with 30.4% Other Foreign Terror. The most prominent stretch in this period was 2019-2021. 2019 featured a rise in antisemitic hate crimes perpetrated by several RMVE, neo-Nazis at synagogues throughout the US, as well as mass shootings in Texas, Florida, and Ohio. Perpetrators of which two rightwing extremists, an RMVE, and a “self-described leftist” with a desire to commit mass murder, respectively (Lemos, 2021). 2020 and 2021 coincided with the COVID-19 Pandemic and increasing social unrest resulting in mass protests throughout the US. During these two years is when Antifa emerged as the gravest domestic terror threat. 68.8% of total references to Other Domestic Terror in the network’s coverage mentioned Antifa. Much like the coverage of radical Islamic extremists, Antifa was framed thematically and presented as a national, occasionally international, network that had infiltrated major American cities with careful and strategic coordination.

Antifa was also used in order to deflect from other acts of domestic terror, namely rightwing incidents. For example, on a Tucker Carlson Tonight broadcast on March 5, 2021, Carlson posited that Antifa was a much more significant threat than rightwing extremists, namely RMVE and MVE, who stormed the Capitol Building on January 6th. He also reported that the leftwing was lying to Americans for political gain. In the broadcast Carlson describes the rightwing conspiracists of Q-Anon as:

“...kind of confused, or have the wrong ideas, they are all gentle people, waving American flags. They like the country. They are not torching Wendy’s. They are not looting retail stores. They are not shooting cops. No, that’s not them. The other people are doing that...They lie to us again and again and again, about the threat of Q-Anon and the insurrection and the white supremacist militia hiding in the closet... doing it for psychological reasons obviously, but also for political reasons... They ignore actual violence in this country.”

In another broadcast, from January 21, 2021, Carlson reports that the focus is on white nationalists and rightwing figures, but that there is a group of domestic terrorists that “self-identify as Antifa” and that the government should be going after them “instead of pretending that it [Antifa] is a mythical group created by the right.” In a June 21, 2021, airing of her show *The Ingraham Angle*, Laura Ingraham echoes a similar sentiment, saying that it astonishes her that while Black Lives Matters and Antifa are looting and burning down American cities like Portland and Minneapolis, “the Biden Justice Department is talking about domestic terrorism, a.k.a. white supremacy, by my count there have been zero white supremacist homicides this year.” In an airing of *Outnumbered* from July 28, 2020, Antifa is referred to as a “fascist militia,” “domestic terror organization,” and a group of “violent, totalitarian anarchists,” that are threatening free speech and the right to keep and bear arms.

6.1.04 Ideological Labels

To answer the third RQ within RQ1 the use of ideological labels was tracked and coded. Three codes were used for this section: Leftwing, Radical, and Rightwing. 53.0% of all transcripts featured ideological labels. The Leftwing label comprised 48.5% of all ideological labels coded. The Radical label comprised 44.9% and Rightwing made up 6.6% of total references (Table 5).

Table 5. Percentage use of Ideological Labels by year in Fox News’ coverage of domestic terror.

Ideological Label:	<u>Leftwing</u> (n=176)	<u>Radical</u> (n=163)	<u>Rightwing</u> (n=24)
<u>Year</u>			
2012	64.7	29.4	5.9
2013	37.5	62.5	-
2014	7.1	92.9	-
2015	1.9	92.6	5.7
2016	13.3	73.3	13.3
2017	43.2	54.1	2.7
2018	83.3	16.7	-
2019	60.5	36.8	2.6
2020	73.7	26.3	-
2021	59.8	21.8	18.4
2022	77.3	22.7	-
Total:	48.5	44.9	6.6

*Bolded percentages indicate the most prominent Ideological Labels in a given year.

Overall, two trends emerge within Fox News’ use of Ideological Labels. First, the use of Rightwing ideological labels occurs seldomly when covering domestic terrorism, and second, the use of Radical ideological labeling decreased over the sample period, while Leftwing labels increased.

The first occurrence of a Rightwing label in the transcripts, from an airing of The Five, on August 6, 2012, was met with pushback from two of the show’s hosts. The show’s panel was discussing a shooting perpetrated by an RMVE, neo-Nazi, at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin. One of the host’s referred to the perpetrator as a “rightwing skinhead,” to which another host asked that “rightwing” not be used in conjunction with “skinhead,” before going on to posit that the perpetrator could also be “liberal.” Then, another host went further saying:

“If you want to focus on the rightwing nature of this, there are plenty of antisocial murdering creeps across the political spectrum. [The] Unabomber, Jonestown, Weather Underground, Black Panthers... Violence married to ideology goes big on the left.”

The assertion from the host that violence and ideology go hand in hand for the political left in America is inaccurate. Jasko, LaFree, Piazza, & Becker (2022) found that radical acts committed leftwing terrorists were less likely to be violent than those committed by rightwing or Islamic extremists. Additionally, in the case of violent terror attacks, leftwing terror was more likely to have zero fatalities than rightwing terror attacks, and there was a positive correlation between conservative ideologies and violent political behavior (p. 6).

Deflection from using the Rightwing ideological signifier in conjunction with groups that are commonly characterized as rightwing, such as RMVE and MVE, was consistent throughout the sample. For example, in 2021, the year with the most Rightwing labels referenced, they accounted for 18.4% of all Ideological Labels across Fox News transcripts. However, 75% of those Rightwing labels were used in two ways. First, were those used to describe how liberals were targeting conservatives, and second, were those used to minimize the impact that Rightwing groups had, by redirecting attention to Leftwing groups. 18.8% of the transcripts explicitly used Rightwing labels as being complicit in domestic terror: 12.5% referred to “pro-Trump” and “MAGA (Make America Great Again)” terrorists via quotes sourced from CNN and MSNBC respectively, and the other 6.3% referred to a quote from President Biden calling President Trump complicit in instigating the January 6 Insurrection. However, following the presentation of the quotes from CNN and MSNBC Fox commentators called them unnecessary, divisive rhetoric, and the reason for political polarization in the US.

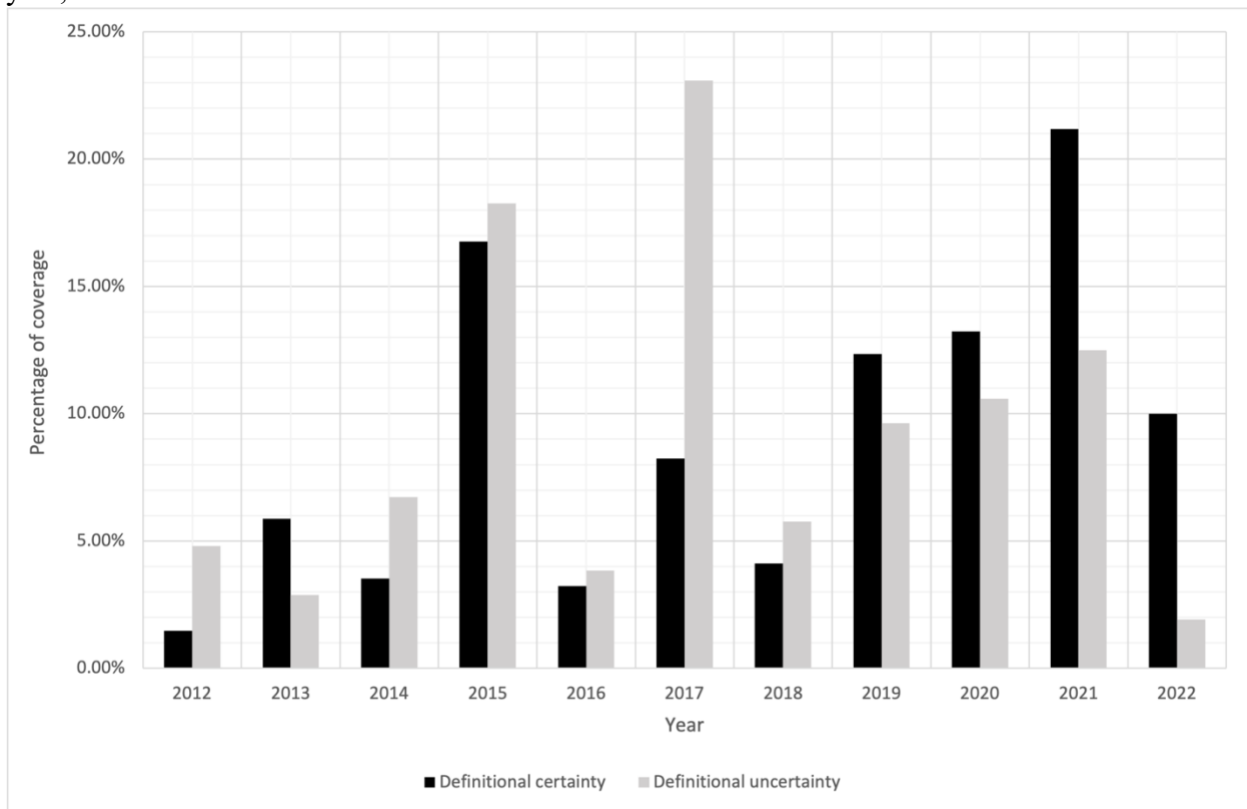
Additionally, the sole instance “rightwing” was used in conjunction with “extremism” by Fox News commentators themselves was when they discussed the FBI, DOJ, DHS, and President Biden’s administrations targeting of rightwing extremism as a broad attack on the entirety of the political right in the US, utilizing an episodic framework painting rightwing extremists as an insignificant, fringe minority posing little threat.

Despite having a nearly identical average annual frequency; 47.5% for Leftwing and 48.1% for Radical. There is a stark divide between the occurrence of both across the sample period, indicative of the network’s willingness to use ideological labels when identifying non-rightwing threats. From 2012-2017, Radical labels had an average annual frequency of 67.5% compared to 27.9% for Leftwing labels. While between 2018-2022, Radical labels occurred with much less frequency, 24.9%, and the use of Leftwing labels increased to 70.9%.

6.1.05 Definitional Certainty

The fourth and final question within RQ1 pertained to definitional certainty and uncertainty in the context of domestic terror coverage. This code was present in 80.8% of transcripts, with Definitional Certainty comprising 76.9% and Definitional Uncertainty comprising 23.1%.

Figure 5: Use of Definitional Un/Certainty (%) by Fox News’ coverage of domestic terrorism by year, 2012-2022.



Except for two spikes in 2015 and 2017, the Definitional Uncertainty code accounted for between 2.8% and 13% of the total number of references across the sample (Figure 5). 2015 featured 18.3% of all instances of Definitional Uncertainty, and 2017 accounted for 23.1%. Much of the Definitional Uncertainty in 2015, as well as the other years in the sample, stemmed from breaking news stories with new or impartial information, or commentators questioning whether an incident was murder or terrorism in the legal sense of the terms.

While there was a high likelihood of developing stories and breaking news being framed with Definitional Uncertainty, there was a similarly high likelihood that once an incident was framed with Definitional Certainty the network would continue coverage with that framework. One such example of this was coverage of the Boston Bombing in April 2013. The incident was given

unanimous Definitional Certainty the day of the attack and in all subsequent coverage throughout the rest of the year and in subsequent years. However, there were exceptions to this trend. For example, the domestic terror attack in Charleston, South Carolina, perpetrated by an RMVE, was framed with both Definitional Certainty and Uncertainty, but at other times it was not framed in terms of terrorism at all. If it weren't for the Chattanooga, Tennessee terror attack, which occurred one month later, coverage of Charleston would have been excluded from portions of the transcripts entirely. In comparison to the definitional uncertainty, and hesitancy to use the word terrorism in coverage of Charleston, the Chattanooga attack was immediately given the title of domestic terrorism. An example of the discrepancy in coverage of the two incidents can be seen here, nearly a half year after the occurrence of both, in an airing of *On The Record With Greta van Susteren* on December 27, 2015, the program began with the following quote:

“It is hard to believe 2015 is coming to a close [...] Dylann Roof killed nine worshippers at a Charleston church, setting off a new debate about the Confederate flag. The legal world rocked by one of the most controversial rulings on gay marriage. Domestic terror hit the US military with a series of shootings in a military installment in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Six people left dead including the shooter.”

Despite being recognized as acts of terrorism, the Charleston incident was framed as a homicide that affected conservative culture and its relationship with the Confederate flag, while the Chattanooga incident was framed as an act of domestic terrorism against the US military. The presentation of the two incidents and their place in the segment's coverage also shows that they were not considered equal in severity, and the positioning of the sentence concerning “controversial rulings on gay marriage” between the two incidents creates further physical distance between an act of “killing” and an act of “domestic terror.”

Coverage in 2017, was slightly different, the two stories that dominated that year were the Las Vegas shooter, the motive of which is still officially undetermined, and a car attack by an RMVE in Charlottesville, North Carolina, which has since been recognized as an act of domestic terror. In the instance of the terror attack in North Carolina, President Trump refused to condemn the violence by the white supremacist, RMVE and repeatedly referenced violence from “both sides,” leading to increased Definitional Uncertainty in Fox News's coverage of the incident. For example, America's Newsroom called the incident a “singular case of vehicular homicide” in their immediate coverage on August 12, 2017, while Fox and Friends called it “a simple murder” in their coverage the following day on August 13, 2017. The incident was also described in terms

of Definitional Certainty in 42.9% of the total references for 2017: 33.3% of those references were quotes from Republican Senator Corey Gardner who immediately called the attack terrorism, 16.6% called it terrorism with the caveat that Antifa was to blame for provoking the white supremacists, another 16.6% called it terrorism but went on to say that it was inconsequential because the “real focus is radical Islamic terrorism,” and the remaining 33.3% used Definitional Certainty with no caveat.

6.2 Phase II Results

While the quantity of sources, ideological labels, contextualization, and definitional certainty are critical to the framing of the topic of domestic terrorism, they tell only one side of the story. The themes, sub-themes, and narratives being conveyed to the network’s audience are of equal importance in terms of framing effects. The following qualitative analysis seeks to answer RQ2 by examining in more detail, the following five themes: Attribution of Blame, Conservatives Under Attack, Questioning Intelligence Agencies, Islamic extremism, and Rightwing Extremism is Not a Threat.

Table 6 shows the incidences of different themes and sub-themes within the sample. These numbers report the percentages of transcripts that include each in the table (regardless of prevalence or how many times it is referenced in a given transcript). These are not mutually exclusive categories as each transcript can include multiple themes and sub-themes, as such they do not add up to 100% within each category.

Table 6: Prevalence of themes and sub-themes in Phase II across all Fox News transcripts

Theme & Sub-theme	Transcripts (%)
Attribution of Blame	54.7
“Both sides”	12.2
Leftwing	42.9
Institutional	21.6
Rightwing	5.9
Conservatives Under Attack	19.2
Questioning Intelligence Agencies	15.3

Islamic Extremism	15.0
Islamic Terror	11.2
Radicalization	7.7
ISIS	5.9
Rightwing Extremism is Not a Threat	23.7
Blown Out of Proportion	8.8
Political Ploy	8.0
Not The Biggest Threat	6.9
The Left	50.0
Islam	35.0
Immigration	15.0

Within this section several key changes in Fox News’ coverage of domestic terrorism will be discussed. First, the network’s Attribution of Blame during the 11 years of the sample will be examined within the context of Rightwing, Leftwing, Institutional, and “Both Sides.” Next, special attention will be paid to two the relationship between two themes: Islamic Extremism and Attribution of Blame to the Leftwing. These themes will be discussed in the section titled ‘Threat Construction and Deflection.’ Lastly, the emergence of three new themes in 2020 will be analyzed: Conservatives Under Attack, Questioning Intelligence Agencies, and Rightwing Extremism is Not a Threat. These themes will be discussed in more depth in the section titled ‘A New Era of Domestic Terror.’

Throughout these sections emphasis will be placed on Fox News’ use of a thematic framework in tandem with the themes Attribution of Blame to the Leftwing, Islamic extremism, and “Both Sides.” Thematic framing, according to Iyengar (1991, p. 18), presents the topic at hand within a broader context of “collective outcomes, public policy debates, or historical trends,” giving viewers the full breadth of an issue.

Table 7. Number of Phase II theme and sub-theme references across each year of Fox News’ coverage of domestic terrorism

Year:	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
	(8)	(10)	(14)	(38)	(12)	(25)	(9)	(43)	(29)	(64)	(34)
Attribution Of Blame	10	10	12	34	18	64	15	84	65	151	58

“Both Sides”	2	-	-	1	-	19	-	3	3	22	5
Leftwing	4	5	6	15	5	15	8	42	48	97	47
Institutional	-	5	6	15	12	10	6	8	4	21	4
Rightwing	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	2	8	10	1
Conservatives Under Attack	-	1	1	1	-	2	4	3	1	56	42
Questioning Intelligence Agencies	-	1	4	4	1	3	1	2	1	24	26
Radical Islam	-	14	36	51	5	8	-	2	-	4	-
Islamic Terror	-	11	22	15	3	4	-	-	-	2	-
Radicalization	-	3	12	17	1	3	-	2	-	1	-
ISIS	-	-	2	19	1	1	-	-	-	1	-
Rightwing Extremism is Not a Threat	-	-	-	11	5	14	12	12	10	82	45
Blown out of Proportion	-	-	-	1	1	3	3	4	2	13	8
Political Ploy	-	-	-	2	-	1	1	1	-	19	9
Not the Biggest Threat	-	-	-	2	1	2	2	1	2	9	5
The Left	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	7	2
Islam	-	-	-	2	1	2	-	1	-	1	2
Immigration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1

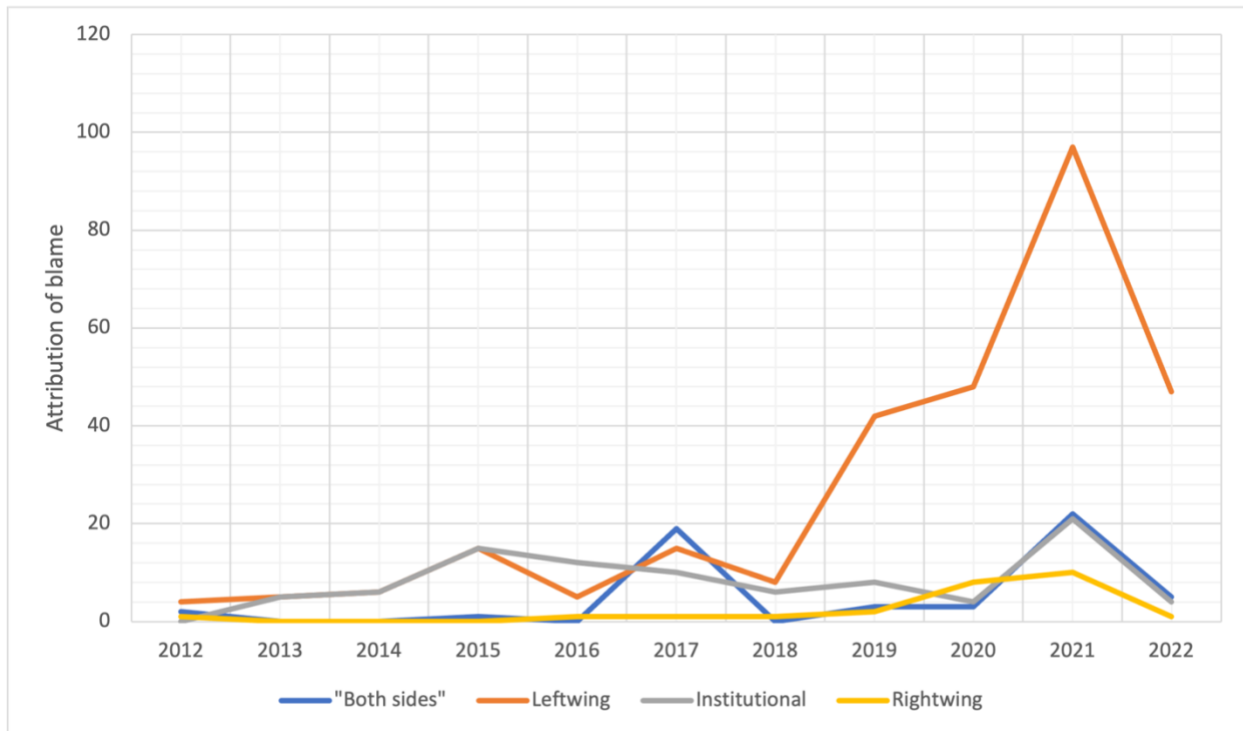
*Bolded titles and numbers denote the total number of references (including all sub-themes) within each main theme

6.2.01 Attribution of Blame

Recall that the brief quantitative analysis from Phase I showed Leftwing ideological labels were the most widely used throughout the transcripts. Thus, it follows that Attribution of Blame was also directed toward the leftwing (Figure 5). Although similar in content, Attribution of Blame

refers specifically to who or what was deemed responsible for a domestic terror incidents, while Ideological Labels tracked the labels used to describe the perpetrator’s ideology. Leftwing blame was used nearly 12 times more often than Rightwing blame. Rightwing never accounted for more than 12% of the Attribution of Blame themes in a given year, despite rightwing extremists being responsible for at least one of the most dominant news stories in all three years (2015, 2019, 2021) of peaks across the period of analysis. In 2015 0.0% of blame was attributed to Rightwing actors, in 2019 the attribution of blame to Rightwing was 2.3%, and in 2021 it was 6.6%.

Figure 6: Attribution of blame across all transcripts, 2012-2022



Leftwing

Much of the early Leftwing blame (2012-2016) was attributed directly to President Barack Obama’s hesitancy to use the label of domestic terrorism quickly enough or with enough definitional certainty, as well as his refusal to condemn what Fox News called “Islamic terror” perpetrated by “radical Muslims.” For example, a December 6, 2015, airing of The Kelly File focused on “Obama remaining silent” in the wake of a terrorist attack in San Bernadino, “the president refused to use the words radical Islam, Islamist, or jihad in describing the greater

challenge from terrorism, preferring instead the term violent extremism.” This critique is absent from coverage of President Trump’s refusal to condemn rightwing violence several years later.

In April 2015, during coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing trial, panelists from The Five suggested that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Obama were sympathetic to the brothers, and other terrorists:

“...this is pure evil. This guy's cut from the same cloth as these killers and these radical Muslims all across the middle east. These are the same guys that the president wants to give jobs to. That the president's negotiating with, that Hillary Clinton says she wants to empathize with.”

Following the election of President Donald Trump, Leftwing blame expanded to include new targets such as Democratic members of Congress, The Senate, and The House, as well as Antifa and the media. Blame also continued to be placed on former President Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton despite both no longer occupying political positions. For example, Antifa became a group frequently blamed for domestic terrorism following the events in Charlottesville when an RMVE drove his car into a group of counter-protestors, killing one. On a broadcast of Fox and Friends from August 13, 2017, a panelist questions, “What about these agitators, so-called antifascists smashing and beating people since the beginning of his [Trump’s] administration?” before another panelist joins in, pointing out the only two possibilities for culprits are “the media or the left.”

The media came under scrutiny with increasing frequency during the Trump years, with both leftwing ideological labeling, and broader references to “the media” (see Institutional theme) as an institution that was not necessarily ideologically cohesive throughout, but nonetheless bound by a uniform agenda to attack the political right and defined in polar opposition to the right. An airing of Tucker Carlson Tonight from June 26, 2018, outlines the situation and the media’s complicity in perpetuating domestic terror:

“Activists on the left are moving to violence and they [the media] are aware of this and some applaud it... The message of all of this is clear: the left no longer considers their political opponents as fellow citizens or human. Democrat members of congress, entertainment and media chieftains, and CNN, they are all silent and covering and complicit in all of this.”

Framing of the media environment also relied strongly on conspiracy language that frequently emphasized “control” and “the narrative,” as well as “elites,” “luminaries,” and “chieftains” on the left, and Fox News as the solely legitimate source of news on the other. Fox News regularly

positioned itself as the only news site that was understanding and sympathetic to the everyday American. An episode of Fox News at Night with Shannon Bream shows how Fox utilizes conspiracy language, while also positioning the media in opposition to everyday Americans. Following the airing of a clip from CNN's Anderson Cooper framing insurrectionists as going "back to Olive Garden and Holiday Inn" to rehash their proud memories from storming the Capitol Building, Bream responds saying:

"That's an embarrassing moment for Anderson Cooper. There are millions of people who go to Olive Garden and stay at Holiday Inns every day who are watching the riots yesterday on the capitol with horror. It's elitist classism of the liberal media to say that."

Like Fox's framing of the media, Antifa quickly became synonymous with a dangerous leftist ideology, rendering the use of explicit ideological labels redundant. However, in the absence of ideological labels, frameworks instead underscored the tolerance, support, and complicity that the political left had in instigating Antifa's behavior. Framing in this manner constructed a narrative positioning Antifa and the media as equal and willing partners. An example of this framing comes from The Ingraham Angle on August 19, 2019:

"Hundreds of masked antifa thugs descended on Oregon over the weekend. The camera stills captured some pretty shocking violence from the roving bands of bullies. To liberals and the mainstream media though they were just people exercising their constitutional rights."

And again, in a broadcast of Tucker Carlson Tonight, the show's guest and fellow Fox News journalist Trace Gallagher utilized a thematic framework in coverage of Antifa, calling the group "a domestic terror threat" that "has been explicitly linked to quite a few riots and at least one full-blown terror attack," before adding that others on the left and in the media were complicit in encouraging the violence from Antifa:

"You can really see that these protesters are not deterred, they have an implicit message that what they're doing is with a wink and a nod approved by Keith Ellison [Democratic Attorney General of Minnesota] or Chris Cuomo [journalist at CNN] or other luminaries of the media and progressive movement."

Institutional (2012-2017)

2012-2017 accounted for 52.7% of all Institutional Attributions of Blame. During this period the prominent institutional actors at fault were the intelligence community, the government, and immigration policy.

The intelligence community, such as the FBI, DHS, and DOJ, were blamed for their inability to effectively share intelligence and data between agencies. This failure reflected real-world concerns by intelligence agencies as numerous internal reports underscored the need for improvement (Office of Inspector General & Cuffari, 2022; Executive Office of the President, 2021). There was also emphasis on the failure of intelligence agencies in curtailing radical Islamic extremism domestically. On an episode of Hannity, from September 4, 2014, Sean Hannity criticized the FBI for a recent domestic terrorism analysis that “doesn't even identify the Islamist threat within its entire report.” Another example of this critique is seen here in coverage from The Five, on September 13, 2014:

“The latest FBI national threat reference makes zero references to Islamic terrorists. [...] A 19-year-old college student was driving home on June 25 when he was brutally murdered by three men, and one of the men, Ali Mohammad Brown said it was vengeance for the US's actions in the middle east. This kid was murdered because he was an American. Domestic terrorism is already here.”

Attribution of Blame toward the FBI and other agencies was often framed within a greater narrative of “political correctness,” that Fox reported had started taking over the government due to President Obama’s insistence on being careful about Islamophobia. In the same episode of The Five, another host states that they “think the reluctance to root out this evil is based on a fear of their [FBI] own making, which is islamophobia. The FBI is willfully obliging, essentially, they have us by the throat with our own political correctness.”

The second Institutional actor to blame was the government, mentioned in tandem with the police. Coverage surrounding the two tended to focus on the shortcomings of the government in communicating the severity of the threat posed domestically by radical Islamic extremism, as well as the ineffectiveness of police in being proactive.

The final institutional actor during the period was immigration policy which was often brought up in relation to the spread of radical Islamic extremism and extremists from the Middle East to the US through legitimate channels of immigration, refugee and asylum seeking. An example of this comes from Special Report with Bret Baier, September 14, 2016, where the host posits that the US has no “national strategy to combat terrorist travel... Our refugee program is not as secure as it needs to be.” Another broadcast from Fox Report Sunday, September 19, 2016, illustrates how this issue was often framed:

“The FBI said it has close to a thousand open cases in all 50 states focused on people who are at some stage of consuming the poison of the group we call ISIL or ISIS and acting on that poison. At the same time the Obama administration has just announced plans to allow an additional 110,000 refugees into the US next year including an unknown number from Syria.”

Institutional (2018-2022)

The second period of the dataset saw the Institutional Attribution of Blame used almost exclusively with reference to the media. Fox News’ coverage became hyper-critical and paranoid, with frequent references to all other media as “biased,” “acting as an organ for one political side,” “fake news,” and “propaganda.” Framing of this blame followed a consistent narrative script that was thematic and similarly conspiratorial to the frameworks utilized with Leftwing ideological labels. A January 7, 2022, airing of *The Ingraham Angle* framed the media as engaging in a widespread and sinister partisan plot:

“You have to accept the reality here: the propaganda media and propaganda academic world. You have a large propaganda of bureaucracy now and I will tell you what worries me the most and every conservative should take seriously, they have begun to lay the groundwork to use the 14th amendment to the constitution to literally block people from being allowed to run on the grounds that they were somehow tainted by obstruction. This would be comparable to Iran or Russia or China.”

Tucker Carlson engaged in a similar framing on his show on September 19, 2022, in conversation with Ohio Congressional Representative Jim Jordan, when he stated that Biden’s administration was engaging in undemocratic activity that wrongly framed conservatives as domestic terrorists “because there is no one to push back. Corporate America is on their side, the entertainment business, and the media, and the entire congress.” This followed Representative Jordan’s assertion that enforcement agencies and President Biden were “juicing the numbers and cooking the books” in their investigation of conservatives who partook in the Insurrection on January 6. Jordan went on to posit that the Biden Administration had taken away resources from child sex trafficking cases to go after the insurrectionists.

“Both Sides”

“Both Sides” became a prominent theme in 2017, after the terror attack in Charlottesville, South Carolina when an RMVE extremist killed a counter-protestor with his car and President Trump condemned violence on “both sides.” Much of the resulting Fox News coverage of the incident was thus centered on excusing Trump’s rhetoric but the theme also remained present in coverage in four of the next five years and became a central framework for discussing acts of terror

perpetrated by rightwing extremists (namely RMVE and MVE). The “Both Sides” theme presented the rightwing extremist violence through an episodic framework and shifted the emphasis of the coverage, within a thematic framework, onto the leftwing instead. The theme was also used to obfuscate the instigation of violence by rightwing extremists.

On August 13, 2017, Fox Report Sunday insisted that “President Trump condemned the violence and the hate” and that he had appropriately not taken a side, instead “he blamed all sides.” Similarly, in an airing of The Story with Martha MacCallum on August 16, 2017, Governor Mike Huckabee was brought onto the show to talk about Trump’s response to the attack in Charlottesville and backed the President’s position while criticizing former President Barack Obama, and questioning whether the incident was terrorism:

“I want to challenge you on the idea that all the presidents have always been clear. When Fort Hood happened President Obama never called it terrorism, he called it workplace violence. That was terrorism. A man stands up in the middle of an army installation and says “Allahu Akbar,” starts killing people, did it as an act for Allah, this is terror.”

Both Fox and Friends Sunday and America’s Newsroom echoed Trump’s assessment of Charlottesville as well, in coverage on August 13 and 16 respectively. America’s Newsroom reported, “what’s happening now is there is violence on both the left and the right,” and, “they might be wrong on the right but look on the left... both are wrong, and we need to acknowledge that.” Similarly, Fox and Friends Sunday stated that “people” had acted out on their emotions and their passions resulting in violence. But then shifted coverage and questioned the counter-protestors, asking “what about these agitators, so-called antifascists smashing and beating people since the beginning of his [Trump’s] administration?”

This theme was also prevalent following the Insurrection at the Capitol Building on January 6, 2021. For instance, The Five, on February 4, 2021, stated, “That [domestic terrorism] is what was going on at Portland and out West and all of our major cities all last year. And we are worried about one insurrection?” In a January 26, 2021, airing of Special Report with Bret Baier he posited that “the John Brennans, Adam Schiffs, and oligarchs in Big Tech” were trying to turn the country into a “police state with KGB style surveillance” and in contrast to the insurrectionists, were much more powerful and dangerous to the wellbeing of the country.

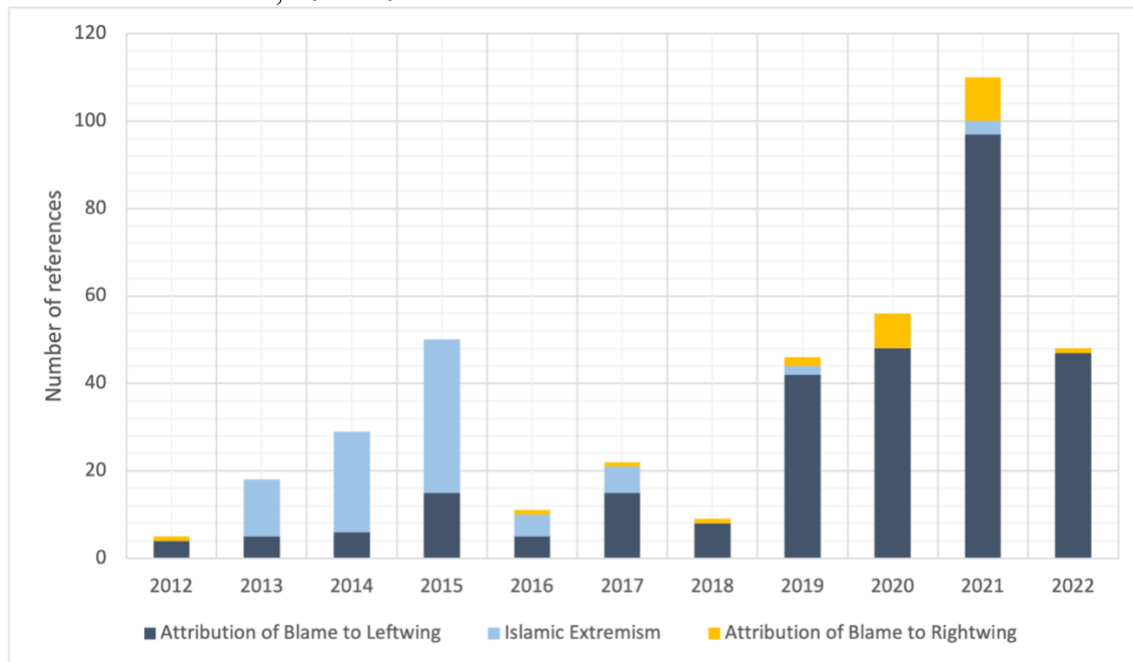
America’s Newsroom with Bill Hemmer and Dana Perino, February 15, 2021, also framed the narrative using “Both Sides” rhetoric:

“If you look at political violence in America, we should look at it. We shouldn't look at it with blinders on about January 6th. We need to look if the democrats are actually going to introduce this Domestic Terrorism Act of 2021, let's look at all the ideologically motivated terrorism.”

6.2.02 Threat Construction and Deflection

Over the course of multiple readings, it became apparent that Fox News utilized a thematic framework in coverage of domestic terror incidents perpetrated by Muslim Americans and perpetrators with reported or presumed ties to the Middle East. This coverage was especially potent from 2013-2017 where references to Islamic extremism were made extensively and domestic terror was commonly referenced in the context of Other Foreign Terror (Figure 7). Coinciding with this period was the first spike in contemporary rightwing extremist incidents accompanied by an absence of attributing blame to the rightwing (Figure 1 & Figure 6).

Figure 7: Attribution of Blame to the Leftwing and Rightwing and references to Islamic Extremism over time, 2012-2022



Under the broad umbrella of Islamic Extremism as a qualitative theme, there were several sub-themes that developed: 1.) ‘ISIS’ tracked when the perpetrator, incident, or similar incidents were

linked directly to the terror group; 2.) ‘Islamic Terror’ tracked instances when perpetrators or incidents were referenced in association within a broader web of Islamic-inspired terrorist activity; 3.) ‘Radicalization’ coded for mentions of radicalization specifically as it pertained to Islamic extremism or perpetrators who had been radicalized in the name of Islam.

Through these three sub-themes, Fox News presented viewers with a set of easily recognizable schema that fit into a broader cultural reference point of who, and what a terrorist is, embedded firmly in the collective memory of the September 11 terror attacks. Doing so reaffirmed the construction the Muslim identity as an object of fear, as well as reaffirmed the lines of transgression that would commonly be associated with future domestic terror incidents. Just as the internalization of conspiracies becomes the central marker of a partisan identity and the departure point for the creation of boundaries that define objects of desire and transgression, the thematic coverage of domestic terror in association with the Muslim identity reinforced the association of the two as points of transgression, clearly delineating rigid boundary lines (Smallpage, et al., 2017, p. 6).

For example, following the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013, hosts from America’s Newsroom called the attack, “an act of war committed in the name of Islam...” and referred to the brothers as “deadly serious, committed, Jihadis,” despite no links to foreign terror groups being confirmed. In other instances, for example in an airing of The Kelly File in June 2016, the coverage depicted Islamic extremism as a dual threat existing across the domestic and global spheres:

“God, we just had the largest attack, as you said, on our own soil in Orlando. Who is talking about that? I mean, Chattanooga, Boston, people forget about 9/11. This is not about guns. They used planes, suicide bombs in Turkey, cylinders in Boston...”

Other coverage focused on the scope and frequency of Islamic extremist attacks in relation to domestic terrorism, and how far-reaching it was. For example, in an airing of Your World With Neil Cavuto in July 2015, the host mentions that there had been “more than 60 ISIS related cases brought in the last year” and points out that there was “now more than one suspect a week” being arrested for domestic terrorism in relation to Islam. Tucker Carlson also reported, in October 2017, that Muslims were responsible for 89% of all deaths and mass killings in the US since 2001.

Additionally, threats from Islamic extremism became a bogeyman of sorts in the later years of the sample. Even when nonexistent, threats from Islamic extremists were constructed to deflect from the danger posed by rightwing extremists and to reinforce or reassure the audience of the fact that their rightwing positionality was on the correct side of the boundary between desire and transgression. For example, a broadcast of Cavuto Live in January 2021, several weeks after the Insurrection at the Capitol Building attempted to shift concern from the rightwing extremists back to foreign terror and the “real bad guys”:

“What concerns me... is the real bad guys, not the concern for domestic activity, but you know, foreign bad guys and terrorist groups that might be taking their cues from what has happened and transpired in Washington over the last week and a half or so...”

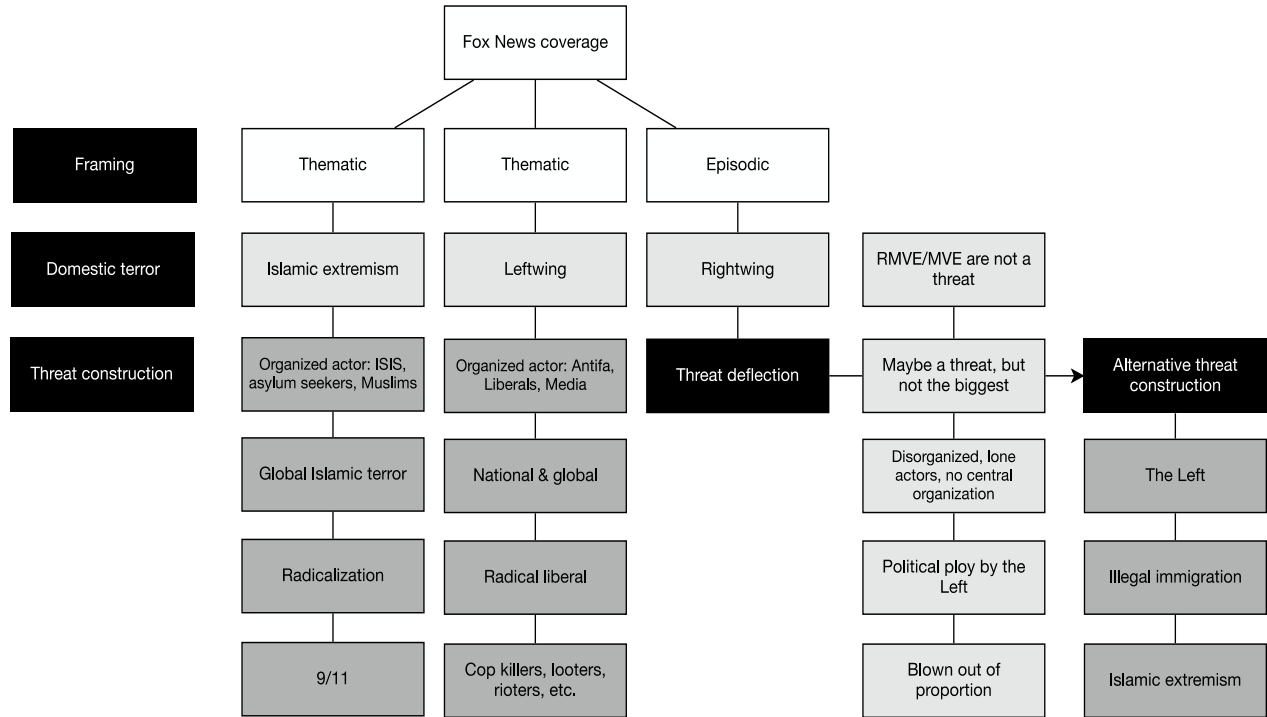
An episode of the Ingraham Angle a year later in January 2022 emphasized this point again stating that “domestic terrorism is totally different from international terrorism, which is the greatest threat facing Americans today... not domestic terrorism.” Fox and Friends Sunday continued this framing in December 2022, calling rightwing terror, “so-called domestic terror” and reemphasizing the significance of international terror:

“I’m afraid we’ve taken our eye off the ball of international terrorism. I think this is a reminder that we need to make sure that we keep our eye on that with all the so-called domestic terrorism going on now, international terrorism like this is still out there.”

Despite continued mention of Islamic extremism in the latter half of the sample, the network placed heavy emphasis on a different object of fear during this time. From 2018-2022, the period comprising the most incidents of rightwing extremist violence, the network utilized a similarly thematic framework in the construction and framing of the American leftwing as a threat, with an extensive and well-connected network of actors, organizations, and institutions (Figure 1 & Figure 6).

Of particular interest here is the network’s redrawing of boundary lines regarding objects of desire and transgression. In the first half of the sample, the object of fear was radical Islam and Muslims with the victim being America and its citizens. However, the new boundary line was assembled along partisan boundaries, with the object of fear becoming liberal Americans, and the victim no longer being framed as a unified America, but a specific group of conservative Americans (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Visualization of the dynamic nature of Fox News’ construction of domestic terror threats and deflection of the threat of rightwing extremism using thematic and episodic frameworks



While much of the Attribution of Blame toward the left has been covered, there remains a parallel between the network’s persistence to deflect rightwing complicity in domestic terror incidents by focusing on threats of lesser significance. This is evident across its coverage of both Islamic and leftwing extremism. For example, after the Insurrection on January 6 the network shifted emphasis to Islamic extremism and international terrorism in some of its coverage. However, a point of even greater emphasis was the amount of coverage given to a story about the DOJ being weaponized by the Biden Administration to go after conservative parents at schoolboard meetings. The story accounted for just under half of all stories in 2021. For example, in an airing of The Ingraham Angle in February 2022, Laura Ingraham framed January 6th like this:

“Rather than treat January 6th as a protest that got way out of hand with some criminal elements, no doubt the Obama administration and their media cronies insisted on claiming that it was an insurrection and treating everyone who supported president trump as a traitor.”

Tucker Carlson, engaged in a similar framing in January 2022:

“These are Americans who came to the capital city with their friends to complain loudly about what politicians were doing. they assumed that was still allowed but it's not allowed. Joe Biden has made that clear.”

Both Ingraham and Carlson downplayed the events of January 6 repeatedly in coverage on their respective shows, while playing up the threat of the Biden administration and the DOJ’s systematic targeting of conservative parents. In March 2022, Carlson reported that conservative parents were being targeted as domestic terrorists:

“... You will see more examples like we are already seeing of people like parents who care about their kids going to school boards and protesting being targeted as domestic terrorists.”

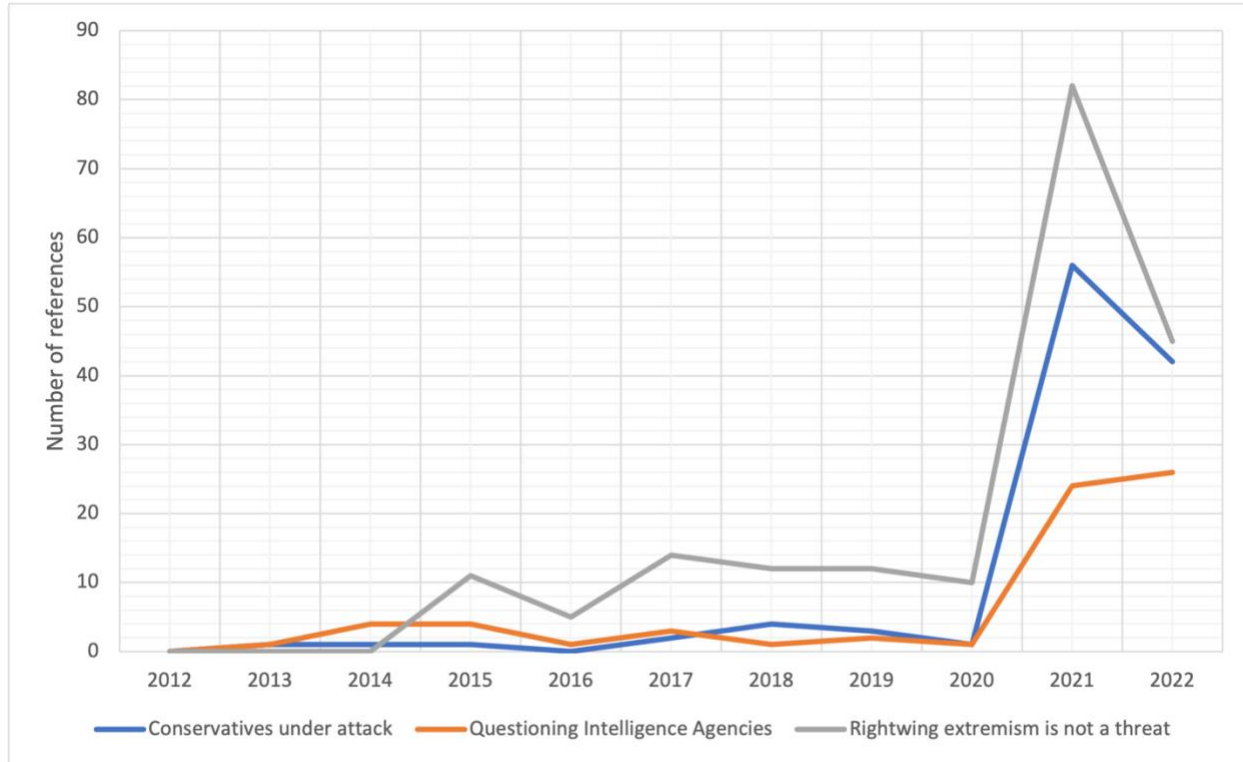
In coverage of her show in February 2022, Laura Ingraham echoed the same sentiment while emphasizing two familiar conservative rallying cries, the first being the threat of the government taking away private guns from citizens, and the second being that Hillary Clinton had deleted thousands of emails:

“You got the FBI going after parents. You got the DOJ setting up a domestic terrorism unit and now we find out the ATF is going after law abiding gun owners. I mean, I think about this Hillary Clinton destroyed 330,000 thousand emails while she was under investigation...”

6.2.03 A New Era of Domestic Terror

From 2020 to 2022, Fox News’ coverage of domestic terror underwent its most significant shift. As the frequency and intensity of rightwing extremist terror incidents increased, so did their emphasis on three key frameworks: Conservatives Under Attack, Questioning Intelligence Agencies, and Rightwing Extremism is not a Threat (Figure 8).

Figure 8: The occurrence of themes Conservatives Under Attack, Questioning Intelligence Agencies, and Rightwing Extremism is not a Threat, in Fox News coverage of domestic terrorism, 2012-2022



Conservatives Under Attack

While much of Fox News’ coverage throughout the sample period alluded to threats to conservative ideology stemming from numerous actors across the political spectrum and in the local and global sphere, Conservatives Under Attack tracked the emergence of the network’s explicit framing of specific actors as threatening to conservatives. This code was present in all but one year of the sample (2016), but 87.5% of all references occurred during 2021 and 2022 where it was used to undermine the integrity of domestic terror legislation introduced by the Biden administration. During these years the severity of the threat language increased as Fox News firmly established itself as a protector of conservatives in the culture war. For example, in an August 18, 2017, airing of his show Tucker Carlson issued a warning to conservatives regarding the Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) fearmongering and unfair attacks against conservative figures and organizations:

“they are vultures that are preying on the fears of Americans. They've gone after Ben Carson and gone after the president and even in Minnesota they are pushing policy, they are not an objective arbiter sitting on the sidelines, they went into Minnesota pushing a liberal policy

in a local school, parents organized against them and instead of arguing the merits of whatever the policy was, the southern poverty law center slapped a label of ‘hate group’ on these parents.”

Carlson consistently used a thematic framework in his coverage, placing the blame on leftwing politicians, school policies, and their victimization of conservative parents who were stuck within a web of dangerous, intersecting liberal agendas. By 2022, the potential attacks against conservatives had moved from the realm of the abstract into warning against physical threats. For example, an airing of *Gutfeld!* on January 12, 2022, framed the threats against conservatives like this:

“How long before they start waterboarding the kids? That's politics these days. The government is cool with the Taliban and abandoning Blackhawks, but they put Mr. and Mrs. Johnson on a watch list for asking why kids are segregated by race. The three r's have gone from reading writing arithmetic to racism, racism, racism.”

Gutfeld! continued the segment, with claims the Democrats had weaponized the DOJ to hunt down conservative parents with the help of the FBI who will “kick your door down at dawn with guns drawn if you leave a nasty message on your kid’s science teachers blackboard, all the while allowing violent criminals to remain on the streets with their lenient criminal justice policies.

Questioning Intelligence Agencies

With the increase of the Conservatives Under Attack theme, there was also an increase in the network’s propensity for engaging in coverage that questioned the efficacy of intelligence agencies following President Biden’s election. Such coverage became a mainstay in 2021 when the network positioned itself in opposition to the prosecution of insurrectionists on January 6th. For example, an episode of *Tucker Carlson Tonight* in September 2022 framed the FBI as acting as an extension of President Biden’s political agenda,

“Joe Biden labeled political opponents terrorists who threaten our nation. This is the President of the United States. Now the FBI is working hard to bolster those false claims opening domestic terrorist investigations against innocent people. Many of these are fraudulent and political. This is so wrong.”

An episode of *The Ingraham Angle* in January 2022 extended this sentiment to mainstream conservatives, not just those who participated on January 6th:

“[this] is very concerning and should be to every US citizen. He's (President Biden) saying basically, DOJ should be targeting mainstream American conservatives, and that's where things get very scary.”

Despite the uptick in the frame's frequency in the latter portion of the sample, it was also evident in earlier years when rightwing figures were in the news regarding domestic terror incidents. The frame's structure also remained consistent across the sample, focusing on elements of outrage, unfairness, witch-hunts, and the politicization of traditionally bipartisan institutions as a tool to limit freedom of speech and access to guns. The emphasis on outrage is the clearest connecting thread through the majority of the themes references and assists in strengthening the boundary between desire and transgression, firmly situating conservatives in opposition to potential transgression and making it increasingly difficult for them to be anything but unfairly persecuted by partisan enemies. For example, on Fox and Friends in August 2013, the panelists pushed back against a DHS bulletin citing rightwing extremism as a potential threat:

“This is [the] DHS, Department of Homeland Security. This is the same exact agency that was issuing warnings to local law enforcement on domestic terrorism about Catholics and Christians and returning army veterans. This is outrageous...”

Other instances focused on the FBI fabricating incidents in order to make Trump supporters look bad. In coverage of the attempted MVE-organized kidnapping plot of Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Sean Hannity questioned the authenticity of the plot, positing that the FBI could possibly have been behind it:

“But it turns out the story is not at all what they claimed it was. From court documents we learned that there were more FBI agents and informants involved in this plot than actual kidnapers. We also learned that a lead FBI agent on this case was a political partisan and in fact a violent criminal himself.”

By undermining trust in established agents of social control Fox News was able to monopolize the market for trustworthy information. As such, the network also managed to maximize ontological insecurity in its viewers through a focus on the threats to conservative ideologies, while simultaneously offering a secure, routinized narrative to bolster identity-based security within the group.

Rightwing Extremism is not a Threat

The final qualitative theme, Rightwing Extremism is not a Threat, tracked instances where the network attempted to downplay the severity of rightwing extremism, namely white supremacy, and militia violence. The theme is organized through three sub-themes: Blown out of Proportion, Not the Biggest Threat, and Political Ploy.

Blown out of Proportion

This theme tracked the network's communication to viewers that rightwing extremism was being blown out of proportion by the media and government. For example, an August 2017 airing of America's Newsroom pushed back against the characterization of the white supremacists marching in Charlottesville as "Trump supporters," opting to describe them instead as a "super minority of fringe people that don't represent the majority." The coverage of RMVE and white supremacists focused specifically on how small of a group they were, making it possible for the framing to remain in the realm of the episodic. Laura Ingraham, in August 2018, called white supremacists, "such a small group, they have no influence in American society" before stating that the attention given to them by the media was a misplaced attempt "to force this false narrative of racial division in this country." She went on to say:

"But if they (the media) continue to turn a blind eye to the hateful action of groups like antifa while exaggerating the importance of a handful of goofy racists craving attention, the question must be who's really fomenting division in America."

Coverage from Fox News at Night with Shannon Bream in October 2020 stated the KKK, "other than isolated incidents here in America... are not active today," and the organization died off in the 1970s. In February 2021, a guest on The Ingraham Angle offered a similar assessment of the potential for white supremacists to exist in the military stating that white supremacy "doesn't exist. It simply does not exist in the national security arena."

Not the Biggest Threat

The second theme within Rightwing Extremism is not a Threat focused on Fox News' attempts to frame a peripheral threat as the preeminent threat in place of rightwing extremism. There were three sub-themes of alternate threats: Immigration, Islam, and The Left.

Immigration was framed as posing a graver threat to national security than rightwing extremism in several transcripts, all of which occurred in 2021 and 2022. In an August 2021 airing of The Ingraham Angle, Ingraham criticized DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas for claiming that domestic violent extremists were the number one priority for the DHS while there was an ongoing "crisis" at the border with Mexico. Ingraham then showed several video clips of the border where migrants were stuck, before inviting Brandon Judd, the President for the National Border Patrol Council, onto the show. Judd stated the reality on the ground at the border is much

worse than the clips showed and the Biden Administration “doesn’t want you to know what’s going on.” A year later, in April 2022, Ingraham once again criticizes Secretary Mayorkas for claiming that domestic violent extremists, particularly RMVE, posed the most lethal threat to Americans. She followed the critique by engaging in conspiratorial language surrounding the scope of illegal immigration, to show that it was more important than rightwing extremism:

“So, you should be far more afraid of your fellow Americans than that millions of illegal aliens being buzzed and flown all over the country in the middle of the night, got it? Of course, we all know that Hunter Biden, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas is not really in charge of the southern border. As a practical matter, the Mexican drug syndicates are. Millions of illegals have already crossed our borders since Biden came into office. In just the month of march.”

Tucker Carlson also engaged in conspiratorial equations between domestic terror and Corona fraud, while positioning illegal immigration as the country’s single biggest issue in his show on September 19, 2022:

“The FBI and DOJ officials point to increasing domestic terrorism around the United States. They are lying with numbers. Just like they did under Corona. This is fraud, while 2 million people waltz into our country.”

The second alternate threat framed as larger and more lethal than domestic terror by Fox News was Islamic extremism. The framework revolved around attempts by Democrats to shift the conversation from Islamic extremism to domestic terror. Fox and Friends coverage from October 2015 offered an example of such coverage:

“President Obama hesitates to call [Muslim] terrorists what they are. But he won't hesitate to use the phrase rightwing extremist. And he's even opened a special office to investigate.”

The theme was still prevalent four years later in a January 2019 airing of Fox and Friends Sunday when the host questioned if democrats were “turning their attention away from taking on Islamic terrorism?”

The final alternate threat within Not the Biggest Threat was The Left. This theme tracked instances where Fox News framed the leftwing as a more lethal and persistent threat than the rightwing. The threat originated from Antifa but over the course of the sample period Antifa evolved to include the entire left side of the political and cultural spectrum in the US. Tucker Carlson summarized the situation aptly in January 2021, when he stated, “if you want to root out domestic terrorism, you go after Antifa.” In October 2020 coverage of a DHS domestic terror

draft report on Fox News at Night with Shannon Bream, lawyer, and Republican Party official Harmeet Dhillon stated:

“Well, I think the report we are hearing, it doesn't surprise me, because the DHS, FBI, have been really far behind on the playbook for some time and ignoring the current and live threats of antifa around the world, particularly rising in the US. Look, it is not just the right raising the alarm about antifa, any American turning on the television can see with their own eyes who is burning down buildings in America... and who is active on social media, making threats, and daily creating chaos in our cities. It's not white supremacists.”

A year later in April 2021, Laura Ingraham engaged her audience in a similar line of reasoning, when she stated President Biden was bringing too much attention to white supremacy that was “rooted in lies:”

“Add to this the flames of racial hatred fanned by our leftwing media night after night, egging on the radicals on the ground in Minnesota, all of them, the BLM activists, the press, politicians, Hollywood, they are all culpable here. They exercise their power, and some get very rich as we've learned by lying to our young kids about our country, they are lying about our history and lying about our founding principles, all of it.”

Political Ploy

The final theme within Rightwing Extremism is not a Threat was Political Ploy. This theme tracked instances of Fox News coverage that presented rightwing extremism, and the attention paid to it by the leftwing, as a ploy by the leftwing to divert attention from more important issues in order to maintain power. The theme was most prevalent in 2021 and 2022, but was also present from 2015 to 2019, with the exception of 2016. The first instance of this code was tracked in an episode of Fox and Friends in October 2015, when hosts questioned President Obama's creation of a special task force to combat rightwing extremists. The hosts mentioned the office was created in response to increases in racial and religious hatred but that it would target a wide array of conservative actors such as “libertarians, conservatives, and constitutionalists.” The following years leading up to 2021 were similar in scope, with the common theme being that conservatives were unfairly targeted by liberals pushing an agenda or narrative.

This coverage reached a fevered pitch in 2021 following the election of President Biden. The Ingraham Angle, America's Newsroom with Bill Hemmer & Dana Perino, and Fox News at Night with Shannon Bream all used soundbites from speeches of President Biden addressing the threat from rightwing extremism to point out that he was advancing a “political narrative,” that began with the Obama administration, to make “veiled attacks on his political rivals.” Ingraham,

especially, pushed the theme introduced in 2015, that everyday conservatives should be frightened by the crackdown on rightwing extremism. In a February 2021 airing of her show, she reported:

“Standing for the national anthem and football games and the next thing you know you could be labeled a white nationalist. Text a friend about how you think Trump is good for the forgotten man and woman: you're practically a KKK member. If democrats were concerned about stamping out extremism, they'd be looking in the mirror. How many wacky, incendiary, inflammatory, defamatory hateful things have been said by their members over the past five years? Just over the past month. we should devote an entire show just to left wing extremism, which runs the gamut from Antifa, BLM, open borders, and those who think we're all living on stolen land.”

Ingraham continued to lead the charge into 2022. However, while the bulk of the coverage in the sample focused on the targeting of conservatives broadly, the 2022 coverage shifted, becoming more personal and addressing Fox News viewers specifically. The framework communicated to viewers they were being actively threatened, while simultaneously considered a threat. In a terrorism segment from a January 2022 airing of *The Ingraham Angle*, she began by addressing her viewers with this statement, “Now, America is always facing threats. Transnational gangs, cartels, China, but the Biden DOJ with great fanfare has concocted a new threat: you.” Earlier that month, Tucker Carlson, commenting on a new domestic terrorism task force also addressed Fox viewers specifically:

“It's designed to hunt down and punish anyone who opposes the federal government or is anti-authority. Who's antiauthority? All thinking people who aren't on the federal payroll, that means you, that means all of us, got the message? ...because you're a threat.”

7. Discussion

This research sought to understand the framing of domestic terrorism by Fox News during a period of time characterized by the heightened salience of rightwing domestic terrorism. There are several points of interest in both the quantitative and qualitative phase that warrant discussion.

Phase I results indicated that sourcing was a consistent feature of domestic terrorism coverage. Use of Expert sources decreased over the period of analysis, while the use of Non-President Government sources increased, as did the rise in incidents of rightwing extremist violence. Of specific interest to this correlation is the utilization of Non-Presidential Government direct

sources by Fox News in 2021 and 2022, all of whom were Republican officials. Recall that Crijns, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017, found that when there is a threat of terror, individuals seek out information from traditional sources of news in order to alleviate concerns. They also found that a perception of high levels of government expert efficacy was able to increase levels of trust. In the case of Fox News, a partisan audience turns to a partisan news source that utilizes partisan sources to communicate terror-related information to alleviate audience concerns, but also to increase levels of political trust and decrease levels of perceived governmental responsibility along partisan boundaries.

The findings show that Fox News' contextualization of domestic terror incidents varied depending on the perpetrator. For example, the first 6 years of the sample featured more contextualization within the context of Other Foreign Terror due to the perpetrators of several incidents being Muslim-American. This reporting was thematic and consistent across this time period, with a focus on the global nature of radical Islam, and references to 9/11. The latter half of the sample exhibited similar thematic framing tendencies, with an emphasis on contextualization to Other Foreign Terror. This period saw the emergence of a new terror threat: Antifa, and the leftwing. Notably absent from these contextual frames were rightwing terror incidents, which by and large remained within episodic frameworks that emphasized fringe actors, super minority movements, and in some cases avoided the designation of domestic terror entirely.

Also noteworthy is the use of ideological labels in domestic terror coverage. Labels were used in over half of all transcripts and the network used Leftwing and Radical ideological labels liberally, while Rightwing ideological labels were rarely used. The hesitancy to use Rightwing labels reflects the partisan stance of Fox News as a network. Additionally, the disparity in use of ideological labels is not reflective of the real-world variation in domestic terrorism. For example, Rightwing labels were not used a single time in 2020 despite that year comprising the most incidents of rightwing extremist violence in the sample period (Doxsee, Jones, Thompson, Halstead & Hwang, 2022). From 2018 to 2022, Leftwing labels accounted for an average of 71.0% of all ideological labels used by the network, despite rightwing extremist incidents of violence occurring 2.5 times more frequently during the four-year span. While there was a

documented increase in leftwing extremist violence during the sample period, incidents of rightwing extremist violence still outpaced leftwing incidents, occurring 1.9 to 3.5 times as often (Doxsee, et al., 2022).

Phase II results are in line with Altheide's (2002) conception of the problem frame which amplifies fear, and his findings that the American media industry actively promotes widespread fear as a central organizing principle, through which audiences contextualize and view an array of social issues. Fox News engaged in the promotion of "a discourse of fear that may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the effective environment" (Altheide, 2002, p. 41). The network promoted this discourse of fear through consistent issue interpretation frameworks aided by partisan sources, thematic framing of leftwing and radical Islamic terror, and the attribution of blame to the leftwing which obscured the complicity of the rightwing and offered an alternative narrative to the real-world domestic terror environment.

Fox News also achieved this end in a less subtle way through emphasis frameworks that structure the network's messaging in way to evoke particular cognitive schemas within its viewers. These emphasis frame are observable in the network's coverage of attacks against conservative figureheads and ideology, in the persistent questioning of the integrity of intelligence agencies, and the repeated emphasis that rightwing extremism is nonexistent or a peripheral threat. Instead, the network engaged in conspiratorial thought exercises designed to demonize easily identifiable partisan enemies.

Further, results from the Threat Construction and Deflection section also fall in line with Altheide's (2002) conception of the problem frame and can be paired with Mitzen's (2006) research on ontological security-seeking practices at the state level. Mitzen posited that "states may not want to escape dilemmatic conflict... Because even dangerous routines provide ontological security, rational security-seekers could become attached to conflict" (p. 341). Scaling down Mitzen's level of analysis to the individual, with a focus on Fox News' coverage of domestic terrorism offers a potential avenue for understanding the network's insistence on deflecting rightwing blame. Taking Crijns, et al., (2017) findings that individuals seek security

through the media regarding terror concerns, one can view the Fox News' audience as security-seekers who, in return for their viewership, receive from Fox News a form of basic trust that is reinforced through the network's rigid and consistent routinization of the domestic terror narrative. The rigid routine, per Mitzen (2006, p. 364), "is associated with an inability to learn; we should not see the states searching for ways out of the conflict or engaging in debates about the other's intentions." Through the consistent and rigid use of the problem frame, the issue of domestic terrorism is presented similarly to an entrenched conflict – the enemy may change over time (Islamic extremism to leftwing extremism) – but the threat is persistent, existential, and the intentions of the Other remain outside the sphere of discourse. Thereby, Fox News is able to construct a straightforward and simple narrative of fear that poses a threat to the physical wellbeing of the viewership's collective body (conservatives under attack), while simultaneously reinforcing its collective identity and binding the audience together through a common threat (attribution of blame to the leftwing). Such a framework offers stability (rightwing extremism is not a threat) in a time of increasing uncertainty by mending the once severed psychological ties that individuals attempt to construct between their own biography and the locales that are the settings of the time-space paths through which they move.

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9. Appendix

Appendix A: Phase 1 Codebook (2012-2022)

Name	Description	Files	References
Context	This code tracked the way in which the domestic terror incident was contextualized by the news program.	132	207
Other domestic terror	This code applies to instances where the incident in question is tied back to other domestic terror incidents.	70	106
Other foreign terror	This code applies to incidents that are contextualized within the scope of foreign terrorism.	62	101

Name	Description	Files	References
Definitional certainty	This code applies to instances where the speaker applied the term of “domestic terrorism” as a statement of fact.	198	340
Definitional uncertainty	Definitional uncertainty identified when the application of “domestic terror/ism” as a designation was questioned or debated as opposed to being applied with certainty.	73	104
Ideological labels	Labels used to describe the attack and or attacker.	192	362
Left wing	Left wing labels include things such as liberal, alt-left, Antifa, etc.	85	175
Radical	Term encompasses labels given that are in line with fringe or extreme politics, radical Islamism, jihad, radicalization, etc.	93	163
Right wing	Right wing labels include terms such as conservative, patriot, alt-right, etc.	14	24
Sourcing	This code identifies who the news program decided to bring onto the program or include a sound bite from in their coverage of the incident.	413	650
Experts	Indicated when academics, think tanks, authors, or any other domestic terrorism “expert” were sourced.	49	74
Group association	When a family member of a domestic terrorist or someone who sympathizes with the terrorists’ views and goals was sourced.	8	11
Group voice	When a person identified as a domestic terrorist, or as being associated with a domestic terrorist organization was sourced.	10	11
Industry or organization	Indicated when those in the private or corporate sector (e.g., business owners, corporate spokespeople) were sourced.	61	71
Non-president government	Indicated when a government official from the local, state, or federal levels of government (e.g., local police, the FBI, Congressional Representatives) were sourced.	150	315
Other press	Indicated when someone from a news organization other than the network covering the story was sourced	41	49
President	When the President of the United States was sourced.	47	60

Name	Description	Files	References
Public	Indicated when someone identified as the “public” or as a “witness” was sourced.	32	41
Victims	When a survivor of a domestic terror incident or family member of a survivor was sourced.	15	18

Appendix B: Phase II Codebook (2012-2022)

Name	Description	Files	References
Attribution of blame	Who the blame for domestic terror incidents was attributed to.	163	502
'Both sides'	This code tracks instances when Fox News blamed 'both sides' for terror incidents.	35	55
Bigger picture	Tying the terroristic action into a larger context of outside factors (lack of economic opportunity, immigration, racism against whites, etc.) to deflect from the nature of the crime or to place the crime into a place of sympathy.	21	39
Institutional	This code encompasses blame placed on the media, the government, law enforcement agencies, etc.	62	91
To left wing	Blame placed on left wing political figures, public figures, the Democratic Party, etc.	123	292
To right wing	Blame for incident placed on right wing politicians, agencies, figures, etc.	17	25
Conservatives under attack	This code tracked instances where Fox News reported that conservatives were under attack by a variety of threats.	55	111
Questioning Intelligence Agencies	This code references the questioning of the FBI and DHS's motives in their investigation of terror incidents.	44	67
Radical Islam	This code tracked Fox News' coverage of radical Islamic terror, or references to radical Islamic extremism	43	204
ISIS	When the perpetrator, incident, or other similar incidents were linked to ISIS.	17	24
Islamic Terror	When the incident or perpetrator was presented as being part of a broader web of Islamic terror.	32	57
Radicalization	Tracks the mention of radicalization specifically with reference to Islamic extremism or refers to the perpetrator as a radical.	22	39
Rightwing extremism is not a threat	This code tracked instances when Fox News downplayed the severity of rightwing extremist incidents or told viewers that rightwing terror was nonexistent.	47	169

Name	Description	Files	References
Blown out of proportion	The issue of rightwing extremism has been blown out of proportion.	25	35
Not the biggest threat	Rightwing extremism is presented as being a threat that is secondary in nature.	20	28
Immigration	Illegal immigration is a far greater domestic terror threat.	4	4
Islam	Islam is a bigger threat than rightwing extremists domestically.	7	9
The left	The left is a bigger threat than rightwing extremism.	10	13
Political ploy	Raising the issue of rightwing extremism is a ploy by the leftwing to divert attention from other issues and maintain power.	23	33