PUBLIC SPHERES OF INFLUENCE AND THE EFFECTS OF THE ALT-RIGHT: A

QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CONSERVATIVE COUNTER SPHERES THROUGH

REPRESENTATIVE MEDIA OUTLETS

by

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Luke Yeates, and they evaluated his presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary understanding of Habermasian public spheres of influence points to a conglomeration of competing counter-spheres all vying for hegemonic control. The interaction of these spheres creates dynamic and shifting landscapes through which individuals and news media outlets maneuver. One of the larger influential groups in the United States is the establishment conservative counter-sphere, but recent political developments have given rise to a new counter-sphere, one that is increasingly racist and violent. The alt-right has grown in its political influence since the 2016 presidential election and its presence is likely having an effect on larger, more established groupings as it vies for control with surrounding groups. Understanding how these spheres affect each other helps map the spread of ideas and power through intergroup information sharing. Often, this information is disseminated through media outlets, so in order to best map this exchange, proxies for these two spheres were selected. Fox News functions as a representative for the establishment counter-sphere, and Breitbart represents the alt-right. By framing their interactions via intermedia agenda setting theory and comparing the results using ethnographic content analysis, unique frames and values were uncovered. Both outlets frame articles around liberal bias, presidential success, and dangerous others, which keys in an overarching value of in-group preservation. This study concludes by connecting these findings to historical American conservative media outlets, as well as contextualizing the results within each respective counter-sphere.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It was the month leading up to the 2018 midterms and Republicans had whipped up a frenzy. At least once a day, President Trump would tweet about the imminent danger of an approaching caravan of "bad thugs and gang members" (@realdonaldtrump, 2018). This caravan, at least according to him and his supporters, was full of undesirable people of unidentifiable origin, some of which could be terrorists. In a major political maneuver, Trump ordered troops to the southern border, troops that he claimed would protect America from the incoming onslaught. Trump was clearly leveraging the incoming group as a focal point for the election; they were walking talking reasons why Republicans needed to maintain control in the House and Senate, and his rallies reflected this same narrative. Mainstream news outlets picked up on the story, chiding the framing of the issue by conservatives while simultaneously boosting the issue Trump had directed the nation toward. Outside of the mainstream, right-leaning news outlets pushed the issue further. Both Fox News and Breitbart claimed that other mainstream news outlets were not giving the issue the attention it deserved and fear-mongering about the potential danger an "onslaught of illegal aliens" could unleash on the United States (Darrah, 2018a). Breitbart even added "Caravan" to their rotating topics on the top of their home page.

Several months later, in March of 2019, Robert Mueller was concluding his two-year investigation. The nation's political apparatus waited anxiously in anticipation of the report's findings, particularly on the issue of presidential collusion and Russian interference. Media outlets in the United States were discussing the issue constantly, and

each new development garnered new coverage. The days leading up to the release, after the report had been handed over to Attorney General William Barr but before he released a redacted copy, outlets like Fox devoted time to discussing not just the report, but the way in which the report was being covered by separate, more liberal, outlets. Articles ran about MSNBC and their reporting (Dorman, 2019), or about how the report, regardless of its contents, would never be enough for Democrats to put the issue to bed (Pergram, 2019). Breitbart even devoted articles solely to discussing tweets by Hollywood actors and directors (Huston, 2019; Caplan, 2019).

Both of these events exemplify the methods of conservative outlets within political spheres of discussion. Regardless of the news story itself, news outlets tend to frame issues in a way that connects to the viewpoints of its readership, and by doing so reinforce their own values and ideals. Participatory governments and the democratic theories that inform them have rooted their understandings in the idea that informed citizens are crucial to the process, yet the competing values that inform the framing of each issue become almost as combative as the attempts to solve each emergent issue. Outlets like Fox News have helped drive a conservative ideology for years (Jones, 2012), but they are not the only conservative outlet. Breitbart, an outlet founded in 2007, is newer to the political landscape but is growing in its influence. What marks Breitbart separate from other conservative outlets though, is its overt affiliation with the alt-right, an aggressive group of far-right individuals with hyper-conservative viewpoints and a penchant for violence. Members of the alt-right, or of far right viewpoints in general, are allegedly responsible for the stabbing of two people on a Portland train (Wilson, 2017), shooting nine churchgoers in Charleston, S.C. (Zapotosky, 2017), slamming a car into a protest killing one (Wilson, 2017a), and

murdering eleven people inside a synagogue (Pengelly, M, 2018). Far right conservatives have been credibly accused of bombing abortion clinics (Stack, 2015), mailing bombs to media outlets and former presidents (Kennedy, 2018), and shooting up pizza parlors (Hauck, 2017). This kind of violence doesn't erupt from nowhere; it is fed in online communities and media outlets. All of these attacks were committed by self-described members of far-right groups on a part of the state or population that they deemed bad, and studying how the alt-right worldview is permeating the larger conservative political landscape is particularly important.

Both Fox and Breitbart are quite influential in their respective political spheres of discussion. And while both of them hold a conservative worldview, it would be unfair to say that their worldview is of the same flavor of conservatism. Fox performs an ideology in its writing and reporting (Jones, 2012), and Breitbart does as well, but it is not the same ideology. Each of these outlets direct their reporting within separate spheres of discussion. Fraser (1990), in their critique of Habermas's introduction of the bourgeois public sphere, would point to counter-spheres as the defining line between these different types of reporting. Counter-spheres, or places created by individuals who do not see their values or needs represented within the larger discussion, is a handy theoretical construct to orient a study toward outlets like this. Original theories posited that one large, bourgeois sphere existed in which individuals discussed political and social issues, but more contemporary thinking presents the idea that instead of one, the public sphere is a conglomeration of separate, competing spheres, all vying for control and power. Spheres will often build their own methods of communication, and the larger spheres will have news outlets that reinforce their ideals. Fox, as an outlet of more mainstream conservative views, can be

compared to a place like Breitbart, one that self describes as an outlet of the alt-right, since each outlet would exist within each of those spheres of influence. Further, if each outlet is studied as a representation of their respective counter-sphere, their intermedia interactions can be mapped to help elucidate how these two hegemonic groups create and leverage power, which can lead to broader connections between each sphere of influence.

There are a few steps that need to be taken to craft a study like this. First, the scope of the study needs to be oriented around specific moments in the contemporary political landscape. Doing so limits the types of articles being written to being about specific moments, which provides a similar topic for any potential articles. For this study, articles were selected around two timely political issues, both the migrant caravan specifically during the 2018 midterm elections, and the release of the redacted Mueller report to the American public. These two issues were selected because of their political importance to conservatives regardless of their political sphere of discussion, and because the issues were of a large enough scope to warrant multiple articles written about them. Also, each topic has a specific bright line in its saliency. The discussion of the migrant caravan shifted after the midterm elections, and the Mueller report had a specific release date. This provides a turning moment, out of which changes in writing style can be examined both within each outlet as well as across both outlets. After selecting each moment, a set number of articles needs to be equitably selected. 16 total articles were studied, 8 from each outlet and from each political event. After each article was found, they were analyzed via ethnographic content analysis, a methodology that allows for the contextualization of issues while maintaining a wholistic approach to a study (Altheide, 1996), as opposed to limiting analysis to quantitative findings like frequency or consistency. Articles were examined for

specific things, namely how they allocate their sources, how they frame each issue, and what key values extend through the writing. After this information is gathered, it can be compared across Fox and Breitbart, selected as proxies for their respective counter spheres, to draw key conclusions about how these spheres may be effecting each-other.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Spheres, Digital Communities, and Neoliberalism

News outlets do not exist in a vacuum, their circulation is a part of a larger conversation held by a larger public, or rather sections of the larger public. One of the cornerstones of research into political discussion amongst citizens is Habermas and his analysis of the public sphere (Duelund, 2010). At its core, the sphere is a medium, a place that can "generate social participation" and then translate that participation into social leverage over state level politics (Duelund, 2010, p. 27). The theory is extrapolated from the historical collapse of the traditional ruling powers, powers like kings and religious figureheads. As the power of the aristocracy either waned or physically moved itself from locations of political power, a secondary set of individuals began forming to discuss issues of public importance. Dubbed the bourgeois public sphere, it was a grouping of "private persons", persons who did not hold state positions and "did not rule" in an official capacity (Habermas, 1991, p. 27). Duelund (2010) argues that a public unhindered from formal power allowed the public sphere to "reason unhampered by outside influence and hierarchical governance", creating a new "medium of opinion" (p. 27). The forums for reasoning became based not in legislative or royal halls, but in French salons and English coffee shops, places where those of a certain station in life could congregate and discuss the news of the day away from those who might leverage opinions to manipulate the speaker.

Contemporary reflections of this sphere still exist. The coffee shop saw its power wane as other locales took its place, eventually leading to digital mediums, and it is here that the sphere finds most of its current interactions. The original users of the internet saw its purpose very similarly to those of the bourgeois societies of the past, including the way in which users evaluated its perceived abilities. Castells (2000) notes the potential level of impact that this new sphere contains, equating it to "at least as major an historical event as was the eighteenth-century industrial revolution" (p. 29). Its usefulness was based in its ability to express thought freely, away from the constraints of government suppression paired with the newly unique benefits of freedom from synchronicity and location. The historical foundations of the internet and the culture it would soon produce bear some importance for this world view. Initial users and creators came from the United States, and many from the cultural core of Northern California, which had a loose libertarian value set that informed their use of digital technologies (Castells, 2000). It should not be surprising, considering the cultural orientation of the earliest digital adopters, that the value systems implemented from the very beginning were based in individual freedoms of expression and discussion.

Slowly though, the haven of the internet gave way as the perception of its purpose shifted. As the diverse platforms of the internet shrank or closed in the face of a more socially motivated web, large corporations either moved in or grew out of this quickly homogenizing space. The corporate perspective of its user base was not based in the original, idea-sharing paradigm of its users, but rather as a commodifiable group of potential revenue streams. Advertising ramped up and suddenly these digital salons and coffee shops were bombarded with advertisements while competitive websites closed or

were bought out by larger ones. McChesney (2000) attributes this phenomenon to the failings of capitalism and the illusion of the free market, stating that "a small handful of firms, ranging from two or three to as many as a dozen or so, thoroughly dominate the market's output and maintain barriers to entry that effectively keep new market entrants at bay" (p. 138). Facebook out-competes Myspace, and then grows large enough to buy competitors like Instagram and WhatsApp. Microsoft grows large enough to buy Skype and LinkedIn to keep the marketplace down to just itself and Apple. This cycle runs as companies increase advertising and monetization of their users, undermining the functionality of the political sphere.

Political shifts and media conglomerates do not occur in a bubble. Large scale social and economic change is a consistent and repetitive cycle, and when these systems move, so too do the ancillary markets and interconnected institutions within the system. Often, the byline of global economic growth is the touting of its successes. Corporate entities point to increased trade, growth of GDP, and the rapid access of technology and consumer goods. Dreiling and Darves (2016) note the rapid globalization of manufacturing and trade liberalization that allow for individuals to be able to "enjoy ordering a Big Mac in Kenya" (p. 1-2). On the surface, this kind of thinking seems to be benign interconnection, but the undercurrent to a system that can provide these things is the limited ability of other systems to check back rampant overgrowth. In short, there has been a large-scale historical shift in economic policy that has created an environment in which government entities and the people that form them are quickly losing their ability to curb this corporate drive.

The somewhat nebulous yet still applicable term that encompasses this issue is neoliberalism. Harvey (2005) provides a rather succinct definition of the term in claiming

it as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). The key elements and most impactful parts of that definition come at the end, specifically the focus on private property, free markets, and free trade. Neoliberal economic policies have made large scale strides to roll back government and social regulations and restrictions to create more laissez-faire economic environments through which large private organizations can generate profit. These rollbacks are often done in the name of free trade and open markets, under which, these entities argue, capital thrives.

One of the interesting developments in the study of the effects of neoliberalism comes from Dreiling and Darves (2016) in their analysis of the relationship between large corporations and the state. The common juxtaposed question asked by a litany of research is a "question of whether or not moments of organized corporate unity reflect modes of class formation and cohesion or indicate a coincidence of otherwise competing economic interests manifest as political pressure groups" (p. 36). This is to ask simply, whether or not, at moments of major private economic growth, if this is the result of happenstance or because of the power of the elite corporate class. News outlets, like Fox, exist as elements of this corporate class, and as places like Breitbart grow in popularity and influence its presence will have a part to play in this neoliberalizing effect as well. The roundabout truth is that as the corporate class recognized the power in collective action to change state-sanctioned regulations, this class began thinking about business as less of a singular goal of a singular company, and more as the interconnected goals of companies that could all be free from regulation. All boats rise with the tide, so to speak. Banks did it first. The

Congressional Pujo Committee was created in 1912 to uncover how "large trusts undermined competition" (Dreiling, 2016, p. 41). And perhaps for a bit there were strong protectorate regulations designed to keep firms competing, but this kind of thinking would be systematically undone as the century progressed and the millennium approached, and outlets like Fox helped justify and rationalize this undoing. Economic deregulation is, after all, one of the tenets of traditional conservatism (Hawley, 2017).

Thus far the public sphere has grown outside of physical spaces and into a digital one, and that digital sphere is being quashed by large firms attempting to leverage that sphere for capital gain. But another factor presses the digital public sphere too, specifically that this sphere was repressive in its conception and did not account for the discussions of those who exist outside of the bourgeois. It should be noted that Frasier (1990) endorses the sphere itself as an "indispensable resource" (p. 56). But the endorsement of the concept does not mean that the concept itself fully encapsulates the ways in which publics communicate, especially when that public is not a member of the ruling, or bourgeois class. Women, the impoverished, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, people of color, and all intersections of these would have found themselves maligned and rejected from the dominant social sphere, and thus would have had to create their own. Frasier (1990) calls this the counter-public, a "parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses" (p. 67). One of the most successful examples of a counter-public comes from late 20th century feminist circles. Frasier (1990) notes the "array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences and conventions" as a robust and well-established public sphere that nevertheless operates

outside of the standardized bourgeois circles (p. 67). When a counter-narrative like this begins and then starts to compete with the dominant narrative, a shift in the power structures of the dominant and the counter-sphere begin to form, and the discursive elements become hegemonic in their relationships. Rule of the masses becomes rooted not in submission to a repressive regime or ruling force, but on "consent supplemented with some measure of repression", it, like older models of dominant political structures, "secures the ability of one stratum of society to rule the rest" (p. 62). The sphere, through control of content and dissent, creates a worldview that promotes the issues closest to the members of it, and maligns the issues brought forth by others. The public sphere then, is not one large social interactive medium, but instead a conglomeration of competing public spheres all vying for promotion of different issues within the dominant sphere. This points to not just a conservative public sphere, but multiple conservative counter-spheres all talking to and influencing each other . It is also important to highlight that not all public spheres operate with virtuous intent. Frasier (1990) points out that some of them are "explicitly anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian" (p. 67). Further, many of these are not "above practicing their own modes of informal exclusion and marginalization" (p. 67).

Historical Conservatism

A historical example of an outlet operating in a conservative counter-sphere could be seen in the John Birch Society, or JBS. Born from the aftermath of the McCarthy era anticommunist furor, the JBS could be summated as the moment a "critical mass of conservatives" reached a point of cohesion, enough to reorient disparate positions into a large scale and powerful political group (Hart, 2008, p. 127). Deeply connected to the work done by outlets like *National Review*, the JBS capitalized on the conservative writing of

the day, writings from places like *National Review*, to pull articulated ideas about American society, liberalism, and, quite frequently, communism.

The JBS was founded by Robert Welch in 1958, a "retired candy manufacturer" and "vice-president of the National Association of Manufacturers", a noted anti-union group (Hart, 2008, pp. 127-128). Conspiratorial in nature, the group began its work by sowing the idea that the American government and its society at large had been infiltrated by communists, and that the liberal policies of the New Deal were direct evidence of this fact (p. 128). Sounding very similar to the development of counter-spheres outlined by Frasier's study of 20th century feminist circles (1990), the JBS disseminated its conservative ideas by "supporting right-wing books, magazines, and radio broadcasts, by establishing conservative reading rooms, and by operating a nationwide conservative speakers bureau" (p. 128). JBS leveraged these mediums to push out a select set of frames though which one could view the political world of the day. These frames were less about analysis of fact and more about how to view said facts within a specific political view. Welch would often publish his own work, including what he called a scoreboard, which "presented a level of communist infiltration in each of the world's nations" (130).

One of the true appeals to the JBS was that it was "one of the only opportunities to practice conservatism" (p. 134). At its height, JBS membership exceeded 75,000 individuals (p. 139). It was a collective identity, a method of social cohesion that provided a sense of belonging while simultaneously creating an enemy on which one could orient their ire. Birchers felt like a part of a community, and through the power of that community it was able to propel thought that helped usher in the broader rollbacks of liberal society that had become accepted at the state level. Oddly enough, many members did not fully

embrace the idea that leftist thought or communist agitators were as large a concern as the group leadership painted it to be. It seems like one of the primary pulls to this group was the sense of belonging, as well as the ability to simply "do something" (p. 137).

The JBS represents a part of the conservative counter-sphere, but, like Fox or Breitbart, specific news outlets can function as proxies, representations of the sphere by which that sphere can be examined. The JBS worked in tandem with and along the same general line of thought as a specific outlet, *National Review*. Lane (2019) writes that beginning in the mid-1950s the *National Review*, a journalistic outlet written primarily with conservative viewpoints, "cultivated doubts about the fairness of mainstream media" (in-press). The primary focus of the outlet became not on framing individual issues in a conservative light, but on interrogating the standard practices of mainstream news outlets and accusing them of being nothing more than "propagandists for a liberal power structure" (in-press). Sivek (2008) notes in their study of the effect of the magazine on conservative groups that the *National Review* helped bring together disparate sections of 1950s and 60s conservative thought under one news outlet, and in so doing helped bridge the groups together to form a more streamlined movement. The magazine discussed notions like liberalism being "on par with communism for its disrespect for tradition and religion", a key paradigm that would inform later conservative counter-spheres (p. 258). It also upheld ideas like traditionalism, the moral righteousness of Christianity, and some of the tenets of libertarianism (Sivek, 2008). All of this adds up to a cross section of a conservative political sphere. One that, through the *National Review*, a continuous thread of conservative thought could be funneled through different cultural apparatuses like the JBS, which could ultimately help build a cohesive and functioning political counter-sphere. Out of this work

conservatives built "a network of people devoted to achieving a broad rollback of liberalism" (Phillips-Fein 2011). This rollback would be garnered by framing "liberalism as the enemy of all conservatives", claiming that news outlets "worked together" in their framing of the news, and that "the media belonged to a smug, elite liberal Establishment" (Lane, 2019, in-press). It should be noted that this mindset is not based in belief, but in opposition. Conservative outlets built their world view not on a cohesive and comprehensive set of values and goals, but on countering conventional thought. As these counters grew, a "conservative counter-sphere began to form (Major, 2013, 459).

This historical framing helps orient the specific media outlets chosen in this study. Sivek (2008) analyzed a specific media outlet to study how its framing helped organize political movements. That a counter-sphere was established in recent American history helps contextualize contemporary conservative groups. Like the *National Review*, a prominent example of a modern conservative counter-sphere is Fox News. Founded by Rupert Murdoch with Roger Ailes appointed as permanent CEO in 1996, Fox News substantiated what Ailes had been trying to establish in the American media system for some time, to implement partisan ideological segments that would attract conservative viewers (Jones, 2012). Fox performs an ideology, their broadcasters, writers, and pundits carry a similar viewpoint, and in so doing Fox has successfully blended the normally separated aspects of legitimate news and partisan talking points (pp. 179-180). Fox News is "consistently and across all of its programs, offering a conservative ideological voice and doing so under the heading of 'news'" (p. 179), and it does so by providing a "consistent set of narratives that threaten or embolden core values and beliefs" (p. 182). Fox may not have as lengthy of a history as the *National Review* when it comes to

participation in a conservative counter-sphere, but its presence does essentially the same thing. Consumers of Fox News, like the *National Review*, can "ritually participate" in the sphere via consumption of the outlet (p. 183). If consumption and ideology align, then Fox News can effectively function as a proxy for the conservative counter-public. Its rites and rituals overlap, its ideological representation align historically with outlets like the *National Review*, and its connection to a larger public becomes similar to that of the JBS.

The Alt-Right as a Counter-Sphere

A more contemporary example of a counter-sphere with negative modes of discussion is the alt-right, a group of aggressively anti-democratic individuals with ideals rooted in racism and misogyny (Hawley, 2017, pp. 25-26), all built around re-establishing a semblance of white male rule with a focus on white male issues. Before delving into what makes the alt-right such a focal piece of contemporary political discourse, their belief systems and actions need to be substantiated. Separated from any context, the alt-right might feel like a sudden emergence to the American political sphere, but to those inside the conservative media bubble their presence is simply a manifestation of a worldview, a worldview that has been carefully constructed over the course of decades.

The alt-right "is not just a racist version of mainstream, *National Review*-style conservatism" (Hawley, 2017, p. 17). The strongholds of alt-right thinking carry no tenants of traditional conservative thinking, they make no reference to "the so-called three-legged stool of moral traditionalism, economic liberty, and strong national defense" (Hawley, p. 17). The alt-right rarely discusses the issue of economics, foreign policy is not a talking point, and taxes are not addressed (p. 34-35). The alt-right is racist; in fact, that could be said to be the fundamental concern of the group (p. 25). But being racist is not enough to

set the group apart from other racially motivated organizations like the KKK. Instead, the alt-right might be most easily defined by how the group comes to believe what it believes. Richard Spencer, an alt-right representative and speaker, references the creation of "white ethnostates", places where only white people would be allowed (p. 31). The form of racism that the group creates is not always, or at least not only, rooted in white superiority, it seems that the crux of their beliefs are derived from embracing the notion that races are incapable of cohabitation. The alt-right is also anti-feminist. This group was instrumental in bringing gamer-gate, a flashpoint in the gaming community, to broader media attention. Again, it is not enough to say that the group holds positions that reduce the role of women in the world, the same critique could be leveled at religious fundamentalists. The alt-right bases their view of gender in what they call "sex realism", that the biological differences between men and women naturally lead to reduced roles for women, and that patriarchy as a system works (Hawley, 2017, p. 33-34). If any one notion could summate the alt-right, it would be that identity politics is the cornerstone of their focus.

By its combative nature and online location, the alt-right can be a tricky thing to study at an academic level. The group is particularly hostile towards academia as well as out-group individuals, and practices constant rebranding to stay ahead of any documentation. The moment a formal article is written about the group's methods, the group changes its methods. As an example, the Pepe the Frog meme, made famous by Richard Spencer, used to be a focal point and meme of the culture (Oppenheim, 2017). But the minute the symbol was discussed at a mainstream level the icon was dropped and newer symbols were created. This is not documented per se, rather it is noted by its absence. The frog no longer has major political play and has dropped from mainstream political

discussion. This makes both journalistic and academic documentation a poor locale for examination. Alternatively, outlets with quicker publication turnaround times seem to function better at tracking the group's activities. Medium is a popular blogging outlet, and several credible people have utilized it to share findings about this group. Emily Pothast, an author for several magazines, published an article on Medium about the alt-right. Pothast (2017) writes about the alt-right and their creation, Kekistan, an in-group term used by members who claim to participate in insincere bigotry for the humorous reactions is garners from others. An example of this humor would be the flag of Kekistan, a flag with a shocking level of similarity to the Nazi War ensign used during World War II (See Figure 1). Instead of a red background with swastikas, the Kekistan flag has a green background and the 4Chan logo.

Currently, Kekistan has been replaced with 'frens', a term used to mask the hostile nature of the group's rhetoric underneath the guise of friendliness and innocent misspelled cute-speak. Members of the group are referred to as 'frens', those perceived as enemies would be 'clowns', and liberal ideas about the world would be the 'clown world'. This makes the sentence "we should attack the liberals" into "frens should bop the clowns". Again, this is not documented at an academic level. The last prominent location for this particular brand of alt-right culture was on the subreddit /r/frenworld. That subreddit was quarantined and since deleted, but the culture did not disappear. Often, users would use the distorted image of a 'fren", a simple green caricature used on message boards (See Figure 3). To see the group in action look to the Idaho Statesman Article written about the newly selected President of Boise State University, Dr. Marlene Tromp, and the image someone from the community created (Foy, 2019). The article shows postcards mailed to lawmakers

with Dr. Tromp done up as a clown, in front of what appear to be other members of the school's administration (See Figure 2). The group will frequently change its entire brand as well. DEO (2017) has catalogued a list of current and former terms the modern alt-right has used in the past, and many, at least in part, still hold sway with modern thinking. Names like "traditionalist, nationalist, ethno-nationalist, demographic nationalist, human biodiversity advocate, demographic preservationist, western chauvinist, neoreactionary, nativist, isolationist, America first, anti-multicultural, anti-globalist, antimiscegenation". Any and all of these could be seen as predecessors if not direct forefathers to the modern alt-right. And likely, by the time this writing finds its way to a shelf, the alt-right will have rebranded again and 'frens' will have been replaced with some new meme.
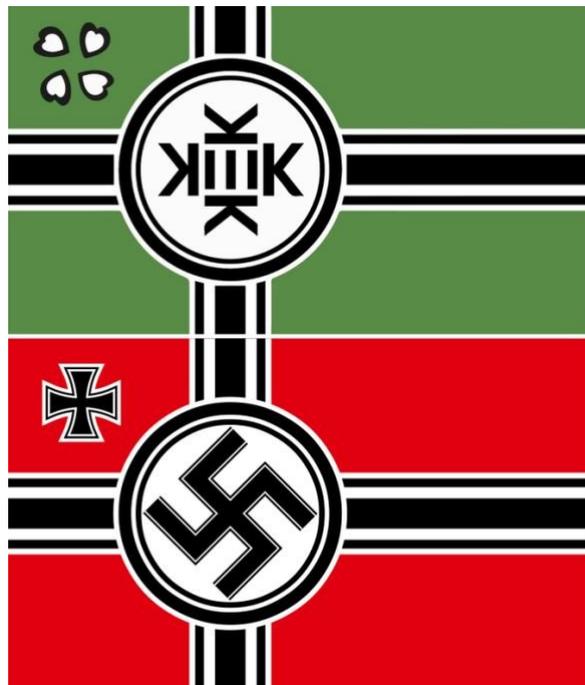
Figure 1.   Kekistan Flag above the Nazi War Insignia (DEO, 2017).
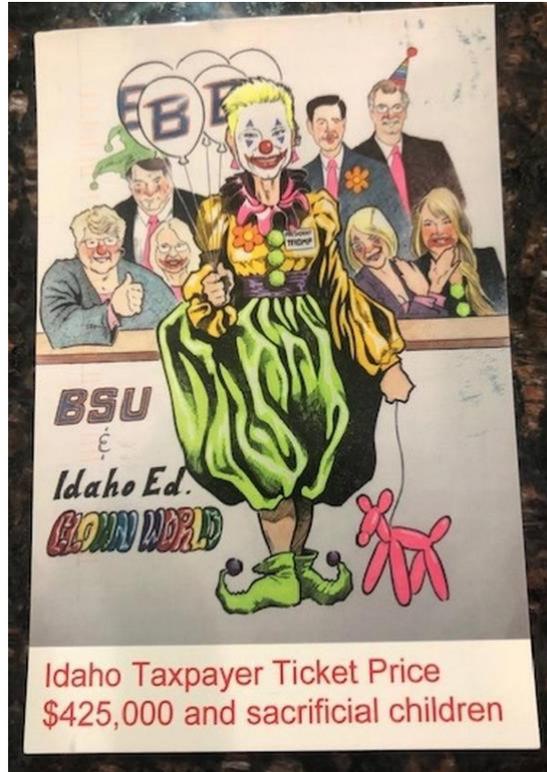
Figure 2.   Boise State University president drawn in clown makeup (Foy, 2019).

Figure 3.   A 'fren'.

The humor from the group is the first step in red-pilling, a term clarified by DEO (2017), another Medium author, as the process of converting "normies" or those not currently members of the group but potentially susceptible to their ideas, into full members

of the organization. The process works by first, targeting "insecure, lonely, and bitter young men" (2017). Once the target is found, the individual is told that their insecurities and loneliness are not due to any personal shortcomings, but rather these are due to outside influences. Groups like liberals, feminists, and women have created a world where their gender and race are spat upon and should be the focal point of their internalized pain (DEO, 2017). Once this new worldview starts to become accepted, the individual is given answers to these supposed harms, solutions that only the group can provide. After that, the group works to pull the individual into the larger political conversation by "mainstreaming the more extreme versions of white nationalism and overt racism by making them appear more friendly and just about 'free speech'" (Pothast, 2017). DEO has also documented many of the talking points and literature utilized by the alt-right in both their conversations and their recruitment. The most apt term to summate it would be 'race realism', or the pseudoscientific notions that there are biological differences between the races that reinforce the idea that white races are superior to others, or that male hormones create more logical humans than females. This pseudoscience is "passed off as absolute fact", and the extent of it is large (DEO, 2017). Long debunked ideas like the IQ, or the Bell Curve are common points of conversation. Poorly sourced infographics that discuss crime rates by race are circulated frequently, and new users are often directed to consume this material before any further conversation is to be had (DEO, 2017).

An anonymous mother wrote an article for the *Washingtonian* about her son's yearlong decent into the alt-right, substantiating DEO's description of the group's tactics as not only accurate, but quite effective. Anonymous (2019) describes her son turning inward after he was transferred to a different school. The son transferred schools because

a bully falsely accused him of assault, but at his new school, instead of making friends, he turned online. There, he was redpilled into joining the Men's Rights Activists, a group with a shocking amount of overlap with the alt-right. His language changed, his insults shifted to words often used by the alt-right: "normie", "cuck", or "SJW" (Anonymous, 2019). All of this is to say that the group knows its views will not be accepted by the rest of society, and that their true message needs to be masked first before it can be introduced and used to indoctrinate. Once in, a member becomes exposed to the culture at large, a culture that clearly holds some of the tenets of larger conservative counter-spheres, yet entirely separate in other ways. In short, the alt-right is its own counter-sphere, playing in the same political landscape as spheres like Fox News.

Similar to the way the conservative counter-sphere of the 50s and 60s had the *National Review* and how the contemporary conservative counter-sphere has Fox News, the alt-right has its own news outlet, Breitbart, which can function as a proxy for this study. The alt-right gained a lot of notoriety running up to the 2016 presidential election, and as the group coalesced into a movement, so followed media outlets sympathetic to their cause. Steve Bannon, the former Chief Strategist for the Trump White House, helped direct Breitbart before the election. Breitbart, at least according to its founder, is the "platform of the alt-right" (Hawley, 2017, p. 200). The outlet focuses on sensationalism when discussing things like liberals, praises anti-government populism, and engages in aggressive denials of any racism, sexism, or homophobia within the group (Lyons, 2017). Bannon's own writing on the site was often veiled in anti-Semitism, if not explicit. Milo Yiannopoulos, another Breitbart contributor who was fired from the outlet in 2017 after a video emerged of him advocating for sex with minors (Cummings, 2017), was titled as the technology

editor. His articles focused heavily on liberal bias in universities as well as perceived bigotry in the LGBTQUIA+ community. His scope was less international than that of Bannon's, but his writing style and choice of topics helped continue the frame of the outlet, one that supported alt-right ideologies and helped legitimize their worldview.

Richard Spencer, a sometimes writer for the outlet, calls it "alt-lite", a pejorative for a form of alt-right writing that is palatable to other mainline conservatives (Lyons, 2017). Refer back to the alt-right tactic of redpilling. In order for the more controversial thoughts of the group can be accepted, the outsider must first be primed by more palatable notions. It is here that Breitbart finds its area of influence with the group. It works not just as a byline for the group, but also helps indoctrinate potential new members. No other conservative news outlet does this for the alt-right, including other online-only sources like The Blaze or Infowars. Further, the more famous alt-right hangouts like 4chan or 8chan are not news outlets, they are forums, temporary ones. Neither of these places function as journalistic outlets, nor do they maintain archives. Posts are removed after a set amount of time to make way for new discussion threads, and old conversations become lost. Trump has a rather favorable disposition to the outlet as well, if his cabinet selections and tweet history are taken into context. The Trump Twitter Archive, an online database that has catalogued all of the president's tweets, shows that he has referenced or retweeted Breitbart 111 times (n.d.). Also, as previously mentioned, the president selected Steve Bannon, the former executive chair of Breitbart, as the Chief Executive Officer of his campaign and then as the president's Chief Strategist. Ultimately, this makes Breitbart not just the best selection for studying media outlets of the alt-right, but the only one with enough political capital to qualify for a study of their workings.

Outlet Overlap and Agenda Setting

Fox News and Breitbart both operate within distinct yet interacting counter-spheres. Each outlet focuses its attention on building frames around their identified audience, and their articles reflect this. But this does not mean that these two outlets do not interact. Fox and Breitbart operate at a level in which their constituents likely overlap in some form or function, and it would be important to discuss how their agendas interact.

Agenda setting as a theory has been driven primarily by McCombs, who brought the idea forward after a 1964 study of perceived issues of importance for voters in a presidential election revealed a correlation with the same issues of importance highlighted by news outlets consumed by the voters (McCombs, 2014). Since then a wealth of studies have been conducted to substantiate this theory, and as it stands there is a clear relationship between what media outlets report on and what individuals focus their attention on. To summarize, agenda setting theory posits that public awareness of specific issues is created by the discussion of that issue by media outlets (2014). The base assumptions are that the media is not an accurate reflection of reality, that it is framed and shaped by the media to present issues. Further, by focusing on specific subjects, the public is then lead to see those issues as more salient than other issues (2014). There are, of course, relationships between the variables in play here, be it the public, the media outlet, or the state actors making policy changes, but the core takeaway is the ability to shape perception based on discussion.

The original work substantiating agenda setting was conducted back when national media outlets were quite homogenized, and while there were options for individuals to choose from, contemporary media fragmentation has greatly diversified the options

available to news consumers. This has added a new paradigm to agenda setting theory, that of intermedia agenda setting. At its core, the idea is that the previous variables available to influence agendas should be expanded to include media on media effects. McCombs (2014) references the agenda setting power of the New York Times, which is "so institutionalized that the Associated Press alerts its members each day to the agenda of stories scheduled for the next morning's front page of The Times" (p. 399). This means that not only is the Associated Press alerted to the stories of the outlet before it is actually published, but also that this priming orients Associated Press writers to factor in the topic selection of the Times into their workflow. A more real-world example could be seen when the New York Times covered drug usage in 1985, which then saw an influx of smaller outlets discussing the same issue for the next year (p. 400).

Sociologists have called this "diffusion of a news story from an elite news medium to a host of other media" a "dendritic influence" (McCombs, 2014, p. 400). There is an "arterial flow" of news and information between news outlets, and this flow is primarily, although not always, one direction (p. 400). This means that, like a tree, the trunk feeds the branches. Here, the trunk would be the larger news outlets, and the branches would be the smaller or local agencies. McCombs points out that "journalists validate their sense of news by observing the work of their colleagues" (p. 406). It would make sense then, that a writer for a smaller outlet like a state newspaper would validate their worldview, and even their agenda, by reading the work of larger and more famous publications. This would essentially build a worldview into the mind of the former journalist by the latter, creating a very similar effect as the one outlined in the more base model of agenda setting theory. Both Fox News and Breitbart operate in a world where this type of influence exists. That

this effect is present in separate outlets means that likely, this effect is occurring between these outlets as well. Fox has been the driving force behind conservative media for the American public for quite some time, but that does not mean other outlets do not maintain power, both over readership or over each other. There is an intermedia relationship between the two outlets as they exist, and the direction of influence between Fox and Breitbart will expose potential power relations between each hegemonic sphere.

The literature above directs us to an interesting intersection between circles of influence and the hegemonic power those circles attempt to wield. The alt-right and other conservative media outlets function as a unique counter-sphere within the political media ecosystem, and considering that their ideals manifest in media outlets while also influencing each-other is an interesting point of study. So, with that in mind, the following question should be asked:

RQ1: How do partisan conservative media outlets leverage current events to reinforce their political ideologies between political spheres?

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

To best understand the relationship between right wing news outlets and their political spheres of influence, this study examines published articles from two major conservative news outlets. Specifically, this study pulls from Fox News and Breitbart. These two outlets are ideal for this study because of their unique position within conservative counter-publics. Few other news outlets occupy such a central position within their respective political spheres, and how they shape their message uniquely effects members of their spheres, up to and including the president himself. From these two outlets, four different articles were pulled from each organization surrounding two different issues, per issue, that reached national headlines, specifically immigration and the Robert Mueller investigation. A total of 16 news articles were studied. These two topics were chosen because of their particular salience not just within the counter-sphere of the alt-right, but within the larger political sphere of American politics. Each of these topics holds ideological, pragmatic, and representational weight amongst a vast majority of American citizens, making it particularly important to analyze the way in which conservative medias are framing these issues.

Each article was pulled from the archives of their respective websites, and article selection was centered around specific dates of publication. To clarify, two immigration articles were pulled from the days directly before the 2018 midterm election on November 6, 2018, and two more from the days directly after the midterm election. Mueller articles follow a similar suit, two being pulled from the days leading up to the release of the public

report on April 18, 2019, and two from the days immediately following. Articles were selected in the order of appearance if the title of the article directly mentioned one of the two issues listed above or maintained a tag that directly referenced either of the two issues. Once a potential article was pulled from the archive, the article was read in its entirety to ensure that its primary focus was on the issue listed in the title, was not written as an opinion piece, and was not a collaborative article between the relevant outlet and another news organization. Fox News, as an example, both publishes and collaborates with Associated Press, and since these articles would not be the sole work of Fox, they were not selected for examination. Also, any article that was solely a transcript or recap of a television spot was omitted as well. Breitbart does not have a cable outlet, but Fox consistently publishes articles that are either unedited scripts of pundit talking points or video links to their on-air reporters. As this study is focused on political journalism and not punditry, these articles were omitted. If all of these criteria of inclusion were met, then the article was admitted to the study.

An ethnographic content analysis was selected as a method of analysis for its principles of analysis and approach to documentation study (Altheide, 1996, p. 13). This particular methodology embraces a wholistic analysis of its content with a primary focus on context and meaning. This is preferable to quantitative content analysis specifically because of the limits of positivist quantitative studies. ECA circumvents the "assumptions about objectivity" built in to quantitative studies, while also allowing the researcher to extend findings beyond "frequency and extent" (p. 15). Its purpose is an establishment of clarity of meaning within a contextualized frame (p. 12). Framing, as a term within media analysis can mean a myriad of things, so as to clarify the usage of the term here, this study

uses the term as "broad thematic emphases" (p. 30). Consider an article about drug use, as an example. The author may choose to frame it as "a public health issue" or a "criminal justice issue", and by selecting either of these the nature of the article changes (p. 30). In this study, articles were examined based on the way in which they framed the political issues selected for the study, either the Mueller investigation or the migrant caravan, respectively.

The process of this analysis begins with identifying a unit of analysis. In this study, each article functions as that unit. The next step is to construct protocols derived from categories that emerge to help guide the process of data collection and analysis. The protocol and process may also generate new categories which can then be folded into the study. Initial protocols are built around the recurrence of a frame around each article, as well as the usage of sources in the protocol. Additionally, protocols will focus on underlying political and social values and how those values manifest in each article, an event summarized as value manifestation. These protocols will develop and accompany new protocols as the study progresses.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Dominant Frames

The most dominant frames found in this study cover three primary themes, that of liberal bias, presidential success, and dangerous others.

The issue of liberal bias formed the backbone to articles written by both Fox and Breitbart. As a point of clarity, the frame liberal bias is not operating in the same manner as the term used in the literature review. While the supporting literature speaks of liberal bias as a focal issue by which conservatives could leverage political change, here the term works much more broadly. Majors (2012) states that the way liberal bias was viewed by conservatives would shift, and it is here that this frame finds its roots. In short, liberal bias would manifest itself as a frame in various ways, but most often it was seen in the topic choice of the article, word choice of the author, and support for conservative policy without acknowledgement for counter-positions. Both Fox News and Breitbart would engage in this type of authorship. Fox articles tended to be more indirect in its presentation of this frame, while Breitbart would be more overt. Fox focused on liberal bias in three of its four articles about the Mueller investigation (See Table 1).

Table 1 **Liberal Bias in Mueller Articles.**

	Mueller Pre Date 1	Mueller Pre Date 2	Mueller Post Date 1	Mueller Post Date 2
Fox News	X		X	X
Breitbart	X	X		

Note. Pre date refers to the articles publication date as before the release of the Mueller Report. Post Date refers to the article publication date as after the release of the Mueller Report.

'Media outlets pan AG Barr before release of redacted Mueller report' (Dorman, 2019), is an article best summated as a list of other news agencies who may have issue with the Attorney General either redacting sections of the report or attempting to frame the report in a certain light before the public has had a chance to read it. The article quotes MSNBC host Nicole Wallace as saying "It's almost impossible now to not see [Barr] as a political actor, given where we are headed, given the flimsiness of the explanations, given the lengths to which he seems to be going to protect the president". The author also writes NBC anchor Chuck Todd as accusatory about the issue, stating "Chuck Todd flat-out accused the administration of engaging in "actual collusion" after a report revealed that Justice Department officials had briefed the White House on the report's conclusions" (Dorman, 2019). 'Why the Mueller report could turn into a never-ending story on the Hill' (Pergram, 2019) is an article similar in nature if not indirect in tone. It begins by comparing the length of the Mueller report to famous books with similar word counts, then expanding on the Democrat's approach to the report as something not worth pursuing, even though congressional Democrats might choose to do so. The article opens with a perceptible

sarcastic tone, and it becomes harder to shake as the piece develops. Even when the writing pivots into providing analysis of the Mueller report, the final lines imply that this arguing will continue, and it will be exasperating, by saying "after all, this seems to be a never ending story" (Pergram, 2019). 'Trump declares victory as Mueller report drops: 'No collusion, no obstruction'' (Shaw, 2019) is a quotation heavy piece, pulling from conservative pundits and members of President Trump's legal and executive team, most of which focus on the vindication of the president from the accusations of collusion. The article contains four quotes from the president, one from the president's legal team, one from the Mueller report, and one from Rudy Giuliani. No counter-position is provided. At their core, each of these articles is explicit in its fundamental thrust; this political issue and its developments are all scaffolded onto the framework that liberal bias is a big enough concern in the Mueller investigation to warrant reporting.

Breitbart wrote about the same issue in two of its four publications about the Mueller Report in 'Rob Reiner: Trump will Use Mueller Report to 'Drive Stake Through the Heart of Democracy' (Caplan, 2019), and 'Michael Rappaport Demands Full Mueller Report from 'Dick Stain' Trump' (Huston, 2019) (See Table 1). The first article is a critique of two tweets from actor and director Rob Reiner, and the second is a critique of tweets made by actor and comedian Michael Rappaport. It should be noted that both articles chose pictures of the actors in unflattering poses, and the final line of the Huston article finishes with "It appears that actor Rappaport is one of those extreme leftists who is trying to set up doubt about the report before it is even released" (Huston, 2019). Breitbart's preference for reporting on celebrity reactions to the redaction of portions of the document is comparatively overt to Fox, with both articles focusing entirely on the reaction of others

instead of the political or social ramifications of said report. Further, word choice like "extreme leftist" is a contextually loaded phrase that implies an invalid position is held by those on the left.

Articles on the migrant caravan focused less on this frame in total, yet the issue still appears in one Fox article and two Breitbart articles (See Table 2).

Table 2. **Liberal Bias in Migrant Caravan Articles.**

	Migrant Caravan Pre Date 1	Migrant Caravan Pre Date 2	Migrant Caravan Post Date 1	Migrant Caravan Post Date 2
Fox News			X	
Breitbart	X			X

Note. Pre date refers to the articles publication date as before the midterm election.

Post Date refers to the article publication date as after the midterm election.

Notably, liberal bias was found as a dominant frame in articles written before the actual midterm election. Both Fox and Breitbart framed articles around liberal bias leading up to the 2018 midterm election, while Breitbart was the only outlet to discuss liberal bias after the 2018 midterm election, specifically in 'Dem Rep.-elect Escobar: El Paso Is the 'New Ellis Island'' (Baker, 2018). Baker does very little writing or analysis in this piece. Instead, the author references Representative Veronica Escobar's comments on an MSNBC talk show wherein she compared her community to Ellis Island. There are broader implications that could be inferred from a right wing outlet choosing to publish this, but without that context its mostly a recap of a television segment. Breitbart was also more partisan in its choice of words. 'Watch–Dave Brat Calls Out Democrat Abigail Spanberger for Defending MS-13' (Binder 2018) accuses Abigail Spanberger of taking "millions" from George Soros, a favorite target of conservatives as well as conspiracy theorists. Binder claims that

Spanberger "previously taught at an Islamic school which became notorious for breeding convicted and suspected terrorists after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks" (2018). Finally, the article incorrectly accuses Spanberger of supporting the gang MS-13. Spanberger called President Trump's statement that border migrants included members of the gang "bigotry", which is more of a rebuke of the statement and less of an endorsement of gang activity, yet the accusation from the outlet remained published.

Presidential success, specifically that of President Trump, emerged as the secondary frame amongst the selected articles.

Table 3.   Presidential Success in Mueller Articles

	Mueller Pre Date 1	Mueller Pre Date 2	Mueller Post Date 1	Mueller Post Date 2
Fox News	X			X
Breitbart			X	X

Note. Pre date refers to the articles publication date as before the release of the Mueller Report. Post Date refers to the article publication date as after the release of the Mueller Report.

Fox discussed presidential success in two articles about the Mueller Investigation, one published before the report was released, in 'Fox News Poll: Approval of President Trump steady since Mueller probe ended' (Blanton, 2019), the other after the release, in 'Trump declares victory as Mueller report drops: 'No collusion, no obstruction''(Shaw 2019). The first article was a breakdown of a Fox News poll of approximately 1000 individuals, with the overall claim that while President Trump's approval rating may not be in a positive upswing, the release of the Mueller report did not seem to have a negative impact on his ratings. The second article is a recap of the President and his team's reaction to the release

of the report, mainly pulling from a speech given at a rally. Additionally, Fox focused on this frame in two of its four articles about the migrant caravan, although the frame is more indirect than in the previous articles. These two focus more on the amount of potential immigrants the United States might potentially face ('Migrant caravan plows on despite facing border bottleneck after Trump tightens asylum rules' (La Jeunesse, 2018)), as well as security work along the southern border and the agencies tasked with that security ('At Rio Grande Valley, strained border agents welcome help from military troops' (Leventhal, 2018)). Again, the framing of presidential success is less evident, yet still present, usually found by contextualizing the article in the larger political picture. The Leventhal article (2018) touts the presence of military troops on the southern border as sorely needed, which, when seen in a broader light, is an endorsement of the President's decision to place troops at the border so close to the election even when total migrant numbers are comparatively down.

Breitbart had a similar spread of articles surrounding the success of the president. Both of the articles released after the Mueller investigation were focused on the success of President Trump. 'Barr on Mueller Report: No Obstruction; Trump Had 'Non-corrupt Motives'' (Pollak, 2019) quotes the Attorney General in his endorsement of the innocence of the President. Further, 'Triumphant Donald Trump Hails 'No Collusion' — 'Never Was and There Never Will Be' (Spiering, 2019) ended with a quote from the song "Every Breath you Take" by The Police, which Trump played at a rally the day of the report's release. The article highlights the lines:

"every breath you take,

every step you take,

every bond you break

… I'll be watching you".

Spiering (2019) claims this is "an obvious reminder" of the fact that former President Obama may have "spied on President Trump's presidential campaign in 2016", and may well be the reason it was played at the rally before the president took to the stage.

Breitbart also discussed the migrant caravan around the midterm elections in a similar tone as Fox News. 'Moms for America Visit Border: Illegal Immigration Is Hurting Women and Children' (Starr, 2018) discusses a visit by the political group Moms for America to the southern border and their support of Trump's decision to deploy the military to the region. Fletcher, the president of the group, is quoted "All we are asking is for our government to protect us, so that we can feel safe in our homes and communities" (Starr,

Table 4.   Presidential Success in Migrant Caravan Articles

	Migrant Caravan Pre Date 1	Migrant Caravan Pre Date 2	Migrant Caravan Post Date 1	Migrant Caravan Post Date 2
Fox News	X			X
Breitbart	X	X	X	

Note. Pre date refers to the articles publication date as before the midterm election.

Post Date refers to the article publication date as after the midterm election.

2018). Similar to the framing done by Fox, this article is designed to highlight the need for border security as well as endorse the president's decision to deploy the military to accomplish this. The tactic of the article is quite different from any of the ones from Fox or Breitbart though. Here, the article implies not just that the president is saving women

and children from migrants, but that women and children are specifically targeted by migrants, and that border security is imperative to provide protection.

The Starr (2018) article bridges quite well between the frame of presidential success and the final frame, the dangerous other. It should be noted that the figures for Breitbart located in Table 4 and Table 5 both match, which is to say that this outlet spent three of its four articles focusing specifically on the dangers of outsiders when writing about the southern border. Fox articles focused less on the issue of potential immigration harms, whereas Breitbart went deeper into the frame, overlapping it with presidential success.

Table 5.   Dangerous Others in Migrant Caravan Articles

	Migrant Caravan Pre Date 1	Migrant Caravan Pre Date 2	Migrant Caravan Post Date 1	Migrant Caravan Post Date 2
Fox News			X	
Breitbart	X	X	X	

Note. Pre date refers to the articles publication date as before the midterm election.

Post Date refers to the article publication date as after the midterm election.

'Watch–Dave Brat Calls Out Democrat Abigail Spanberger for Defending MS-13' (Binder, 2018) begins the article by discussing the South American gang MS-13, a favorite topic of President Trump in the leadup to both the presidential and the midterm election. While the primary message of the article is to paint a democratic challenger as supportive of the group, contextually the use of the term carries more weight. MS-13 is often brought up in conservative circles as proof of the need for a border wall, and while the article does not outwardly do this, the backend story has already been seeded enough to connect the conspiracy with the article. MS-13 has been primed for quite some time in conservative

circles, and the term itself is more often used as a call to arms to the border than it is to discuss the actual gang. 'Moms for America Visit Border: Illegal Immigration Is Hurting Women and Children' (Starr, 2018) bridges the emotional weight of potential societal victims with the implied danger of so many border crossings. Choosing to focus on moms who wish simply to protect their children reinforces the frame of dangerous other, except the tactic is less in ostracizing the border migrants and more about highlighting who might be victimized if the border is not secured, preferably with a wall. Finally, 'U.S. Military, DHS Conduct Training Exercises Ahead of Caravan Migrants' (Binder, 2018) begins the article by discussing the actions of the troops ordered to secure the border by the president. The article mentions increased waits for those seeking to cross under formal methods, and then pivots into discussing the number of potential individuals headed to the border to seek asylum. Breitbart cites itself in claiming that potentially thousands of individuals may be in the caravan, and the United States is right to be ready to repel them.

An interesting counter-perspective is offered by Fox in the article 'Migrant caravan plows on despite facing border bottleneck after Trump tightens asylum rules' (La Jeunesse, 2018). While La Jeunesse does discuss increased numbers approaching the border and chose the word "plows" to describe their movement in the title, a substantial portion of the piece is devoted to describing the migrant members themselves. The article even quotes some of the migrants, with the final line being "When asked why he was going back, even when he's been deported four times, Blanco replied: "For my kid, for my little girl, every little girl needs a daddy."" (La Jeunesse, 2018). Additionally, a buried critique of the President's plan might be implied in the following quote, which stated that migrants "will be required to enter through official ports of entry, like those near San Diego, Yuma and

El Paso. By issuing the new directive, the President is creating a bottleneck by funneling tens of thousands of illegal immigrants to already overcrowded ports" (La Jeunesse, 2018). This breaks from both Breitbart and other Fox articles in their approach to both presidential success frames and the dangerous other frames, and sits as a unique outlier amongst the rest of the study.

Dominant Sources

Selected articles for this study were reviewed for their sources. Types of sources were cataloged based on five criteria: whether the source was from the same news outlet, a government official, a 3rd party news outlet, a 3rd party individual, or from social media. Based on these criteria each outlet was tabulated and totaled. Once this information was found, it was charted and each outlet was compared to the other for analysis. As a point of clarity, President Trump will tweet frequently, so to differentiate this type of source from any other, it was counted as a government official as opposed to social media.

Breitbart articles leaned toward three of the five criteria more heavily, specifically utilizing their own publication, government officials, and social media more than 3rd party news or 3rd party individuals. In total, all eight of the Breitbart articles contained six sources from their own outlet, eight sources from government officials, and six from social media. Trailing behind were 3rd party news sources at four, and one source from a 3rd party individual (See Table 6).

Table 6.   Dominant Sources in Breitbart Articles

	Self-Source	Government Official	3rd Party News	3rd Party Individual	Social Media
Breitbart Mueller Pre 1		X,X,X			X,X
Breitbart Mueller Pre 2					X
Breitbart Mueller Post 1		X			
Breitbart Mueller Post 2	X	X,X			
Breitbart Caravan Pre 1	X,X		X,X,X		X
Breitbart Caravan Pre 2				X	X,X
Breitbart Caravan Post 1	X,X,X	X,X			
Breitbart Caravan Post 2			X		
Totals	6	8	4	1	6

Note. Pre refers to the article release date before the date selected in methods. Post refers to a release date after the date selected in methods. Each X indicates one source, multiple X's indicate multiple sources of that type per article.

Breitbart used two articles from the Washington Post, one from the Baltimore Sun, and one from MSNBC, although to be clear the article that used MSNBC was about MSNBC. It counts as a source, but the article did not use it to substantiate evidence so

much as to claim MSNBC reporting may be unfair. Source types also fluctuated based on whether or not the article was released before or after the selected dates in the method. Notably, Breitbart preferred to use social media as a source in articles that were published before the release of the Mueller report or the Midterms. After each of these events occurred the amount of social media sources dropped to zero, instead preferring to lean on government officials and their own reporting. After the Mueller Report and the midterm elections, nine of the ten sources used were either from their own reporting or from a government official. 3rd party news was not heavily used regardless of the date of publication. Three of the four 3rd party news sources came from one article, and two of them were over a decade old. The decision to use these is most likely a limitation of the story, as the Breitbart article in question, 'Watch–Dave Brat Calls Out Democrat Abigail Spanberger for Defending MS-13' (Binder, 2018), is specifically about how a Democratic congressional candidate (later successfully elected in the 2018 midterms) was the subject of an attack ad. The Breitbart article went back into the candidate's history to attempt to link her to both MS-13 as well as known terrorists, something that may or may not have occurred in 2002.

Breitbart articles tended to bounce their source material across the selected dates outlined in the methods section, that of the Mueller report release and midterm elections. The analysis above compares all pre articles to all post articles (See Table 6), however, when the articles written right before the selected date are compared to the article released right after, there is a distinct difference in source choice. Breitbart Mueller Pre 2 (Huston, 2019) uses a singular social media source, and Breitbart Mueller Post 1 (Pollak, 2019) uses a singular government official. Breitbart Caravan Pre 2 (Starr, 2018) uses two social media

posts and one 3rd party individual, and Breitbart Caravan Post 1 (Price, 2018) uses three self-sources and two government officials (See Table 6). To clarify this, in articles released right before the event, articles used no official or 1ˢᵗ party sources, instead defaulting to social media and 3ʳᵈ party individuals. Once the event passed, Breitbart switched back to using government officials and, most heavily, their own writing. Also of note is the number of sources across a singular article, regardless of type. Three of the eight Breitbart articles use only one source, and one of those articles only referenced a social media post, which tended to be shorter and more heavily editorialized. The articles with the most sources capped out at six, with two of those being self-referential, three being 3rd party news, and one coming from social media. In total, Breitbart used an average of 3.125 sources per article.

Source types in Fox articles have their own unique breakdown. In total, Fox leaned most heavily on self-sourcing and government officials, with 3ʳᵈ party sources and 3ʳᵈ party individuals trailing behind significantly. Across all eight articles, Fox used twelve of their own articles as a source, eleven government official sources, three 3ʳᵈ party news sources, and two sources from 3ʳᵈ party individuals (See Table 7). Fox did not use a single source from social media.

Table 7.   **Dominant Sources in Fox News Articles**

	Self-Source	Government Official	3rd Party News	3rd party Individual	Social Media
Fox Mueller Pre 1	X				
Fox Mueller Pre 2	X		X,X	X	
Fox Mueller Post 1	X,X,X	X,X,X,X			
Fox Mueller Post 2	X,X,X	X,X,X			
Fox Caravan Pre 1	X	X	X		
Fox Caravan Pre 2	X,X	X			
Fox Caravan Post 1	X	X		X	
Fox Caravan Post 2		X			
Totals	12	11	3	2	

Note. Pre refers to the article release date before the date selected in methods. Post refers to a release date after the date selected in methods. Each X indicates one source, multiple X's indicate multiple sources of that type per article.

Fox has a distinct skew toward specific types of sources, with their own writing coming in first, followed closely by government officials. Interestingly, the two articles with the most sources are based around the Mueller investigation, with the article written the day before its release containing seven sources, and the article released immediately

after containing six. In this entire study, these two articles are the most heavily sourced, with only one Breitbart article coming in with a similar amount.

There is a significant shift in source type based on the release date of the article in reference to the change in status of the subject matter. Articles that were written immediately after the Mueller investigation or the midterm elections defaulted solely to government agencies and their own reporting. The only time Fox utilized 3rd party sources of either type was in the lead-up to the event. Of the three instances where Fox used 3rd party sources, two came from one article. The reason for this is quite clear as well. 'Media outlets pan AG Barr before release of redacted Mueller report' (Dorman, 2019) is specifically about how 3rd party news agencies discussed the actions of the Attorney General. Since the goal of the article is to talk about other media outlets, it makes sense that there would be a few sources from them. However, had this article not been focused on outside agencies, the total amount of outside information pulled from 3rd party reporters would be one.

There is a unique spread to the total number of sources per article as well. Like Breitbart, Fox had a few articles come in with only one source. Fox wrote one article about the Mueller investigation and one about the migrant caravan that only contained one source. Important to note though is that both of these sources came from either another Fox article or from an official government source. Of the three single sourced Breitbart articles, one came from social media, another from a 3rd party source. The third was a government response. Comparatively Fox preferred more official sourcing types than their conservative counterpart. In total, Fox used an average of 3.5 sources per article.

A comment about 3rd party sources, as not all are made the same. Fox referenced the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the New York Post. When checking, each of these were written as a summary of a primary source like a government agency, at least when referring to the portion that Fox chose to refer or quote. This is to say that when Fox chose to go outside their own reporting to substantiate an article, they only did so when the other article had also quoted or verified their writing.

Manifested Value

Derived from both the dominant frames discovered above as well as the articles themselves, deeper value systems begin to manifest within both outlets. While the framing of an article is specifically how the article presents a certain event or selectively chooses what to focus on in a story, these frames can help pinpoint the deeper values held by either the author or the outlet. Amongst the most dominant value found within the study is the preservation of the ingroup. For far-right and alt-right identities, these articles substantiate the idea that not only is the group member correct in their world view, but that outsiders wish to attack that view. All three frames support this idea, albeit in different ways.

The frame of liberal bias is a direct representation of the dangers of outsiders. While these outsiders are not otherized or ostracized as heavily as the framing done in the dangerous other, liberal bias still maintains a kindred position. Table One and Table Two show that 50% of the articles studied framed liberalism as a bias within both political identities as well as other news outlets, and when that frame is paired with the data provided by Lane (2019), it becomes clear that this position is not only historically rooted but consistently present. These articles continue to push liberal bias in their framing because it helps essentialize and centralize the idea that the group itself is under attack.

The frame of dangerous others does something incredibly similar to that of liberal bias, in that it supports the value of in-group preservation. Alt-right literature has often built itself around the idea of preserving white culture, and by choosing to demonize individuals crossing the southern border by portraying them as numerous, dangerous, and greedy, the threat to the ingroup becomes palatable. Articles like Breitbart's 'Watch–Dave Brat Calls Out Democrat Abigail Spanberger for Defending MS-13' (Binder 2018) are the most overt in their representation of this value, and after the data analysis done here it does appear as if Breitbart takes the lion's share of this type of writing. 'Moms for America Visit Border: Illegal Immigration Is Hurting Women and Children' (Starr, 2018) takes a different route to support the same value. While the Binder article focuses on the threat, Starr focuses on the victim. Two articles with similar publication dates reinforce the aforementioned value from both ends. While these two articles are from Breitbart, Fox News is not absent in its value of the group either. Although less frequent, the body of Fox articles in pieces like 'Migrant caravan plows on despite facing border bottleneck after Trump tightens asylum rules' (La Jeunesse, 2018) manifests the otherness of migrants in a similar manner. Yes, this article also humanizes migrants in a rather unexpected way, but large portions of the piece still focus on the perceived dangers of immigrants, and the word 'plow' in the title cannot be overlooked.

Framing articles around the success of the president approaches the value in a different manner entirely. While the first two frames are negative, representing danger to the group, framing the president as successful provides hope for the protection of the group, thereby protecting the value. Again, Breitbart is more direct. 'Triumphant Donald Trump Hails 'No Collusion' — 'Never Was and There Never Will Be' (Spiering, 2019) does not

investigate the truthfulness of the president's statements nor does it provide any sort of counterpoint to the Mueller report, of which there are many. Instead it portrays the report as a win for the executive branch, implying that the in-group is not only successful in its battles but that their actions are legal and justified. Constitutionality aside, if the President is seen as a member and protector of the group then supporting him is supporting the value. Like with the first two frames, Fox is more opaque in this regard. Two of the Fox articles about the Muller investigation supported the frame of presidential success, yet the writing in them is comparatively indirect. 'Fox News Poll: Approval of President Trump steady since Mueller probe ended' (Blanton, 2019) is entirely an analysis of a poll run by Fox News about the president's rating. The takeaway is that the president is successful and thereby protecting the group, but the way in which Fox reaches this conclusion is quite different from Breitbart. While the latter simply quotes the president, Fox utilizes polls and percentages to justify their claim. Yes, it was a poll created for Fox, but at least the article could present a quantified figure as their argument. The end result is that all three frames indorse a very specific value, that of preserving the in-group.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Both Fox News and Breitbart clearly occupy positions within their conservative political spheres. Fox has a myriad of academic articles documenting their conservative slant, and even though Breitbart is newer to the journalistic scene, their partisan nature is not only supported by this study but also claimed as such by alt-right leaders. The thrust of this study was to analyze the relationship between two news outlets acting as proxies for their larger political counter-spheres, to find an answer to the question:

RQ1: How do partisan conservative media outlets leverage current events to reinforce their political ideologies between political spheres?

Framed under the theories and critiques of Habermas, as well as historical conservative developments within news media and intermedia agendas, multiple conclusions can be drawn.

Differences and Similarities

Both Fox and Breitbart cover similar news stories in similar ways, but there are some notable differences. The first notable difference is in the directness of the message. Each frame analyzed in the results section documents similar frames, but almost as important is the manner in which each article accomplishes this goal. Fox has, in the past, employed the guise of journalistic integrity to create a sense of security. In this study it appears as if they still operate in this manner. Articles by Fox about liberal bias will directly quote purported liberal outlets to substantiate the article's claim. Dorman (2019) pulls directly from MSNBC and NBC to chide their pundits as overtly liberal. Blanton (2019)

pulls polling analysis to justify the claim that the presidential approval rating has not dipped after the release of the report. While both of these articles support the idea of liberal bias, they each employ empirics and evidence to validate the frame, which is to say that even if the end goal is the same, Fox is markedly more careful and meticulous in its writing.

Comparatively, Breitbart will simply accuse the other side of having a liberal bias. This is shown in Spiering (2019), who quoted a Police song to support the claim that former President Obama spied on the Trump campaign. Or, instead of citing statistics like Fox's Blanton (2019), Breitbart will only quote the president, as in Pollak (2019). Shaw (2019) ran a similar article to Pollak (2019) but instead of limiting the scope to the president's remarks at a rally, the Fox article opted to include quotes from the Mueller report as well as substantiate the scope of the investigation by naming page counts and total interviews conducted. Further, Breitbart is more aggressive in the frame 'dangerous others'. Table 5 shows that while Breitbart wrote three of their four articles about the migrant caravan under this framework, Fox wrote one. Also, Fox's article came after the midterm elections, which, if the point of the article was to motivate voters, then Fox did not meet this goal, at least in their print department.

The two outlets differ in their choice of words as well. Yes, Fox does use terms like 'illegal immigration' instead of 'undocumented immigrant' (La Jeunesse, 2018, Leventhal, 2018, Mears, 2018), but aside from this instance their choice of words seems to walk the neutral line. While not every Breitbart piece employed direct and biased language, when it appeared it was quite apparent. Binder (2018) accused a democratic candidate of supporting 9/11 terrorists, Caplan (2019) called the Russia investigation debunked, and Huston (2019) labeled an actor an extreme leftist. Breitbart does openly choose to occupy

the space claimed by the alt-right, so it does make sense that their rhetoric would be more loaded.

There are some differences that can be pulled from the timing of each article as well. Table 1 shows that Fox focused more on Liberal bias when discussing the Mueller investigation, especially after the report was released. Comparatively Breitbart dropped the issue after the report was released, at least in terms of this study. Table 4 shows Breitbart focusing heavily on the successes of the president in his attempt to curb immigration when compared to Fox. Also, Table 5, which discusses the dangerous other frame, leans heavily toward Breitbart, with three articles published about the issue as compared to Fox's one. Contextually this makes sense however, as the alt-right identity is rooted deeply in racism, the migrant caravan would make a more salient issue for their readership. Also relevant is the La Jeunesse (2018) article from Fox, that simultaneously framed the caravan as large and imminent, but also included humanizing aspects about the travelers, something lacking in their alt-right counterpart.

Outside of the emergent themes of the study, there are key differences in how these two outlets choose to source their articles. Fox heavily favors their own reporting when writing articles. Every article save one had at least one other Fox article as a source, and often these articles would build on each other. One would reference another which would reference another to build a cohesive and thorough byline of thought. Twelve of 28 total sources used is a large number, that's nearly half of all references made. Breitbart only referenced its own writing six times, and three of those were in one article immediately after the midterm elections. As previously stated, the migrant caravan is a more salient issue for the outlet than it appears for Fox, at least surrounding the 2018 midterms, so it

makes sense that at least one article would pull so heavily from their own reporting. Regardless, Breitbart does not use nearly as many of their own articles as sources. Another notable difference is the preference for social media as a citation. Fox had exactly zero social media posts, Facebook pages, tweets, or otherwise in their articles, which is a little surprising considering how much President Trump tweets. Breitbart had six, with is the same amount as their self-referential sourcing. A few of them were links to Facebook pages, which seemed to be links to the Moms for America group that Starr (2018) wrote about. One link was to the group page, the other to an announcement that the group's leadership would be venturing down to the southern border for a visit. Regardless, Breitbart utilizes social media to a much larger extent than Fox.

Another significant difference is noticed when examining the skew between which subject matter received the most attention, source-wise. Breitbart had ten total citations when discussing the Mueller case. Most of these came before the report was actually released, and when compared to the amount used when talking about the caravan, the difference becomes clear. Breitbart had fifteen sources in their articles about the migrant caravan, with several articles having an excess of five. Now look to how Fox allocates its sources. Fox had exactly ten sources for their articles about the migrant caravan. It should be noted that one of the source-light articles was written by a reporter who went for a ride along with Customs and Border agents (Leventhal, 2018), and as such it works more as a primary piece of evidence than others. Regardless, considering that Fox had 28 total sources, the outlet devoted a considerably larger amount of effort in sourcing their material when discussing the Mueller investigation. It is also worth mentioning that Fox uses official government communication more deeply than Breitbart. Fox used eleven sources

from the administration, Breitbart used eight. The difference is only three but the allocation here matters as well. Most of the government sources used by Breitbart are allocated to three articles, Caplan (2019), Spiering (2019), and Price (2018). Three of them come from the Caplan article, which was about Rob Reiner and his tweets about the president, meaning these sources were less substantiating and more about subject focus. Fox used similar sources, but their point was to substantiate analysis and development in their respective stories. In short, Breitbart uses official sources when discussing liberal individuals, Fox uses them when making claims about the news story.

The differences between Fox and Breitbart are apparent and distinct, but the overarching similarities tie the two together more directly than previously thought. Through both the analysis of the frames as well as the underlying value within the articles, the broader strokes of these two outlets seem to paint a similar picture. First, take a look at all three frames. In terms of liberal bias, fox had three articles with this frame in their Mueller pieces and one in their caravan articles. Breitbart had two in their Mueller articles and two in their caravan articles. This averages out to four each, meaning 8 of the 16 articles utilized this frame, split down the middle for each outlet. The only major difference is that Fox used this frame more often when discussing Mueller, and Breitbart used it when talking about the migrant caravan. Also, liberal bias continued as a frame across the focal point of each issue. This is to say that instead of dropping the subject after the midterm election, both outlets continued to write about it. Instead of reframing the Mueller report, both outlets continued framing the issue as a liberal attack. As previously stated, while their methods may differ at the micro level, their macro goals seem to be aligned.

The next major frame found was presidential success, and again, Fox and Breitbart overlap. Both table 2 and 3 focus on the framework of presidential success, and both have a fairly even spread of articles across the publications. Table 2 shows that both outlets touted the president's victories after the midterm elections ended and the migrant caravan lost salience with the executive branch, each publishing one article about the issue. Table 3 is more conclusive, with three of the four articles in the table coming after the release of the Mueller report, with Breitbart writing two of the three. Further, the manner in which these issues were discussed have some similar tones. Both outlets discuss border security in similar ways. Yes, Breitbart may springboard an article about the border by talking about a group of visiting mothers, but the analysis in Starr (2018) and the analysis by Fox in their article visiting the southern border in Leventhal (2018) is functionally the same. Both articles reference the number of individuals coming to the border, both mention efforts of the administration to stop people from crossing, and both pitch the presence of troops on the border as a net good.

The final frame was the dangerous other, and again there are overlaps between the outlets. Fox wrote with this frame less, but both outlets only wrote about the issue after the midterm elections once. Also of interest, Breitbart's articles were published well after the election was over, by over a week. Fox published both articles about the caravan on the 7th and 9th of November, while Breitbart published on the 15th and the 19th. While this might first appear as a marked difference between the two, they functionally create a similar result. Yes, Breitbart discussed the issue to a further extent than Fox, but their articles came way after the election was over, well past when the issue was most salient and politically opportune to discuss. This seems to neutralize the effect of publishing like Fox did

immediately after the election and instead spreads the effect of the frame out, making the articles more akin to reinforcement of the frame rather than publishing the article to garner votes.

In-Group Preservation

The similarities in frames across each outlet lead to an interesting development within the alt-right and Fox counter-spheres. The idea of protecting in-group members from perceived threats is a sociological phenomenon, and its existence is well documented. Summated as social identity theory, it posits that members of groups derive both self-concept and self-identity from association with that group (Tajfel, 1974). Finding groups provide a sense of belonging and identity, and is a core part of human socialization. This study shows overlap with this phenomenon, and it is rooted in the intergroup interactions seen in this social theory as each counter-sphere works to protect itself from outsiders while also attempting to substantiate themselves as valid and influential.

Groups change their nature as their existence becomes solidified. Newer in-group members devote time to understanding both their place in the group as well as the group's place within the larger social and political landscape. This is primarily an inward focused event. A group needs, for lack of a better term, territory to establish its grounds, to find its familiar faces, and to construct meaning. But once this is accomplished, attention would be turned outward. Group members, and the group itself, would shift from defining their worldview by what they are, to what, and who, they are not. To continue the analogy, once territory is established, it needs to be defended. This is when intergroup interactions come in to effect, and all three frames found in this study substantiated the value of in-group preservation. Beginning with the presentation of the overarching value across both outlets.

Preservation of the in-group became the sole value found present across the two outlets. It makes sense, the alt-right has planted its Kekistan flag squarely into the racial culture war, and while Breitbart may write about the ingroup and its threats in a more direct and biased way, Fox is not immune from writing this kind of article. Both outlets have discussed the threats posed by liberals, with table 1 showing an almost even spread of articles focusing on the ever present attacks from identified out-group individuals. Breitbart may have focused more on celebrities (Caplan, 2019, Huston, 2019) while Fox wrote about other news organizations (Dorman, 2019), but the end result is the same: liberals are unfair in their assessment of the president, the Mueller report, and the migrant caravan, and these things are threats to the group.

The second negative frame in the study, dangerous others, is a direct racial connection to the value of group preservation. Articles from Breitbart about the immigrant caravan were overt in their presentation of the group as dangerous, they even wrote one from the perspective of those who would be harmed if the caravan is not stopped (Starr, 2018). Fox was more tacit, even reticent in its discussion of the caravan in one article (La Jeunesse, 2018), yet still presented the allocation of troops to the southern border as not only a strategic and necessary measure, but a courageous one by the president.

Speaking of the president, the frame of presidential success equally endorses the protection of the group as a value, but instead of presenting threats to the group it praises its champion, Donald Trump. This could be seen as a positive relationship between the frame and the value, as opposed to negative connections from the other two. It is important for Fox and Breitbart readers to see others holding their shared values, and by talking about

border security and troop placement as a net good for the group, the group's needs are reinforced and seen as important.

Counter-Spheres and Agenda Setting

Both Fox News and Breitbart are situated in a uniquely contextualized position within the larger American media landscape. A deep dive into their frames, sources, and underpinned values all peel away types of organizations that are assuredly partisan, and are choosing to use their platforms to leverage their readership into supporting specific ideals to maintain hegemonic control. This study connects to the larger theoretical perspective of the literature review in a few notable ways, the first of which is each outlets position within the larger technological landscape. Remember that the ruling positions of the bourgeois political sphere have shifted locations historically. Previous locations were in palaces and castles, which then moved into marketplaces and coffee shops, which moved online, where the online landscape then shifted radically and fundamentally changed the manner in which the political sphere can speak. Both Fox and Breitbart occupy this space now, but it is important to note that while one moved there, the other was born there. The concept of media convergence was outlined in the literature review, and the idea that older media outlets need to adapt to newer world technology is absolutely relevant here. Fox News has converged into the digital world, or at least, is in the process of converging. Yes, the outlet still pulls most of its revenue from its cable channel and various pundits, but the backbone of the company and the element that provides it with the most legitimacy, "performing ideology under the heading of 'news'" (Jones, 2012, p. 179) is found elsewhere. That last section, providing news, is what the online journalistic outlet of Fox provides, and in that manner is subject to the same market forces as the rest of the internet, regardless of the

power of the cable punditry. The online world thrives on clicks, and while the outlet has found a home, there are others that are fighting for that same space, both ideologically as well as monetarily. As a contrast, Breitbart was formed online. It has never had a printed past, it has never had a cable channel, and it has never had a tower with its name on it in New York City. But Breitbart is singular, its power resides in its ability to adapt to the changing online marketplace and find a place to live, thereby maintaining flexibility with its readership so it can build a stronger political foundation within and among other counter-spheres. There is clearly a lesson to be learned, and this study at least partially supports the idea that Fox is learning that lesson from the alt-right counter-sphere. Yes, there are marked differences between how each company accomplishes its goals. Fox still prefers more traditional sources like primary news outlets and government officials. Fox may curtail the more partisan words from its writing while still maintaining a political position. Fox may even mask some of its framing, as evidenced in the analysis of the frame of the dangerous other. But the overlap between the two is too large to ignore. The online portion of Fox News is adopting, if not fully embracing, the political and ideological leanings of Breitbart. The primary thrust and frames of their articles are the same, and the values that function as the undercurrent of those frames appear from here to be too similar to be coincidence. This means that, as each outlet is a representation or proxy for their larger political sphere, the establishment sphere is borrowing ideas from the alt-right.

Now take the convergence of Fox with the world that Breitbart inhabits, and connect it to the larger economic forces at play. Neoliberalism has been reshaping the political, social, and monetary worlds since the 1950s. Fox, founded in 1996, sits squarely in a world that was fully embracing the new wave of deregulation and private enterprise.

Fox, at least based on how Rupert Murdoch and Roger Ailes envisioned it, was intended to be a mouthpiece to help usher in a world in which Regan style policies become internationally embraced. This would assist not just the increasing conglomeration of smaller media outlets and thus help the corporation grow, but it would also assist any other connected enterprise in finding a better way to squeeze money out of a free market system. It makes sense, for that is a direct reflection of the idealized power of the corporate ruling class when working together, as outlined by Dreiling and Darves (2016). The themes and frames found in this study, in their small part, do not challenge, and in truth support the notion that institutions could and should work together to help shape opinion and therefore policy. The overlap between Breitbart and Fox is then, at least according to Neoliberal thinking, less of an accident and more of an intentional overlap to accomplish a similar goal.

But as that system shifts, so too does the requirement of the news outlet. Both outlets have embraced specific political views. These views are more than likely intended to fall into line with the historical precedence discussed above. Remember, there is a historical angle to much of this that should absolutely factor in to the discussion and analysis of this study. The John Birch society, in its anti-communist and limited government ways, clearly has its own ties to neoliberal policy. But it also has ties to the nature of political media in the United States. Lane (2019) points out the nature of historic conservative outlets and their influence. The *National Review* was designed not to simply report the news, but to provide a worldview. Its job was to challenge mainstream media, reframe issues with a conservative position, and ultimately undo the policy advancements of liberalism. In this study it was revealed that a majority of articles examined were framed

with an anti-liberal policy, upheld conservative statecraft like increased border security, and otherized the very presence of an incoming population. While none of the articles analyzed directly attacked welfare, many touched on the nature of mainstream news, directly reframing outlets like MSNBC as biased against an entrenched government. They also supported the idea that liberals and those with liberal ideas were extreme, potentially violent, sometimes anti-American, and ultimately bad for society. It would be hard to summate "a broad rollback of liberalism" wished for by the JBS and written about by the *National Review* in more direct terms (Phillips-Fein, 2011). A point of interest however, is Breitbart's relationship to this way of thinking. All research on the alt-right points to a group that is heavily entrenched in race based politics. Hawley (2017) explicitly states that most of the things that the alt-right advocate for are distinct from the older versions of conservative thought, that of moral traditions, economic liberties, and militaristic defense (p, 17). Except in the articles for this study, and especially the ones devoted to discussing the border wall and the migrant caravan, it seems as if Breitbart is shifting away from the foundations of the alt-right to embrace, at the very least, national security. Several articles talk about the benefits of deploying the military to the southern border, and one that was framed as an attack on a liberal congressperson also devoted some time to mention MS-13, a group modern conservatives bring up when talking about the dangers of immigration. This seems to align with John Birch, *National Review*, even Fox News style of conservatism, but even more so, it supports the notions of intermedia agenda setting and the direction of the flow of power between media outlets. Perhaps it could be argued that the reason Breitbart articles are in favor of border security is rooted in racism, and it likely is, but the advocacy for national security to ensure that racist protection is unique here, and

at the least a new development for the alt-right based on previous research. Consider the relationship between the two outlets, then recall the analysis done around agenda setting, specifically intermedia agenda setting. McCombs (2014) references the dendritic influence of news between outlets. It is likely that Fox, as the larger news outlet, is setting agendas for writers over at Breitbart, who then reiterate that agenda. None of the research done here on source allocation showed any overlap between the two outlets, which is to say that neither outlet was citing the other, but the analysis of frames suggests a relationship here because of their clear overlap. The frames correlate heavily with agenda and ideology, and if the ideologies are moving, then it may be that Fox is influencing Breitbart in a way similar to how the alt-right is influencing Fox; creating a more complex intermedia relationship than previously thought.

Which brings us back to the public sphere. Habermas proposed the idea of a liberal public sphere which could discuss the issues of the day, via a medium, and transform social groups into levers upon which state politics could be manipulated. Habermas has had a myriad of critiques, and the most applicable here is Frasier's (1990). Yes, the original nature of their research was centered on those publics that did not have the social capital to influence the conversation in the bourgeois political sphere. Often this conversation is centered around the subaltern, and it is absolutely fair to say that the alt-right, and especially Fox News, are not members. Their social capital is far too great to qualify, and in truth their presence is likely part of the reason the subaltern is repressed. But the subaltern is only part of the backing research. The interesting point of connection is with the counter-public. Frasier notes that groups not a part of the prime public can "circulate counter-discourses" (1990, p. 67). The origin of the alt-right is rooted in fringe thinking. It

would, if following the definition, be a counter-public, its ideas would not be accepted by the larger political sphere, and the way in which it communicates would not connect to the mediums that would reach larger communities. Yes, it is repressive and exclusionary, even "anti-democratic" as Frasier would say (p. 67), but if the goal of the counter-public is to introduce ideas currently absent from the national discussion, then the alt-right is functioning just as a counter-public would. Xenophobia, racism, anti-liberalism, all of these are now at the forefront of the national conversation, and this study supports the idea that the alt-right has now built enough hegemonic power to start influencing the counter-spheres that operate around and among it. That Fox and Breitbart are so heavily aligned in their positions on various political issues is evidence of that, both through the frames found here as well as the underlying value of in-group preservation.

All of this adds up to an answer to the research question. First, it is clear that conservative media outlets leverage current events to reinforce ideology. This is evident by the backing research in neoliberalism, and framed within the theoretical constructs of Habermas and Frasier. That these groups do these things is evident in this study as well, but also not the focus of the study, and is substantiated in other research. The focus here, the manner in which it is done and the effect of the act, as shown in this study, is through selective framing, specific choices in sources, and cooperation among position. Both Fox News and Breitbart have partisan political positions, and the reinforcement of those positions through discussing political issues through frames and selective choices in their sources is the how, in the research question. The interesting development comes after that. There is a growing overlap between Fox and Breitbart. The original assumption was that Fox, a member of the public sphere, was adopting the positions of the alt-right counter-

public and introducing them into the sphere. The assumption was that in so doing, Fox would shift its position further to the right than it was before. This study still supports that position. What was unexpected is the notion that Breitbart would be adopting positions of the public sphere that it previously did not. That Breitbart is embracing some of the conservative political positions advocated for by the *National Review* and Fox was unexpected, but substantiated. Every article about the migrant caravan framed its argument around the idea that the United States needed protection. In their articles about the Mueller investigation, their frame was definitively anti-liberal. And across both article categories, sources from the dominant public sphere were utilized, even if not as frequently as Fox. All of this is to say that in some manner, both Fox and Breitbart are reorienting each other, and as proxies, this means that their respective counter-spheres are aligning on certain issues.

This research does have some limitations. First, based purely on the methodology used, it is difficult to generalize this kind of study. Yes, the research here can substantiate research used in the literature review, but it cannot reveal any trends within other conservative media outlets, like The Blaze, the Daily Caller, or Infowars. A future study would do well to compare the research found here to the cultural orientation and writing styles of either these or any other conservative political outlet. Second, while historical trends are a large part of the literature review here, and they are used to draw together specific trends within the media landscape, this article cannot function as any long term barometer. By the very nature of the online political landscape it would be difficult to use this article to establish a firm notion of the alt-right, especially since the alt-right is wont

to change its tropes freely. A lot of this is because there is a lack of current research into the alt-right as a news making entity, which again, could be an interesting future direction.

In short, this study has helped orient the existence of the alt-right, operationalized as Breitbart, next to larger conservative counter-spheres, represented by Fox News. It elucidates the current framing of national issues by the far right though Habermasian public spheres as well as intermedia agendas, and reveals newer manifestations of conservative thought in contemporary media outlets. It does this by contrasting Fox News and Breitbart through qualitative media analysis focused on the protocols of frames, sources, and values. In the end, both entities are effecting each other, which in turn is effecting the larger political landscape. This is not happening in a vacuum, and there are definitely large scale repercussions from it. Politics aside, the American media landscape is changing. This is not new, it is not unexpected, and the influence of more dangerous political spheres will create lasting impacts on those groups who choose to align with them.

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