IS "MAN BITES DOG"

STILL NEWS?

TRUMP-v.-G.O.P. SPATS

IN A

PARTISAN MEDIA MILIEU

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ABSTRACT:

Traditional norms of newsworthiness include favoring conflict and unusualness. In political news, this arguably results in greater emphasis on same-party conflict or partisan infighting between officials in "man bites dog" fashion. However, given the recent rise of partisan or more aligned media outlets, the incentive for this behavior may be altered. This study examines two sets of parallel case studies of within-party and cross-party conflict across three outlets: Fox, MSNBC and ABC – two opposite partisan and one neutral – in a tentative attempt to see if news norms on this dimension are different in today's slanted media. While it does not find stark differences, it does raise new questions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict appears to be one of the most prevalent themes, and even strongest journalistic norms, in media coverage of politics and policy. Media scholar Tom Patterson notes "Reporters are drawn to conflict, as is the news audience. 'Everyone loves a fight,'" as another researcher he quotes put it (2013, p. 37). Patterson goes on to explain that conflict can be orchestrated through the norm of balance – two opposing sides – as well as more importantly through selection, what to air and not to air: "to be sure, newsmakers are the ones doing the attacking. But journalists are the ones who decide which statements make it into the news" (2013, p. 38). This might be a variant on the quip, "Let's you and him fight."

But while conflict is valued, the type of conflict matters as well; some fights are more newsworthy or interesting than others. One complimentary element might be unusualness, or what is known as the "man bites dog" standard. In political coverage, given reliance on official sources, combined with the simplicity of the two-party system, one manifestation comes through partisan cues: when officials deviate from the policy positions or criticize members of, or in particular, act not in "bipartisan" fashion but contrary to party, they make news.

This principle, however, is based on a relatively non-partisan (not necessarily unbiased) media the likes of whom have dominated the US media system in varying degrees from the late 1800s to the early 2000s. Given the development of outlets with implied if not outward ideological and partisan positions deriving from technological changes with cable television and the Internet, such norms might also be changing. Perhaps the poster child for this sea change is Fox News Network, which since late 1990s has sought out a niche as a conservative, but especially pro-Republican, outlet. (Though launched as a conservative alternative to the supposed liberal mainstream media, Fox's longtime motto was "fair and balanced," to at least imply it was upholding such values; tellingly, it has since abandoned that creed in a pragmaic nod to reality.)

Such news practices seem to be "equal opportunity destroyers" of both Democrats and Republicans, whether fighting with each other or more importantly with themselves. The question this work addresses is: given the partisan implications of both "man bites dog" and conflict stories, do partisan outlets also "bias" the implementation of these norms, at least in terms of how they portray intra-party disputes? A more partisan news environment, with outlets linked to partisan politicians, at least ideologically or in terms of audience and media elite allegiance, if not technically owned as in the 19th Century, could change the newsworthiness equation.

 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS WORK

It is well-documented that news does not naturally occur (Gans, 1979). Instead, news is constructed out of a range of possibilities by organizational and procedural rules. Among these are important professional norms or values that say what "news" is. Journalists and gatekeepers like editors and producers consciously seek out or select certain items to publicize out of the multiple events or actions occurring each day. Judgments rendered by newsrooms are based on news factors or values,

such as proximity (including localizing a story for a particular audience), prominence, conflict, and timeliness (Mencher, 2006: 58-60).

Indeed, a large body of research has identified several aspects that make some events, people, or actions much more likely to be covered. In addition to those mentioned above, and conflict, mentioned earlier, we can add novelty. Patterson (2013, p. 28) argues that almost no attribute in a news story is more highly sought than novelty, or newness – the eagerness to dump the old story for the new. Others include the notion news has a "negativity bias" as well, in preferring bad news over good (again, see Patterson 2013).

As Wolfsfeld (2011) bluntly points out, in the end, media want to "tell a good story" and look for action, conflict and drama. He also mentions how power determines news access. Following a similar point by Gans (1979, p.14-15) that lists unknowns who "participate in unusual activities" as newsworthy, Woldsfeld claims one of the only ways weak political actors, like social movements, can get covered is through weird stunts, like naked bicycle rallies (pp. 13-14). These are examples of the classic phrase, "when a dog bites a man, it's not news; when man bites dog, it is."

What constitutes "newsworthiness" is thus important, since it largely determines what the audience will encounter. In fact, it not only impacts public opinion, but also what gets covered clearly influences all other media effects, as forces such agenda-setting (what we think about) and framing (how we think about it) must flow from decisions on what's "Fit to print." Therefore, how these norms are implemented in practice in creating political news – and especially the voices present – impacts how politics is portrayed and received.

The most relevant work to the study here – and indeed, to some degree it's impetus if not inspiration is Groeling's *When Politicians Attack: Party Cohesion in the Media* (2010). In Groeling's formulation, journalists are more likely to run with a story if it is novel, conflictual, and balanced, and involves authoritative government sources (p. 48). He then goes on to develop four "axioms of political news"(p. 49-55):

   -*The Novelty Axiom*: journalists prefer news that is novel over that which isn't;

   -*The Conflict Axiom*: journalists prefer news where politicians attack each other to those where they praise each other; -

   -*The Authority Axiom*: journalists prefer stories with more authoritative sources (e.g., president over a House representative, over a mayor);

   -*The Balance Axiom*: journalists prefer stories with both parties' views over one (admittedly, countering the unusualness of same-party criticism preference).

His work explores how news values, when applied to the partisan governing, much less campaigning, worlds lead media to highlight or favor party infighting and to a lesser degree, cross-party praise. These principles serve as the baseline for this effort.

Furthermore, his notions of novelty overlap with those of unusualness, in that he sees "man bites dog" stories as being novel or new. Thus, whether "news of the weird" should be considered a separate category or not is unclear, but it does seem like something unusual might not be new – though granted, the media has a notoriously limited historical memory. Furthermore, he links the argument of Woldsfeld

that weak or ordinary actors can storm the news gates due to being "odd" to authoritative, government officials, thereby applying the same standard to them.

Groeling's research, focusing on two different sets of data roughly from the Carter to early W. Bush Administrations, was limited in the sense that it relied on data from the major, mainstream television networks ABC, CBS and NBC. Similarly, the theoretical framework on which it was based built on traditional notions of newsworthiness and elite or authoritative sourcing.

As alluded to earlier, the explosion of media outlets since the 1990s that brought new choices, coupled with a reciprocal fragmentation of audiences, has created a shift from non-partisan patently "objective" media to outwardly partisan news outlets, existing in tandem if not competition with the old. These include not only cable TV channels like Fox and MSNBC, but blogs, websites and other platforms from the left and right, like HuffPost and Red State. These now promote opinion, commentary, and discussion formats with a partisan slant over reporting of straight news.

For example, a "Fox News Effect" (Brock and Ravi-Havt, 2012) was identified that separated its viewers from others and was found to have effects in a conservative direction. This trend accelerated in the late Obama to early Trump administrations.

Fox had already become an outlet for conservative populist rhetoric and "community brand building" before Trump (see Smith, 2019), but Trump embodied the network's messaging better than it could. Of course, alternative media on the other side of the spectrum do the same for the Trump "resistance" in the elite and mass public. This dynamic also helps explain the degree of partisan polarization in the electorate and politics today.

The rise of these media outlets have been accompanied by – some might say, driven by – changes in audience behavior. Whatever the cause, their existence has led to noticeable changes in information and political opinion processing. One is revival of self-selection bias, a concept popular in the 1950s – that people will only seek out information that appeals to them or even agrees with their preconceived notions (see Stroud, 2011). Given the audience decline of "straight news" outlets like the big three networks and national newspapers, and the availability of partisan ones, the public can – and does, if Pew surveys (e.g., 2020) are any indication – simply choose the cable, social media, TV, Internet outlet(s) that fits their fancy, creating their own media bubbles.

Clearly, the fact that partisan outlets might downplay intra-party conflicts for partisan ones, or might treat these "man bites President" type stories differently than traditional outlets, is key question left unanswered. Groeling himself even speculated that, the difficulty of parties controlling unified messaging due to the differing incentives of presidential and congressional parties (e.g., a Senator from a swing state who publicly distances themselves from an unpopular presidential policy or even incumbent of their party through criticism or lack of support), might be overcome by revitalization of the partisan press. "While it is by no means clear that the increasing partisan activism across media in recent years will grow to resemble anything like the pervasively partisan press of the past, it seems the mainstream media's hegemonic control of both the rules and content of American news has been undermined. If a party can succeed in its struggle to manage its internal disputes and generate a consistent brand name, it should now have a far easier time communicating that brand, particularly to its supporters," (2010: 194).

The coincidental – or more accurately perhaps, parallel - rise of Donald Trump, and his willingness to violate Reagan's "11th Commandment" by criticizing fellow Republicans, as well as divisions within and dissent created in Republican circles by his tumultuous reign, makes this an apropos time to examine these questions. His controversial nature, and willingness to violate political norms, coupled with his strong love/hate relationship with certain outlets (e.g., Fox and Breitbart on the one hand, and CNN or MSNBC and *The Daily Beast* on the other), add to the mix.

This study attempts to provide a preliminary exploration as well as food for thought on how to address this underlying question. It does so through comparison of similar sets of "paired" cases containing media events with both intra- and inter- party conflict or discord across partisan media outlets from both major sides plus one "non-partisan" outlet used as a control.

METHODOLOGY

Ideally, to fully explore this question, one would conduct a long-range study comparing coverage of official partisan commentary in multiple news sites, akin to what Groeling (2010) did. For practical reasons, this approach was not undertaken. Indeed, Groeling (2010: 72-73) cogently notes analyzing both negativity and comments at the micro level in media data is an extremely daunting and laborious task, even over a short period of time.

Instead, this study takes a comparative case study approach. It does so through a dual comparison, similarity-and-differences (or "double control") design. Especially when trying to determine news slant , it is useful to compare coverage rather than using some theoretical standard of "reality," (Entman, 1989, p. 40).

Two pairs of cases will be examined across three media outlets. First, by comparing across media, we can see whether or not news values remain relatively constant by partisanship of outlet; by comparison of cases across the same media outlet, we can see whether the "news situation" or criteria of "man bites dog" or partisan cross-expectations by situational type, akin to Groeling (2010).

Thus, the study here attempts to get at these questions through parallel media outlet and event studies by comparing both across media and across events. This approach will hopefully make it easier to see the relative news choices at work. For example, one can both see whether there are differences *across outlets* by event (e.g., whether Fox covers one event more than MSNBC) as well as *across events* by media (e.g., whether Fox covers a same-party flap similarly to a cross-party one).

Case Selection.

Two sets of parallel cases were chosen for analysis: portions of Trump's clashes with four Members of Congress, two Republicans, and two Democrats. This approach allows for comparison of the "more ordinary" case of cross-party conflict (Republican President v. Democratic member), and "man bites dog" case of an inter-family feud (Republican President v. Republican member).

The first comparative exercise centered on Trump's remarks "disparaging the dead" by making negative comments about two recently deceased Congressional icons: John McCain (R-AZ) and John Dingell (D-MI) and their families, because of political differences. The latter cases are not only

interesting for their partisan implications, but because they are additional extraordinary examples of "Man Bites Ghost."

Trump and McCain had had an uneasy relationship, if not outright bad blood, stemming from disparaging remarks Trump made in the 2015-16 presidential primary (he famously said McCain was "no war hero" and he "preferred people who weren't captured"), which continued in his first years as President. Though they worked together on some issues, in one telling episode, McCain – suffering from a brain tumor – dramatically returned to the Senate to cast the deciding vote to kill the tentative GOP and Trump-backed plan to repeal Obamacare in 2017. Despite the replacement of McCain after his passing with a more amenable Martha McSally, at least temporarily, Trump somehow managed to rekindle the feud months after McCain's death. Inexplicably, in a speech Trump decried McCain's family's lack of appreciation for his facilitation of the Senator's official funeral; attacked him again for his vote against the health care bill; inaccurately accused him of disloyalty in helping start the investigation into Russian involvement with his election; and publicly stated he, Trump, personally was "not a fan" of McCain in life. McCain's family, along with other Republicans, rebuked him.

As clear evidence Trump had no shame nor learned little from the McCain brouhaha, he went on to do a repeat performance (with a twist in targets) at a rally in Michigan – a key battleground state he needs to win again in 2020 – by attacking deceased longtime Rep. John Dingell (D-MI), whose seat is now held by his late wife. After noting Rep./Mrs. Dingell's vote for his impeachment earlier that week, he suggested John "might be looking up [from Hell]," and in similar fashion to McCain implied the family didn't appreciate official funeral arrangements by his administration, some of which was factually untrue. Congress had the authority over the ceremony, and as a WWII veteran Dingell was eligible for burial in Arlington National Cemetery. Similarly, Debbie Dingell and other politicians decried his attack, and she even fundraised off the affair.

The second pair concerns two Senators who clashed with Trump over his administrative leadership and whom Trump attacked publicly. The first was Bob Corker (R-TN), who engaged in a tit-for-tat with the President in the news and on Twitter in October, 2017. Essentially, Corker charged that Trump was dangerously reckless in foreign affairs, even risking nuclear World War III, and was only restrained by responsible officials on his national security team and White House staff like Gen. Kelly and Secretaries Mattis (Defense) and Tillerson (State). Trump then insulted Corker on Twitter, calling him "Liddle Bob" and saying he would've lost reelection, and so cowardly retired. Corker responded in kind, implying Trump needed adult supervision, tweeting, "Alert the adult daycare staff – someone missed their shift!" And, as for Trump's claim he desired his endorsement and withdrew from reelection when Trump refused, he sarcastically commented on the Tweet with, "Just like Mexico will pay for the wall." This row was also related to Trump's own spat at the time with his Secretary of State Tillerson regarding Trump's mental intelligence. This was not the first time Corker clashed with Trump, nor would it be the last, and the two continued to have issues until the Senator left office in 2019.

The other is Senator Jon Tester's (D-MT) torpedoing of Trump's pick to head the troubled Veterans' Administration, White House physician Dr. Ronny Jackson. Tester, the ranking minority member on the Veterans Affairs committee, passed along information he received from over 20 not-publicly released (at least, remaining anonymous) sources that Jackson created a toxic work environment in the White House medical office, handed out prescription drugs freely on trips (even referring to him, quoting sources, as "the candy man") and had been drinking on the job on a few

occasions. Jackson, though denying the allegations, withdrew under fire, after Trump himself, though publicly supporting him, attacked Tester ruining Jackson, even calling on him to resign and for "being dishonest and sick." He vowed it would come to haunt the Senator's reelection chances in Montana, a state Trump carried easily (he would later go on to campaign albeit unsuccessfully for Tester's GOP opponent.)

As Entman notes, for an effective analysis, cases do not have to be comparable or identical in "reality," as that is nearly impossible, but just have to possess "comparable journalistic potential" (1989, p. 40-1). In other words, they should share enough elements to theoretically be covered similarly, and their nature would be expected to have similar impacts on public opinion.

These cases share those characteristics. In the "dissing the deceased" cases, Trump violated long-standing social norms of not speaking ill of the dead, and attacked two relatively well-respected politicians, plus their families for not treating him well. (Granted, perhaps a Republican would be less upset with Trump attacking Dingell than McCain, but we can assume both would be covered negatively and likely would impact an independent similarly.) The two cases of the Trump fight with Senators over his administration may not be as close on the surface, as one directly dealt with his relationships with his advisors and foreign policy style, and the other was a battle over the nominee for a cabinet post. Nevertheless, in both sagas you have a high-ranking Senator on a relevant committee (Corker as Chair of Foreign Relations, and Tester as ranking Minority Member on Veterans Affairs) making charges about presidential incompetence in their area of expertise, with a presidential attack on them personally and politically.

Still, the "man bites President" angle of newsworthiness, when applied to partisan media, does complicate the picture a bit. We expect that same-party conflict might have greater effects, even as it has greater news value. And, that is precisely why it might be handled differently by a partisan news outlet.

Outlet Selection

Television was chosen as the medium for analysis because it remains one of main ways people get their news, though is likely indicative of other media. In terms of partisan outlets, clearly the two most prominent ones are Fox News, a blatantly conservative or pro-Republican outlet that even links itself to Trump (Smith, 2019), and MSNBC, which emerged during George W. Bush administration as the liberal market alternative. ABC was selected as a suitable, non-partisan "mainstream media" outlet as a sort of control variable. As one of the three main "legacy" networks, it thus continues in the ostensibly nonpartisan tradition. Furthermore, despite attacks on all MSM outlets for being part of the "liberal" media outside of Fox, which is likely overstated, some studies have found ABC to be the most balanced of the Big Three (Groeling 2008; Schaefer and Fordan, 2014).

Analytic Framework: Data, Measures, Coding, etc.

The data from the study were taken from transcripts of stories/shows from each of the three networks for each case contained in the Nexis Uni database. Stories were found from keyword searches of "Trump" and the politician in question (e.g., "McCain") within a paragraph during roughly one week (sometimes 8 days, if event was on weekend or late) after the "triggering event" in question.

All relevant news, commentary, etc. shows on each network were included. Some shows found in the search were excluded if they contained less than 100 words (or very small part, such as fleeting reference, etc.) and thus really were not part of the story; the cable networks tended to have shows with several segments, for example, and only the segments specifically addressing the controversy, were included. For example, news about the Trump Administration's new immigration crackdown during the Dingell controversy, or the Las Vegas shooting during the Corker flap.

As newsworthiness is primarily a criteria of story selection and prioritization, this study intentionally focuses on prominence or amount, etc., of coverage of these events, not their framing, though some discussion of that is likely warranted. (Obviously, a more comprehensive study would also examine certain attacks, like Trump Tweets, that didn't get covered, though that also would make it hard to draw specific conclusions.) As Entman cogently notes, news slant is different from "bias." Slant is direction or tone of a particular story or series, whereas bias is a consistent slant by a news outlet over time (Entman, 2010). Nevertheless, the assumption of partisan bias thus also would presumably apply to how cases here were slanted in their coverage by these different outlets.

  Importance judgments are thus one key to determining news slant (Entman, 1989). They are also most relevant to the research question being discussed here.

As defined by Entman (1989, p. 43), *importance* includes prominence, amount (number and length), repetition, and duplication. Prominence is determined by placement of the story (e.g., leads are more powerful). Due to differences in format, prominence or placement will not be measured.

Length is of course the amount, either time or words, a story or stories devote to the topic. We will also look at average length for a more comparable measure. Repetition refers to how many times the same topic is used in an outlet or broadcast – i.e., days where multiple stories or segments appear on the topic. Lastly, duplication is a measure of duration – how many different days the story runs, which measures its longevity or staying power.

Hypotheses or Expectations

Attempting to project some of Groeling's axioms, if not findings and trends in media behavior from other research, lead to several hypotheses or at least expectations for the data analysis. In terms of cross-media findings, we would expect to see that Fox, as the "GOP network," would give less attention to cases of Republican infighting than would MSNBC, the "Democratic" network. ABC, as a non-partisan outlet, should serve as a control or be in the middle. Trump's battles with Democratic members, however, should see the opposite result.

In similar fashion, with cross-event or case pair analyses, if partisanship has changed the newsworthiness of partisan conflict, the partisan networks should give relatively greater attention to partisan scenarios that "benefit" their side while less to those that do not. Again, cases of Republican clashes with Trump or vice-versa should receive less attention on Fox News relative to Trump spats with Democrats, with MSNBC being the opposite. ABC, as the neutral "control," should, if the assumption of "man bites dog" influences newsworthiness, should give more attention to the cases of Republican infighting. Still, presumably it should be relatively greater with MSNBC.

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

The data analysis on the several dimensions of importance and overall coverage is shown in Tables 1 and 2. For simplicity sake, each deals with results *by parallel event/topic*, and across media outlets, though the inverse will be discussed as well. Thus, Table 1 shows the results concerning Trump's attacks on the two departed legislators McCain and Dingell, whereas Table 2 displays the results for the conflicts with the two "testy" Senators.

Overall, the results are mixed, or at least not immediately conclusive. In terms cross-network coverage of the two pairs of cases, a few things do stand out. For one, ABC generally devotes the least amount of coverage to all of these events, with the lowest story, average word, and repetition and duplication and perhaps surprisingly, MSNBC, the most. In ABC's case, it is clearly likely due to it not being a 24-hour news-and-opinion site, but one would think Fox is comparable to MSNBC. Still, even using average word count, contrary to expectation the "more neutral" outlet did not fall in-between the others on any measure or in any case event. Alternatively, using another all-news network like CNN would have been a more appropriate "control," though most conservatives and especially Trump would disagree.

Fox did give more air time, relatively speaking, to the Dingell controversy in terms of average length, and was far below MSNBC in word counts about the Republican inter-family feud with the McCains. In this sense, then it followed expectation of downplaying same-party spats. It was otherwise "in the middle" of networks on most measures, however. It kept the McCain and Corker stories going for almost every day that week Fox perhaps surprisingly covered the troubling Corker-Trump spat about Trump's foreign policy competence and threat of stumbling into "World War III," than one might expect, though perhaps this was because of the importance of the issue, or Fox's own divisions regarding the state of the GOP in this issue area. MSNBC, in leading the pack in coverage on almost all dimensions seems to have been publicizing Trump fights both sides, maybe in an effort to portray him as combative in general or convey the message the "resistance is greater than it appears." Then again, it also devoted more time to the Tester issue, which it might have downplayed, except in the sense that it showed a Democrat sticking it to the Republican president, even if he retaliated with plausible -if unrealized in the end – electoral threats. It is interesting, though that MSNBC devoted more airtime and stories to the assault on McCain's memory than Dingell's, but perhaps pointing out schism on the Republican side was more important.

When we instead compare the coverage the paired cases received on each network, a different picture regarding the salience of "man bites dog" coverage emerges. On both ABC and MSNBC, the McCain flap, as would be expected for that norm, received much greater coverage. The raw airtime or word count is over three times as much, the number of stories is double, though average length is not quite as large. The number of days the story ran was also somewhat bigger, but mixed.

Fox, on the other hand, as noted devotes more average words per story to the Dingell controversy as might be expected, but in other respects, oddly news about the Trump-McCain spat was covered longer and in total greater. So, it appears the newsworthiness of majority-party infighting remained paramount, though that could be due to the greater status of McCain. Though both men were senior, respected members, McCain had been a presidential candidate, and Senators get more coverage than House members in general. Still the "man bites ghost" oddity would seemingly be the same, unless its very novelty was hampered in Dingell's case because Trump had done such a bizarre thing before.

A similar contrarian pattern appears when comparing the Corker and Tester flaps by network. ABC gives the Corker story slightly more airtime, more stories, and more days. MSNBC covered both extensively, but also covered the Corker spat longer and with more stories and airtime, as would be expected. Again, it is Fox that is the oddball: it ran the Tester story longer, as might be expected to criticize a Democratic Trump opponent, and relatively downplay internal GOP rifts; but more total stories and airtime (though not average, which was equal) were surprisingly devoted to the Corker controversy.

To some extent, we see that MSNBC covers all of these stories more than the others. Whether this is due to their general focus on controversy and conflict, regardless of its source, is unclear. They do, however, appear to play up in-fighting among Republicans more than "unfair" attacks by a vindictive (and hated President).

Still, somewhat surprisingly Fox did cover the "man bites (their) president" equally if not more than his attacks on or fights with Democrats. This finding could imply, if this is typical, that perhaps Fox is attempting to resolve inter-party struggles, or instead may be trying to make an example of recalcitrant members who don't support the president. This study, like Groeling, avoided attempting to code for framing, but at the very least an examination of the rhetoric, or qualitative nature of the coverage would illuminate this further. In any event, the findings are more intriguing than definitive.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, it is difficult to provide even a preliminary, cautious direct answer to the question that spawned the work – whether partisan outlets would cover partisan conflicts differently.

 The main point of this exercise was to stimulate further approaches or research agendas, and to begin thinking about re-examining questions about newsworthiness raised by partisan outlets that might impact "traditional" journalistic values (here, such as balance, conflict, and especially unusualness). In particular, there is the pragmatic question of how to build studies that can effectively answer these questions without the nearly impossible undertaking of minute, massive coding over periods of time.

All told, then, this was a first cut. Clearly, the hypotheses themselves were not directly proven. If nothing else, perhaps it is more the inherent newsworthiness of particular cases or controversies themselves that override pure partisan considerations. And ABC, as the "neutral control," didn't show much difference across cases, either, though it did seem to show that same-party infighting was generally more newsworthy.

Nevertheless, at least with the example of MSNBC, the findings do seem to indicate that partisan outlets in the "opposition" to the administration seem to have an incentive if not intent to both play up or focus on ruling party dissension as well as try to defend their partisans from presidential attack. Fox showed that the "ruling party" outlet doesn't necessarily shy away from family squabbles, and to perhaps not only as a way for its viewers to make sense of things but also remind its partisans in government of the need, if not enforce the party line. (Admittedly, one problem of using Fox is it's overarching subservience to the Trump administration or at least symbiotic relationship with it (Smith, 2019; Stelter, 2020; Schaefer, forthcoming.)) This situation suggests the network may both serve as a messenger to other Republicans to fall in line, as well as a way to try to coax Trump toward better behavior; another conservative outlet not so wedded to the fortunes of his presidency might be a better barometer, but

given there are no real alternatives in the television realm, as Trump said about Covid-19, "it is what it is."

Lastly, Donald Trump's unusual presidency in itself may impact news norms or change the editorial calculus, with his degree and kind of attacks on politicians of all stripes. Until new research says otherwise, at least tentatively it does appear that when "president bites fellow partisan" media of all stripes make note of it. Future research should explore additional cases, and/or perhaps look at some from Obama's presidency for further comparison.

FIG. 1: MAN BITES GHOST

TOPIC	Network	# of Stories	Length (words)	Avg. Length	Repetition	Duplicat'n
McCain	ABC	7	3025	432	1	5
McCain	Fox	11	5911	537	4	4
McCain	MSNBC	15	28144	1876	4	5
Dingell	ABC	3	897	299	1	2
Dingell	Fox	5	4991	998	1	2
Dingell	MSNBC	8	6262	783	2	4

FIG. 2: SENATORIAL DISCOURTESY

TOPIC	Network	# of Stories	Length (words)	Avg. Length	Repetition	Duplicat'n
Corker	ABC	7	3299	471	1	4
Corker	Fox	14	12075	863	3	4
Corker	MSNBC	15	36170	2411	4	5
Tester	ABC	4	1562	391	2	2
Tester	Fox	10	8808	881	4	5
Tester	MSNBC	11	17495	1590	3	4

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