

The House that Fox News Built?

The influence of partisan news is presumed to be powerful, but evidence for its effects on political elites is limited, often based more on anecdotes than science. Using a rigorous quasi-experimental research design, observational data, and open science practices, this book carefully demonstrates how the reemergence and rise of partisan cable news in the United States affected the behavior of political elites during the rise and proliferation of Fox News across media markets between 1996 and 2010. Despite widespread concerns over the ills of partisan news, evidence provides a nuanced, albeit cautionary, tale. On one hand, findings suggest that the rise of Fox indeed changed elite political behavior in recent decades. On the other hand, the limited conditions under which Fox News' influence occurred suggests that concerns about the network's power may be overstated.

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Kevin Arceneaux , Johanna Dunaway , Martin Johnson , Ryan J. Vander Wielen

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The House that Fox News Built?

*Representation, Political Accountability, and the
Rise of Partisan News*

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Dedicated to the memory of our friend Martin Johnson.

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Preface

We decided to write this book over dinner one evening at the 2019 Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington, DC. The four of us had just published an article that studied the effect of the emergence of Fox News in the late 1990s on politicians' decisions to run for Congress. This article itself was an extension of another article published by three of us a few years before, which studied the effects of Fox News on the voting behavior of members of Congress. While at the table, we sketched out how there was still more to know and how the natural experiment created by Fox News' slow and haphazard roll out beginning in 1996 was essentially the gift that kept giving. We wrote down many ideas, and we vowed to preregister our expectations. As recent converts to the open science movement, we thought it would be exciting to methodically map out our analyses and declare them to the world before running a single statistical model and writing a single word. Not all of our ideas that evening made it into our preanalysis plan, but we report all the ones that did in the pages that follow.

We had expected to start right away, but many things conspired to slow us down – the largest obstacle being the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted our personal and professional lives from March 2020 onward. As each of us regained our footing in the summer of 2020, we finalized our preanalysis plan and preregistered it at the end of August. A few weeks after the 2020 Meeting of the American Political Science Association, we sat in front of our individual computer screens over Zoom, a tool few of us had used before it had become a daily feature of our lives. We were excited to begin the work. Our analyses were preregistered and we put

into place a strategy for moving forward: who would draft which chapters, who would collect which data, and who would run which analyses. We shared some laughs as we caught up on each other's personal lives. It was good to see each other, even if it was in this new virtual world.

Not even a week later, the unexpected happened. Martin Johnson – our dear friend and coauthor – died at the age of 50. Martin was more than just a coauthor. He was a friend and a mentor. As Dean of the Louisiana State University Manship School of Communication, Martin did not have as much time as he would like for research, but he carved out time for this project and he generously funded our data collection efforts. The project brought together two of his passions: the study of mass media and the study of institutions. Even in the earliest stages of his graduate studies, Martin expressed his consternation that research on “political behavior” seemed wholly uninterested in the behavior of political elites. Martin was often prescient, and scholars of political behavior did in fact begin to turn their attention to the behavior of political elites. Just to name a few: Dan Butler, Cherie Maestas, Stuart Soroka, and fittingly Martin Johnson.

In the months after Martin's passing, we pushed the project forward. While our project meetings lacked Martin's warmhearted laugh and his trenchant insights, we continued to work on our shared vision. This project could not have come to fruition without Martin, and so we think that it is fitting that his name remain as a coauthor. We also think it is fitting to dedicate this book to his memory. There is little doubt that if he were still alive this book would be better written and make deeper insights, but it is what we have to offer.

We were lucky to have had him in our lives.