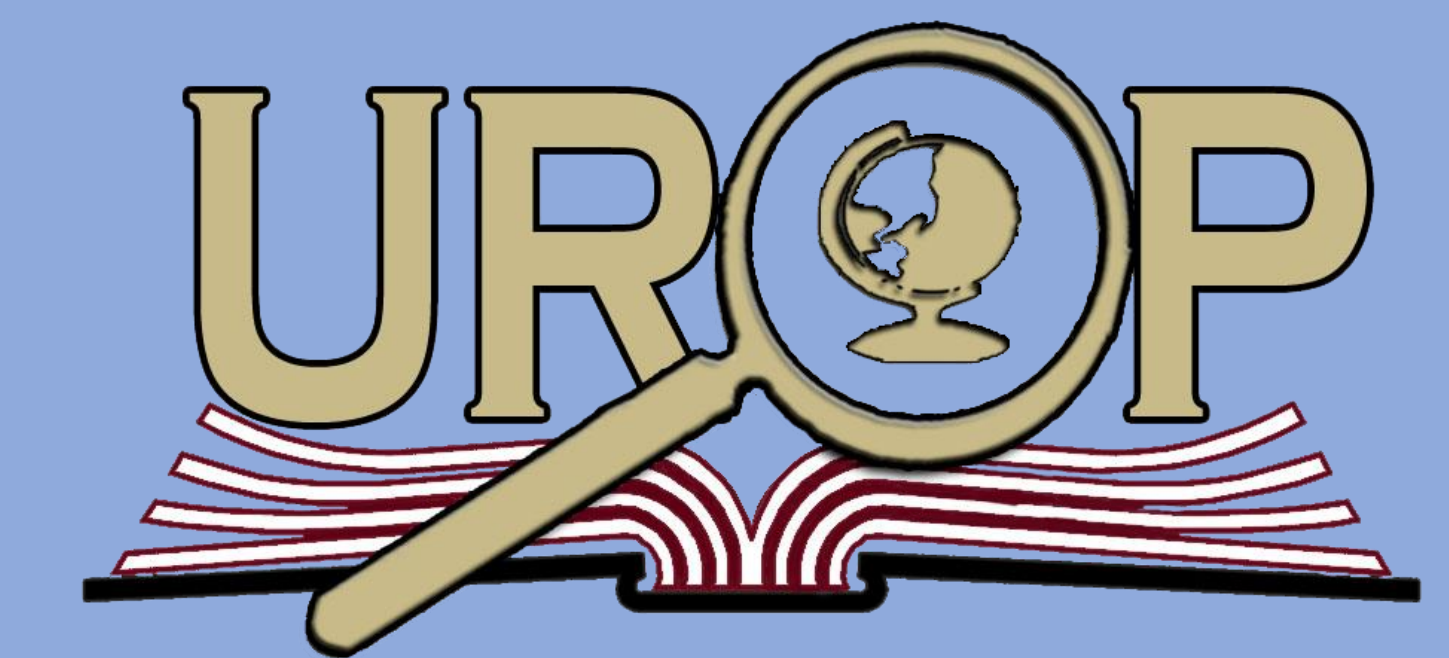




Into The Media's Framing of Climate Change

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Introduction

Media coverage of climate change varies across different cable news networks. With partisan-leaning news networks especially, the tonality and rhetoric used to discuss climate change provides interesting insight into how society has received environmental news in the past 30 years or so.

Prior literature suggests there are stark differences between how partisan media covers climate change, and these differences have shaped the opinion of viewers. Yet, curiously, a majority of Republicans still support various policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

This project focuses on the similarities and differences in how partisan media has covered environmental issues over the last 30 years in order to capture a more nuanced picture of the media landscape, and to help identify effective environmental communication strategies moving forward.

Methodology

To accomplish this task, we collected a random sample of transcripts from CNN, FOX, and MSNBC over the past 30 years. Transcripts were selected based on key words related to the environment. Once our sample was selected, transcripts were hand-coded based on the following key variables:

- Insult:** was the environment used as an insult (e.g. those planet-murdering capitalists)?
 - Environment:** was the environment substantively talked about (if no, cease coding transcript)?
 - Topic:** what is primarily being discussed about the environment (e.g. climate change, extreme weather, pollution)?
 - Support:** how supportive of the environment is the coverage?
 - Expert:** is an expert or study referenced?
- Coverage:** what is the coverage primarily about (policy, politics, facts, problems/events, etc.)?
 - Factual:** is coverage more factual or opinionated?
 - Connect:** is environmental discussion connected to other policy area (e.g., religion, jobs, national security, energy)?

Results

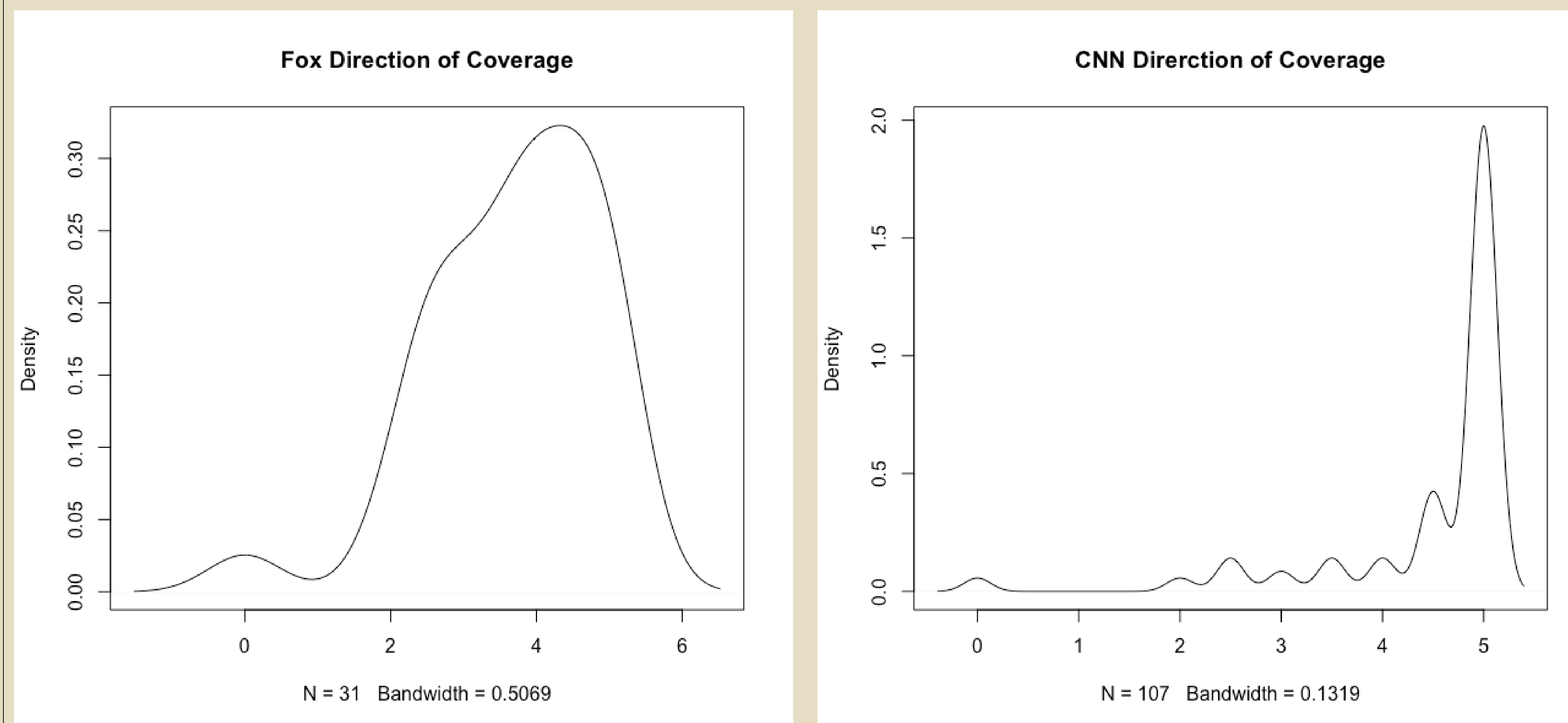


Figure 1 and 2: Density curves for both CNN and Fox News networks based on the level of support for the environment. CNN's curve displays a concentration at level 5, the highest level on the scale, while Fox has a lower average at 4.5, but sees a wider variation.

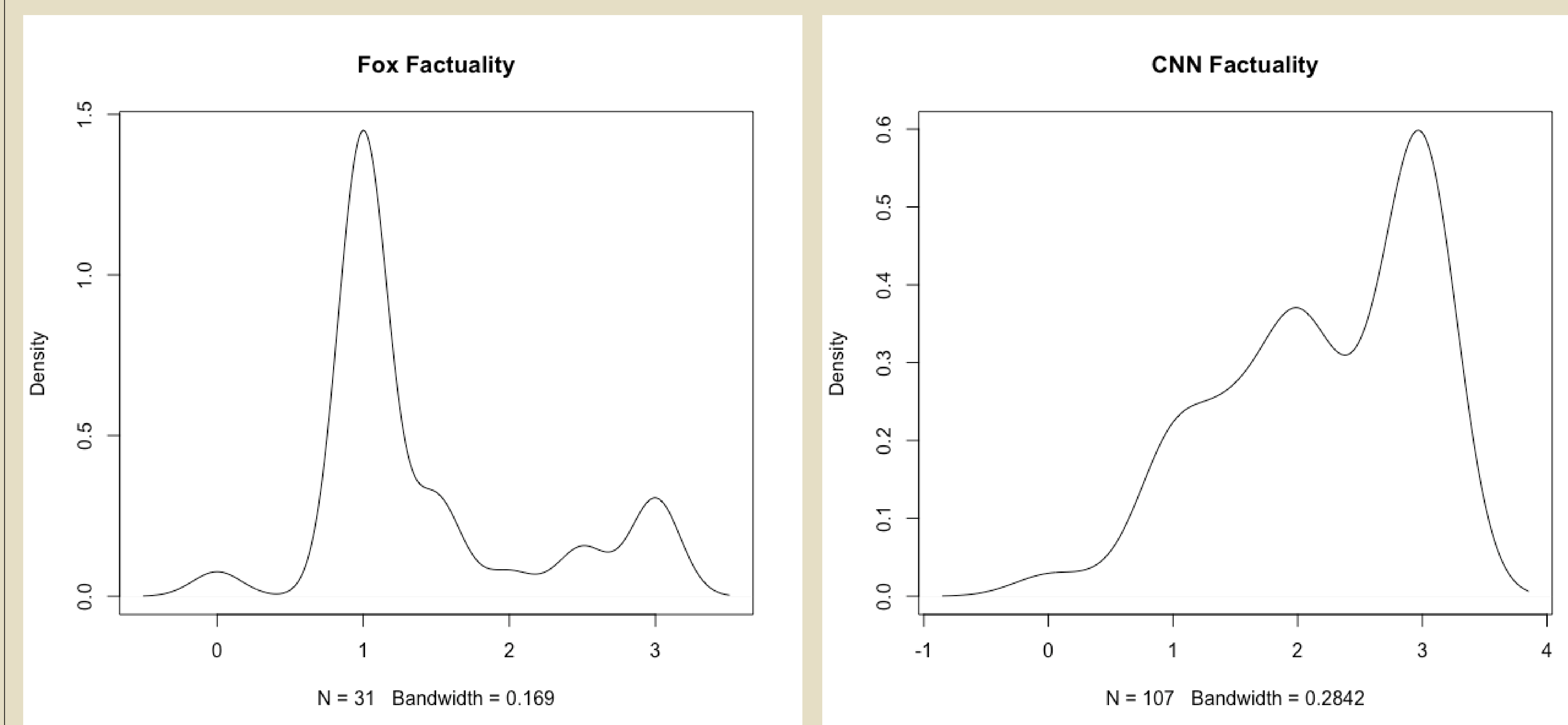


Figure 3 and 4: Density curves for both CNN and Fox News networks based on the level of factuality in comparison to opinion in their reporting. CNN's curve is concentrated at level 3, signaling fact-based objective reporting while Fox News' curve is concentrated at a level 1, signaling opinion-based subjective reporting.

Conclusion

News sources that were predominantly right-wing were more likely to speak negatively about issues concerning the environment than other news sources. For example, FOX coverage had an average support of 3.7 on a 5-point scale, while CNN was 4.9 (see Figures 1 & 2). Yet, even so, this suggests that a majority of the coverage from FOX was supportive of the environment—a key finding not discussed in prior work.

Another important difference in coverage emerges when looking at the manner at which the environment is discussed. CNN is much more likely than FOX to discuss the environment using factual statements (Figures 3 & 4), with an average value of 2.2 and 1.4 out of 3, respectively.

While this research is far from complete, these early results point to an important finding. Cable news coverage of the environment is more complicated than prior work has led on. Most of the time spent talking about the environment is done so in a positive light. What is left to better understand are the differences between how the environment is covered. Does FOX avoid discussing climate change? How does positive coverage of the environment differ between the cable news companies?

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