The Structure of News Sources on Television: A Network Analysis of "CBS News," "Nightline," "MacNeil/Lehrer," and "This Week with David Brinkley"

by Stephen D. Reese, University of Texas, August Grant, University of Texas, and Lucig H. Danielian, State University of New York, Albany

Behind the "conventional wisdom" of mainstream television news lies a structured pattern of sources: newsmakers, experts, and commentators. This study uses network analysis to examine the interconnections of these sources—defined as joint appearances—within and across programs to produce a cohesive "framework." Supporting an elite model, a single cohesive "insiders" group, knit together by officials, accounts for most of these sources and spans a number of key national issues. This news framework provides an important conceptual approach to understanding how the boundaries of public affairs discourse are staked out by the choice and positioning of news sources.

The mainstream media cover issues with often striking similarity. Whether it is domestic issues, foreign policy, or political scandal, the media follow each other's lead as they "converge" on the same topics and interpretations, often limiting the range of views on important policy debates. Indeed, considering that thousands of journalists cover such "media events"

as economic summits, political conventions, and most recently, the Persian Gulf War, remarkably few divergent points of view emerge.

This phenomenon is partly rooted in pack journalism, the routine based on the psychological need of reporters and their editors, in the highly ambiguous world of news, to confirm their work with others (Crouse, 1972; Sigal, 1973). But in addition, a more "systemic" convergence is encouraged by the common socialization patterns of newsworkers, large conglomerate ownership of news organizations, information subsidies through public relations efforts, and the dominance of a few key wire and syndicated news services. By relying on a common and often narrow network of sources—newsmakers, experts, and commentators, in other words—the news media contribute to this systemic convergence on the conventional wisdom, the largely unquestioned consensus views held by journalists, power-holders, and many audience members.

The perspective that guides our analysis in this study of these news sources is based on elite theory, which directs attention toward the structure of power in society. This approach focuses on commonalities, cohesion, and coordination among those individuals at the top rungs of society, and rejects the traditional pluralist notion of power distributed across a number of competing and balancing blocs. C. Wright Mills (1956), for example, in his influential work *The Power Elite,* traced the convergent interests of business, economic, and military elites, as forming an apex atop the social structure pyramid (see also Domhoff, 1970, 1979, 1983). More recently, network analysis has found a broad-based group, or "social circle," of elites, supporting a cohesive and unified conception of elite power (Alba & Moore, 1983). Among the few scholars who have applied this approach to the media, Dreier (1982), who examined the interlocks between media boards of directors and others, found the strongest interconnections between the elite media companies and other powerful institutions.

This same theoretical perspective can be usefully applied to the study of news sources, because it focuses attention on the interconnections among those sources.[1] We already know that elites, both governmental and corporate, receive privileged access to news channels (e.g., Herman & Chomsky, 1988), but here we examine the extent to which the news sources on which the national media rely form an interlocking structure across programs and issues. Locating a large, cohesive, interconnected group of sources, which addresses a number of issues, would support a conception of sources comparable to the "higher circles" found by elite

[1] As Blumler and Gurevitch (1986) have noted, the term "source" is ambiguous, and has been applied to organizations, groups, and individuals who represent them. Here we use "source" to refer to the individuals that journalists depend on for news, and, more specifically, those actually appearing in the news.

85

theorists. Alternatively, a pluralist view would predict a number of sets of sources, which group with little overlap around specific events and issues. Understanding this structure of news sources is important to understanding their power in the U.S. media as expressed through news coverage.

Thus, this study has two major objectives. First, to argue for the importance of using a structural perspective that emphasizes the manner in which sources are linked together and the ways they are combined and arranged both within and across news stories on television, and second, to describe the overall structure of these news sources, a structure which we argue better conforms to the elite than to the pluralist model. Ultimately, these source selections by news producers give us important insights into the ideological assumptions behind their news judgments. We will specify below exactly what we mean by our conceptualization, what constitutes the structure's "nodes" and links, and what they represent.

A Structural Approach to News Sources

To examine television's source structure we adopt the network paradigm, which emphasizes relationships rather than attributes. The network approach allows us to capture the interconnections among sources in a way not addressed by simply describing and categorizing individual newsmakers. Typically, network analysis has been applied to social systems to identify structural characteristics such as cohesion, communication flows, and the people most central to those systems (Monge, 1987; Monge & Contractor, 1988; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981), but we can easily apply it to our questions about arrangements of sources in the news.

To do this, we chose to take an in-depth look at source use across several programs over a relatively short period of time, October and November 1987, a period that featured several key issues, including the Bork, Ginsburg, and Kennedy nominations to the Supreme Court, the budget deficit, stock market crash, and Persian Gulf conflict involving the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers. This allowed us to look more intensively at the connections across media during a given period.

We examined a range of network news and interview programs: "CBS Evening News," "Nightline," "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour," "This Week with David Brinkley," "Face the Nation," and "Meet the Press." CBS was chosen to represent the three evening network newscasts, which strongly resemble each other in their content (e.g., Altheide, 1982). "Nightline" has become a model for the "hard-hitting" journalistic live-interview show and has a wide viewership. The "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" appeals to a more elite audience, and although lengthier, it resembles "Nightline" in the newsmakers it features, according to analyses of both programs ("All the Usual Suspects," 1990; "Are You On," 1989). The Sunday morning talk shows—"Brinkley," "Face the Nation," and "Meet the Press," all produced by their respective news organizations—completed our list. The same

sources likely to appear on the other news shows also value a chance to appear on the Sunday programs. We consider all of these news programs to be members of the mainstream press, with greater similarities than differences, and so expect to find substantial connections across these shows via their source selections.

This emphasis on news sources as the basic building blocks of the structure departs from many content studies, which tend to organize news coverage by topics or issues: "war," "the economy," or "the campaign." A source focus is consistent with a number of media sociology studies (e.g., Lasorsa & Reese, 1990). Gans (1979), Sigal (1973), and others since them have emphasized the important role sources play in actively shaping the news. When we look at who says what in the news, it helps get us beyond imprecise statements about what "the media" say about an issue: the media express views by allowing newsmakers to express theirs. Thus, although the media are often said to be "powerful," in large part that power derives from media's ability to amplify the views of certain powerful sources, such as the president, members of Congress, and other elites. Thus, no analysis of news media content is complete without a close look at the sources of that content.

Increasingly, many of the opinion leaders who dictate the conventional wisdom that concerns us here are found on television. According to David Shaw, the media critic for the *Los Angeles Times,* "it is increasingly television that drives the journalistic consensus today, especially on Washington-based public affairs stories" (Shaw, 1989b, p. 8). He adds that "predictability is a major factor in the conventional wisdom dispensed by the TV talk shows" (p. 9), and this predictability is served up within a narrow range of opinion and superficial analysis. Shaw further notes that although the some 20 public affairs talk and interview shows on television barely register on the ratings, they are in fact influential beyond their audience size because they reach important opinion leaders and other journalists: "Television increasingly acts as a megaphone, broadcasting the conventional wisdom back to its vast audience—which includes other print journalists" (Shaw, 1989b, p. 10).

Because television must distill news into a dramatic format, with a beginning, middle, and end, Hallin (1986) argues that television provides more explicit ideological guidance than newspapers and strives for a more coherent ideological vision. This suggests that television should display more readily than print media a discernible structure of source selections.

Linkages in the Source Structure

We assume that the joint appearance of two or more sources in a television news story or on a public affairs show indicates a "relationship" between those sources. They are considered to "go together" for the purposes of presenting the media treatment of an event or story. These sources are assumed to be more involved with each other than with oth-

ers who do not appear, even if that relationship is largely symbolic as it relates to their political positions or the interests they represent.[2] In other words, the linking of two or more sources in this manner does not assume anything about the intentions or actions of the sources themselves, who obviously do not usually control the appearance of others with them, nor does it assume that they even communicate with each other. We do assume that these links tell us something meaningful about the actual structure of sources who appear to discuss important national issues, upon whom news content is based.

In addition, and just as importantly, these sources by their joint appearance are considered by writers, reporters, or talk show producers to represent the essential players or range of views on a topic. By their selection of sources, television news gatekeepers implicitly define the limits of discourse on an issue. This selection of sources confines the debate and carries with it implicit assumptions about who is important.[3] For example, when National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, and former advisers Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski were chosen by the producers of "This Week with David Brinkley" (August 26, 1990) to be the best people to talk about the Persian Gulf crisis, it revealed much about the range of opinions considered important.

On "Nightline," for example, Republican Rep. Robert Dornan and Democratic Sen. Christopher Dodd appeared to discuss a Nicaraguan peace plan with Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams (November 16, 1987). Behind the co-appearance of these three lay many behind the scenes decisions and institutional arrangements, but their presence ultimately reveals the voices and interests that the present system of newsgathering considers to go together. These officials were not the only ones involved in the Nicaraguan issue, but by selecting this configuration of views, "Nightline" framed the debate (illustrated in Figure 1).

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[2] In an innovative application of the technique to archival data, Burt (1983) examined newspaper accounts of events to determine the relationships between classes of actors mentioned jointly in the articles. His fundamental assumption was that "actors embroiled in the same events are more likely to have relations with one another than actors involved in different events" (p. 163). In network terms, actors are connected by their tendency to be recorded in the same stories "as prominent with respect to the same events or issues" (p. 163). These media accounts provided a convenient set of data that allowed access to a wide range of relationships otherwise unavailable.

[3] It may seen counter-intuitive that two sources are considered linked when they may appear on a program taking polar opposite positions. And yet, in the minds of viewers, such sources are no doubt linked precisely because they always appear in opposition. Thus, these "strange bedfellows" may disagree yet occupy equivalent *network* locations with respect to a given issue. Ultimately, of course, we assume that news viewers absorb this often two-sided structure, learn the sources that "go together," and use this framework in their understanding of issues and events.
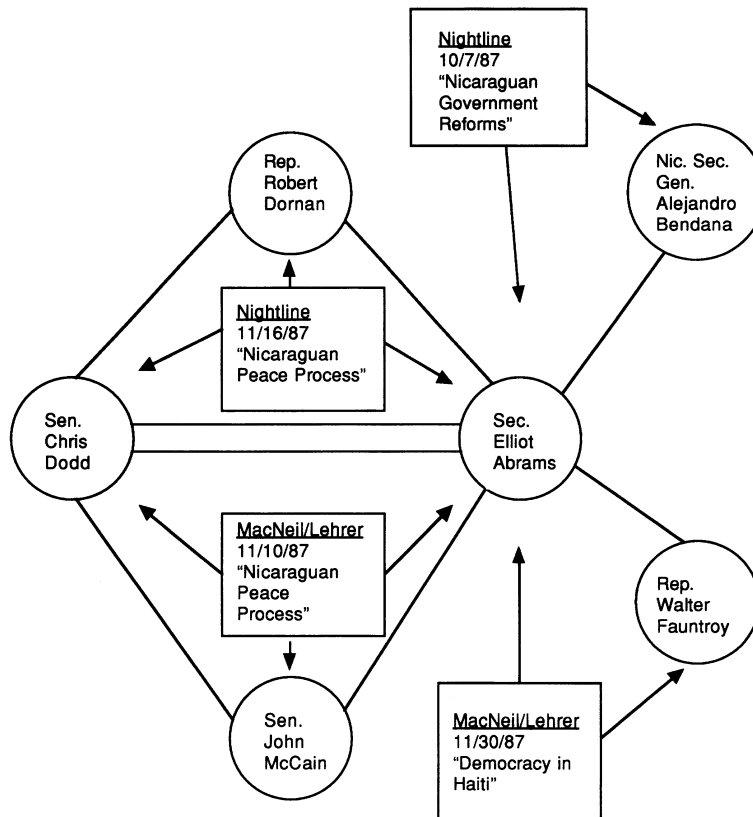
Figure 1. Example of structure nodes and links in news source network.

Both strong Contra supporters, Dornan and Abrams strongly opposed the Nicaraguan Sandinista government; Dodd was presumably picked to "balance" the other two as a critic of administration policy. His contribution, however, was limited to commenting on a procedural controversy, whether House Speaker Jim Wright had the right to meet with visiting Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega against State Department advice. Ultimately, he differed only tactically from Dornan and Abrams, arguing that if the peace process worked—if the Sandinistas shaped up— "there'll be no reason to support Contra aid," that is, to punish them militarily.

In the example given above, we have three sources and three links, reflecting both disagreement and agreement, yet taken together they show the group called upon to represent debate on the Nicaraguan issue. This linkage approach resembles the co-citation technique used to identify intellectual areas within academic disciplines, where linkages are based on the joint citation of studies by others. For example, if two journal articles are cited together within a later article they are considered to go together, even if one is an effort to "disprove" the other (e.g., Cawkell, 1977; Tankard, Chang, & Tsang, 1984). This linking of research (whether defined as articles, books, authors, or journals) adds a new, structural dimension to the conventional ranking of research by sheer frequency of citation, just as we go beyond listing frequent sources to showing their arrangement. It is important to note that conceptualizing links as we do allows the source structure to encompass several dimensions, connecting sources across different points in time, news "reports," and issues. To illustrate, we can expand the example above with three other programs. In addition to the "Nightline" appearance, Dodd and Abrams appeared a few days earlier on "MacNeil/Lehrer" (November 10, 1987) to discuss peace in Nicaragua, joined by Republican Sen. John McCain (note the equivalent group structure: Republican, Democrat, administration source). Thus, the link between Dodd and Abrams remains, with both now being linked to an additional source, McCain. Abrams also appeared on "Nightline" (October 7) paired with Alejandro Bendana, the Secretary General of the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry (discussed in greater detail below), and on "MacNeil/Lehrer" (November 30) with Democratic Rep. Walter Fauntroy to discuss democracy in Haiti, thus linking Abrams across two issues. These six linked sources, then, span four news programs as seen in Figure 1.

The Public Affairs Shows

Our look at television goes beyond the half-hour network newscasts to include the broader range of news programs on television that add important emphasis and interpretation to breaking stories. These public affairs shows place the news into context by drawing on more extensive conversations with newsmakers, experts, and commentators, and because these programs are usually presented live, their spontaneity makes the choice of guests critical.

The proliferation of news on television in recent years, including the public affairs programs, adds less than ought to be expected to the diversity of opinions. The Sunday public affairs shows in particular—"Brinkley," "Face the Nation," et al.—concentrate on Washington officialdom (Adams & Ferber, 1977; Harmon, 1990; Nix, 1973).[4] As Tuchman (1974)

More recently, Hitchens (1987) has contended that the Sunday morning shows guarantee intellectual mediocrity and political conformism. He charges that the shows are (cont.)

observes, producing a successful talk show requires a certain predictability in what guests will say. This leads to typifications of guests into definable categories to make possible a routinization of guest selection. Familiar commentators serve the same purpose for television public affairs shows—their predictability safely fits the "format," and their views can be balanced with others who are also well known.

As producers come to rely on a limited number of these elites for news, viewers also develop psychological relationships with these often-seen sources. Thus, sources gain credibility by appearing often, and that credibility helps ensure their continued selection in a self-justifying cycle. Television relies on the same news sources as do the print media, and, in cases like "MacNeil/Lehrer," depends regularly on print reporters themselves as guests. Despite their importance, however, much less scholarly attention has been directed at these programs than at the traditional evening newscasts.

In recent years, "Nightline" and "MacNeil/Lehrer" have come under particular scrutiny. The media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting has conducted systematic content analyses showing that both programs focus on elites, with heavy reliance on administration sources. "MacNeil/Lehrer," although twice as long and broadcast on non-commercial PBS, is also heavily dependent on the power elites, usually white, male Capitol Hill pundits ("All the Usual Suspects," 1990; "Are You On," 1989). The most frequent "Nightline" guests, appearing more than ten times in a three-year period between 1985 and 1988, were, in order, Henry Kissinger, Alexander Haig, Elliot Abrams, Jerry Falwell, Lawrence Eagleburger, Jesse Jackson, Arthur Miller (Harvard Law), and William Hyland (former National Security Council official), thereby demonstrating the program's strong tilt toward government and former government elites. Our analysis will require that we look at specific people such as these—including those like Kissinger who appear frequently, and on more than one show.

Sources in the News

Like the print media, television news in general relies heavily on institutional sources, that is, officials speaking through routine channels. In particular, the networks have been oriented toward Washington news, with regular attention given the president and Capitol Hill. In addition to officials, we consider two other important categories: experts, and journalists themselves.

The experts. Media analysts in recent years have begun to give greater attention to expert sources. These academics, think-tankers, and retooled

(cont.) subject to manipulation by administration officials, who may refuse to appear if the format, other guests, and journalists are not to their liking. From his personal experience, he observed how some of the seemingly "unrehearsed programs," such as "The McLaughlin Report," are carefully planned to get the proper sequence of guests and views.

political insiders have become an important element in many stories. In addition, these expert commentators in network newscasts appear to have a strong impact on public opinion, as shown by Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey (1987), who suggest that their potency may stem from their expression of elite consensus.

Journalists find it easier and more predictable to consult a narrow range of experts than to call on new ones each time.

Albert R. Hunt, Washington bureau chief for the Wall Street Journal, *says he grew so annoyed at seeing the same experts quoted in his paper all the time that he banned the use of several of them for a couple of months last year. "The ban ended when I did a column and had to quote a couple of them," he says, sheepishly.* (Shaw, 1989a, p. 3)

Cooper and Soley (1990) confirm this tendency in their study of "experts" on network newscasts, noting that correspondents showed a clear pattern of reliance on a homogeneous handful of the same experts to put events in context in an apparently neutral and objective fashion. They were mostly men, East Coasters, and Republicans, ex-government officials from Republican administrations and "scholars" from conservative Washington think tanks. Among the top ten most-quoted experts or analysts in 1987 and 1988 on ABC, CBS, and NBC were William Schneider and Norman Ornstein (both of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, AEI), and Stephen Hess (of the centrist Brookings Institution). These experts are valued for their succinct and predictable responses, which further reinforce the conventional wisdom.

In addition, Steele (1990) argues, university experts are particularly attractive to television news producers, who usually have already decided what they want said before calling these sources to "reinforce their own understanding of a story" and to create "the illusion of objective reporting" (p. 28). Although few of these academics provoke or challenge, hearing them creates the impression that an objective analysis has been given. Their value depends on their presumed impartiality and lack of bias, which helps producers and reporters round out stories. Political scientist Ornstein, typical of many experts, promotes himself into the news, hawking his largely descriptive commentary to the mass press in publications like *TV Guide* (Cooper & Soley, 1990). His centrist viewpoint both ensures his audience appeal and certifies his suitability.

Journalists as sources. Journalists themselves—broadly including authors, columnists, and commentators—have also become important sources. The use of print media journalists, commentators, and columnists anchors the television world to the print media, encouraging group consensus. On network newscasts, these journalists stay behind the scenes, but on the interview shows they are as likely as anyone to appear on camera. The "Brinkley" program, for example, has several rotating journalists, who appear with regulars Sam Donaldson and George Will.

92

These have included Cokie Roberts (NPR), Hodding Carter (former Carter State Department spokesperson and now PBS commentator), Tom Wicker (*New York Times* columnist), Morton Kondracke (*New Republic*), Ellen Goodman (syndicated columnist), Mary Anne Dolan (syndicated columnist), and the late Robert Maynard (*Oakland Tribune* editor).

Similarly, "Nightline" and "MacNeil/Lehrer" also make extensive use of journalists as sources. From a producer's standpoint, journalists are a boon. They are usually articulate, up on the issues, accessible, predictable, and desire the exposure. In fact, journalist sources effectively subsidize the cost of a show by relieving the news program's own reporters from the task of digging up information. Because the journalists themselves have already made the investment in compiling their "stories" they can "repackage" that information on television for a modest incremental cost in their own time. Thus, the relationship between journalists and the public affairs shows is symbiotic.

A network perspective alerts us to the collection of working press figures, pundits, and commentators who span the public affairs talk shows. "The Capital Gang" on Cable News Network (CNN), for example, provides a forum for Washington insiders to discuss political issues. These guests include columnist Robert Novak, *Wall Street Journal* Washington bureau chief Al Hunt, the *Washington Post*'s Mark Shields, and Pat Buchanan (presidential aspirant and former director of communications for Reagan), who also has appeared regularly on "The McLaughlin Group" on PBS, among others, and writes a column. Hunt has appeared on "Meet the Press", "The McLaughlin Group,"[5] and PBS's "Washington Week in Review." Others can also be seen across several shows, expressing essentially the same view on each. Shields has been featured weekly as a commentator on "MacNeil/Lehrer" with David Gergen, former *U.S. News & World Report* editor and Reagan staff member (most recently a Clinton staff member). Hunt is a regular on a number of shows, as is Hedrick Smith of *The New York Times*. These "interlocking directors" effectively knit these shows into a seamless forum of mainstream journalism and provide a centripetal force toward consensus.[6]

An elite/structural versus agenda/pluralist view. Before proceeding further, it is important to make a final point about the way this elite/structural approach to news content differs from the traditional agenda/pluralist

[5] "The McLaughlin Group" is underwritten by General Electric, a major corporate sponsor of conservative causes over the years, and features guests like Eleanor Clift of *Newsweek*; Fred Barnes, *New Republic* senior editor; columnist Jack Germond; and moderator McLaughlin, former *National Review* editor. The fact that General Electric, owner of NBC, sponsors both this program and the "Brinkley" show provides another important interlocking *corporate* linkage, but one we will save for a future study.

[6] One wonders how journalists can prepare for so many different appearances? They must stick to common topics they are already up on and that they can approach in their accustomed, "formulaic" fashion. A diversity of guests would not be practical from a "routines" standpoint.

view. In both cases, key metaphors help illustrate their differences. The agenda metaphor—underlying the agenda-setting approach to media effects—has been especially strong in the way it has directed the study of news content toward a "topical" emphasis. The very term "agenda" implies a list of prioritized and discrete topics or issues, and "agenda-setting," the transmission of those priorities to the public. At the risk of over-simplifying, the method for analysis that often follows is to establish a fixed number of news "issues" and measure the relative amount of coverage devoted to each. Like any metaphor, however, this one highlights one view of reality while hiding another. We can readily see that if the sources, articulated interests, and perspectives were the same for each issue on the *nominal* agenda, then the diversity implied by the agenda metaphor would be effectively much less.[7]

In keeping with the elite model, consider the metaphor of a "framework." This signifies a more interlaced, interconnected view of news content, with the structure of sources being one important component. We can imagine the key load-bearing poles of this framework anchored in the institutional foundations of Capitol Hill and Wall Street. On its outer surface lie the words and images about events in the news at any given time, but the interconnecting structure draws attention to how the whole set-up, the "system" itself, is geared toward certain stories and points of view. This model leads us in this study to consider a number of news programs together, as different components of this news framework—an approach that emphasizes commonalities across programs rather than differences. Of course, some news media occupy a more pivotal location than others: the power of *The New York Times* and the "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour," for example, lies not in their circulation or ratings but in their ability to color the way issues are presented in other media (reviewed in Reese & Danielian, 1989). Even specialized publications and the alternative press can be seen as part of the framework, in the sense that they must contend with the way events have been framed elsewhere.

Thus, the elite model we adopt as a theoretical perspective requires an approach to news content indicated by this "framework" conception, an important part of which is the source structure. We now turn to measuring this structure, specifically within the framework constituted by television news.

Studying the News Source Structure

We examined news programs in October and November 1987, a period that proved appealing for a number of reasons. It was not an election pe-

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[7] In recent years the agenda metaphor has received renewed theoretical engagement. See, for example, Becker, 1991; Protess and McCombs, 1991; Reese, 1991; Swanson, 1988; and Whitney, 1991, for a fuller discussion.

riod dominated by campaign coverage, it did not fall during a slow summer or holiday news period, and it featured a varied range of important issues. The *Vanderbilt Television News Archives Abstracts* were used to identify the sources used in network news. We coded only the weekday broadcasts of the "CBS Evening News" that matched issues discussed on any of the other talk shows. A few other CBS stories were also omitted—namely, nonpolitical news such as Baby Jessica falling down the well in Midland, Texas, and Nancy Reagan's breast cancer. All sources who spoke on camera (identified by brackets in the *Abstracts*) were coded with their affiliation and/or title where listed. Unnamed sources ("man," "realtor") were omitted, as were occasional names of individuals used as anecdotal illustrations of problems.

Complete transcripts were ordered for every program for "Nightline," "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour," and "This Week with David Brinkley." These full transcripts contained a list of guests who appeared and what they said.[8] The guests on "Face the Nation" and "Meet the Press" for that period were obtained from the television summaries in *The New York Times* for those Sundays.[9]

If two or more sources appeared in the same program segment, talking about the same issue, they were coded as symmetrically linked. For network purposes, each was considered linked to each of their fellow guests, regardless of their number. When programs like "MacNeil/Lehrer" and "Nightline" featured more than one interview segment, each was treated separately if they were clearly separated in the program and dealt with different issues, such that each source was linked only to the others in their respective segments. (The short news summaries that begin the "MacNeil/Lehrer" and "Brinkley" shows were not coded.) For the CBS newscasts, the program unit was defined as the major underlined topic titles in the abstracts. For example, a newscast main section called "STOCK MARKET" might have contained two stories by two different reporters, in which case all of the sources contained in the two reports were considered to go together and to be linked.

Note that some programs, such as "Nightline," consisted entirely of a single segment, or topic, while others, such as the "Evening News," included several topics. If a source appeared as the sole guest or source for

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[8] Records of network news programs have been traditionally harder to get than print media, although this situation is changing. Lexis/Nexis has recently added several news programs to its news retrieval service, including "Nightline" and the "Brinkley" show. Records of other public affairs shows are also now available—a catalog of Purdue University's new archive lists guests and topics of programs aired on C-Span, including Washington conferences, World Affairs Council speeches, and commission meetings.

[9] Note that these lists are subject to change and, thus, are not always accurate records of who appeared. "Intended" sources still have value, however, in revealing the choices of news decision makers.

a given topic, that person was effectively an "isolate" in the network structure. Because CBS tended to include more sources within a single topic, those sources had more opportunities to be linked to others than on programs such as "MacNeil/Lehrer," where often only two sources were featured discussing an issue.[10] These program differences do not affect this study, however, which looks for connections across news shows. Furthermore, we make no distinction between brief and more lengthy appearance. It is the pairing and arrangement of sources that concern us, not the amount of information they present.

The list of "linked" sources generated by this coding process was analyzed using the NEGOPY computer program (v. 4.01), which uses a graph–theoretical approach to analyze the pattern of linkages and divide the subjects into groups based upon patterns of co-appearance. For this program, a "group" is defined as a set of at least three individuals who have at least 50.01% of their communication, or links, with others in the group. In addition to identifying group structure, NEGOPY also identifies other structural roles including Isolates, Liaisons, Tree Nodes, and Dyad Members. An isolate appears with no other sources or with only one other source; dyads constitute a free-standing pair of isolate sources who appear only with each other; tree nodes are sources who connect two or more isolates, such that removing the tree node would sever the connected isolates' only link with the network; and liaisons are not group members themselves but connect groups. In addition to reporting group membership or other structural roles, the NEGOPY program also computes various network, group, and individual level characteristics.

The NEGOPY computer program was chosen for this analysis because it divides members of a system into mutually-exclusive groups based upon patterns of linkages among group members. The specific definition of a "link" is not constrained by the program, allowing the researcher to define the parameter or parameters that connect two or more members of a network. Our measure of a link as a co-appearance does represent a departure from typical measures of connectivity; however, this definition is based upon the theoretical goal of identifying an underlying structure of news sources for these programs as discussed above.

Sources were categorized to give an overview of who appeared and to help compare across programs: (1) Officials, divided into Senators, Representatives, Judges, Administration, Former Administration, and Military; (2) Interest Group spokespersons; (3) Political Candidates; (4) Corporate Executives; (5) Experts, divided into Think Tank, Analysts, and University

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[10] Although a list approaching 500 sources is not large by traditional content analysis standards, network analysis requires keeping track of each source's relationship(s) and thus multiplies the complexity. To keep up with everyone, coding sheets were compiled which included each source's program appearance(s), affiliation, and a brief note about the issue and his or her stance on it. Other lists were maintained in both alphabetical and code number order, and where necessary the original transcripts were consulted for other details.

Table 1: Source Categories by Programs

Source	Program Nightline	CBS News	MacNeil	Brinkley
Senator	9%	20%	15%	27%
Representative	8	9	7	16
Judge	—	2	—	—
Administration	5	10	6	11
Former administration	6	4	8	9
Military	—	1	—	—
Interest group	6	6	5	2
Political candidate	1	2	2	7
Corporate exec	11	6	12	7
Think tank	2	2	7	—
Analyst	6	10	5	—
University expert	3	7	7	—
Labor leader	1	1	—	—
Other professional	11	2	4	—
Other worker	8	4	1	—
Local	2	4	1	7
Foreign	8	7	4	—
Journalist	15	3	17	16
Total N = 584	119	258	162	45

Note: Some sources are counted more than once if they appeared on more than one program. There were 456 unique sources counted across the four programs above (128 appeared on more than one program), many of whom also appeared more than once *within* one or more programs.

Experts; (6) Labor Leaders; (7) Other Professionals; (8) Workers; (9) Local sources; (10) Foreign sources; and (11) Journalists. Some sources may have performed multiple roles, such as David Gergen, then *U.S. News & World Report* editor. Where sources had an important former government affiliation, such as Gergen with Reagan, they were coded as such, with the assumption that the government connection was a highly salient one for the purposes of this study.

The interest groups category contained spokespersons for groups like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and People for the American Way. The expert category was divided into analysts, formal think-tank labeled sources, and university experts. Analysts were called upon for their expertise but were typically associated with a corporation (e.g., chief economist for Shearson Lehman). Other professionals included doctors, lawyers, and otherwise unaffiliated professionals. The journalist category included commentators such as *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis and authors such as Bob Woodward and, excluding CBS, comprised between 15% and 17% of all sources.

Table 1 compares the sources during the study period across the four major programs examined (omitting the Sunday talk shows other than "Brinkley"). As other studies have shown, the programs featured a substantial number of current and former government officials, especially

97

senators. The Washington-based "Brinkley" show had the most congressional sources (43% of its total) and "Nightline" the least (17%). A rough balance of administration and former administration officials was also well represented, ranging from 11% of "Nightline" guests to 20% of "Brinkley." Note that the sources in our cross-sectional list on Table 1 undercount the influence of the government sector, since it lists only unique sources; many government sources—especially senators—appeared more than once.

The Source Network

Turning to the connections among these people, and their associated issues, 27 such groups were identified by the NEGOPY program. The network as a whole is large by social network standards but not very dense—two percent of all possible links are present. Because this density measure varies with the size of a network (as network size increases, network density decreases), NEGOPY reports an alternative "structure" measure, the degree to which the pattern of links in a network differs from that expected in a "random" network. The structure for this network was .30, compared to a score of 0 expected in a perfectly random network (this falls within the average structure range for communication networks between .15 and .35 reported by Richards, 1989).

The most striking feature is a large 237-member group. The issues that this group discussed included the Persian Gulf policy; Bork, Ginsburg, and Kennedy Supreme Court nominations; abortion, the stock market, U.S./Soviet Summit, Iran-Contra, Central America policy, Social Security, and the deficit. The other groups, mostly containing three to six members, are defined largely by single programs on special topics, such as the National Football League strike or spouse abuse, or different looks at ongoing issues overlapping those of the larger group, for example, a special "Nightline" "Viewpoint" broadcast featured a number of otherwise unconnected sources discussing the stock crash.

The large group, which we call the "Insiders," contains most of the senators (50 of 59), representatives (18 of 26), and most of the former and current administration sources on our list. Considering only federal government officials, 85 of the 237 group members, or 36%, fit this category, although they represented only 114 of the 456 unique sources in our list (25%). Put another way, 75% (85 of the 114) of the officials in these programs are in the Insiders group. Key think-tank experts like William Schneider and Norman Ornstein (both of the AEI) are also included, as are journalist/commentators like Cokie Roberts, Hodding Carter, and Tom Wicker.

Furthermore, because these sources were more likely to appear more than once, they add to the group's cohesion by connecting many of its members through their multiple appearances. Thus, officials provide many of the linkages that enable this group to span multiple issues (dis-

98

cussed below), and, thus, wield influence beyond their numbers. Note that many others in this group are effectively government insiders, such as former officials, political writers and pundits, and campaign consultants.

A clear pattern emerges from the issues associated with these groups. The smaller groups are not typically involved with national partisan political issues, or at least the issues had not become so at that time: the NFL strike, spouse abuse, mental health, local problems in St. Louis and Atlanta, homelessness, high school dropouts, death and cremation, hunger in Ethiopia, and high art prices. These more transitory topics are treated in isolated fashion, with no government or other dimension connecting them across programs. In general, the Insiders provided a number of different treatments for about a dozen important national political, economic, and foreign policy issues. These on-going issues often focused on legislative or administrative action, such as the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Bork and Ginsburg.

When the smaller groups handled political issues, it was in a nonpartisan manner. One, for example, dealt with changes in the communist world, featuring three guests, two of whom were ostensibly nonpartisan, and interviewed for their expertise—Henry Kissinger and a Princeton Sovietologist, speaking with Sen. William Proxmire. The stock crash story had a political component (more leadership out of Washington needed on the deficit) but was also an economic story. So, it appears under both the Insiders group and within other groups. (As Lasorsa and Reese [1990] note, the causes and consequences of the stock crash were sufficiently unclear as to make it difficult for the media to decide how to treat it.)

Special Network Roles

Liaisons. We further examined the roles of the liaisons, sources who connect groups either directly, or indirectly through other liaisons. In network studies these liaisons among groups, or "weak ties" that join social groups, have proven particularly influential because of their role in bringing more useful information and innovations to a group than its members might receive from each other (e.g., the Granovetter [1973] tradition). In the Appendix we see that in large part these 33 liaisons are journalists and experts, or, in a few cases, high profile corporate or political figures (e.g., H. Ross Perot, Sen. Moynihan, or former president Carter). In several cases these sources bridge the Insiders group to the smaller groups.

Within-group "liaisons". Although not formally called liaisons, many sources can be identified who perform this function within their respective groups. They can be located by measuring their, in network terms, "integrativeness," that is, the extent to which the sources that they connect to are further connected with each other. The smaller the score, the more the source is a member of different subgroups (members of the subgroups not typically appearing with members of other subgroups). Isolates are by definition set at 0, while members of a group within which everyone is connected (say a number of guests on a single program)
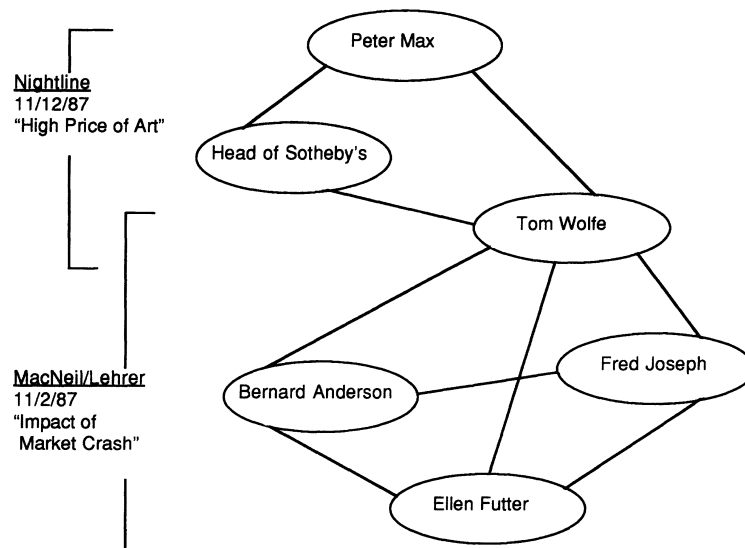
99

Figure 2. Example of actual network group, showing source with low integration.
Sources are artist Peter Max, author Tom Wolfe, and John Marion, chairman of Sotheby's art auction house, appearing on "Nightline"; and Drexel, Burnham, Lambert CEO Fred Joseph, corporate lawyer Ellen Futter, and Bernard Anderson of the Urban Affairs Partnership on "MacNeil/Lehrer." Wolfe has a low integration score (400), reflecting his membership in the two subgroups. As such, he serves as a liaison within the larger group; he is connected to sources who themselves are not connected but for his linking role.

would be rated 1,000. Ronald Reagan, for example, had the lowest integrativeness score of the Insiders (63), because he appeared (only on CBS) across many different issues with different people each time—acting as a sort of within-group liaison. An example of this property, from one of the smaller actual network groups, is shown in Figure 2 using author Tom Wolfe as a source spanning two subgroups. Among the Insiders, the sources with the lowest integrativeness scores—meaning they joined with a number of subgroups—were mostly senators and high-ranking current and former administration officials. In order they were, at the time, Senate majority leader Robert Dole (148), Secretary of State George Schultz (199), Sen. Howell Heflin (214), House Speaker Jim Wright (224), House Majority leader Rep. William Gray (232), Sen. Orin Hatch (241), former deputy Treasury Secretary Richard Darman (250), former Assistant Secretary of Defense, and Rep. Dick Cheney (295). Fitting their institutional role, they appeared with a number of other sources across different is-

sues. Of the Insiders group, 66 members had integrativeness scores below 500 (a natural cutoff point based on a distribution of all scores): 24 of the 66 were senators, 12 were representatives, 14 were current or former administration members. In other words, 76% of these subgroup spanning individuals were officials, serving to knit the Insiders group together along a government dimension.

Isolates. A number of sources (26), termed isolates, appeared by themselves in a single program or segment. Often these were highly newsworthy figures who justified a segment to themselves, or were seen as nonpolitical and therefore not requiring a balancing counterweight, such as televangelist Jim Bakker, controversial economist Ravi Batra, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, China expert Kenneth Lieberthal, or El Salvador's Jose Napoleon Duarte. (Of course, when a Nicaraguan leader was included, he would be balanced with an opposition member.) In this network isolates are, by definition, outsiders, which may be strategic for them if they are allowed to frame an issue without contending with a contrary view. On the other hand, their status may render them idiosyncratic and difficult to link to a larger network of sources, such as perhaps Jesse Jackson. About the same number, 24, appeared with only one other source. Finally, there were 38 dyads, pairs of sources linked to no one else in the network, and four tree node sources that connected isolates.

Talking Heads

In this study we have sought to show the nature of the source structure on television, and by doing so to support our conceptualization of news content as expressed through a structure of news sources. The network analysis suggested by this approach shows a series of important relationships among these sources. Consistent with the elite model of source structure, the two months of programming that we examined does indeed show a coherent and meaningful structure of news sources. The large central group, characterized by a preponderance of government officials and other political insiders, spans a number of programs and issues. Not only can we attribute influence to the Insider group by virtue of its elite membership, but we argue its cohesion gives it an important added power. Considering the structure of the Insiders and the connections to the rest of the network suggests how government officials, in particular, can wield influence beyond simply being allowed to speak in the first place. This "gravitational" influence on other sources may function in three ways.

Structural Influence
The Insiders group does contain many non-government sources, but we suggest that joint appearance with officials obliges them to operate within terms defined by the government process. This may come about through

a joint appearance, further shaped by the order of that appearance. For example, an October 19 "MacNeil/Lehrer" segment focused, using four Insider sources, on the U.S. response to an Iranian missile attack on an American-owned tanker ship. First, Sens. Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar established their positions that the response (destroying two Iranian oil platforms) had been prudent and appropriate. Then, Robin Wright, senior associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Michael Ledeen, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), followed with their comments. In this case, the senators were allowed to frame, or at least be seen establishing, the issue to which the think tank experts added.

Secondly, a source may not have been part of the Insiders group, but appeared jointly with one of its members, for example, when outsider Alejandro Bendana, the Sandinista official, appeared on the October 7 "Nightline" with hard-line Contra advocate Elliot Abrams (referred to earlier in Figure 1). Bendana defended the adequacy of his country's reforms, while Abrams labeled them propaganda. (Tellingly, in the Nicaraguan case, government spokesperson Bendana was not a member of the Insiders group, but the Nicaraguan opposition spokesperson, Enrique Bolanos, was!) Thus, outsider sources may have been called upon, but in a way calculated to underscore their deviance or outsider status, by pairing them with an Insider, thus, in a sense, bringing them under the structural influence of the Insider group. Finally, smaller groups may have been linked to the Insiders through liaisons (a number of whom were government members), connections that may have hooked them indirectly with the orientation of the larger group.

One could argue that government sources would naturally be included in stories based on government action, and in one sense news emphasis on government officials is natural. Because the press must monitor the activities of government and its officials, we expect to see important national leaders on a wide variety of news programs. But this can be carried too far. In many cases, it appears that the partisan political dimension is the only salient sense-making device used by news producers in assembling their programs. Ultimately, government officials are not only allowed to explain their own actions, but also to interpret events in other areas as well. The views of people and groups affected by the powerful are also important, but these are infrequently heard. Non-elite sources are few in number, and when they are included their position in the source structure is not prominent.

Experts and Journalist Sources: Holding the Center

We also find an important liaison role played by journalists and experts, especially in linking groups, and thus, issues. By connecting the Insider group to others, these sources help anchor guests from different political positions with a core of "factuality," expertise, and "inside dopesterism." This is in keeping with the philosophy of American journalism, that the

102

truth lies somewhere between competing truth claims (e.g., Hackett, 1984) and that seemingly disinterested journalists and experts, being free of politics, help to locate this consensual truth-center. The role of these sources deserves further study. As we find more experts in the media attached to ideologically oriented think tanks (Heritage Foundation, Hoover, CSIS, AEI, etc.), their status as impartial observers becomes dubious.

The same goes for the category we loosely call "journalists," which includes not only the traditional print reporters but also commentators and retreaded administration officials such as David Gergen (*U.S. News*) and Caspar Weinberger (publisher of *Forbes*). Although sought for their expertise, the ties and perspectives of these Insiders are close to the political system. Thus, the revolving door between government, think tanks, and media commentator roles gives cohesion to the elite circle by linking these sectors through the career lines of the individuals spanning these multiple roles. This shuttling among elite sectors by the Insiders also adds to the recycling of ideas and perspectives, adding to the consensual pressures.

Although criticized for their overly narrow source list, the programs we examined still produced a fairly scattered structure by network analysis standards (even prominent senators appeared no more than four times in combination). In choice of network newscasts, CBS represents a somewhat conservative test of our source overlap, given that two of the other programs ("Nightline" and "Brinkley") were produced by another network. Both CBS and ABC reporters, for example, may cover a civil rights issue and want to feature the ACLU perspective—CBS may have one spokesperson on the Rolodex, while the ABC reporter may prefer another. Both sources, however, would presumably articulate the same position, yet our network was unable to capture this link. Thus, rather than treat as different each unique individual, a denser and more coherent network may be formed by treating different spokespersons for the same group (say the ACLU) as the same "source." In any case, from our perspective, it is not strictly an over-reliance on a few specific sources that concerns us, but the way these sources are linked together into an interlocked group of insiders, and the way this structure strengthens the position of the sources in that inner circle.

Having examined the basic outlines of this source structure, we intend to pay more attention in future work to what these sources actually say when they appear. How does the way they communicate parallel and reinforce the structure we have described? Discussions by members of the Insiders group, for example, as on many talk show discussions, often includes minor quibbling but little real disagreement. This can be seen especially in programs featuring journalists. Nimmo and Combs (1983), for example, argue that "Washington Week in Review" on PBS encourages a group-think mentality: "Questions raised by panelists are rarely critical or argumentative. Instead they clearly assist the reporter to present a consensus view regarding the topic in the news" (p. 153). The moderator acts

103

to reinforce the group consensus, one based on an inside dopester approach to politics, featuring information gathered from sources and contacts in official Washington circles.

Further, explicit analysis is needed of how public affairs programs in particular function ideologically. Programs like "MacNeil/Lehrer," "Nightline," and "Brinkley," although built around breaking news, are just as formally structured as entertainment shows, and their features can be analyzed in a similar fashion. For example, Gitlin (1979) argues that by relying on the repeatable formulaic show, entertainment programs encourage a feeling of social stability resistant to substantial social change—episodes regularly end with solutions to even difficult problems, allowing the TV world to justify itself by "wrapping it all up" (p. 262).

Political talk shows function similarly: dissenting views are included, but they are incorporated into the larger framework of an ongoing and manageable discussion. Every week, for example, David Brinkley encourages the audience to stay tuned for the program's final main section, the discussion by the show's regular commentators: "Coming next, our discussion here—and judging from the past, there are likely to be arguments" (November 1, 1987). Of course, these arguments are rarely fundamental, and are ultimately capped in closing by Brinkley's brief humorous story. The positioning of disagreement among guests in a regularly recurring format is an important feature of political talk shows like "MacNeil/Lehrer," which presented Mark Shields and David Gergen as ostensibly "balancing" commentators. The fact that they returned weekly, still on speaking terms, invariably on a first-name basis, presented whatever disagreement arose within an adequate "comfort zone."

Ultimately, though, the point of the present study is that one need not know what sources actually say on television to obtain an insight into the ideological framework that they constitute. Just the selection of news sources and their combination within and across programs and issues speak volumes. The media restrict debate by organizing it primarily in relation to the government process, especially in the narrow political range defined by the two-party system. Establishing the middle ground with centrist or conservative experts and "objective" insider journalists further anchors the "conventional wisdom," in a format easily applied across many issues. The media convergence on the conventional wisdom can be understood much more easily once we know the contours of this source structure through which events and issues are addressed within the news media framework.

Appendix

Sources in Liaison Roles, Linking Groups

Journalists
Michael Gartner, NBC News
David Gergen, *U.S. News & World Report* (also former admin. official)

104

Television News Sources

Jordan Goodman, *Money Magazine,* senior reporter
Stephen Milligan, *London Sunday Times*
Mark Shields, *Washington Post*
Leonard Silk, *New York Times*
Andrew Tobias, author
Nina Totenberg, National Public Radio
R. Emmett Tyrell, *American Spectator* editor

Government
Former president Jimmy Carter
U.S. Sen. Nancy Kassebaum
U.S. Sen. Jack Kemp
U.S. Sen. Patrick Moynihan
U.S. Sen. Tim Penney
Sol Linowitz, Organization of American States ambassador

Expert (Think Tank, Analyst, University)
Ann Lewis, Democratic adviser
Francis Modigliani, MIT economist
Stephen Sestanovich, Center for Strategic & International Studies
Allen Sinai, Shearson Lehman economist
Robert Solow, MIT economist

Corporate Executive
Richard Fisher, Fisher Capital Management
Carl Ichan, TWA Chairman
Irwin Jacobs, MINSTAR Chairman
H. Ross Perot
Miles Shore, Robert Wood Foundation

Interest Group
Carl Cox, Committee for Responsible Budget
Robert Hayes, Coalition for the Homeless

Foreign
Alejandro Bendana, Nicaraguan Secretary General

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106

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