

THE BBC'S FRAMING OF TRUMP'S REACTION TO THE 2020 ELECTION AND THE CAPITOL INSURRECTION¹

Fathi Bourmeche

Faculty of Letters and Humanities

University of Sfax, Tunisia

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to throw more light on media framing and its impact on the public. Attention is paid to the way the BBC has portrayed Trump's reaction to the 2020 US presidential election and the Capitol insurrection. The assumption is that Trump's reaction to the election results was a precedent in American history, which would presumably have a significant impact on the image of the US around the world. A corpus selected from the official website of the BBC is qualitatively analyzed using McCombs' media framing. Media frames are also juxtaposed with Gallup polls covering similar issues. Findings reveal that Trump's reaction to the election as well as the Capitol Hill event were framed in relation to three themes. The first one is the tight race for the White House and the highly-contested campaign on social media. The second theme is Trump's narrative of a fraudulent election and the potential violence to stop the steal. The third theme is the Capitol Hill riots and their impact on the US image and American democracy. In this sense, the article could offer a deeper insight into media effects in relation to Trump's narrative and its impact on the American political landscape.

Keywords: BBC, Capitol insurrection, Donald Trump, framing, media

¹ An initial draft of this paper (under a different title) was presented at the international conference on Dissent and communication: Voices and discourses in the era of alternative facts held in Valencia, Spain in October 2021.

Introduction

Trump's presidency has been controversial in many respects, particularly in relation to Russia's interference with the whole electoral process. Although such an interference was refuted later through a lengthy report, the whole investigation remained controversial for a while. The implication is that Trump's coming to power in 2016 remained subject to criticism, raising concern about his win despite his inexperience in politics. Schier and Eberly (2017), for instance, were surprised by Trump's emergence as a Republican figure despite his inexperience. In other words, Schier and Eberly (2017) did not expect Trump, a billionaire and reality TV star, to defeat his Democrat rival, Clinton, one of the most experienced politicians in the US in the 2016 US presidential election.

Similarly, Trump's campaign for the 2016 US presidential election was controversial, particularly in terms of his attitudes toward a number of media outlets. His repeated accusations of the media for spreading 'fake news', seemed to have contributed to his win in the election at the expense of Clinton, the first lady as contender for the position. In Schier and Eberly's (2017) view, Trump's win would signal more transformations on the American political scene. In the same vein, Wead (2019) argued that Trump challenged political experts twice, once as a final nominee for Republicans and once as a president-elect in the 2016 US presidential election. Trump's victory came despite the fact that every living president, both on the Republican and Democrat side, had voted against him in 2016. Wead (2019) also pointed out that two hundred and forty newspapers had backed his Democrat rival, adding that the majority of billionaires had voted against him, with a ratio twenty to one. Nevertheless, he had had a landslide victory, with 306 electoral votes against 232 for Clinton, though the latter had won the popular vote with 48% against 45.9% for Trump.

Interestingly, the 2020 US presidential election yielded the same results as the 2016 election: 306 against 232 for Trump's rival, the Democrat Joe Biden. In this sense, the 2020 US presidential election was historic in some respects, particularly in terms of popular votes, yielding a landslide majority for Biden, with 81,283,485 votes against 74,223,744 votes for Trump, in addition to a huge turnover in the history of elections in the country. Yet, Trump repeatedly claimed that the election was stolen from him and from the Americans. What should be pointed out is that *PolitiFact* revealed that about 70% of Trump's statements between February 2011 and April 2017 were 'mostly false, false, or outright lies' (Boczkowski, Papacharissi 2018, p. 18). The implication is that Trump was known for propagating lies, as would be validated in the current study.

In fact, Trump did not accept the result of such a landslide victory and refused to pave the way for a smooth transition of power, often arguing that it was a rigged election that prevented him from having a second term in the White House. Trump's reaction to such results was a precedent in American history, which would presumably have a significant impact on the image of the US around the world. The whole event deserves investigation and research from new angles and perspectives,

shedding more light on Trump's reaction, in the hope of gaining a better insight into its implication on the American political landscape.

Objectives and research questions

The main objective of the paper is to see the impact of Trump's reaction to the 2020 US presidential election on the American political scene in terms of the whole democratic process. Particular attention is paid to Trump's attitudes toward the election results, blocking a smooth transition of power despite a landslide victory of his Democrat rival, Biden. Such attitudes, based on his repeated narrative of a fraudulent election, seemed to have fueled anger among some of Trump's supporters. Such anger escalated to breaching Congress and causing chaos at the legislative institution, putting the lives of representatives of the American people at risk and raising concerns about American democracy. Protesters, with flags bearing the name of the outgoing president and *Make America Great Again*, caused such chaos and disorder when representatives were meeting to confirm Biden's win after having been approved by the electoral college.

But Trump's unwillingness to secure a smooth transition of power in the aftermath of an election, considered by observers as one of the cleanest elections in the history of the country, seemed to have contributed to such chaos, demonizing the democratic process in the US. In other words, Trump's reaction would have a significant impact on the American political scene, affecting not only the image of Republicans but also the image of the country as a whole on the international scene. The study is, therefore, an attempt to throw more light on the whole event from a media studies perspective in a bid to gain a better insight into the impact of the media on public opinion, contributing to the existing literature on media effects. It could also contribute to studies on elections and the democratic process in a country which has long been considered as a beacon to many countries around the world.

The objectives of the study could be elaborated in two main research questions. The first one is 'How did the BBC frame Trump's reaction to the 2020 US presidential election and the Capitol insurrection?' The second research question is 'What was the impact of media frames on the American public opinion?' The intention behind these two questions is to gain a better understanding of media effects on public opinion with respect to American elections and the whole democratic process. To achieve this goal, media frames are juxtaposed with Gallup polls dealing with the same issues in order to gauge the impact of such frames on the American public opinion in relation to presidential elections and democracy.

Methodology

The methodological tool adopted in this study is McCombs' media framing, given its significance in gauging media effects. Framing was used by Todd Gitlin (cited in McCombs, Shaw, Weaver 1997) when he studied how CBS² had 'trivialized' a student movement in the 1960s. There are several framing strategies that can be used in media coverage for such events, basically documenting social problems, providing alternative proposals to cope with such problems and focusing on tactical efforts of activists and government officials to cope with such problems. Using one or more strategies at a time to frame one particular issue does not exclude the possibility of prioritizing one set of attributes which in turn has an impact on the priorities of the public. Therefore, the way an object is framed can have a considerable effect on public behavior. It was believed that occasionally the media's agenda can change people's norms for evaluating the president (McCombs, Shaw, Weaver 1997, p. 61–63). In this sense, McCombs (2004, p. 71) argues that the media 'not only tell us what to think about, but [...] also tell us *how to think* about some objects'.

Frames are considered as 'organizing principles incorporating and emphasizing certain lower level attributes to the exclusion of many others' (McCombs 2004, p. 88). Framing is the transfer of attribute salience, attributes being the range of properties and characteristics related to the object or issue covered in the media. The way these attributes influence the public is known as the second level of agenda-setting (McCombs 2004, pp. 36, 24, 70). In other words, framing is interested in how objects of attention or topical issues are presented by exploring the impact of certain attributes or details about such issues on public opinion (McCombs 2004). The object in the current study is basically Trump's reaction to the 2020 US presidential election, along with the ensuing repercussions on the American political landscape. The focus is on the way the BBC framed such reactions as well as its impact on the American democratic process in order to gain a better understanding of media effects on the public.

Corpus description

The corpus of the study consists in a collection of articles selected from the BBC's official website, along with opinion polls downloaded from Gallup's official website. In order to obtain the most relevant articles to the main objectives of the study, two main keywords were used in the search engine: *US election 2020* and *Capitol Riots*. The initial results yielded hundreds of articles, all of which were zoomed in to keep the ones in which at least one of the keywords was mentioned, obtaining a total number of 109 articles from the BBC, published between the 1st of November 2020

2 CBS Corporation is a mass media company which owns the most-watched television network in the U.S. and one of the world's largest libraries of entertainment content. For further details on this corporation see <<http://www.cbscorporation.com>>.

and the 8th of January 2021. The intention was to cover a time span extending between two days prior to the election on the 3rd of November 2020 and two days following the 6th of January, 2021 breaching of Capitol Hill for a better understanding of media frames. The same keywords were used for Gallup polls, obtaining a total number of 14 polls. The main corpus collected from the BBC's website was qualitatively analyzed, using McCombs' media framing in order to find out the way Trump's reaction to the 2020 US presidential election was framed. Then, such frames were juxtaposed with opinion polls in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of the media on the public. What should be pointed out is that the BBC is one of the famous media outlets around the world, reaching an average audience of 489 million adults in 2020/2021, including 48 million Americans, the second largest group after Indians, with 65 million viewers³.

Findings and discussion

A close examination of the corpus has shown that Trump's reaction to the 2020 US presidential election as well as the Capitol Hill event were framed on the BBC in relation to three major themes. The first one is associated with a tight race for the White House and a highly-contested campaign on social media. The second one is linked to Trump's narrative of a fraudulent election and the potential violence to stop the steal. The third one is associated with the Capitol Hill riots and its impact on the US image and American democracy. Indeed, Trump's reaction to the 2020 presidential election seemed to have generated more divisions in the country, given his repeated accusations of a fraudulent election which had disappointed the incumbent president as well as his supporters. His narrative was particularly based on conspiracy, with repeated claims that the election had been stolen from the American people. Such a narrative seemed to have created more tension and division within the American society, thus sowing the seeds of rebellion among his supporters. In the same vein, the Capitol Hill insurrection, presumably incited by Trump's refusal to accept the election results, was framed in terms of its impact on American democracy, long considered as a beacon for countries around the world. The event was shocking to the extent that it raised concern about the smooth transition of power in the US, shaking the democratic process. Such frames were also reflected in opinion polls dealing with similar issues, validating the impact of media frames on public opinion.

3 For further details on the BBC's popularity see BBC on track to reach half a billion people globally ahead of its centenary in 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2021/bbc-reaches-record-global-audience>; accessed on 8.01.2024.

A tight race for the White House and a highly-contested campaign on social media

The race for the White House was tight between the two candidates, usually characterized by a great tension between Trump and Biden during the campaign. The 2020 US presidential election was historic and exceptional in many respects, involving the incumbent president, 74 years of age and his Democrat rival, Biden aged 77, with an unprecedented number of early votes. Tension between the candidates as well as their supporters was also spread in social media, making results unpredictable. Indeed, there were different clashes and issues raised between the two campaigners, particularly in relation to attracting supporters among minorities, sparking debate on ethical issues during election campaigns. One example was in Missouri when Democrats complained about a noose near polling booths, seen as an intimidation to black voters (BBC 2020e, n.p.). The implication is that Republicans were using any means available to secure a win in the race for the White House.

The two candidates were active during the campaign, particularly in swing states, including Pennsylvania where the race looked tight (BBC 2020a, n.p.). What made the 2020 election exceptional and unpredictable was also the large number of early votes, presumably avoiding any health issues during the pandemic. Americans had the opportunity either to vote in-person at voting stations – a common practice in countries such as Finland, Canada, the UK and Switzerland – or absentee, i.e. by post, avoiding crowds of people and long queues during polling day. It was reported that early voting was in the rise, measured as five times higher in the 2016 election compared to that of 1992. As for the 2020 election, the number of early voters reached 99 million on the 2nd of November 2020, with the highest number registered in California, 12 million voters, followed by Texas, 9.7 million people. Interestingly, Trump was among the early voters back in 2016, casting his vote when he was in his home in Florida. But for the 2020 election, he would use high rates of early voting as one of his major arguments for his narrative of a fraudulent election.

Another aspect which made the 2020 election exceptional and historic was the role played by some celebrities and influential figures on social media whether siding with Trump or Biden. Dan Bongino, former New York City Police Department officer and Secret Service agent who worked as presidential protection for George W. Bush and Barack Obama, emerged as one of such influential figures. As a right-wing commentator, his Facebook posts yielded more shares than those of Fox News and CNN combined, implying his significant power as an influencer on social media. With an intense election campaign, people like Bongino emerged on both sides of the political divide, appealing to a large number of audiences far exceeding the power of politicians and media organizations. Some of these influencers would select what they judge as political contradictions and hypocrisy; others would either make memes or inspire meme-makers with their ironic remarks (Fabbri 2020, n.p.).

Bongino was critical of mainstream media despite him being a Fox News commentator. In a section of his website dedicated to debunking liberal myths, he had some successful posts, including titles such as «Exposing how much of a liar Joe Biden

is» and «Fact-checking Kamala Harris' fake Lincoln quote at the debate». Such posts were extensively shared by people despite the fact that Bongino was himself subject to criticism and fact-checking. In Bongino's view, his success on social media was attributed to both his team and Facebook's user base, which was for him, 'older and more conservative than other social networks' (Fabbri 2020, n.p.).

Other influencers included Franklin Graham, the son of a late preacher who became one of the most influential evangelicals in the US with widely shared posts on Facebook. Graham's posts were particularly praising Trump's foreign policy, pushing his followers to pray for the incumbent's win. Other posts shared discredited theories on the cause of the pandemic. As for Biden's supporters, on Bernie Sanders' withdrawal from the race in April 2020, Rafael and Omar Rivero, two immigrant brothers and founders of «*Occupy Democrats*» on Facebook, created a new page, «*Ridin' With Biden*», which turned into a great success on Facebook. The two brothers were also running other accounts such as «*Impeach Trump*» and «*Fight Trump*».

Another influencer siding with Biden was Robert Reich, economic adviser and US Secretary of Labor under Trump, who had served in the administrations of three Democratic presidents. Reich's tweets and memes on social media appealed to a large number of left-leaning Americans, with more shares on Facebook than Biden and Obama combined in October 2020. SYSCA, an Instagram account run by three young ladies from New Zealand, including Ms Blakiston, became significantly influential among progressive media bands, moving from more than 100,000 followers at the beginning of 2020 to more than 2 million by the end of the same year. The upsurge was due to their coverage of the US election according to Blakiston, particularly for their interest in Americans' need of a trustworthy leader caring for them. Lady Gaga was also among Biden's supporters, joining the campaigners on the eve of the voting day.

Such a tight race was also reflected in opinion polls, though favoring Biden over Trump. The implication is that media frames could have a major impact on public opinion. Biden was doing better than Trump, with 56% of American voters who were satisfied with his campaign, 10 points higher than Trump. What is more, 90% of Democrats and Republicans combined were highly satisfied with the 2020 US election campaign (McCarthy 2020, n.p.).

Importantly, there were concerns about the breakout of pockets of post-election violence, pushing businesses in Washington, D.C., and New York City to take preventive measures, covering their windows with wooden boards, in order to protect their premises from any potential unrest. Each candidate chose to end his campaign in battleground states; Biden headed to Pennsylvania and Ohio whereas Trump toured Wisconsin, Michigan, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. Trump targeted Scranton, Pennsylvania, where Biden had lived until the age of 10, reminding his supporters that he had secured the state in 2016 despite polls suggesting a Clinton win. But what should be remembered is that Trump had secured the state with a single percentage lead in 2016.

Trump expressed his dissatisfaction with the high court's decision in Pennsylvania to accept ballots received three days after election day. He tweeted that such a decision was dangerous, as it would allow 'rampant and unchecked cheating and will undermine our entire systems of laws. It will also induce violence in the streets' (BBC 2020b, n.p.). As a reaction, Twitter blocked Trump's tweet, warning that it might contain 'misleading' information. In Ohio, Biden reminded his supporters that the race for the White House was about the soul of the country. He also stated that it was high time for Trump to 'pack his bags', arguing that they are 'done with the tweets, the anger, the hate, the failure, the irresponsibility' of his rival (BBC 2020b, n.p.).

Indeed, the efforts made during the campaign, particularly in the swing states mentioned above, made the race between the two candidates tight and predictions on the winner hard. This was also hardened by the late counting due to the upsurge in mail voting, preventing any candidate to claim a win in the aftermath of election day in a historic election with the highest turnout. Yet, Biden was confident that his Democratic campaign would be triumphant without any claims of him winning the race. Trump, however, claimed victory, emphasizing that his campaign had already filed lawsuits in two states won by Biden (see BBC 2020f, n.p.).

Trump's narrative of a fraudulent election and the potential violence to stop the steal

Trump's suspicion about the election result was obvious even before exit polls which gave Biden an obvious lead at the national level as already mentioned in the previous section. He had repeatedly objected against early votes, particularly by mail, claiming that they would favor his Democrat rival. Trump's narrative was also dissipated in social media outlets, enhancing more conspiracy, particularly among his supporters. In the aftermath of the polling day, Trump's objection increased by insisting that the election was stolen from him and from the American people. Such an attitude was clearly emphasized in his speech on election night, claiming victory when officials were still counting votes in key states, including Georgia and Pennsylvania, insisting again on his narrative of a fraudulent election. Such a claim had been debunked in September 2021 by Christopher Wray, FBI Director, denying 'any kind of coordinated national voter fraud effort in a major election' (BBC 2020d, n.p.).

Trump said: 'Frankly, we did win this election [...] Most importantly, we're winning Pennsylvania by a tremendous amount of votes.' (BBC 2020d, n.p.). His claim of winning Pennsylvania was fact-checked to find out that while he had a significant lead there, about half of the votes had been counted in Philadelphia, the largest city in the state which was heavily Democrat. Nevertheless, Trump's team behaved as winners, celebrating the event by drinking beer and sharing angst, breaking protocols in the White House, as no other president before had had such a gathering on election night. This festive mood prevailed in the West Wing of the White House on Tuesday morning, i.e. election day, when women appeared

dressed in Republican-red sweaters, skirts and stilettos, watching election results throughout the day and into the night. When Trump secured Florida, these people were delighted – though occasionally nervous – as illustrated by the table in the office of Kayleigh McEnany, Trump's Press Secretary, which was littered with wine bottles and bags of crisps (McKelvey 2020, n.p.).

One day after the election, Trump's tweets indicated his concern about losing his lead in the race, claiming that his lead in states run by Democrats was magically disappearing. His concern was clearly stated in this statement. 'Last night I was leading, often solidly, in many key states, in almost all instances Democrat run and controlled [...] Then, one by one, they started to magically disappear as surprise ballot dumps were counted. VERY STRANGE.' (BBC 2020h, n.p.). The implication is that Trump was worried about losing the election despite his repeated accusations of frauds. What should be noted is that Twitter hid such tweets, warning that such claims might be misleading. Such a measure was also taken by Facebook, informing readers about recent posts on both Trump's and Biden's accounts that the winner had not yet been projected in that votes were still being counted in a number of states. Yet, Twitter had reacted against Trump's claim of a stolen election, considering it as a violation of the company's civic integrity policy (BBC 2020h, n.p.).

It was reported that social media contributed to the spread of claims of election fraud or misinformation on the results in the aftermath of election day, thus enhancing Trump's narrative of a stolen election. It was also expected that more posts would spread on social media before announcing the final result, enhancing misinformation and presumably paving the way for a violent reaction against a Biden win. It was argued that 'Conspiratorial claims about rigged elections can spread like wildfire', particularly through politicians or influencers' posts on social media (BBC 2020h, n.p.). Such an argument was confirmed by experts who believed 'that viral misinformation about voter fraud and « rigged » elections might have the potential to undermine people's trust in democratic process for years to come' (BBC 2020h, n.p.). In this view, Twitter and Facebook's suspension of newly-created accounts, particularly those violating their spam and manipulation policies to influence online conversations, could be seen as an attempt to stop the flow of misinformation and conspiratorial messages. YouTube, in turn, stopped live-streamed fake election results broadcast via several accounts on its platform.

Yet, Trump did not stop his narrative of a fraudulent election. He was said to have been consistently critical of postal ballots, claiming that they would systematically lead to frauds (BBC 2020c, n.p.). But it was emphasized that his claims were not sound given that postal ballots, a common practice which has been increased by the pandemic, did not result in any serious frauds. This was confirmed by Ellen Weintraub, Head of the Federal Election Commission, who argued against any conspiracy theory suggesting that postal ballots were fraudulent. Nevertheless, Trump tweeted that there were 50,000 voters in Franklin County, Ohio, who had received wrong ballots. But the local elections board claimed that such a mistake was redeemed by sending the correct voter slips for those concerned to make sure that no one would vote twice. Another issue with postal ballots was reported in Pennsylvania

where they discovered nine discarded military ballots, seven of which, according to the US Department of Justice, were cast for Trump.

More cases on frauds appeared when a misleading post reached Trump's Twitter account. The post was a voting map in Michigan, one of the battleground states, revealing a more than 138,000 vote increase for Biden, with no additional votes for Trump. But such a map was a mere mistake in data processing, as confirmed by Decision Desk, the company which had posted the map, later redeemed by providing an updated record. But this did not prevent social media, particularly Twitter, from spreading the incorrect information, with accusations of election fraud. Similarly, a large number of anonymous accounts and platforms such as *Parler*, in addition to online forums appealing to far-right groups, started promoting the erroneous map. Some of these outlets used other languages, including German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, gaining significant shares (Giles et al. 2020, n.p.).

Other claims on fraudulent votes were further reported, focusing on the use of names of the dead to vote for the 2020 election. Although such mistakes had been occasionally registered in previous elections, possibly due to clerical errors or family members with similar names voting with their ballots, Trump's supporters claimed that they reached a massive scale in the 2020 election. Such claims were also promoted on social media platforms by Republican legislators. When some individual cases in Michigan were checked against the state's public record, it was found that there were 31 ballots sent to the dead. But their death records showed that they had died outside the state. According to the Michigan authorities, when someone submits the voting ballot and dies before election day the ballot would be rejected. Some people were also interviewed for further checks, including Roberto Garcia who confirmed that he was alive and that he had voted for Biden.

Against Trump's narrative of a rigged election, some arguments were advanced to explain his loss. For example, it was argued that Trump had managed to secure 24 states, including his favorites, Florida and Texas, along with more than 47% of popular votes. Yet, he lost the election 'because he was a norm-busting political outsider who was prepared to say what had previously been unsayable' (Bryant 2020, n.p.). It was further argued that while Biden had gained the support of the Rust Belt states, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, in addition to Georgia and Arizona, Trump failed to gain the support of suburban women, very likely because of his misbehavior and aggressiveness. His racist discourse on Twitter, targeting people of color, his silence on white supremacists, along with his admiration to authoritarian leaders, including Vladimir Putin, contributed to such a loss. More importantly, his promotion of conspiracy theory seemed fatal for his performance in the 2020 election.

Trump's insistence on frauds and conspiracy theory was criticized by Chris Christie, former New Jersey Governor and one of his main allies, urging him to stop such a narrative and give up overturning the 2020 election results. Christie had not only been the first governor to endorse Trump's candidacy in the 2016 election but was also the one who helped him with preparations for the debates with Biden for the 2020 election. In Christie's view, the behavior of Trump's legal team was a 'national embarrassment' in the sense that they were 'often discussing

election fraud «outside the courtroom, but when they go inside the courtroom they don't plead fraud and they don't argue fraud» (US election 2020: Trump ally Chris Christie urges him to accept defeat 2020, n.p.). The same view was also confirmed by Judge Matthew Brann, arguing that the arguments presented by Trump's team missed any merit and speculative accusations. Similarly, other Republicans followed suit, urging Trump to concede, including Larry Hogan, Governor of Maryland. In Hogan's view, the efforts of Trump's team to overturn the election were making the US seem like 'a banana republic'. Other Republicans who shared the same views included Fred Upton, Michigan Representative and Kevin Cramer, North Dakota Senator (BBC 2020g, n.p.).

In the same vein, two TV networks, Fox News and Newsmax, debunked Trump's narrative. Members of Trump's team were repeatedly pushing the theory on these channels. However, three different programs in these channels denied any allegations of a fraudulent election caused by Dominion and Smartmatic, the two companies selling electronic software and hardware. Such allegations were also refuted by federal courts, dismissing lawsuits related to such claims (Sardarizadeh 2020, n.p.). Importantly, these allegations seemed to have affected Trump, decreasing his favorability rate considerably. It was revealed that in November 2020, Biden's favorability reached 55%, compared to Trump's with 42%. On the 17th of December 2020, the US image at the international level was at its lowest rate, reaching 15% in the eyes of the British and 6% in the eyes of the Germans (Brenan 2020, n.p.).

The Capitol Hill riots: Hurting the US image and shaking American democracy

Trump's narrative seemed to have fueled anger among his supporters who decided to breach the Capitol on the 6th of January 2021, thus hurting the US image and shaking American democracy a great deal. The event took place when lawmakers were meeting to certify Biden's win. But this was stopped by the chaos caused by insurrectionists, forcing the suspension of the joint session of Congress. Such an insurrection, lasting several hours was harmful, resulting in serious injuries following the confrontation of the crowd with the police, knowing that a number of people among the crowd were using chemical irritants. One indication that these people were driven by Trump's narrative was the fact that some were chanting «We want Trump» (BBC 2021a, n.p.); others asked for the ballots, implying that they did not trust the election results. Richard Barnett from Arkansas was among them, occupying the Speaker's office and leaving a note calling her (Nancy Pelosi) an expletive, as he informed the *New York Times*. Although Trump appeared in a short video asking the crowd to go back home, after expressing his love and appreciation to all of them, protesters were not obedient. In Biden's view, the event was an assault on American democracy.

What is noteworthy is that the majority of the protestors were associated with extreme and far-right groups who had been active on social media and at rallies

supporting Trump. One example was the far-right group *Proud Boys* whose members participated in the insurrection in large numbers. Nick Ochs, known as a «*Proud Boy Elder*» from Hawaii, tweeted a selfie inside the Capitol and filmed a live stream inside. Other protestors included social media activists with large online followers such as Tim Gionet, known as «*Baked Alaska*». Gionet was described by the Southern Poverty Law Centre as a white nationalist. Some Republicans, including Representative Matt Gaetz, claimed that the insurrection ‘was antifa masquerading as Trump supporters’ (BBC 2021b, n.p.). A rioter, Mr Angeli, wearing fur and horns, was holding a QAnon sign. QAnon is described as ‘a wide-ranging, completely unfounded theory that says that President Trump is waging a secret war against elite Satan-worshipping pedophiles in government, business and the media (Wendling 2021, n.p.)’. Another one was holding a Confederate flag, a symbol of southern US history, characterized by supporting slavery. The flag had already been banned because of its divisive nature.

Indeed, the event was seen as the ultimate result of Trump’s discourse of a stolen election, with repeated calls for his supporters to challenge Congress and Vice-President Mike Pence before certifying Biden’s win on the 6th of January 2021. Trump had urged Pence to stop the steal, though the latter insisted that he would not be able to do so, as his role during certification would be rather ceremonial. Rudy Giuliani, Trump’s personal lawyer, contended that election ‘disputes should be resolved through «trial by combat»’; Trump’s eldest son warned that Republicans ‘who would not «fight» for their president’ (Zurcher 2021, n.p.) would no longer belong to the party as it would be Trump’s own party. The implication is that Trump, his eldest son and Giuliani were behind the Capitol riots. As a reaction to the chaotic scenes broadcast on various media outlets and social media platforms, Trump was silenced by Twitter and Facebook by locking his account. Such an unprecedented measure was significant in terms of the damage caused by the Capitol riots inflicted on the image of the country. Despite Trump’s intimate relationship with social media, suspending his Twitter and Facebook accounts seemed to have condemned him of inciting such chaos. Chuck Schumer, the Democrat Would-be Senate Majority Leader, confirmed such a condemnation by laying the insurrection at Trump’s feet. What is more, the event resulted in a series of resignations among the Trump administration officials, including Sarah Matthews, Deputy White House Press Secretary.

The event was condemned by many leaders around the world, including British Prime Minister Boris Johnson who considered the whole scene as disgraceful. Similarly, Dominic Raab, British Foreign Secretary, along with Priti Patel, British Home Secretary, argued that there was no excuse for such an insurrection which was meant to stop a smooth transition of power. For Nicola Sturgeon, Scottish First Minister, the event was ‘utterly horrifying’; Angela Rayner, Deputy Leader of the British Labor party, explicitly accused Trump for causing such a chaotic situation, arguing that ‘the Republicans who stood by him [Trump] have blood on their hands’; Layla Moran, Liberal Democrats’ Foreign Affairs spokeswoman, considered the scenes in Washington, D.C., as ‘an attack on democracy’ (BBC 2021c, n.p.).

Equally important, the Capitol riots impacted on a significant number of Americans living in the United Kingdom. One of them, Whitney Simon, who had already expected protests against Biden's win, was shocked by watching the images of people breaking down the doors and breaching their symbol of democracy. Simon blamed Trump for the insurrection, arguing that his narrative of a stolen election on social media escalated to such chaos. The same argument was supported by another expatriate who claimed that Trump had continuously fed the flames. What is more, the event was said to have put the American identity at stake. It seemed that 'there are clauses that it's the land of the free if you're white and male, but if you're a person of color, it's slightly different' (Pandey, Rackham 2021, n.p.). Such a statement was based on the way the police had previously handled Black Lives Matter protests. However, white rioters who breached the Capitol were treated much differently.

Conclusion

The study has been concerned with two research questions. The first one is 'How did the BBC frame Trump's reaction to the 2020 US presidential election and the Capitol insurrection?' The second research question is 'What was the impact of media frames on the American public opinion?' In relation to the first question, the study has shown that Trump's reaction to the 2020 US presidential election was framed in relation to three major themes. The first one is that of a tight race between the two candidates, namely Trump and Biden, intensifying on social media platforms, particularly among supporters of the two nominees. The second theme is that of Trump's narrative of a fraudulent election, stolen from the American people, ominous of more tension and violence in the aftermath of the election results. The third theme is linked to the Capitol riots on the 6th of January 2021, presumably incited by Trump's conspiracy, given his insistence on frauds, raising more concern about the American democratic process in terms of a smooth transition of power. Such frames were also reflected in opinion polls, evidence of media effects on the public. Indeed, a number of polls showed that Trump's narrative as well as the Capitol insurrection put American democracy at stake in the sense that people seemed to have lost confidence in American leadership, particularly under the ongoing president. In this sense, the study could contribute to the existing literature on the impact that the Trump administration left on the American political landscape. It could also open more avenues to further research on Trump's impact on the political landscape, particularly with more speculations on his intention to take part in the 2024 election.

Bibliography

- BBC. (2021a). US Congress in turmoil as violent Trump supporters breach building. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 27.09.2021].
- BBC. (2021b). Capitol riots: Who broke into the building? *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 27.09.2021].
- BBC. (2021c). Boris Johnson condemns 'disgraceful scenes' in US. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 7.09.2021].
- BBC. (2020a). US Election 2020: Biden and Trump hit swing states. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 18.09.2021].
- BBC. (2020b). US Election 2020: Biden and Trump make final pitches to voters. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 25.09.2021].
- BBC. (2020c). US election 2020: Do postal ballots lead to voting fraud? *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 26.09.2021].
- BBC. (2020d). US election 2020: Fact-checking Trump's speech on election night. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 25.09.2021].
- BBC. (2020e). US Election 2020: Missouri officials cover noose near polling booths. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 7.02.2022].
- BBC. (2020f). US Election 2020: Tense wait as US election winner remains unclear. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 25.09.2021].
- BBC. (2020g). US election 2020: Trump ally Chris Christie urges him to accept defeat. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 7.02.2022].
- BBC. (2020h). US Election: Twitter hides Trump tweet about 'disappearing' lead. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 26.09.2021].
- Boczkowski P.J., Papacharissi Z. (eds.) (2018). *Trump and the Media*. Cambridge, MA.
- Brenan M. (2020). Biden's Favorability Rises to 55%, Trump's Dips to 42%. Gallup [<https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>; 11.01.2022].
- Bryant N. (2020). US election 2020: Why Donald Trump lost. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 26.09.2021].
- Corasaniti N. (2020). How Immigrant Twin Brothers Are Beating Trump's Team on Facebook. *New York Times* [<https://www.nytimes.com>; 19.05.2020].
- Fabbri T. (2020). US election 2020: The people behind the political memes you share. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 18.09.2021].
- Giles C., Robinson O., Sardarizadeh S. (2020). US election 2020: How a misleading post went from the fringes to Trump's Twitter. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 26.09.2021].
- McCombs M., Shaw D.L., Weaver D. (eds.) (1997). *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*. Mahwah, NJ.
- McCombs M. (2004). *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge.
- Mccarthy J. (2020). Americans More Satisfied with Biden Than Trump Campaign. Gallup [<https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>; 12.01.2022].
- McKelvey T. (2020). US election 2020: Beer and angst as White House party defies another protocol. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 25.09.2021].
- Pandey M., Rackham A. (2021). Capitol riots: How it feels to be an American in the UK. *BBC* [<https://www.bbc.co.uk>; 27.09.2021].

- Sardarizadeh S. (2020). US election 2020: Fox News, Newsmax walk back voter fraud claims after legal threat. *BBC* [https://www.bbc.co.uk; 26.09.2021].
- Schier S.E., Eberly T.E. (2017). *The Trump Presidency: Outsider in the Oval Office*. London.
- Wead D. (2019). *Inside Trump's White House: The Authorized Story*. London.
- Wendling M. (2021). QAnon: What is it and where did it come from? *BBC* [https://www.bbc.co.uk; 2.02.2022].
- Zurcher A. (2021). Capitol riot: What does a deadly day mean for Trump's legacy? *BBC* [https://www.bbc.co.uk; 27.09.2021].

STRESZCZENIE

Oprawy w telewizyjnych relacjach BBC dotyczących powstania na Kapitolu i reakcji Trumpa na wybory w 2020 roku

Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie większej uwagi na *framing* w mediach i jego wpływ na publiczność. Uwagę zwrócono na sposób, w jaki BBC przedstawiła reakcję Trumpa na wybory prezydenckie w Stanach Zjednoczonych w 2020 roku i powstanie na Kapitolu. Reakcja Trumpa na wyniki wyborów była precedensem w historii Ameryki, co miało znaczący wpływ na wizerunek Stanów Zjednoczonych. Korpus tekstów, poddanych analizie mającej zweryfikować powyższą tezę, wybrany został z oficjalnej strony BBC. W analizie jakościowej wiodącą była koncepcja *framingu* McCombsa. Ramy medialne zostały również zestawione z sondażami Gallupa dotyczącymi podobnych kwestii. Wyniki ujawniają, iż reakcja Trumpa na wybory oraz wydarzenia na Wzgórzu Kapitolijnskim zostały przedstawione w odniesieniu do trzech tematów. Pierwszym jest zacięty wyścig o Białą Dom i bardzo krytykowana kampania w mediach społecznościowych. Drugim tematem jest narracja Trumpa o sfałszowanych wyborach i potencjalnej przemocy w celu powstrzymania aktu kradzieży. Trzecim tematem są zamieszki na Wzgórzu Kapitolijnskim i ich wpływ na wizerunek Stanów Zjednoczonych oraz amerykańską demokrację. W tym sensie artykuł może zaoferować głębszy wgląd w oddziaływanie narracji Trumpa na amerykański krajobraz polityczny.

Słowa kluczowe: BBC, zamieszki na Kapitolu, Donald Trump, *framing*, media

