

Still Failing the “Fair & Balanced” Test

Special Report leans right, white, Republican & male

By Steve Rendall & Julie Hollar

FAIR’s latest study of Fox’s **Special Report with Brit Hume** finds the network’s flagship news show still listing right—heavily favoring conservative and Republican guests in its one-on-one interviews. And, according to the study, **Special Report** rarely features women or non-white guests in these prominent newsmaker interview spots.

In previous studies FAIR has found that looking at a show’s guest list is one of the most reliable methods for gauging its perspective. In the case of **Special Report**, the single one-on-one interview with anchor Brit Hume is a central part of the newscast, and the anchor often uses his high-profile guests’ comments as subject matter for the show’s wrap-up panel discussion. If Fox is the “fair & balanced” network it claims to be, then the guest list of what Fox calls its “signature news show” ought to reflect a diverse spectrum of ideas and sources. FAIR has studied **Special Report**’s guest list on two earlier occasions (**Extra!**, 7–8/01, 7–8/02).

FAIR’s current study looked at 25 weeks of **Special Report**’s one-on-one interview segments (6/30/03–12/19/03), finding 101 guests. FAIR classified each guest by political ideology, party affiliation (where applicable), gender and ethnicity. When FAIR first studied **Special Report** in 2001, the dominance of conservative guests was so overwhelming (71 percent of all guests) that we used just two ideological categories, “conservative” and “non-conservative.” The latter included guests with no discernible political ideology.

When FAIR’s second study in 2002 found conservative guests had dropped to less than half of the total, we added a “left of center” category for comparison purposes. Though the “left of cen-



Brit Hume, the host of FOX’s **Special Report**.

ter” category was more broadly defined than the “conservative” category—since many right-of-center guests were not counted as conservatives—conservatives still outnumbered those on the left, 14 to one.

For this study three ideological categories were used: conservative, centrist and progressive. Guests affiliated with openly conservative, centrist or progressive think tanks, magazines or advocacy groups, or who openly promote such views, are labeled as such. Guests who do not avow an ideology—such as military operations experts and journalists who decline to reveal their own political inclinations—were categorized as non-ideological.

As with earlier FAIR studies of **Special Report**, Republicans were not automatically counted as conservatives and Democrats were not automatically counted as liberals. For instance, Georgia Democratic Senator Zell Miller,

who champions many conservative causes and openly campaigns for George Bush, is classified as an ideological conservative. Likewise, Georgia Democratic congressman Jim Marshall, who has one of the most conservative voting records of any congressional Democrat, was classified as a “centrist,” as was Democrat Susan Estrich, who was a member of Republican California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s transition team and has implored Democrats to move to the center (e.g., “Let Clinton Be the Centrist Clinton,” **USA Today**, 6/22/95). Dennis Ross, who has served under Republican and Democratic administrations and whose positions on the Middle East are center-right, was counted as a centrist for the purposes of this study.

In the past, **Special Report** featured interviews with moderate Republicans such as Christopher Shays, Christine Todd Whitman and David Gergen who were

counted as “non-conservatives” under the earlier classification system. Only one Republican was counted as a “centrist” in the current study period: Noah Feldman, a legal expert who worked for the Bush administration in Iraq.

Conservative & Republican

Fifty-seven percent of **Special Report's** one-on-one guests during the period studied were ideological conservatives, 12 percent were centrists and 11 percent were progressives.

Twenty percent of guests were non-ideological. Among ideological guests, conservatives accounted for 72 percent, while centrists made up 15 percent and progressives 14 percent. (The total exceeds 100 percent due to rounding.) Viewers were roughly five times more likely to see a conservative interviewed on **Special Report** than a progressive.

The five-to-one conservative-to-progressive imbalance is actually a marked improvement from FAIR's 2002 study, which found that “left-of-center” guests—three percent of the total—were outnumbered 14 to one. In the 2002 study, however, conservative dominance was less marked, at 48 percent of total guests.

Special Report's guestlist shows a similarly heavy slant toward Republicans. Forty-two guests were current or former Democratic or Republican officials, candidates, political appointees or advisers. Guests who had past affiliations with both Republicans and Democrats were counted as nonpartisan; for example, Dennis Ross—having served under presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton—was classified as non-partisan.

Of the 42 partisan guests, 35 were Republicans and only seven were Democrats—a five-to-one imbalance. Furthermore, of the handful of Democrats that did appear, the majority were centrist or conservative, and frequently expressed views more typical of Republican guests. For example, centrist Rep. Jim Marshall (10/23/03) argued that the media weren't covering the “good news” in Iraq, while Sen. Zell Miller (11/4/03) talked about his dissatisfaction with the Democratic party and his fondness for George Bush. Thirty-four of the 35 Republicans who appeared were conservatives; only

Special Report's Special Guest

One of **Special Report's** favorite guests is **Fox News** analyst Mansoor Ijaz, an American investment manager of South Asian heritage. Neither a conservative nor a Republican, Ijaz plays a special role on **Special Report**. Leading all other guests with five appearances during the period studied—he's appeared on **Fox** more than 100 times on other occasions—Ijaz regularly echoes Bush White House and neo-conservative claims about global threats, ignoring evidence while citing only shadowy, unnamed sources.

For instance, when anchor Brit Hume (11/10/03) asked Ijaz if there was “evidence of any consequence” linking Saddam Hussein to the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, Ijaz replied, “Absolutely.” But the remainder of Ijaz's answer contained nothing even vaguely suggesting such evidence. The segment ended with Ijaz criticizing Democrats for questioning the White House's case for war.

If Ijaz's support for official policy is central to his current role on the show, it's not what first made him a star on **Special Report** (and several other **Fox** shows). Ijaz came into heavy rotation as a **Fox** guest after charging in the **Los Angeles Times** (12/5/01) that President Bill Clinton blew a chance to capture Osama bin Laden in the 1990s. Ijaz claims to have brokered a deal in which Sudan would have produced Osama bin Laden in exchange for the lifting of sanctions on the African country—a deal Ijaz says Clinton failed to act on.

It was a questionable claim—in fact, the September 11 Commission later found no “reliable evidence” to support it (Hearing 8, 3/23/04)—and other news outlets noted that the Clinton administration flatly denied the allegations. **Salon.com** reported (8/16/02) that “the Clinton administration says there was no deal and that Ijaz never had a role in diplomatic discussions,” and quoted Clinton's National Security Adviser Sandy Berger calling Ijaz's claims “ludicrous and irresponsible.” Even Clinton critic Richard Miniter, in his book *Losing Bin Laden: How Bill Clinton's Failures Unleashed Global Terror*, saw fit to include a Clinton official's assessment of Ijaz as “a Walter Mitty living out a personal fantasy.” But when Ijaz repeated his Clinton-let-Bin-Laden-get-away story on **Special Report** (11/6/03), Hume simply ended the segment, “Got you. Mansoor Ijaz, great to have you. Thanks very much.”

Rarely naming his sources or even identifying them by nationality or occupation, Ijaz insists on their reliability. When asked by Hume about the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden (11/20/03), Ijaz replied: “Well, Brit, tonight I can report from my intelligence sources, I consider unimpeachable intelligence sources, that we have eyewitness accounts that both Osama bin Laden, in a modified, disguised form, as well as Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number two in Al Qaeda, are, in fact, in Iran.” This is less than airtight evidence, but Hume apparently needs little convincing; that night, as on many segments featuring Ijaz, the anchor introduced him with lavish praise for his connections: “He is an American businessman by trade, but few people on Earth have better connections and sources in the Mideast than Mansoor Ijaz.”

While many of Ijaz's claims are so vaguely sourced as to be uncheckable, some have been questioned by other reporters. According to the **New York Times** (2/4/02), Ijaz once “confirmed” for **Fox** (2/3/02) an inaccurate report that the body of **Wall Street Journal** reporter Daniel Pearl had been found. While Pearl's body wouldn't turn up for another three months, and the erroneous story was called a hoax by U.S. and Pakistani officials, **Fox** invited Ijaz on less than a week later (**On the Record**, 2/8/02) to speculate again about Pearl's condition and kidnappers.

Last summer Ijaz told the British **Guardian** (8/23/03) that the White House had reached a secret agreement with Pakistan not to capture or kill bin Laden in late 2001, following the U.S. war in Afghanistan. Nerves were too raw right after the war, said Ijaz, and the immediate capture or death of bin Laden might inflame unrest in Pakistan and incite attacks on the West elsewhere. “There was a judgment made that it would be more destabilizing in the longer term,” Ijaz told the paper. “There would still be the ability to get him at a later date when it was more appropriate.”

If true—an important qualifier—this story would obviously be huge news. But Ijaz did not repeat his dubious bombshell on **Special Report** when he next appeared on the show (9/10/03), perhaps because he knew that stories that reflect badly on the Bush White House are not received well there. —S.R. and J.H.

No Balance From "Liberal" Media

Conservatives often defend **Fox's** rightward slant by claiming that it simply counterbalances a predominantly left-leaning media. But previous FAIR studies have found that, across the supposedly "liberal" media, Republican sources dominate—and **Fox** simply skews even farther to the right.

FAIR's original 2001 study of **Special Report (Extra!, 7-8/01)** included a comparison to **CNN's Wolf Blitzer Reports**—which favored Republicans 57 to 43 percent. And a 2002 FAIR study of the three major networks' nightly news broadcasts (**Extra!, 5-6/02**) found an even greater imbalance than on **CNN**: Of partisan sources, 75 percent were Republican and only 24 percent Democrats. The differences among the networks were negligible; **CBS** had the most Republicans (76 percent) while **ABC** had the fewest (73 percent).

Even **NPR**, characterized by conservative critics as "liberal" radio, favored Republican sources over Democrats by a ratio of more than three to two in a recent study of its main news shows (**Extra!, 5-6/04**). And Republican political domination doesn't explain the imbalance: In FAIR's 1993 study of **NPR (Extra!, 4-5/93)**, when Democrats controlled the White House and both houses of Congress, Republicans still outnumbered Democrats 57 to 42 percent.—*S.R. and J.H.*

one, Noah Feldman, was classified as a centrist.

The five-to-one partisan imbalance represents a greater slant than FAIR's 2002 study, which found Republicans outnumbering Democrats by three to two, though it is still better than FAIR's 2001 study, which found **Special Report's** guest list favoring Republicans by more than eight to one (50 vs. 6). After the 2001 study, the show's anchor, **Fox** managing editor Brit Hume, told the **New York Times** (7/2/01) that, though he had yet to read the findings, "if it is a reasonable question, and we find that there is some imbalance, then we'll correct it."

White & male

Special Report continues to overwhelmingly favor white and male guests: As in 2002, only 7 percent of guests were women, and the percentage of people of color rose only slight-

ly, to 11 percent from 7 percent in 2001 and 2002. In 2003, only one woman of color was featured in a one-on-one interview: National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.

As in past studies, those women and people of color who did appear on **Special Report** were remarkably conservative. Four of the seven appearances by women were by conservative Republicans and two were by centrist Democrat Susan Estrich. No progressive women appeared in the study period. Of the seven guests of color (accounting for 11 appearances), five were conservative and only one was progressive, journalist Charles Cobb of allAfrica.com. The one person of color classified as non-ideological, Mansoor Ijaz, accounted for five appearances. Ijaz, a wealthy investment manager who has expressed support for Hillary Clinton, is also a frequent and vocal booster of neo-conservative causes and

difficult to label ideologically. (See sidebar.)

In our second study of **Special Report (Extra!, 8/02)**, FAIR remarked, "While **Special Report** can claim to have *moderated* its imbalance with regard to Republican and conservative guests, the show still falls short of reflecting the diverse ideas and communities of the United States." With current findings indicating that the show has tipped back toward increased imbalance, it becomes harder to defend **Special Report** from charges that it chooses its guests based on political sympathies, not news judgment. ■

This study was commissioned for the film Outfoxed by Robert Greenwald.

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