

Murdoch, the Fox Effect and Trump: How the Sky takeover could poison Britain's public debate



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Rebecca P. Lenn
Meredith Alexander

About Avaaz

Avaaz—meaning "voice" in several European, Middle Eastern and Asian languages—launched in 2007 with a simple democratic mission: organize citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want.

Avaaz empowers millions of people from all walks of life to take action on pressing global, regional and national issues, from corruption and poverty to conflict and climate change. Our model of internet organising allows thousands of individual efforts, however small, to be rapidly combined into a powerful collective force.

The Avaaz community campaigns in 15 languages, served by a core team on 6 continents and thousands of volunteers. We take action -- signing petitions, funding media campaigns and direct actions, emailing, calling and lobbying governments, and organizing "offline" protests and events -- to ensure that the views and values of the world's people inform the decisions that affect us all. We have over 1.5 million members in the United Kingdom.

About Media Matters for America

Media Matters for America is a web-based, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) progressive research and information center dedicated to comprehensively monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in the U.S. media.

Launched in May 2004, *Media Matters for America* put in place, for the first time, the means to systematically monitor a cross section of print, broadcast, cable, radio, and Internet media outlets for conservative misinformation - news or commentary that is not accurate, reliable, or credible and that forwards the conservative agenda - every day, in real time.

Using the website mediamatters.org as the principal vehicle for disseminating research and information, *Media Matters* posts rapid-response items as well as longer research and analytic reports documenting conservative misinformation throughout the media. Additionally, *Media Matters* works daily to notify activists, journalists, pundits, and the general public about instances of misinformation, providing them with the resources to rebut false claims and to take direct action against offending media institutions.

Media inquiries

Bert Wander, bertATavaaz.org, +44-0796-801-7731

Laura Keiter, pressATmediamatters.org, +1-202-772-8195

Introduction

The United Kingdom deserves a TV news media that is fair, fact-driven, and free from interests that seek to polarise the British public. If 21st Century Fox's bid to take full control of Sky is approved, the UK could see irreparable harm done to both its media and political landscapes. Produced by Avaaz and Media Matters for America, this report demonstrates the damage 21st Century Fox's executive chairman, Rupert Murdoch, and his news outlets have inflicted on the integrity of a free press, politics, and public opinion in the United States, playing a leading role in fueling post-truth politics.

The pattern pursued by Rupert Murdoch and his sons - who also play executive roles - is clear: They spread fringe and frequently false stories in the US through Fox News, and use their newspapers in the US and the UK to meddle in politics. The Murdochs have a demonstrated record of both tearing up promises they make ahead of takeovers and using their massive power to twist the arms of editors and politicians to advance their political and commercial interests. UK regulations provide some protections against partisan TV news, but they are far from complete.

With one-third of the newspaper market, the Murdochs already have disproportionate influence across all news platforms, pursuing a partisan agenda and pushing news that is then picked up by TV news channels. If Fox is allowed to own all of Sky, the Murdochs will likely succeed in shifting Sky News from serving as a professional, impartial news service for the British public to another powerful, poisonous one-sided mouthpiece for the family's agenda.

The Fox effect: how a lie spreads

In 1996, marking his first venture into the 24-hour cable news market, Rupert Murdoch appointed Roger Ailes -- a former adviser to Presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush -- to launch and build what would become the most-watched cable news network in the US.

Murdoch's selection of Ailes to run Fox News ushered in a new era in American news media and conservative politics, but the general approach has been enabled and driven by Murdoch. For example, after Ailes was ousted over sexual assault allegations from senior employees, Murdoch took over as Fox News CEO and said it would be "business suicide" to change the editorial direction of the network.¹

Murdoch's approach is highly partisan with a clear political motivation, which is legal for US broadcasters. However, Fox has a history of using false stories to promote its political objectives. This abuse -- and its resulting damage in American public discourse -- has been so widespread that it has been termed the "Fox effect."

The pattern is best understood in six unique steps:

- 1) Right-wing bloggers, talk radio hosts, and other conservative media outlets start to focus on a story that fits their ideology and political agenda and distort it.
- 2) Fox News picks up the story and gives it heavy, one-sided coverage, elevating far-right activists and politicians as expert informants.
- 3) Fox News and conservative media then attack the so-called "liberal media" for ignoring the distorted story.
- 4) Mainstream media outlets eventually cover the story, echoing the right-wing distortions.
- 5) Fox News receives credit for promoting the story.
- 6) The story is later proved false or wildly misleading, long after damage is done.

Here is a play-by-play of how this system of fabrication has worked:

In 2008, then Senator Barack Obama and then Senator Hillary Clinton were campaigning for the presidency. A fringe outlet InsightMag.com published an anonymously sourced report claiming that Obama attended a madrassa, or Islamic religious school, as a boy and that Clinton's campaign was the source of the story. With the aid of Fox News, these two lies turned into *11 days of fact-free accusations against the leading candidates for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination*.²

In the first stage as outlined above, right-wing radio personalities gave InsightMag.com's post a platform. On January 19, the story hit the far-right radio airwaves, with hosts Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Michael Savage, and others uncritically discussing its accusations.³

¹David Bauder, "Fox boss: We want to keep Megyn Kelly," Associated Press, 27 Oct. 2016, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/ce7de1c83d1f498cb4930bfb24ac8501/fox-boss-we-want-keep-megyn-kelly>.

²Rob Dietz, "Timeline of a smear," *Media Matters for America*, 30 Jan. 2007, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2007/01/30/timeline-of-a-smear/137882>.

³Rob Dietz, "Timeline of a smear," *Media Matters for America*, 30 Jan. 2007, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2007/01/30/timeline-of-a-smear/137882>.

Then in stage two, the story jumped to Fox News, which devoted four segments to the story. Mainstream media outlets followed suit. For example, on January 25, on the front page of ABC News' website, a headline read: "Madrasa Madness: Was Hillary Behind Obama Smear?" While CNN, The Associated Press, and the conservative-leaning *Washington Times* all debunked the smear and discredited its source, other mainstream media outlets and commentators continued to amplify it. Starting January 27, editorials in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Newsweek*, and *The Washington Post*, and a front-page article in *The New York Times*, had all been forced to dedicate space to this complete fabrication.⁴

Ultimately the baseless story decelerated in the news cycle, but the lie at its core was pushed for years by politicians and media figures and shaped public perceptions of Obama's faith. A 2015 poll found that 29 percent of Americans say they think Obama, a Christian, is a Muslim, including 43 percent of Republicans.⁵

Fox successfully spreads false stories on an industrial scale

Another example of how the "Fox effect" has turned fringe falsehoods into mainstream stories accepted by many as fact involves the UK. In 2015, frequent Fox guest Steve Emerson -- part of the network's stable of extremists who lead its conversation about Islam -- made the false claim that the city of Birmingham is "totally Muslim" and a place "where non-Muslims just simply don't go in."⁶ Prime Minister David Cameron and Ofcom both condemned the segment, and Fox News host Jeanine Pirro apologised for Emerson's "incorrect" comments, telling viewers, "We deeply regret these errors and apologize to the people of Birmingham, our viewers and all who have been offended."⁷ But once again lasting damage was inflicted. Despite Fox's retraction, the myth of no-go zones has been repeated by Donald Trump during his presidential candidacy,⁸ Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal,⁹ and various conservative commentators and outlets.¹⁰

The network has succeeded in entrenching fictions in its audience so deeply that many believe these lies as irrefutable fact. Following the 2010 election, the University of Maryland released a

⁴ Rob Dietz, "Timeline of a smear," *Media Matters for America*, 30 Jan. 2007, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2007/01/30/timeline-of-a-smear/137882>.

⁵ Jennifer Agiesta, "Misperceptions about Obama's faith, but aren't so widespread," CNN, 14 Sept. 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/13/politics/barack-obama-religion-christian-misperceptions/>.

⁶ Dylan Stableford, "Fox News apologizes for terror expert's 'totally Muslim' claim," Yahoo News, 18 Jan. 2015,

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/fox-news-apologizes-muslim-only-city-birmingham-uk-154509889.html>.

⁷ Dylan Stableford, "Fox News apologizes for terror expert's 'totally Muslim' claim," Yahoo News, 18 Jan. 2015,

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/fox-news-apologizes-muslim-only-city-birmingham-uk-154509889.html>.

⁸ Mark Molloy, "Trump facts: Twitter users mock Donald Trump's 'radicalised London' comments," *The Telegraph*, 8 Dec. 2015,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/donald-trump/12040300/Trump-facts-Twitter-users-mock-Donald-Trumps-radicalised-London-comments.html>.

⁹ "Louisiana governor unapologetic after Muslim 'no-go zones' comments," Associated Press, 20 Jan. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jan/20/boby-jindal-muslim-no-go-zones>.

¹⁰ Alex Kaplan, "Pro-Trump Media Push Myth Of Muslim 'No-Go Zones' In Sweden," *Media Matters for America*, 22 Feb. 2017,

<https://mediamatters.org/research/2017/02/22/pro-trump-media-push-myth-muslim-no-go-zones-sweden/215420>.

study showing that Fox News viewers were the most misinformed audience of any major news network. Compared to other cable news viewers, they were, for example, 31 percentage points more likely to agree that “it is not clear that Obama was born in the United States.”¹¹ A national poll conducted by Suffolk University in October 2016 found that 65 percent of loyal Fox News viewers expressed concern that 2016 election results could be manipulated,¹² echoing President Trump’s baseless claims -- which Fox News heavily promoted -- that the election was “rigged” and would be influenced by widespread “voter fraud.”¹³

Even more worrying, the falsehoods fabricated and promoted by Fox News have driven real world political impact. For example, there is currently a debate in the US about the future of the Affordable Care Act (also known as “Obamacare”). A thoroughly debunked, Fox News-promoted lie from 2009 is being used by some politicians as a reason to make healthcare inaccessible to millions of Americans.

Here’s how it happened. In July 2009, former New York Lieutenant Governor Betsy McCaughey falsely claimed in the Murdoch-owned *New York Post* and *Wall Street Journal* that a health care reform bill introduced by the House of Representatives would “require” end-of-life counseling for seniors to “tell them how to end their life sooner.”¹⁴ Fox News pundits began citing her claims immediately, but the smear was popularised with the frame “death panels” by former Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin in August 2009. Within days, Fox personalities had picked up and spread the false “death panels” smear – and Fox hired Palin as a commentator just months later.¹⁵

Although the claim was widely debunked, including via its selection by PolitiFact as its 2009 “Lie of the Year,”¹⁶ Fox pushed the myth in various forms for years. Elected officials still uncritically cite “death panels” to this day. For example, at a recent Republican town hall meeting in Florida, a local GOP county official explained his support for repealing the Affordable Care Act by saying, “There is a provision in there that anyone over the age of 74 has to go before what is effectively a death panel.”¹⁷

The push to weaponise coverage to a political end has been proved to come directly from Ailes and his executive team. For example, according to leaked internal emails and sources at the network, Fox News’ vice president of news and Washington managing editor, Bill Sammon,

¹¹Clay Ramsay, Steven Kull, Evan Lewis, and Stefan Subias, “Misinformation and the 2010 Election: A Study of the US Electorate,” College Park: University of Maryland, 10 Dec. 2010, http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/11375/Misinformation_Dec10_rpt.pdf;jsessionid=340BDC03BE188476C86E5AF078554031?sequence=4.

¹² Brian Stelter, “Fox News fans pessimistic about the country, and Clinton,” CNNMoney, 28 Oct. 2016, <http://money.cnn.com/2016/10/28/media/fox-news-conservative-media-poll/>.

¹³ “US election 2016: Trump says election ‘rigged at polling places’,” BBC, 17 Oct. 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37673797>.

¹⁴ Karen Famighetti, “A History Of Death Panels: A Timeline,” *Media Matters for America*, 22 March 2011, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2011/03/22/a-history-of-death-panels-a-timeline/177776#1>.

¹⁵ Hannah Dreier, “Fox News personalities advance Palin’s ‘death panel’ claim,” *Media Matters for America*, 10 Aug. 2009, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2009/08/10/fox-news-personalities-advance-palins-death-pan/153138>.

¹⁶ Angie Drobnic Holan, “PolitiFact’s Lie of the Year: ‘Death panels’,” PolitiFact, 18 Dec. 2009, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2009/dec/18/politifact-lie-year-death-panels/>.

¹⁷ Eric Bradner, “‘Death panel’ disputes erupt at Florida GOP congressman’s town hall,” CNN, 11 Feb. 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/11/politics/death-panel-florida-gop-congressman/>.

directly ordered staff to cast doubt on established climate science¹⁸ and echo Republican pollster recommendations about what messaging to use when covering health care reform.¹⁹ Discussing the dynamics in the Washington bureau during an interview, a Fox source said of Sammon's approach, "When news is being tampered with, you have to worry ... If things are being classed as news that aren't, that is a problem."²⁰

Fox News plays a significant role in US party politics

Fox News' ambition even goes beyond campaigning for or against single issues and promoting specific politicians. Starting in 2009, the network played a key role in the rise of the tea party -- a far-right social movement that formed in the wake of the 2008 presidential election. Fox aired repeated segments encouraging viewers to join the movement and its upcoming protests, even providing protest dates, locations and website information.²¹ By encouraging people to attend local rallies, the network lent structure and legitimacy to what might have otherwise been a brief episode. In contrast, Fox aired negative coverage of 2011 protests that favoured collective bargaining rights, with hosts and pundits falsely calling pro-union protesters "violent."²²

Fox News followed up by supporting the Republican party on an industrial scale. A report found that during the 2009-2010 election cycle, more than 30 Fox News personalities endorsed, raised money, or campaigned for Republican candidates or organizations in more than 600 instances. In the run up to the 2014 and 2016 election cycles, the network became an incubator for Republican politicians and served as the stage for Republican presidential primaries. Numerous Fox News personalities have left the network to run for office (several returned to Fox after losing) especially for the 2016 presidential election. In many instances, the network helped launch those Republicans' political careers while they were on the payroll, including Ben Carson, Mike Huckabee, Newt Gingrich, John Kasich, Rick Santorum, and Scott Brown.²³

The widely debunked and condemned "birther" conspiracy (that President Obama is not a natural-born US citizen and therefore disqualified to be president) that originated during the 2008 presidential campaign also resurfaced. In 2011, Trump came forward and became the

¹⁸ Jack Mirkinson, "Fox News Boss Ordered Staffers To Cast Doubt On Climate Change Science," Huffington Post, 15 Dec. 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/12/15/fox-news-climate-change-email_n_796963.html.

¹⁹ Trudy Lieberman, "Frank Luntz Rides Again: The wordsmith and the public option," Columbia Journalism Review, 10 Dec. 2010, http://archives.cjr.org/campaign_desk/frank_luntz_rides_again.php.

²⁰"LEAKED EMAIL: Fox boss caught slanting news reporting." *Media Matters for America*, 9 Dec. 2010, <http://mediamatters.org/blog/2010/12/09/leaked-email-fox-boss-caught-slanting-news-repo/174090>.

²¹ Eric Hananoki, "REPORT: 'Fair and balanced' Fox News aggressively promotes 'tea party' protests," *Media Matters for America*, 8 April 2009, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2009/04/08/report-fair-and-balanced-fox-news-aggressively/149009>.

²²Melody Johnson, "'Frothing,' 'Rabid,' 'Slobs,': The Right-Wing Media's Smear Campaign Of Pro-Union Protesters," *Media Matters for America*, 10 March 2011, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2011/03/10/frothing-rabid-slobs-the-right-wing-medias-smea/177452>.

²³Eric Hananoki and Ben Dimiero, "Roger Ailes' Legacy: Building The GOP's Communications Arm Under the Guise Of A 'News Network'," *Media Matters for America*, 19 July 2016, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2016/07/19/roger-ailes-legacy-building-gops-communications-arm-under-guise-news-network/211722>.

leading voice of the “birther” movement, raising questions about Obama’s birth certificate in a series of interviews, including on Fox News, despite all the evidence to the contrary.²⁴ The network promoted Trump’s claims in dozens of segments, and several of the network’s hosts joined in, suggesting that Obama’s birthplace was in doubt. This was the start of Trump’s ascent to the White House, and the network’s years of fearmongering about Obama’s birthplace, as well as about progressive policies and immigrant and Muslim communities, was the ladder.

Murdoch has consistently leveraged UK newspapers to meddle in British politics

Just as they have with Fox News in the US, Murdoch and his family have used their UK newspapers as tools to advance their political priorities and shape policy. The perception of power around Murdoch-owned media is so powerful that the threat of being attacked by his press has forced at least the last five British prime ministers to seek his support to get into office and remain there. Here are some recent examples of how his newspapers have pushed his political agenda in the UK:

- For years, Murdoch and *The Sun* have skirted journalistic integrity to fuel Euroscepticism. In the run up to last year’s referendum, the newspaper published a misleading front page story declaring that the “Queen backs Brexit,” which forced Buckingham Palace to issue a complaint to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). The IPSO called the headline “significantly misleading” and said it breached the first clause (accuracy) of its Editors’ Code of Practice.²⁵ Buckingham Palace released a statement saying, “The Queen remains politically neutral, as she has for 63 years. We will not comment on spurious, anonymously sourced claims. The referendum is a matter for the British people to decide.”²⁶
- Following the Conservative leadership race after the referendum, Murdoch threw his weight behind his former *Times* reporter and Conservative Member of Parliament Michael Gove, declaring he’d be “happy for Michael Gove to get” the top post.²⁷ Later, Gove obtained the first post-election UK exclusive interview with President-elect Trump, ahead of any working journalist, and ahead of any official meetings with representatives of the British government. Gove asked no critical questions and it was later revealed that Murdoch had sat in on the interview.²⁸

²⁴Ashley Parker and Steve Eder, “Inside the Six Weeks Donald Trump Was a Nonstop ‘Birther’,” *New York Times*, 2 July 2016,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/us/politics/donald-trump-birther-obama.html>.

²⁵ “Sun’s Queen Brexit headline ruled ‘misleading’,” BBC, 18 May 2016,

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-36319085>.

²⁶ “Sun editor defends ‘Queen backs Brexit’ headline as watchdog rules it inaccurate,” *The Guardian*, 18 May 2016,

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/may/18/queen-backs-brexit-headline-in-the-sun-was-inaccurate-press-watchdog-rules>.

²⁷Peter Sterne, “Rupert Murdoch’s influence felt in post-Brexit political chaos,” *Politico*, 30 June 2016,

<http://www.politico.com/media/story/2016/06/murdochs-influence-felt-in-post-brexit-political-chaos-004640>

²⁸James Martinson, “Rupert Murdoch was in room for Michael Gove’s Donald Trump Interview,” *The Guardian*, 9 Feb. 2017.

- Murdoch was formative in shaping the British agenda around the Iraq War. Freedom of information requests reveal that he had three conversations with then-Prime Minister Tony Blair in the nine days before the war. His British newspapers *The Sun* and *The Times* kept up a steady drumbeat of stories and editorials in support of the war despite growing opposition among readers. *The Times* declared, “Winning the public-relations battle is almost as vital as military victory.”²⁹ In 2003, nearly 173 of News Corp.’s newspapers worldwide aired support for the war.³⁰ Blair’s deputy director of communications, Lance Price, called Murdoch the “24th member of the cabinet,”³¹ and Murdoch later admitted that News Corp. “basically supported the Bush policy in the Middle East.”³²

These practices are of course legal with regards to British newspapers. While there are different rules governing broadcast news, these are not foolproof, as discussed below. Murdoch’s use of UK newspapers for political outcomes gives a preview of what he might aim to do with Sky News if the Murdochs take full control and use their considerable power to change or skirt broadcasting standards.

Murdoch’s outlets in the US and UK have shared dubious tactics in the past

Even while *News of the World* was under public pressure for phone hacking, Murdoch’s companies and news outlets continued to use these tactics elsewhere. In 2010, well after the news had broken of hacking in the UK, *Media Matters* senior reporter Joe Strupp investigated behaviour at Fox News; in doing so, Strupp reported on what anonymous sources at the network had told him. Years later, on September 2, 2016, reports surfaced that Fox News had sought Strupp’s phone records through almost certainly illegal means in order to identify these anonymous network sources.³³

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reviewed allegations that News Corp.’s advertising division -- News America Marketing -- hacked into competitor Floorgraphics’ computers to steal information. The investigations failed to pinpoint

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/feb/09/rupe-murdoch-was-in-room-for-michael-goves-donald-trump-interview>.

²⁹ Roy Greenslade, “Their master’s voice,” *The Guardian*, 17 Feb. 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/feb/17/mondaymediasection.iraq>.

³⁰ Roy Greenslade, “Their master’s voice,” *The Guardian*, 17 Feb. 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/feb/17/mondaymediasection.iraq>.

³¹ Ryan Chittum, “Murdoch’s Threat To Democracy,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, 4 Oct. 2010, http://archives.cjr.org/the_audit/murdochshttps://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/07/17/five-things-rupe-murdoch-and-henry-luce-would-agree-on/?utm_term=.90ed47a61ff3_threat_to_democracy.php.

³² Justin Moyer, “Five things Rupert Murdoch and Henry Luce would agree on,” *Washington Post*, 17 July 2014.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/07/17/five-things-rupe-murdoch-and-henry-luce-would-agree-on/?utm_term=.90ed47a61ff3.

³³ Gabriel Sherman, “The Revenge of Roger’s Angels,” *New York Magazine*, 2 Sept. 2016, http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/09/how-fox-news-women-took-down-roger-ailles.html?mid=nymag_press.

those responsible. Years after Floorgraphics filed a lawsuit against News Corp., the salesman responsible for hacking Floorgraphics openly talked about receiving a preview of the company's ad campaigns before their rollout.³⁴

Fox-style tactics could easily spread to the UK despite the different regulatory regime

Some of the Murdochs' tactics described above would not easily go without consequence in the UK. For example, the Ofcom Broadcasting code forbids politicians acting as newsreaders, interviewers or reporters unless there is an exceptional editorial justification. This would make it much harder to have the same kind of revolving door between a Fox-owned UK newsroom and Westminster as there is between the Fox-owned US newsroom and Washington.

However, other tactics to distort the truth and alter public opinion for political gain are completely permissible under UK regulations. For example, the decision of what stories to cover is not governed by Ofcom's impartiality rules. Fox News is entirely free to use its share of voice to turn a fringe story into a massive media circus. This concern was noted by Secretary of State Karen Bradley in her recent letter about the acquisition:

29. The parties contend that the requirements of impartiality in the Broadcasting Code provide a significant constraint on the ability of owners to exert control over the output of Sky News. However, while Ofcom considered these requirements to be relevant, in its report on the 2010 bid Ofcom concluded that they did not adequately address all potential concerns in particular because they "would not necessarily prevent an individual with control of a media organisation from influencing the news agenda through the selection or omission of stories".³⁵

Perhaps more importantly, after the fact enforcement will not prevent the damage Fox News' tactics will have on British public opinion and the overall state of public discourse. Fox's tactic of quickly amplifying false news to the extent that even denials feed the story and further impact public opinion cannot be stopped by after the fact intervention. Given both Murdoch's disregard for the rules and Fox News' run ins with regulators here in the UK, it is very reasonable to assume that the "Fox effect" will continue to be a problem.

In her 3rd March letter, Secretary of State Bradley has already seen "a list of all breaches of licence conditions and Ofcom's codes and rules over the last 10 years against each of the licensees and VOD service providers owned by Sky pic subsidiaries and by 21st Century Fox subsidiaries" ("Ofcom data on breaches"). However, it is worth highlighting some notable examples of Fox News' willingness to breach existing rules, including:

³⁴ Eliot Caroom, "Alleged computer hacking of N.J. company by News Corp. subsidiary gets new attention," *The Star-Ledger*, 18 July 2011, http://www.nj.com/business/index.ssf/2011/07/alleged_computer_hacking_of_nj.html.

³⁵ Bradley, Karen, "To Jeffrey Palker and James Conyers" 3 March 2017. 21st Century Fox Inc. and Sky Plc. European Intervention Notice. DCMS website www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596538/20130303_Sky_letter_FINAL.pdf.

1. During “routine monitoring,” Ofcom found three episodes in which Fox News host Sean Hannity’s coverage of the US elections was heavily biased in favour of Trump. The regulator said there were “no criticisms of Donald Trump’s policies, actions or integrity analogous to criticisms in the same areas made about Hillary Clinton.”³⁶
2. Ofcom ruled that Fox News violated election broadcast rules by airing pro-Brexit coverage on the day of the European Union (EU) referendum. An Ofcom spokesman said, “Following a careful investigation, we found that Fox News breached broadcasting rules by showing a discussion about the EU referendum while the polls were open on the day of the referendum.”³⁷ The coverage breached rule 6.4 for programmes at the time of elections and referendums.³⁸
3. The Fox News programme that reported that Birmingham was a city “where non-Muslims just simply don’t go” -- the heart of the “no-go zone” myth noted above -- also breached impartiality rules.³⁹ Ofcom reported that the broadcast was “materially misleading and had the potential to cause harm and offence to viewers” in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in Paris.
4. Ofcom ruled that a *Fox Extra* broadcast on April 7 about whether abortion should be lawful in the US breached broadcasting rules because alternative viewpoints were completely excluded.⁴⁰

Murdoch is a hands-on owner whose media outlets promote his political views despite promises to the contrary

There is widespread evidence that Rupert Murdoch is a very active owner. A few examples from his UK titles demonstrate a clear pattern:

- Former reporters for *News of the World* shared that Murdoch “used to turn up unannounced -- you wouldn’t know he was there. No jacket, sleeves rolled up, at the back bench, quite hands-on.”⁴¹

³⁶ Ofcom, “Ofcom Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin,” Issue Number 317, p. 22, 21 Nov. 2016, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/94271/Issue-317.pdf.

³⁷ Mark Sweney, “Fox News broke broadcasting rules with pro-Brexit views on EU referendum day,” *The Guardian*, 22 Aug. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/aug/22/fox-news-brexit-eu-referendum-bbc-ofcom>.

³⁸ Ofcom, “Ofcom Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin,” Issue Number 311, p. 8, 22 Aug. 2016, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/88750/Issue_311_of_Ofcoms_Broadcast_and_On_Demand_Bulletin.pdf.

³⁹ John Plunkett, “Ofcom criticises Fox News for calling Birmingham no-go zone for non-Muslims,” *The Guardian*, 21 Sept. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/sep/21/ofcom-criticises-fox-news-for-calling-birmingham-no-go-zone-for-non-muslims>.

⁴⁰ Ofcom, “Ofcom Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin,” Issue Number 311, p.12, 22 Aug. 2016, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/88750/Issue_311_of_Ofcoms_Broadcast_and_On_Demand_Bulletin.pdf.

⁴¹ Mark Hosenball and Kate Holton, “Special report: Rupert Murdoch, a hands-on newspaperman,” Reuters, 19 July 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-newscorp-murdoch-papers-idUSTRE7611T20110719>.

- Kelvin MacKenzie, a former editor for *The Sun*, said he “would hear from Murdoch on a daily basis” in the 1980s.⁴²
- Roy Greenslade, former senior editor at both *The Sun* and *Sunday Times*, observed, “As an editor you were never in any doubt about what pleased him.”⁴³
- Former editor of the *Sunday Times* and *The Times* Sir Harold Evans told the Leveson Inquiry that “Mr Murdoch was constantly sending for my staff without telling me and telling them what the paper should be.”⁴⁴
- Former *Sunday Times* editor Andrew Neil told a House of Lords committee looking into media ownership in 2008, “On every major issue of the time and every major political personality or business personality, I knew what he thought and you knew, as an editor, that you did not have a freehold, you had a leasehold ... and that leasehold depended on accommodating his views ... Rupert Murdoch is obsessed with what his newspapers say. He picks the editors that will take the kind of view of these things that he has and these editors know what is expected of them when the big issues come and they fall into line.”⁴⁵

Murdoch also has a habit of breaking promises about how news outlets will be run. For example, soon after taking over *News of the World*, Murdoch abandoned his pledge to run the paper with the Carr family which had sold the paper to him after running it for 80 years.⁴⁶

In another example, Fred Emery, a former *Sunday Times* assistant editor, said Murdoch told him in March 1982 that he was considering firing then-*Times* editor Evans. Emery reminded Murdoch of his promise that editors wouldn't be fired without the approval of the independent directors. Murdoch answered, “God, you don't take all that seriously, do you?”⁴⁷ When Murdoch acquired Times Newspapers Limited in 1981, he soon fired Evans as editor of *The Times*. Evans had been the twelfth editor at *The Times* in its nearly 200 year run. And Murdoch employed and fired five editors in just eleven years. In response to Murdoch's testimony before Parliament on the phone hacking scandal, Evans wrote, “Political independence was only one of the promises he made and broke.”⁴⁸

⁴² Mark Hosenball and Kate Holton, “Special report: Rupert Murdoch, a hands-on newspaperman,” Reuters, 19 July 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-newscorp-murdoch-papers-idUSTRE7611T20110719>.

⁴³ Mark Hosenball and Kate Holton, “Special report: Rupert Murdoch, a hands-on newspaperman,” Reuters, 19 July 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-newscorp-murdoch-papers-idUSTRE7611T20110719>.

⁴⁴ James Cusick, “Rupert Murdoch is ‘evil,’ former editor Sir Harold Evans tells Leveson Inquiry,” *The Independent*, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/rupert-murdoch-is-evil-former-editor-sir-harold-evans-tells-leveson-inquiry-7763811.html>.

⁴⁵ Mark Hosenball and Kate Holton, “Special report: Rupert Murdoch, a hands-on newspaperman,” Reuters, 19 July 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-newscorp-murdoch-papers-idUSTRE7611T20110719>.

⁴⁶ Ken Auletta, “PROMISES, PROMISES. What might the Wall Street Journal become if Rupert Murdoch owned it?” *The New Yorker*, 2 July 2007, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/07/02/promises-promises-2>.

⁴⁷ Steve Stecklow, Aaron O. Patrick, Martin Peers, and Andrew Higgins, “In Murdoch's Career, A Hand on the News,” *Wall Street Journal*, 5 June 2007, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB118100557923424501>.

⁴⁸ Harold Evans, “Harold Evans Responds To Murdoch,” *The Daily Beast*, 25 April 2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/04/25/harold-evans-responds-to-murdoch.html>.

In 2007, when Murdoch bought the *Wall Street Journal*, he promised the previous owners that he would maintain the paper's journalistic integrity. However, the *Journal* has come under fire both inside and outside the newsroom for its rightward shift at the expense of transparency and objectivity.

For example, during the 2016 election coverage, *Journal* staffers expressed dismay with the paper's "galling" and "absurd" Trump coverage that they believed not only undermined the paper's journalistic integrity, but also its competitive standing compared to the investigative wherewithal of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.⁴⁹ Despite the internal tumult, the *Journal* stayed the course after the election. For example, in February of this year, a memo was sent by Baker that "instructed editors to stop referring to the countries targeted in President Trump's travel and refugee executive order as 'seven majority Muslim countries' in news coverage,"⁵⁰ a move that divided the newsroom even more and paved the way for more staff departures, including the *Journal's* editorial features editor.⁵¹

Murdoch has a history of using the political power generated by his media outlets to push for commercial gain

In the US, Murdoch has worked for years to ease regulations on media consolidation. During the Clinton administration, he mobilised Republican support when the then-Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman, Reed E. Hundt, launched an investigation into whether News Corp. violated commission rules in its acquisition of television stations to form the Fox Network.⁵² After being confronted by Murdoch's then-chief lobbyist, the FCC granted News Corp. a waiver, permitting Murdoch's network to remain intact. The deal was later determined to be in violation of the rules.⁵³ This marked the first of many successful attempts by Murdoch to win exemptions and expand his company.⁵⁴ Marking the height of Murdoch's influence in championing deregulation in the US media landscape, the mogul was asked by President

⁴⁹ Tyler Cherry, "The Newsroom At Rupert Murdoch's WSJ Is Fed Up With Its 'Galling' Pro-Trump Coverage," *Media Matters for America*, 14 Oct. 2016, <http://mediamatters.org/blog/2016/10/14/newsroom-rupert-murdochs-wsj-fed-its-galling-pro-trump-coverage/213837>.

⁵⁰ Steven Perlberg, "Wall Street Journal Editor: Stop Calling The Travel Ban Countries 'Majority Muslim'," *Buzzfeed News*, 31 Jan. 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/stevenperlberg/wall-street-journal-editor-stop-calling-the-travel-ban-count?utm_term=.hpkz1RZAB#.poMdmAEx5.

⁵¹ Rosie Gray, "Conflict Over Trump Forces Out An Opinion Editor At The Wall Street Journal," *The Atlantic*, 10 Feb. 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/conflict-over-trump-forces-out-an-opinion-editor-at-the-wall-street-journal/516318/>.

⁵² Jo Becker, "Murdoch, Ruler of a Vast Empire, Reaches Out for Even More," *New York Times*, 25 June 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/25/business/media/25murdoch.html>.

⁵³ Jo Becker, "Murdoch, Ruler of a Vast Empire, Reaches Out for Even More," *New York Times*, 25 June 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/25/business/media/25murdoch.html>.

⁵⁴ Jo Becker, "Murdoch, Ruler of a Vast Empire, Reaches Out for Even More," *New York Times*, 25 June 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/25/business/media/25murdoch.html>.

Trump in January 2017 to submit the names of possible nominees for FCC chairman.⁵⁵

Murdoch has also successfully pressured UK governments from different parties. In May 1995, Conservative Government proposals to limit media ownership to 20 percent of market share was met with such hostility by Murdoch-owned media that the government eventually dropped the plan. The Labour Government under Tony Blair also admitted that he was not going to take on the Murdoch media over the issue of media plurality. James Murdoch referred to Broadcasting Act standards objectives in 2009 as “authoritarianism,” implying that the Murdochs may plan to weaken current UK regulation.⁵⁶

Conclusion: Fox’s bid to take full ownership of Sky is a threat to reliable news and political discourse in the UK

Rupert Murdoch has expressed a clear desire for Sky News to become more like Fox News. For example, House of Lords committee minutes reveal that Murdoch wants Sky News to more closely resemble Fox News.⁵⁷

If he and his companies were to take on sole ownership of Sky, he would have the power to reshape Sky in Fox’s image. The experience of the US shows that Fox has tested and perfected a series of tactics to use broadcast news to create widespread belief in false news stories which result in political outcomes. Experience in both the US and the UK shows that Murdoch’s promises with regard to journalistic integrity and editorial independence cannot be trusted. And again evidence from both countries shows that Rupert Murdoch is willing to use his share of voice to achieve policy goals for both political purposes and his own commercial gain.

These reasons, as well as those set out in other submissions from Avaaz, make it incumbent upon the Secretary of State to exercise the power she has under Section 58 of the Communications Act 2003 to raise broader public interest grounds than those she currently says she is minded to exercise to ensure that people directing and controlling media enterprises are likely to maintain high standards of corporate governance, accountability and conduct.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Gabriel Sherman, “Megyn Kelly’s Departure Is A Big Clue About the Future of Fox News,” *New York Magazine*, 3 Jan. 2017, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/01/megyn-kellys-departure-is-clue-about-future-of-fox-news.html>.

⁵⁶ James Murdoch. “The Absence Of Trust.” 2009 Edinburgh International Television Festival. Edinburgh International Conference Centre, Edinburgh. 28 Aug. 2009. <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Media/documents/2009/08/28/JamesMurdochMacTaggartLecture.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Owen Gibson, “Murdoch wants Sky News to be more like rightwing Fox,” *The Guardian*, 24 Nov. 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/nov/24/bskyb.television>.

⁵⁸ Peretz George QC, “RE: ANTICIPATED ACQUISITION BY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FOX, INC (“21CF”) OF THE ENTIRE ISSUED AND TO BE ISSUED SHARE CAPITAL OF SKY PLC (“SKY”): PROPOSED EUROPEAN INTERVENTION NOTICE” submitted to DCMS on 8 March 2017 by Avaaz.