

# National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 9: Media and Politics<sup>1</sup>

## Key Issues:

*How do factors such as political interest, knowledge, ideology and partisanship influence media consumption and vice versa?*

*Has the rise of partisan niche news contributed to selective media consumption?*

*Does the increased prevalence of partisan niche media—and the concomitant rise in media incivility—exacerbate political polarization?*

## Overview

The economics and technology of media have changed dramatically since the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Scholars in the field note that “[t]he psychology of selecting media content is tightly linked to the economy of media brands and the technology of media platforms.”<sup>3</sup> While niche news radio and cable television often feature cacophonies of “screaming heads,”<sup>4</sup> virtually all media outlets have increased their reliance on “infotainment.”<sup>5</sup> Consumers perceive media slant differently depending on their partisanship, and there is scholarly disagreement on slant depending on the comparative standard of reference that is used.<sup>6</sup>

This brief summarizes research on how political factors influence media use among the American public and conversely how media use influences the politics of the American public, including political knowledge, ideology, partisanship and partisan polarization.<sup>7</sup> These questions appear deceptively simple, but involve complex methodological issues.<sup>8</sup> Survey data that are collected at one time point—cross sectional data—can provide measures of association only. They do not answer the question of whether partisanship *produces* a particular media usage pattern, whether a particular media usage pattern *produces* partisanship or whether the relationship is reciprocal. Panel or longitudinal studies, in which survey data *on the same individuals* is collected at more than one point in time can help us decipher the directional or reciprocal nature of the impacts over time, while also helping us examine partisan selectivity into particular usage patterns and potential reciprocal effects between media consumption and political interest, knowledge, ideology and behavior. Unfortunately, *all* survey data are suspect because self-reported media use dramatically inflates the amount of news (of any kind) that people consume and because it is subject to systematic reporting biases that tend to confound usage itself with political interest, knowledge and partisanship.<sup>9</sup>

The typical lab experiment design, using random assignment, can tease out real causal effects of exposure to highly partisan news and uncivil media discourse. But this will show the potential average impact on all regardless of whether they would have chosen—or otherwise ended up getting—that particular type of news exposure in the real world or not. By incorporating participant choice into exposure to different types of news and news vs. entertainment programming, experimenters can get closer (but not duplicate entirely) real world media choice situations.<sup>10</sup> This can help us determine whether watching highly partisan news further polarizes those partisans who have selected into attitude conforming media exposure, whether selecting into counter-attitudinal programming changes political ideology or partisanship, and/or whether those opting for *no* news consumption would be encouraged to engage politically on one side or another if they did happen to encounter partisan news.<sup>11</sup>

Taking all these methodological issues into consideration and giving greater weight to the better designed studies, evidence reported here suggests eight primary findings:

- 1) Expanded media choice encourages a great many Americans to opt out of political news altogether.<sup>12</sup>

- 2) Only 10-15% of the American population exercises partisan-based selective exposure to political news.<sup>13</sup>
- 3) The impact of partisan news ranges from substantial to negligible.<sup>14</sup>
- 4) The predominant impact of partisan news is to exacerbate polarization among those who already are strong partisans.<sup>15</sup>
- 5) Exposure to highly partisan counter-attitudinal programming may contribute to a loss of trust in the mass media.<sup>16</sup>
- 6) The political knowledge gap between those in the U.S. who prefer news, and those who prefer entertainment, is increasing. As choice of media expands, individuals' preference for news consumption is a good predictor of political knowledge, even more so than socio-economic status.<sup>17</sup>
- 7) Although "there is no firm evidence that partisan media are making ordinary Americans more partisan," and "ideologically one-sided news exposure may be largely confined to a small...segment of the population," this small population is "highly involved and influential."<sup>18</sup>
- 8) The highly uncivil, conflict-laden programming characteristic of partisan niche news alienates Americans from their political system by diminishing political trust; heightening negative feelings towards politicians and office holders; and reducing the perceived legitimacy of political opponents.<sup>19</sup>

## Arguments and Findings

### *Scholarly Controversy over Media Slant*

Many Americans *perceive* that the media they encounter are biased in one partisan direction or another. Whatever their partisanship, they tend to perceive biases favoring their opponents but less often find bias that favors them.<sup>20</sup> However, in addition to researching public perceptions of media bias, media scholars have constructed systematic coding schemes that evaluate news content on a scale reflecting conservative to liberal political ideology.<sup>21</sup> Because the traditional newspaper model distinguished between unbiased news coverage and opinionated editorials, researchers are careful to code editorial statements separately from news coverage. Acknowledged opinion slants should not be confused with whether news reporting itself exhibits partisan bias.

A 2005 study by political scientist Tim Groseclose and economist Jeff Milyo "count[ed] the times that a particular media outlet cite[ed] various think tanks and policy groups, then compar[ed] this with the times that members of Congress cit[ed] the same groups."<sup>22</sup> The researchers then took the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) score of the member of Congress exhibiting the same think tank and policy group citation count as a given media outlet and assigned that ADA score to the outlet. Having done this, the authors reported that:

[their] results show a strong liberal bias; all of the news outlets...except *Fox News Special Report* and the *Washington Times*, received scores to the left of the average member of Congress. Consistent with claims made by conservative critics, CBS Evening News and the New York Times received scores far to the left of center. The most centrist media outlets were PBS NewsHour, CNN's Newsnight and ABC's Good Morning America: among print outlets, USA Today was closest to the center. All of our findings refer strictly to news content....<sup>23</sup>

A 2010 study by economists Mathew Gentzkow and Jesse Shapiro critiqued the Groseclose and Milyo study for coding and measurement problems.<sup>24</sup> For example, the 2005 study depended on the assumption that differing rates of mention of research and advocacy organizations accurately convey media partisan slant. According to the Groseclose and Milyo measure, the *Wall Street Journal's* news

reporting is even more liberal than that of the *New York Times*.<sup>25</sup> Gentzkow and Shapiro instead computed a measure that relied on language typically associated with partisanship.

Our slant index measures the frequency with which newspapers use language that would tend to sway readers to the right or to the left on political issues. We focus on newspapers' news rather than opinion content... To measure news slant, we examine the set of all phrases used by members of Congress in the 2005 *Congressional Record* and identify those that are used much more frequently by one party than another. We then index newspapers by the extent to which the use of politically charged phrases in their news coverage resembles the use of the same phrases in the speech of a congressional Democrat or Republican. The resulting index allows us to compare newspapers to one another.<sup>26</sup>

Gentzkow and Shapiro's measure puts the *Wall Street Journal* on the conservative side of the spectrum, and shows it to be almost as conservative as the *Washington Times*.<sup>27</sup>

A 2011 study by John Gaspar found that the estimated ideological position of news outlets according to the Groseclose and Milyo measure changed when one major think tank was excluded from the computation. Conversely, however, a media outlet's estimated ideological position "was *not* sensitive to alternative specifications of the ideology of members of Congress."<sup>28</sup> Because Gaspar's analysis from the early 1990s through 1999 *did* show that the estimated ideological position of media was sensitive to even very small changes in time period, future research should examine whether this finding is replicated—and if so—what can account for the observed changes.<sup>29</sup> It will be important to conduct frequent studies of media outlets' ideological position so that we always have an accurate current view.

Given all the evidence we have at this point, it may make the most sense to apply a measure such as the ADA ranking of ideology (from 1 on the extremely conservative side of the spectrum to 100 on the extremely liberal side). Doing so suggests that most large media outlets have been centrist. For example, in 1999, eighteen of twenty outlets were rated as being ideologically between Joe Lieberman (D) and Susan Collins (R), at that time two moderate Senators from opposing parties.<sup>30</sup> For the years 1993-1999, Susan Collins received an ADA score of 39.3 and Joe Lieberman received an ADA score of 74.2.<sup>31</sup>

However, when we make 50 the center of the scale and designate only those media outlets scoring below 50 as *conservative*, then we come to the conclusion that only Fox News (39.7—higher than Susan Collins) and the *Washington Times* (35.4) are conservative and the *Wall Street Journal* (85.1—the highest score of outlets ranked, including the *New York Times*—is liberal). No major media outlet from among the 20 evaluated by Groseclose and Milyo is even close to the ranking of the "average Republican." Outlets evaluated included the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today* and *Washington Post*, nightly ABC, NBC and CBS News, CNN News Night with Aaron Brown, the PBS News Hour with Jim Lehrer, Fox News Special Report with Brit Hume, NBC's Today Show, ABC's Good Morning America and CBS' Early Show, NPR's Morning Edition, *US News and World Report*, *Newsweek*, *Time Magazine* and the *Drudge Report*. Groseclose and Milyo calculated that the "average Democrat" scored 84.3 whereas the "average Republican" scored 16.1.<sup>32</sup>

In short, findings about media slant allow us to make *comparative* evaluations only. If we anchor our comparison to the "average Republican," ideology score as calculated by Groseclose and Milyo, then major media outlets are comparatively *liberal* and even the *Washington Times* and *Fox News* are far more liberal than the "average Republican" in Congress in 1999. If we anchor our comparison to each party's

moderate wing in 1999, then major media outlets are *centrist*. If we anchor our comparison to the “average Democrat” in Congress in 1999, major media outlets are more conservative.

Other studies provide different types of evidence and have found that historically some media outlets slanted their news coverage in one direction or the other. For example, after taking account of the impact of days since the last poll and days since the most recent report of the President’s approval ratings had aired, Fox News Special Report was more likely to report opinion polls when they showed President Clinton’s approval rating slipping.<sup>33</sup> Whereas Fox News and the Free Republic websites presented stories that favored Republicans and avoided stories that favored Democrat, the Daily Kos site disproportionately ran stories favorable to Democrats.<sup>34</sup> Political blogs providing links to other blogs disproportionately choose to link to blogs taking the same partisan position.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Do People Select Their Media Based on Political Partisanship and Ideology?***

**There is substantial evidence of partisan selective exposure to mass media.** This includes evidence provided by laboratory experiments that also collected—or have access to previously collected—survey data providing information about the participants in their experiments, including key information about partisanship.<sup>36</sup>

**Research based on cross-sectional survey data consistently shows evidence of such partisan selective exposure,** although the magnitude of the selective exposure varies depending on the study. For example:

- Scholar Natalie Stroud used various classification schemes for media outlet partisanship to examine representative sample data from the 2000, 2004 and 2008 National Annenberg Election Studies. She combined this information with survey data that assessed the data on media use in different ways and then assessed the impact of political leaning on media use holding constant, or already having taken account of, the impact of race, age, number of adults in the home, number of telephone lines in the home, education, income, use of divergent media platforms, region of the country, internet access, political knowledge, interest, and discussion.<sup>37</sup>
- Through this analysis, Stroud found that “the effects [were] consistent...whether [it was] use of newspapers, radio, cable television or the internet: political leanings are related to media selections. There seems to be something attractive about media outlets that are more in accord with one’s political predilections.”<sup>38</sup>
- In the study described above, “those labeled ‘Conservative/Republican’ include[ed] roughly 28% strong Republicans with a moderate ideology and 69% not strong or leaning Republicans with a conservative ideology. Those labeled ‘Liberal/Democrat’ include[ed] roughly 50% Democrats with a moderate ideology and 47% not strong or leaning Democrats with a liberal ideology.”<sup>39</sup>  
**Those with the strongest party and ideological leanings exhibited greater tendency to select media consistent with their partisanship.**<sup>40</sup>
- A study based on survey data from a representative sample of 1,510 adults collected by the 2004 Pew Internet and American Life Project found that George W. Bush supporters were more likely to use conservative web sites, whereas John Kerry supporters were more likely to use liberal web sites. Stronger supporters of both candidates were more likely than were weaker supporters to visit the ideology-consistent web sites. As the frequency of participants’ exposure to online news

increased, Kerry supporters (but not Bush supporters) increased their exposure to opinion-challenging information.<sup>41</sup>

- A study based on data from the Pew Research Center's biennial Media Attitudes Survey, sampling 3000 respondents, showed that, holding constant age, education, sex, and whether respondents had a subscription to cable or satellite television, Liberals and Democrats were more likely than Republicans and conservatives to watch CNN and *The Daily show* and less likely than Republicans and conservatives to watch Fox News and the *O'Reilly* factor.<sup>42</sup>
- A cross-tabular and logistic regression analysis based on a 2008 representative sample of 14,793 respondents to the 2008 Annenberg National Election Survey found that **for Republicans, conservatives, Democrats and liberals alike, both party identification and party ideology were positively associated with using like-minded news sources.** In this study, however, *Republicans* were more likely than Democrats to use counter-attitudinal news sources in addition to attitude-consistent sources.<sup>43</sup>

Cross sectional surveys cannot show us whether or to what extent consumers select media based on prior political ideology and party preference versus basing their party preferences and political ideology on the partisan nature of their media exposure.

- A 2011 study measured participants' political ideology (via interviews) and then used comScore internet tracking information to examine the partisan selectivity of their online media use. Selective association existed; it was "slightly smaller than the average zip code" and "slightly larger than in the average county."<sup>44</sup>

In addition, Nielsen ratings (a national-level measure of television viewership, including of televised news), are a useful source of information about audience characteristics and selectivity. Although Nielsen ratings are proprietary, individual-level data are not available, and the political ideology of viewers is not tracked by Nielsen. However, the aggregate audience size for partisan cable outlets such as Fox News and MSNBC can be assessed. It is also possible to see the degree of segregation or overlap between these two audiences. For example, scholar Markus Prior drew these conclusions from a recent assessment of Nielsen data:

- "By any reasonable definition of heavy news viewing, the Fox News and MSNBC audiences are small. **The share of the Americans who watch cable news at a rate of 10 minutes or more per day is probably no larger than 10-15% of the voting age population and rises moderately when an exciting election approaches...**[Based upon Nielsen data collected for 2004 and 2008] 65% of the people who watched FNC [Fox News Channel] for an hour or more over two weeks also watched a mix of CNN and MSNBC for at least 15 minutes during the same two weeks. But of FNC viewers who watched at least two hours, just 45% also watched the other cable news channels...Overlap is less frequent when it is defined as watching two channels for an hour per week each. Of those who watched at least an hour of FNC in the week of March 22, 2008...only 13% [also watched] at least an hour a week of MSNBC."<sup>45</sup>
- Based on a dataset that included individual-level party affiliation along with automatic tracking of television and radio consumption in the Chicago and New York City media markets, one study found that that, "[o]n average, Democrats selected 23% liberal news and 10% conservative news. For Republicans, 22% of media use was devoted to conservative news and 15% to liberal news."<sup>46</sup> On average, selective exposure existed but it was small. "The large majority of partisans followed mostly local news," but for a small percentage of political partisans in this

study—four percent—“[l]ike minded exposure exceeded 80 percent of all news exposure.”<sup>47</sup> Among *all* participants in the study, seven percent had 80% or more of their news exposure confined to media associated with one side of the partisan debate.<sup>48</sup>

In short, **studies that rely on automatic tracking of media use (including online, radio and television news) also suggest the existence of partisan selective exposure.**

### *What is the Causal Relationship between Partisanship and Selection of Media?*

As noted above, tracking data and cross-sectional survey data show relations of association, but they cannot demonstrate causation. They cannot show whether, or to what extent, consumers’ media selections are caused prior political ideology/party preferences, or, conversely, whether political ideology/party preferences are caused by their exposure to partisan media. They also cannot show whether there is some reciprocal causation between political partisanship and media usage.

That said, there is **experimental evidence that suggests prior partisanship does, to some extent, produce subsequent selective media consumption.** For example:

- One recent experiment recruited subjects from readers of two partisan online news services (one aligned with the political left and the other with the political right), showed them news content and then used tracking software to record their behavior. Taking account of various demographic factors, participants—whose *prior* political partisanship was inferred based on the news services from which they were recruited—were more likely to read stories that supported their opinion. However, they did not *avoid* stories that were opinion-disconfirming.<sup>49</sup>
- Another recent experiment provided participants with four news headlines. In addition, some randomly selected participants also were provided with a news logo next to the headline—either Fox, NPR, the BBC or CNN. “Among Republican participants, adding the Fox News logo to a headline increased by about 25 percentage points the chance that they would want to read the story. Adding the CNN or NPR logo reduced the probability by close to 10 points. Among Democrats, the effects were smaller, with a reduction in selection of just over 10 percentage points when a headline was labeled Fox News.”<sup>50</sup>
- A third recent experiment randomly assigned participants to four conditions that varied the diversity and number of magazines they could choose to read while left in a room to supposedly wait for a research study to begin. Participants were provided either three or five magazines to choose from; some got more ideologically extreme magazines and others got less ideologically extreme magazines.<sup>51</sup> The researchers also collected data on party identification and political ideology. The experiment found that participants were a bit more likely to read, or select a free subscription to, ideologically consistent magazines.<sup>52</sup> Having more choices resulted in limited decreases in partisan selectivity, with both Democrats and Republicans spending somewhat less time with ideologically consistent magazines.<sup>53</sup>

### *What Do We Really Know? Inaccuracy and Bias in Self-Reported Media Use*

The most accurate way to measure aggregate media consumption is through automatic tracking of consumers.<sup>54</sup> Depending on the media, this can be undertaken in a variety of ways. On the Internet, for example, comScore collects data on digital traffic, revealing the aggregate number of visitors to any given web site in a specific time period. [C]omScore also classifies websites into categories such as “general

news” and “politics,” and it surveys 12,000 of the over one million panelists it tracks, to gather information on survey participants’ political ideologies.<sup>55</sup>

For television—both traditional broadcast network and cable—the field relies heavily on the Nielsen Company and its proprietary automatic tracking software. Nielsen monitors television consumption in a random sample of approximately 10,000 U.S. households, but does not make the details of its estimates public.<sup>56</sup> Another strategy for tracking television (as well as radio) habits has been used by Integrated Media Measurement Incorporated (IMMI). The method uses cellular telephones with the capacity to pick up radio and TV sound to continuously capture all radio and TV exposure, match the data in the New York and Chicago markets to a database of radio and TV programs there, and then combine the tracking data with surveys measuring panelists’ partisan affiliations.<sup>57</sup>

For print newspaper readership, newspapers themselves maintain aggregate circulation numbers. However, there is no automatic tracking information that can be matched against political partisanship or political ideology at either the aggregate or individual levels. For print media consumption, researchers have therefore relied on self-reported survey data.

While tracking data accurately measure media consumption, when survey self-reports of media consumption are introduced, inaccuracy becomes a significant problem. Inaccuracy is a concern even when the same respondents are interviewed over time. Markus Prior recently conducted a thorough review of the magnitude of—and reasons for—such inaccuracy in survey data pertaining to media consumption.<sup>58</sup> He concluded:

Existing research indicates that many self-reports of media use are not very accurate. Low validity has been shown for self-reported exposure to network news, all television news and presidential debates. The main cause of inaccurate self-reports appears to be the failure to recall exposure in any detail. Asked to report it anyway, survey respondents give inaccurate estimates that often inflate their actual exposure. If anything, theorists of motivated reasoning heighten validity concerns for exposure to partisan media: taking self-reports at face value requires the assumption that the very people who follow their wishful thinking when they evaluate economic performance or perceive centrist news as biased faithfully report when they turn off the pro-attitudinal message stream to follow counter-attitudinal programming. If interested partisans forget, underestimate or fail to admit their exposure to ‘the other side’ but are happy to report following ‘their side,’ self-reports will exaggerate the extent of selective exposure.<sup>59</sup>

Prior went on to compare estimates of selective exposure based on two 2008 surveys, to the estimates based on Nielsen automatic tracking data for the same time period. He did so using two 2008 surveys that were done at different points during that year. The surveys he used were the Media Consumption Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center on People and the Press, questioning a representative probability sample of 3,615 Americans 18 and older, and a Knowledge Networks Survey of 1,583 Americans 18 and older that involved a randomly selected subset of a larger Knowledge Networks representative probability sample.<sup>60</sup> For the tracking data he focused his attention on measures of the cumulative reach of diverse news (and other) channels, called “cumes.” A cume is “an estimate of the number of unique people who watch a particular program or channel for more than a certain number of minutes in a specified period.”<sup>61</sup>

- Prior found that 52% of respondents in the Pew survey, and 55% of respondents in the Knowledge Networks survey reported watching Fox News “sometimes” or “regularly. Twenty-four percent of respondents to the Pew Survey, and 22% of respondents in the Knowledge Networks Survey reported watching Fox News “regularly.”<sup>62</sup> Although the survey response

categories were not directly comparable to Nielsen cumes, the Nielsen data painted a distinctly different picture.<sup>63</sup>

- **“Nielsen’s estimates are much smaller, indicating considerable over-reporting in surveys. Only 6-8% of Americans watched at least 60 minutes of FNC [Fox News Channel] per week in March/April 2008, but three to four times as many called themselves regular viewers of the news channel.** Even if we define a regular viewer as anyone who watches more than five minutes per week, which is surely too lenient a definition, survey estimates are still twice as high as Nielsen estimates. One would have to implausibly treat six minutes of exposure *per month* as regular viewing in order to achieve rough correspondence between self-reports and Nielsen estimates.”<sup>64</sup>
- “Fewer than 4% of American adults watched an hour of MSNBC or more in a week, but three times as many called themselves regular viewers. The 60-minute cume for CNN was 4.8%, compared to 18% ‘regular’ viewers, averaged across the two surveys.”<sup>65</sup>

Prior further demonstrated that partisan audiences’ estimates of overlap (meaning the amount of cross-ideology programming they watch) are also substantially biased upward. That is, survey responses estimate more audience overlap than is shown by the far more accurate automatic tracking reports. The CNN-Fox News overlap is from 31-33% based on survey self-reports, but based on Nielsen’s 60 minute weekly cume—involving watching quite little per day—it is just 16%.<sup>66</sup> One nuance to this finding is **the difference in reported overlap between “sometimes,” “regular” and “heavy” viewers. While all types of viewers report substantially more overlap than is actually shown in the Nielsen tracking data, Prior found that survey-based estimates of overlap were “generally lower among self-reported regular viewers”<sup>67</sup> than they were among “sometimes” viewers.** Further, MSNBC-Fox News “overlap among ‘regular’ viewers in surveys [was] still almost twice as high as the 13% overlap among heavy viewers according to Nielsen.”<sup>68</sup> Prior summed up the differences this way:

The principal defect of surveys in gauging audience overlap has its roots in the over-reporting problems. The number of self-proclaimed regular viewers is at least three times that revealed by automatic tracking—and that’s when we generously define regular viewing as one hour per week or about eight minutes per day. So many respondents claim “regular” exposure to cable channels that it is not possible to isolate the respondents who in fact did watch a lot of news. As a result, surveys fail to distinguish nonselective casual viewers from more selective heavy viewers.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, according to self-reports, “[m]any Americans regularly watch a heavy mix of different news channels (including cable). In stark contrast, automatic viewer tracking indicates that a large majority of Americans actually tune out *all* cable news. However, among the heaviest cable news viewers, selective exposure is common.”<sup>70</sup>

In short, survey reports of cable news consumption do not allow us “to distinguish the many occasional viewers with a mostly bipartisan diet from the few partisan viewers who typically follow one side only.”<sup>71</sup> And, Prior concludes, concerns about the low validity of survey self-reports are not limited to descriptions of news exposure. **All survey-based analyses “examining the association of self-reported partisan news exposure with political outcomes [including] political beliefs, political participation, candidate evaluations [and] voting behavior” are suspect because “self-reports reflect an unknown mixture of political interest, ideological self-recall error and presumably true exposure.”<sup>72</sup>**



Without analogous automatic tracking of print newspaper readership, we cannot be absolutely certain that self-reports on print readership also suffer from over-reporting of usage and/or upward bias on partisan overlap. However, there is no reason to assume that the general limitations of memory, as well as the possibility of memory contamination, would not apply to this medium as well. We should therefore be equally suspect of self-reported print media consumption data.

Across media, then, Prior's conclusion holds: "future research on selective exposure and the political impact of partisan media" he said, would do well to "avoid self-reported media use until we have a properly validated survey-based measure of exposure."<sup>73</sup> In other words, if avoidance of self-reported measures of media consumption is not possible, then extreme caution should be exercised in using the results.

### ***Partisan Niche News, Partisan Media Selectivity and Voting Patterns***

Given that both experimental and survey data suggest partisan selectivity in news media consumption, and that selectivity is especially pronounced for strong partisans on the left and the right, how—and how much—did the rise of partisan niche news contribute to the magnitude of partisan selectivity in media usage? Time series data on both media slant and partisan selectivity (data measuring these two concepts in the same way at regular intervals so that the relationship between the two can be assessed over time) would be helpful. In the absence of such data, some media scholars have presumed that having more media options that are explicitly partisan may have increased partisan selective exposure.<sup>74</sup>

Historically, increased programming choice over time *is* associated with increased partisan voting. As the presence of cable TV rose within the media landscape, partisan voting also increased.<sup>75</sup> Scholar Markus Prior found that "[a] rise in the share of households with cable television in a media market was followed by an increase in partisan voting, as measured by the correspondence between presidential and House voting patterns in the media market or by the correlation between consecutive presidential election results."<sup>76</sup>

However, **because these trends began in the 1970s, when cable channels did not provide news, the increase in partisan voting cannot be attributed to the availability of partisan news through cable.**<sup>77</sup> Other forces, it seems, were in play. The 1960s-1970s were known as the "glory days of broadcast television," during which "more people routinely watched [network, not cable] television news than at any other period."<sup>78</sup> In this era, the lack of alternatives to network news broadcasts over the dinner hour meant that many people who were not particularly partisan or interested in politics tuned in—watching the news may have motivated them to go to the polls.<sup>79</sup> Because these voters were not especially partisan, "their votes reduced the aggregate impact of party ID [identification], so elections were less partisan in the broadcast era."<sup>80</sup> This in turn may help explain the relative absence of extreme polarization, as well as the presence of bipartisanship, among political elites in the 1970s.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, the rise of cable began to exert an unanticipated influence on this dynamic. Cable provided a welcome escape from news for those who preferred entertainment – this group on average may have been less politically interested and partisan than those who continued to watch the news. No longer forced to consume news, this population segment may also have become less motivated to turn out for elections. The remaining voters therefore were the more politicized and partisan.<sup>82</sup> Prior argues the case more strongly:

The culprit turns out to be not Fox News, but ESPN, HBO and other early cable channels that lured moderates away from the news—and away from the polls. Polarization without

persuasion—through technology induced compositional change of the voting public and elite induced clarification of electoral choices—is sufficient to explain why elections have become more partisan and moderates have all but disappeared in Congress.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Issue Selectivity, Social Endorsement, and the Role of Political Interest and Political Knowledge in Shaping Partisan Selectivity***

Partisan selectivity is not the only type of political selectivity that occurs – in fact it is likely not even the most important type of selectivity. Multiple studies have compared partisan selectivity in media use to issue selectivity. These studies have found that, other potential explanatory factors pertaining to media selection equal, people may be more likely to select media when it covers issues that are relevant and important to them than to simply choose media that is like-minded.<sup>84</sup> Further, people are likely to select based on issues when they already have substantial political knowledge about these issues.<sup>85</sup> As well, a study building on the study discussed earlier that used logos to cue study participants on media partisanship added a social endorsement cue to the set of experimental conditions. The cue said that ten thousand people had recommended the particular story. Under this condition, endorsement “cues over[rode] the impact of source labels, leading people to select ideologically *incongruent* media outlets.”<sup>86</sup>

A recent study using data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election survey in a cross sectional research design found that **both political interest and political knowledge shaped partisan use of media:**

- Consistently, across different types of media use, and holding constant political interest in addition to age, sex, race, education, income, number of adults in the house, number of phone lines in the house, region of the country, and use of diverse media platforms, as their knowledge about politics increased, already partisan individuals were even more likely to choose like-minded news.<sup>87</sup>
- Similarly, as their interest in politics increased, partisans were more likely to choose likeminded media.<sup>88</sup>

### ***How Does Media Consumption Influence Americans’ Political Knowledge, Partisanship and Voting Behavior?***

#### *Media Consumption and Political Knowledge*

Substantial research investigates how varied patterns of media use may be associated with variability in political knowledge:

- A 2005 study conducted by political scientist James Druckman focused on a single Senate campaign in a media market that had four local television networks and two local newspapers. Researchers first analyzed the content provided by these media outlets and then examined whether and how variations in media use reflected differences in political knowledge, as expressed in an Election Day exit poll. The exit poll locations were selected randomly and pollsters asked every third voter to complete a questionnaire about their media use.<sup>89</sup>
- Analysis of the data indicated that newspapers provided substantially more campaign coverage than did television news programming. And, holding constant respondents’ age, sex, race/ethnicity, party identification, Senate vote choice, household income, education, political

interest, general political knowledge, outside information, and use of other media platforms, that increased reading of newspapers enhanced political knowledge. “Compared to never reading the paper, reading it every day decrease[d] the probability of getting 0 [on a four point knowledge scale] correct by 12% and increase[d] the probability of getting a majority right by 10%.”<sup>90</sup>

- A 2006 study based on the Annenberg Risk Study of Youth (with 1,501 respondents aged 14-22), found that, holding constant race, education, gender, ethnicity, current student status, average household income in the neighborhood and use of *other* media platforms, watching local television news, listening to radio news and reading magazines all were unrelated to political knowledge. However, political knowledge *did* increase as the consumption of books, digital media and national television news increased. The researchers measured knowledge by the number of correct answers each respondent achieved on a standard set of political knowledge items.<sup>91</sup>
- Findings from an experiment using a convenience sample of 276 persons, with random assignment to the conditions of television news or a control group subject to the constraint of equal distribution across groups by sex, race, age, and education, showed that those exposed to the television news had higher political knowledge.<sup>92</sup>

Contravening findings like these, one two-generational, three-wave panel survey. The survey reported on levels of political knowledge over seventeen years. It showed that, holding constant a diverse array of individual level factors including education, parental knowledge, political interest, magazine consumption and having taken a political science course, newspaper consumption was not significantly related to political knowledge.<sup>93</sup>

This study is valuable not just because it collected data on multiple generations but also because it asked questions about potential explanatory factors that typically are not measured, including having taken a political science course. The study’s apparently anomalous finding may well be explained by the atypical measure of knowledge used: the measure relied more on “textbook type” information than on specific information of current events. Especially given this measure, it would seem reasonable that, after having controlled for taking a political science course and parental political knowledge, there would be no additional impact of newspaper usage.<sup>94</sup> It also may be that before the availability of digital media, both print newspaper consumption and political knowledge tended to be positively associated across generations.

**Research also has found that as media choice increases, increased preference for news consumption is a good predictor of political knowledge—more so even than socio-economic status. Thus, as access to cable and the internet increased, the knowledge gap between those who preferred news and those who preferred entertainment rose.**<sup>95</sup> Likewise, research also found that levels of political knowledge depend more on the amount of self-reported interest in politics in market-oriented media systems (as in the U.S.) than in systems where there are public media subject to substantial government oversight in the public interest (as in, for example, Denmark and Finland). In the latter, so much hard news is delivered that even disinterested consumers get a good dose of it.<sup>96</sup> This is similar to news consumption patterns in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, as described above.<sup>97</sup>

### *Media Consumption and Political Partisanship*

Survey data suggest a positive association between exposure to highly partisan media and enhanced individual-level political partisanship. However, caution about inferring media impact from these data is required given the measurement error and causal ordering issues described earlier in this

brief. **At the same time, experimental data suggest that selection into attitude-consistent (as opposed to counter-attitudinal) media programming reinforces prior political identity.**

Communications scholars Gangheong Lee and Joseph Cappella conducted a study using data from five separate surveys to examine the impact of political talk radio on political judgments during the primary phase of the 1996 U.S. Presidential campaign. The researchers oversampled to ensure the needed number of listeners, as well as non-listeners, and to enable division of listeners into those who selected Rush Limbaugh's radio program, those who listened to another radio host (subdivided into liberal and conservative hosts), and those who listened to more than one host. The researchers analyzed the radio programming to determine its contents and measured exposure based on how often respondents' said they listened to talk radio.<sup>98</sup>

The study found that "[l]isteners who were exposed to more conservative talk evaluat[ed] Democrats more negatively and Republicans more positively, while those exposed to more liberal and moderate talk shows show[ed] the opposite relationship."<sup>99</sup> Media effects were statistically significant and strongest for those who listened to Rush Limbaugh, suggesting that Limbaugh may have exacerbated partisan polarization.<sup>100</sup>

However, the study also found that, as exposure to conservative talk radio among Democrats and Independents increased, these groups agreed more with the conservative talk show host. In short, those who selected counter-attitudinal programming moved closer to their prior "opponents." We do not know whether the programming itself had this effect or whether those Democrats and Independents who were inclined to counter-attitudinal program selection would already have been inclined to move closer to conservative opinions whether they listened to the counter-attitudinal programming or not.<sup>101</sup>

In another example, media scholars Silvia Knobloch-Westerick and Jingbo Meng conducted an experiment in which they used a questionnaire to assess twelve political attitudes, as well as attitude certainty, belief in attitude importance, political interest, news consumption habits, and political self-concept. They assessed this last with a scale including characteristics related to partisanship and ideology, and also to aspects of political self-concept such as patriotism. As the scale measure increased, political liberalism increased. Researchers then tracked online news exposure (in the lab for one experiment, online for the other). When participants selected news with *attitude-consistent* messages, they were able to respond significantly faster to post-experiment questions about their political identity (e.g., Republican, Democrat, liberal, conservative), than when they selected attitude-inconsistent messages. This suggests that **attitude-consistent messaging reinforces one's political identity.**<sup>102</sup>

### *Media Consumption and Voter Behavior*

A number of studies have examined how media consumption influences voter turnout and voting choices. **As described above, there are studies suggesting that increased media choice increases gaps in voter turn-out between those who prefer consuming news and those who prefer consuming entertainment.**<sup>103</sup> The research also suggests that, at least under some conditions, increased availability of—as well as exposure to—partisan media may have some polarizing electoral effects:

- A study conducted by political scientist Markus Prior randomly provided Washington DC residents who were not already subscribers to a local newspaper with a subscription to either the *Washington Post* (a liberal newspaper) or the *Washington Times* (a conservative newspaper) in the weeks leading up to an election. Compared to a control group, those who previously had not been newspaper subscribers who got the *Washington Post* exhibited increased electoral support

for the Democrats. For those who previously had not been newspaper subscribers, however, receiving the *Washington Times* failed to increase support for Republicans.<sup>104</sup>

- Economists Stefano DellaVigna and Ethan Kaplan capitalized on the variability in when cable companies began carrying Fox News after the program became available in 1996. They measured the impact of staggered exposure to this programming. Their study found that the availability of Fox News increased Republicans' vote share by 0.4 to 0.7 points in the very close 2000 Presidential election. Further, the availability of Fox News increased both Republican turnout and voting share most in *Democratic districts*, although it is not clear whether this reflects a conversion of Democrats or Republican mobilization efforts in these districts.<sup>105</sup>
- Political scientists David Hopkins and Jonathan Ladd conducted a subsequent study that added survey data to this analysis and suggested *some* partisan reinforcement effects. The "Fox News effect," the study found, could be accounted for by the stronger support generated for George W. Bush among independents and Republicans.<sup>106</sup>

Pinning down the precise size of partisan reinforcement effects and specifying the conditions under which they occur, awaits future research.

### ***The Impact of Incivility on Media Consumers***

Increased choice in today's media landscape has been accompanied by heightened emotional content and incivility, most often found in highly partisan radio broadcasts, cable television programming, and digital media.<sup>107</sup> While the field lacks sufficient research on the impact of different types of emotional language, displays and appeals across these diverse media platforms, existing research suggest important effects. These are consistent with research showing that emotional arousal increases attentiveness and can also facilitate the persuasiveness of messaging.<sup>108</sup>

A 1998 study based on a representative cross-sectional survey of 1,318 respondents confirms that consumers have emotional reactions to television and radio news. In this study, respondents answered questions about their media consumption across platforms that included print journalism, television and radio, as well as questions about simply talking with others. The researchers measured emotional reactions by asking whether members of Congress ever made respondents feel "angry," "afraid," "disgusted" or "uneasy."<sup>109</sup> The study found that those who relied more heavily on television and radio news had more negative reactions to members of Congress.<sup>110</sup>

Researchers have begun to examine the *impact* of uncivil media content—as well as whether incivility is emotionally arousing.

A 2006 study conducted by political scientists Richard Forgette and Jonathan Morris examined how conflict-oriented televised media coverage of the State of the Union event affects viewers' attitudes. Researchers assigned 135 undergraduates who had been recruited through 11 different courses to watch two different formats that covered this event: one was CNN's *Crossfire*, the other was CNN's *Inside Politics*. The researchers conducted their experiment on the day after the State of the Union address. They describe the design of their study as follows:

We crafted a design that exposed subjects to two different formats covering the State of the Union event. The media formats used were the CNN *Crossfire* (high uncivil conflict) and CNN's *Inside Politics* (low uncivil conflict, much more reminiscent of a traditional political news broadcast). We intentionally selected within the family of CNN to maintain further control over extraneous factors... Subjects were ...randomly assigned to view one of the two conditions. Half of the sample watched a ten-minute video clip from CNN's *Crossfire* that included a spirited debate of

the State of the Union speech in which left-leaning Paul Begala and James Carville faced off against right-leaning Tucker Carlson and Bob Novak. In the true spirit of this conflictual talk show format, the media commentators shouted down, cajoled, and sometimes insulted each other and various political figures. The other half of subjects were assigned to watch a ten minute clip from CNN's *Inside Politics* summarizing and interpreting the State of the Union event, which was primarily mediated by CNN correspondent Judy Woodruff, who was appearing live from Capitol Hill. The clip included a news summary as well as opposing political elites' comments of the event. Like their rivals at Fox News and MSNBC, CNN *Inside Politics* emphasizes timely information through quick-paced (and often highly repetitive) news anchor presentation. Additional information is also readily available through flashy and decorative textual information presented simultaneously in the form of "tickers" or "popups" at the bottom of the screen... While much more verbally subdued than the clip from *Crossfire* (much less verbal combat), the *Inside Politics* stimulus contained discussion with elites from both partisan perspectives (Republican Speaker Dennis Hastert and Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer), with issue content and arguments that closely resembled the *Crossfire* news clip.<sup>111</sup>

After participants had watched one of the two clips, the researchers asked them if they approved of politicians and political institutions and thought they were effective; researchers also asked whether participants trusted the President and members of Congress. The study found that the **uncivil conflict laden coverage decreased positive evaluations of political institutions, trust in political leadership, and overall support for political parties and the political system as a whole.**

Political psychologist Diana Mutz and communications scholar Bryon Reeves conducted a 2005 study consisting of a set of three experiments with both undergraduate and adult participants. The researchers manipulated levels of civility and incivility in a mock political debate (using professional actors to portray debating candidates) to explore the impact on viewers. The researchers described their procedures in this manner:

The candidates expressed exactly the same issue positions in the same words in both versions and offered exactly the same arguments in support of their positions. But in the civil version the candidates [played by professional actors] went to extremes to be polite to the opposition, inserting phrases such as "I'm really glad Bob raised the issue of..." and "I don't disagree with all your points Bob, but..." before calmly making their own positions clear. Both candidates observed the norms of civility in expressing their viewpoints, not only in their speech, but also while waiting patiently while the other person answered and by paying attention to the opponent while he was speaking. In the uncivil version of these exchanges, the candidates used the same script but inserted gratuitous asides that suggested a lack of respect for and/or frustration with the opposition. Sample statements include[ed] comments such as "You're really missing the point here, Neil" and "What Bob is *completely* overlooking is..." The candidates also raised their voices and never apologized for interrupting each other. Nonverbal cues such as rolling of the eyes and rueful shaking of the head from side to side were also used to suggest lack of respect for what the opponent was saying. Voices were raised when conflict intensified, in contrast to the persistently calm voices in the civil version. Manipulation checks confirmed that the two versions of each issue discussion were perceived as significantly different in levels of civility.<sup>112</sup>

Mutz and Reeves found that **although "televised presentations of differences of political opinion do not in and of themselves harm attitudes toward politics and politicians...trust is adversely affected by levels of incivility in these exchanges.** Our findings suggest that the format of much political television effectively promotes viewer interest but at the expense of political trust."<sup>113</sup>

Two years later, in 2007, Diana Mutz built on the Mutz and Reeves findings by exposing 155 participants to one of four different versions of the same 20-minute political exchange. In this experiment, levels of civility were altered as was the camera angle -- either showing the whole upper body, or featuring tight close-ups on the speaker. The study found the following:

- Uncivil discourse proved to be significantly more arousing than civil discourse, with the most arousing condition of all being that which featured tight close-ups combined with incivility.
- Incivility enhanced recall for awareness of arguments on one's own side.<sup>114</sup>
- Incivility combined with the close-up camera angles resulted in viewers finding *opponents' arguments* less legitimate than they would have thought without any viewing.
- The intimacy of the close-up in an exchange presented in a civil manner enhanced the perceived legitimacy of the opponents' arguments.<sup>115</sup>

Not only does the Mutz experiment suggest **that media portrayal of uncivil, in-your-face political arguments exacerbates political polarization. As well, by undermining the perceived legitimacy of the opposition, such programming may contribute to feelings that opponents' arguments are not worthy of debate; may diminish the propensity to compromise; and may ultimately increase the likelihood of partisan deadlock.**

### *Consumer Choice as an Added Variable in Experimental Design*

Experimental studies differ in whether they employ random assignment to different media exposure conditions or allow participants to select the media of their choice. As Prior explains, the usual experimental design randomly assigns news exposure as the treatment.<sup>116</sup> If the goal of the study is to investigate the *potential* for specific media messages to promote attitude change, this design is likely to be effective.

However, to estimate how often an observed, experimental media effect can be expected to occur under natural conditions, researchers need to know what shapes likely viewing patterns under natural conditions. It is possible that experimental results occur only among subjects who would never experience the experimental "treatment," i.e., exposure to that particular type of news, naturally.<sup>117</sup>

Some researchers approach this conundrum by tracking news exposure as part of the experiment itself (as in the study of media effects on political identity discussed above). The best of these studies allow us to identify separate media effects for randomly assigned, attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal programming. They also allow us to identify media effects for those who choose attitude-consistent versus counter-attitudinal programming, and to identify the impact of opting out of news and politics altogether and choosing entertainment instead.

Although most current research is not designed to sort out such potential heterogeneous media effects, there are some studies that *do* tackle these questions of heterogeneous media effects for different subsets of the population. Following up a study showing that many survey respondents chose to watch news only if other options were unavailable, political scientists Kevin Arceneaux and Martin Johnson designed an experiment that allowed some participants to choose between a news segment on Fox News or MSNBC and two different entertainment segments. Other participants were assigned to watch attitude-consistent or attitude-inconsistent news programming. This study found that "the polarizing effects of political programs on cable networks dissipate when people can choose among these options or watch entertainment programs."<sup>118</sup> It further concluded that media fragmentation *does* "[allow] people to construct an ideologically congruent information environment but it also allows those most susceptible to media influence to select out of political information altogether."<sup>119</sup>

- A follow-up study by the same researchers used random assignment but could separate out subgroups of participants who were exposed to attitude-consistent vs. counter-attitudinal programming because, before the experiment began, the researchers surveyed respondents about their political orientation. Under random assignment to Fox or MSNBC, those who viewed attitude-consistent programming, whether Fox or MSNBC, rated the outlet as more fair, friendly, good and cooperative. **Those who were exposed to counter-attitudinal programming, whether Fox or MSNBC, rated it as less informative and the media as less trustworthy.**<sup>120</sup>

To enhance the external validity of their results (i.e., the generalizability to the real world), Arceneaux and Johnson conducted two additional studies that incorporated selective exposure. In both, when participants entered the viewing room, they encountered a blank television screen and were given a remote control with which to select among programming options. Researchers tracked which shows they watched and how much time they exposed themselves to each show.<sup>121</sup> In one of these studies, three conditions were applied: participants were exposed to a clip of *Hardball* with Chris Mathews; they could choose among *Hardball* and two entertainment options; and they were exposed to one entertainment option (a “control” condition). In the other study, some participants were exposed to an entertainment option, some participants were assigned to watch either *The Rachel Maddow Show* or *The O’Reilly Factor*, and some participants were allowed to choose among the four options. Participants assigned to the choice condition could escape counter-attitudinal programming if they wanted to do so. The researchers also gathered a pre-exposure measure of political ideology.<sup>122</sup> The findings from this study include the following:

- **A large part of the sample tuned-out news entirely** and, under these conditions, those who watched partisan programming did *not* exhibit less post-treatment trust in the media than those in the control group.<sup>123</sup>
- Distrust of the media among those who selected partisan media exposure was smaller than for those who were forced to watch counter-attitudinal programming. Further, while **distrust of the media, and other hostile responses, were blunted in the choice situation, they did not entirely disappear.**<sup>124</sup>
- The researchers suggested that this finding may emerge because hosts of partisan media usually explicitly or implicitly try to convince their consumers that other news sources cannot be trusted.<sup>125</sup>

Finally, to identify causal mechanisms underlying the various media effects observed, Arceneaux and Johnson also conducted a study to see if the effects of media exposure were, in fact, different depending on what people would have preferred to watch. Here, participants who had indicated what they preferred to watch prior to the experiment were randomly assigned to attitude-consistent versus counter-attitudinal programming, or to one of two entertainment shows. News exposure was either to broadcasts of *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* or *The O’Reilly Factor*. Both clips had aired the same day and were focused on the BP Oil Spill.

After watching the clips, participants were asked to do a timed listing of their thoughts. Researchers coded the thoughts for positive and negative affective content and then, for all participants, constructed a summary measure of the balance between the positive and negative.<sup>126</sup> The findings included:

- Participants who indicated they preferred to watch entertainment reacted negatively to both the Olbermann and O’Reilly clips.<sup>127</sup>



- Participants who preferred to watch political news were less affected by whether or not they had been assigned to watch attitude-consistent or counter-attitudinal programming.<sup>128</sup>
- Those who preferred to watch news but were assigned to counter-attitudinal news programming reacted more negatively, but the effect was insignificant.

Arceneaux and Johnson's variations on partisan media exposure allowed the researchers to estimate the causal impact of media exposure conditional on the participants' prior preferences. Going forward, more studies that assess a variety of exposure effects on different population segments will be important. In particular, the field would benefit from research designed to further our understanding of how the impact of media consumption depends on prior preferences; whether, and to what extent, consumer choices are dictated by limited options and thereby may not reflect preferential selection, and whether exposure is attitude-consistent or counter-attitudinal.<sup>129</sup>

### ***A Final Word on Partisan Media and Political Polarization***

Future research capable of sorting out media effects that differ depending on prior preference, the structure of viewing options, and whether exposure is attitude-consistent or counter-attitudinal must investigate not only viewers' emotional responses to the program exposure but whether the exposure increases political partisanship and exacerbates polarization. Conducting a 2013 study of media effects on political partisanship, political scientist Matthew Levendusky constructed his research design in such a way that he could examine whether partisan selective exposure to media does exacerbate polarization.

In his study, Levendusky asked experiment participants which of three types of news shows (such as for example, a show from Fox News like the O'Reilly Factor) they would "most like to watch," before exposing them to a randomly chosen clip from among the three types.<sup>130</sup> He concluded:

[The study] demonstrates that partisan media polarize the electorate by taking relatively extreme citizens and making them even more extreme. Though only a narrow segment of the public watches partisan media programs, partisan media's effects extend much more broadly throughout the political arena.<sup>131</sup>

In short, **as many suspected, but few have been able to show convincingly, the rise of partisan niche media does seem to contribute to the dynamics that fuel contemporary political polarization among elites and the mass public.**<sup>132</sup> Future media effects research must get us further down the road towards a definitive understanding of these issues by addressing the many thorny methodological issues that have plagued the field to date. New studies should use various combinations of random assignment, random assignment after gauging prior preferences, and participant choice situations. Further, they should focus not just on exposure to attitude-consistent and counter-attitudinal programming, and preferences for entertainment over news, but also on various aspects of civility, emotional content, outrage speech, and the intensity of conflict that can characterize news today.

**Effort should also be devoted to improving the validity of media consumption measures that are used in survey research.** Multi-wave surveys that substantially improve on current media consumption measures can complement experimental studies in helping us understand how—and the extent to which—partisan media exacerbates political polarization, thereby impeding our capacity to tackle the most serious problems facing the nation.

Because the number of "ideologically driven news junkies," is small but influential, future surveys also should do a better job of defining and identifying these "junkies."<sup>133</sup> As Prior suggested, research could usefully distinguish among populations with different levels of political engagement or

activism—from convention delegates and party regulars to those who self-report interest in politics or who exhibit knowledge of politics.<sup>134</sup> Based on extant research, Prior was very dubious that any mass polarizing influence of partisan media could extend beyond about 10-15% of the American population.<sup>135</sup> He nonetheless recognized that this small minority “has disproportionate influence” and, along with polarized elected officials, can thwart the desires of the majority of the public. Prior summed it up this way:

Activists shape the political choices of the American public. New technologies make it easier for activists not just to consume ideologically one-sided news but to add their own opinion to the mix. Part of “the media” in this account—especially all websites not run for financial profit and commercial outlets that cater to ideological niches—are conduits for activists’ partisan messages as much as they are independent editorial voices. These ideologues may use their connections into the homes of core party constituencies to mobilize the fringes, raise money and make compromise more difficult. The main danger of this more partisan media environment is not polarization of ordinary Americans but a growing disconnect between increasingly partisan activists and largely centrist and modestly involved masses.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bethany Conway, Department of Communication, University of Arizona, and Robin Stryker, Department of Sociology and National Institute for Civil Discourse, University of Arizona prepared this research brief (October 23, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See Robin Stryker and Zachary Schrank, “Transformation of the Mass Media,” *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 8*, University of Arizona, October 10, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Markus Prior, “Media and Political Polarization,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16, 2013, pp. 101-127, 120

<sup>4</sup> Stryker and Schrank 2013, *supra* n. 2; Diana Mutz and Brian Reeves, “The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust,” *American Political Science Review* 99, 2005, pp. 1-15; Diana Mutz, “Effects of ‘In-Your-Face’ Television Discourse on Perceptions of a Legitimate Opposition,” *American Political Science Review* 101(4), 2007, pp. 621-635; Richard Forgette and Jonathan Morris, “High Conflict Television News and Public Opinion,” *Political Research Quarterly* 59 (3), 2006, pp. 447-456; Sarah Sobieraj and Jeffrey M. Berry, “From Incivility to Outrage: Political Discourse in Blogs, Talk Radio and Cable News,” *Political Communication* 28, 2011, pp. 19-41. The term screaming heads comes from Forgette and Morris 2006, p. 448.

<sup>5</sup> See Stryker and Schrank 2013, *supra* n. 2 and citations therein.

<sup>6</sup> See this brief’s section, “Scholarly Controversy and Media Slant,” *infra*.

<sup>7</sup> *NICD Research Brief No. 6*, “Political Polarization” (Robin Stryker, University of Arizona, 2011) summarizes the literature evaluating the extent of and change in both elite party polarization and mass polarization in the United States, and it assesses the relationship between the two. The former pertains especially to members of Congress and party spokespeople; the latter to the views of the mass public. This brief adds to that discussion, examining whether, and how, change in the media – and current patterns of media usage – might exacerbate mass polarization. For discussion of the relationship between transformation of the media, including the rise of partisan niche news and incivility in the media and the behavior of political elites, see Stryker and Schrank 2013, *supra* n. 2.

<sup>8</sup> For an especially thoughtful review of many—but not all—of these issues, see Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3. Our own discussion is indebted to Prior’s (2013) review. We extend the inferences that can be drawn from Prior’s methodological critique to discuss how media influences such political factors as knowledge and engagement as well as polarization.

<sup>9</sup> Markus Prior, “The Immensely Inflated News Audience: Assessing Bias in Self-Reported News Exposure,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73 (2009), pp. 130-143; Markus Prior, “Improving Media Effects Research Through Better Measurement of News Exposure,” *Journal of Politics* 71, 2009, pp. 893-908; Michael J. LaCoeur, “A Balanced

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News Diet, Not Selective Exposure: Evidence from a Direct Measure of Media Exposure, Working Paper, University of California, Los Angeles, 2012; Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, pp. 115-117.

<sup>10</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See *infra*, pp. 11-12, 17-18 and associated citations.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin Arceneaux, Martin Johnson and Chad Murphy, "Polarized Political Communication, Oppositional Media Hostility and Selective Exposure," *Journal of Politics* 74, 2012, pp. 174-186.

<sup>17</sup> Markus Prior, "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science*, 49, 2005, pp. 577-592.

<sup>18</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> Sobieraj and Berry 2011, *supra* n. 4; citing Richard Forgette and Jonathan S. Morris 2006, *supra* n. 4; Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney, The Dimensions of Negative Messages. *American Politics Research* 36, 2008, pp. 694-723; Mutz 2007, *supra* n. 4; Mutz and Reeves 2005, *supra* n. 4. For more discussion of persuasion, see Jerry Lee and Robin Stryker, "Classical Rhetoric, Modern Science and Contemporary Civil Discourse," *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 4*, August 3, 2011; Taylor Danielson and Robin Stryker, "Political Knowledge, Persuasion and Campaign Rhetoric," *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 5*, August 30, 2011; Robin Stryker, Carli Brosseau and Zachary Schrank, "Negative Campaigning," *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 7*, September 7, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Natalie Jomini Stroud, *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 89-102.

<sup>21</sup> See Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo, "A Measure of Media Bias," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, 2005, pp. 1191-1237; Mathew Gentzkow and Jesse M. Shapiro, "What Drives Media Slant? Evidence from Daily Newspapers," *Econometrica* 78, 2010, pp. 35-71; John T. Gaspar, "Shifting Ideologies? Re-Examining Media Bias," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6, 2011, pp. 85-102; Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Groseclose and Milyo 2005, *supra* n. 21, p. 1191.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010, *supra* n. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010, *supra* n. 21, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Gaspar 2011, p. 1, emphasis ours. Alternative specifications of Congressional ideology included the Poole-Rosenthal Common Space measure and the American Conservative Union (ACU) ratings.

<sup>29</sup> Among issues to investigate is whether a change in the partisanship of Presidential administrations or a changing political issue mix over time brings change in news slant.

<sup>30</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Groseclose and Milyo 2005, *supra* n. 21, p. 1203.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* The Groseclose and Milyo ranking of media outlets can be found in their Table III, p.1212. Newspaper editorial pages traditionally have been partisan. So, for example, there is widespread recognition that, whereas *The New York Times* typically provides a liberal take on current events, the *Wall Street Journal* typically provides a conservative take. Daniel Ho and Kevin Quinn collected and classified more than 1500 editorials in 25 major newspapers on 495 Supreme Court cases between 1994 and 2004. Adapting to newspaper editorials a standard liberal-conservative scale used to identify the ideological positions of Court members, they found that the *New York Times* was more liberal than the most liberal justice on the Court at that time. The *New York Post*, *Washington Times* and *Investor's Daily* were almost as conservative as Justice Antonin Scalia, who was the second most conservative justice during these years. The *Wall Street Journal* too was quite conservative, although not so conservative as these other three papers. Still, about half of the newspapers took an ideological position between Justices Anthony Kennedy and Steven Breyer, the second and third most centrist justices on the court at that time (Daniel E. Ho and Kevin M. Quinn, "Measuring Explicit Political Positions of the Media," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 3, 2008, pp. 353-377; Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.)

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<sup>33</sup> Tim Groeling, "Who's the Fairest of them All: An Empirical Test for Partisan Bias on ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox News," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38(4), 2008, pp. 631-657.

<sup>34</sup> Mathew A. Baum and Tim Groeling, "New Media and the Polarization of American Political Discourse," *Political Communication*, 25, 2008, pp. 345-365. In contrast to the partisanship of the Daily Kos on the left and Fox News and the Free Republic on the right, the authors found that Reuters and AP newswires tended to hew to traditional criteria of newsworthiness.

<sup>35</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, citing Lada Adamic and Natalie Glance, *The Political Blogosphere and the 2004 US Election: Divided They Blog*, Ann Arbor Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 2005; and Esther Hargittai, Jason Gallo and Mathew Kane, "Cross Ideological Discussions among Conservative and Liberal Bloggers," *Public Choice* 134, 2008, pp. 67-86. Hargittai et al (2008) found that "top" bloggers across the political spectrum were more likely to link to other bloggers who shared their views. Adamic and Glance (2005) found that, although both liberal and conservative blogs tended to link to other like-minded blogs, conservative blogs linked to each other more densely and more often than did liberal blogs.

<sup>36</sup> Stroud 2011, *supra* n. 20; R. Kelly Garrett, "Politically Motivated Reinforcement Seeking: Reframing the Selective Exposure Debate," *Communication* 59, 2009, 676-699; Rico Neumann and Kate Kenski, "Revisiting the 'Rigidity-of-the -Right' Hypothesis: An Assessment of Ideological Polarization and New Media Use in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election," Paper presented at the 97<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the National Communication Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2012; Mathew Gentzkow and Jesse M. Shapiro, "Ideological Segregation Online and Offline," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126, 2011, pp. 1799-1839; R. Kelly Garrett, "Echo Chambers Online? Politically Motivated Selective Exposure Among Internet News Users," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 14(2), 2001, pp. 265-282; Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick and Jingbo Meng, "Reinforcement of the Political Self Through Selective Exposure to Political Messages," *Journal of Communication* 61, 2011, pp. 349-368; LaCour 2012, *supra* n. 9; Solomon Messing and Sean J. Westwood, "Selective Exposure in the Age of Social Media: Endorsements Trump Partisan Source Affiliation When Selecting Online News Media," *Working Paper*, Department of Communication, Stanford University; Joseph Graf and Sean Aday, "Selective Attention to Online Political Information," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 52, 2008, pp. 86-100; Shanto Iyengar and Kyu S. Han, "Red Media, Blue Media; Evidence of Ideological Selectivity in Media Use," *Journal of Communication* 59:19-31; Shanto Iyengar, Kyu S. Hahn, John A. Krosnick and John Walker, "Selective Exposure to Campaign Communication: The Role of Anticipated Agreement and Issue Public Membership," *Journal of Politics* 70, 2008, pp. 186-200.

<sup>37</sup> Stroud 2011, *supra* n. 20, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, Appendix C, pp. 202-214.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79, n. 7. Researchers presented patterns of partisan selection by constructing a combination measure including party identification and political ideology and then highlighting results for respondents who were one standard deviation away from the average political leaning found in the study.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> Garrett 2009, "Politically Motivated Reinforcement," *supra* n. 36.

<sup>42</sup> Kevin Coe, David Tewksbury, Bradley J. Bond, Kristin L. Drogos, Robert L. Porter, Ashley Yahn and Yuanyuan Zhang, "Hostile News: Partisan Use and Perceptions of Cable News Programming," *Journal of Communication* 58, 2008, 201-219.

<sup>43</sup> Rico and Kenski 2012, *supra* n. 36.

<sup>44</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 111, discussing Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010, *supra* n. 21. Zip codes typically are more segregated in terms of political partisanship than are counties—a larger geographic unit. If we were to ask not what percentage of liberals or conservatives visit like-minded web sites, but what percentage of visitors to liberal or conservative websites share the political ideology of the web-site, the Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) study showed that the largest news web sites get a greater diversity of visitors. Based on Gentzkow and Shapiro's (2010) findings, Prior (2013) reports that 30% of daily visitors to the *New York Times* online are conservative, whereas just 22% of the *Huffington Post*'s online visitors are conservatives. Meanwhile, fully 75% of the daily visitors to Fox News online are conservatives, and Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly's websites get an even greater percentage of conservatives among their visitors. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) also compared ideological segregation of *online* media consumption with the ideological segregation of *offline* media consumption. However, because measures of the latter were based on survey data, and because survey data are inaccurate in ways discussed later in this brief, it is not clear to what degree these comparative findings are useful.

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- <sup>45</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 114.
- <sup>46</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 114.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, discussing LaCour 2012, *supra* n. 36.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, discussing LaCour 2012, *supra* n. 36.
- <sup>49</sup> Garrett 2009, *supra* n. 36, “Echo Chambers Online.”
- <sup>50</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 109, discussing Iyengar and Haln 2009, *supra* n. 36. Prior (2013, p. 109) also points out that the findings of Messing and Westwood (2011, *supra* n. 36) are “very similar.”
- <sup>51</sup> Stroud 2011, *supra* n. 20, pp. 63-73.
- <sup>52</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 109, discussing Stroud, 2011, *supra* n.0.
- <sup>53</sup> Stroud 2011, *supra* n. 20
- <sup>54</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.
- <sup>55</sup> Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010, *supra* n. 21. ComScore’s MediaMetrix data are based on a panel of more than one million US resident users of the internet. Panelists install the tracking software on their computers; comScore has a method of distinguishing among multiple users of a single computer. MediaMetrix reports data for sites that have at least 30 unique panelists visit them during the month. ComScore also provides PlanMetrix data based on a survey given to 12,000 of the comScore panelists; the survey asks panelists a standard question tapping their political ideology on a five point very liberal to very conservative scale (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010, *supra* n. 25, p. 6. MediaMetrix data thus permits assessing the ideological orientation of diverse websites. It is MediaMetrix data that form the basis for lists of the Top 100 Conservative (or Liberal) Websites for various years.
- <sup>56</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.
- <sup>57</sup> See Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 114; Simon D. Jackman, Michael J. LaCour, Jeffrey B Lewis and Lynn Vavreck, “Digital Fingerprints : A New Method for Measuring Political Advertising,” Prepared for the Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans (cancelled), 2012, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2108108](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2108108), last accessed October 23, 2013; Michael J, LaCoeur, “A Balanced Information Diet, Not Selective Exposure: Evidence from a Direct Measure of Media Exposure, Paper Presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2013, [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=231916](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=231916); Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, pp. 115-117.
- <sup>58</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 114-115 (emphasis ours), citing LaCour 2012, *supra* n. 9, Prior, 2009, *supra* n. 9, “Improving Media Effects Research”; Prior 2009, *supra* n. 9, “The Immensely Inflated News Audience”; Markus Prior, “Who Watches Presidential Debates? Measurement Problems in Campaign Effects Research,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, pp. 350-363; Larry M. Bartels, “Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions,” *Political Behavior* 24, 2002, pp. 117-150; Russell J. Dalton, Paul A. Beck and Robert Huckfeldt, “Partisan Cues and the Media: Information Flows in the 1992 Presidential Election,” *American Political Science Review* 92, 1998, pp. 111-126; Robert P. Vallone, Lee Ross and Mark R. Lepper, “The Hostile Media Phenomenon: Biased Perception and Perceptions of Media Bias in Coverage of the Beirut Massacre,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 49 1985, pp. 577-585.
- <sup>60</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 115
- <sup>61</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 112.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>63</sup> See text, *infra* for more information on Nielsen and other sources of automatic tracking data.
- <sup>64</sup> Prior, *supra* n. 3, p. 115, italics emphasis in original, boldface emphasis ours.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115, emphasis ours.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 115-116
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>74</sup> See Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.

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- <sup>75</sup> Markus Prior, *Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Elections*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- <sup>76</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 107, citing Prior 2007, *supra* n. 75, pp. 239-244.
- <sup>77</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 107. Prior likewise indicates that, although the effect of rising cable penetration on vote partisanship increased in the 1980s, when CNN was in operation, neither Fox News nor MSNBC came onto the media landscape until the 1990s.
- <sup>78</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 107
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, citing Prior 2007, *supra* n. 75, pp. 37-91, 163-213. See Stryker 2011, *supra* n. 7, for the concept and measurement of mass polarization and for time trends in partisan polarization in the American public.
- <sup>81</sup> See Stryker 2011, *supra* n. 7, for discussion of the relationship between elite party polarization and mass polarization. The 1970s stands out as a low point for elite political polarization.
- <sup>82</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3 citing Prior 2007, *supra* n. 75, pp. 94-138, 214-248F.
- <sup>84</sup> See Iyengar et al 2008, *supra* n. 36; Graf and Aday 2008, *supra* n. 36, pp. 73-78.
- <sup>85</sup> Kim (2009) found that having access to detailed candidate information promotes issue-based selection (Young Mie Kim, "Issue Publics in the New Information Environment.: Selectivity, Domain-Specificity and Extremity," *Communication Research* 36 (2009), pp. 254-284.
- <sup>87</sup> Stroud 2011, *supra* n. 20, pp. 102-106. The measure of partisanship or political leaning in this study combined answers to standardized questions pertaining to party identification and political ideology.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>89</sup> James N. Druckman, "Media Matter: How Newspapers and Television News Cover Campaigns and Influence Voters," *Political Communication* 27, 2005, pp. 663-481. Ideally, variables such as political interest and general political knowledge would have been measured prior to the campaign rather than through exit polling.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.
- <sup>91</sup> Josh Pasek, Kate Kenski, Daniel Romer and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "America's Youth and Community Engagement: How Use of Mass Media is Related to Civic Activity and Political Awareness in 14-22 Year Olds," *Communication Research* 33, 2006, pp. 115-135.
- <sup>92</sup> Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.
- <sup>93</sup> M. Kent Jennings, "Political Knowledge over Time and Across Generations," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 60(2), 1996, pp. 228-252.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* Neither having taken a political science course nor parental knowledge are usually measured or controlled for in survey research associating newspaper consumption with political knowledge.
- <sup>95</sup> Prior 2005, *supra* n. 75.
- <sup>96</sup> Shanto Iyengar, James Curran, Anker Brint Lund, Inka Salovaara-Moring, Kyu S. Hahn and Sharon Coen, "Cross National Versus Individual-Level Differences in Political Information A Media Systems Perspective," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 20(3), 2010, pp. 291-309.
- <sup>97</sup> See notes 44-52, *infra* and associated text.
- <sup>98</sup> Gangheong Lee and Joseph N. Cappella, "The Effects of Political Talk Radio on Political Attitude Formation: Exposure versus Knowledge," *Political Communication* 18, 2001, pp. 369-394.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>102</sup> Knobloch-Westerick and Meng 2011, *supra* n. 36.
- <sup>103</sup> Prior 2005, *supra* n. 75.
- <sup>104</sup> Alan Gerber, Dean Karlan and Daniel Bergen, "Does the Media Matter? A Field Experiment Measuring the Effect of Newspapers on Voting Behavior and Political Opinions," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1, 2009, pp. 35-52. A problem with this study, however, is that we cannot know whether those who received the newspapers actually read them, and if so, whether they exposed themselves similarly to each newspaper or were more or less exposed to one or the other. As well, the media effects for those who already had chosen to receive either the *Washington Post* or the *Washington Times* and so were *not* included in this study could well have

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been different from the measured impact on previous non-subscribers assigned to receive one or the other newspaper.

<sup>105</sup>Stefano DellaVigna and Ethan Kaplan, “The Fox News Effect: Media Bias and Voting,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122, 2007, pp. 133-156. As Prior (2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 119) pointed out, this study too is limited because it is impossible to connect the *availability* of media with *exposure* to media. The authors relied on both survey self-reports and on media diaries. Depending on measurement instrument, the range of audience share that Fox News convinced to vote Republican was somewhere between 3% and 28% (a very wide range), and these results would not account for partisan-based selective exposure.

<sup>106</sup>Daniel J. Hopkins and Jonathan McDonald Ladd, “The Consequences of Broader Media Choice: Evidence from the Expansion of Fox News,” Working Paper, Georgetown University, 2012, discussed in Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 118, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2070596](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2070596), last accessed Oct. 23, 2013.

<sup>107</sup>See Stryker and Schrank 2013, *supra* n. 2 and citations therein.

<sup>108</sup>See Lee and Stryker 2011, *supra* n. 19; Stryker, Brosseau and Schrank 2011, *supra* n. 19.

<sup>109</sup>Elizabeth Theisse-Morse and John R. Hibbing, “The Media’s Role in Public Negativity toward Congress: Distinguishing Emotional Reactions and Cognitive Reactions,” *American Journal of Political Science* 42(2), 1998, 475-498.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.* The prior study does not reveal *how* watching television and radio news promoted negative emotions, but it is possible that those who disproportionately watched television and radio news *also* tended to watch more partisan and highly emotional or uncivil content. If so—and whether they were watching programming consistent with their attitudes or counter-attitudinal programming—they might well have become more angry, disgusted or uneasy.

<sup>111</sup>Forgette and Morris 2006, *supra* n. 4, p. 449. Recognizing that convenience samples of undergraduates do not allow generalizing the findings to a larger population, the authors also replicate their findings on survey data collected on a representative sample of adults by the Pew Research Center.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5, emphasis in original. A 2007 laboratory study manipulated the incivility of mock negative political advertisements by adding pointed insults (but not insults involving name calling or vulgarity) to an already negative, but civil depiction of an opponent. The study found that incivility, operationalized in this way, did *not* significantly diminish political trust (Deborah Jordan Brooks and John G. Geer, “Beyond Negativity: The Effects of Incivility on the Electorate,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51(1), 2007, pp. 1-16.

<sup>113</sup>Mutz and Reeves 2005, *supra* n. 4.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>Mutz 2007, *supra* n. 4.

<sup>116</sup>Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>118</sup>Kevin Arceneaux and Martin Johnson, “Does Media Fragmentation Produce Mass Polarization? Selective Exposure and a New Era of Minimal Effects,” Paper Presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington DC, Sept. 1-4, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup>Arceneaux, Johnson and Murphy 2012, *supra* n. 16.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.* Participants were not told in advance how long they would be watching television, but viewing lasted 16 minutes. There was wide variability in participant behavior. Some participants spent almost no time watching the political shows and some spent almost all their time on one political show. The distribution was bimodal, with 30 percent of participants spending a minute or less watching a political show, 30 percent devoting 13 minutes or more to political viewing, and the remaining 40% of participants in between. To ensure that the placement of a given show on the dial (whether position 1, 2, 3 or 4) had no impact on viewing patterns, for each participant, the researchers randomly assigned shows to one of the four channels.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*

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<sup>129</sup> See also Sungtae Ha, “Attribute Priming and Presidential Candidate Evaluation: The Conditionality of Political Sophistication,” *Mass Communication and Society* 14, 2011, pp. 315-342, suggesting that different sub-segments of the population are more or less susceptible to different kinds of media effects. See also Danielson and Stryker, 2011, *supra* n. 19.

<sup>130</sup> Mathew Levendusky, “Why do Partisan Media Polarize Voters?” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(3), 2013, pp. 611-623.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 611. This study also found that the media effects persisted several days after the media exposure.

<sup>132</sup> In part because researchers cannot agree on whether the *reinforcing* effects of media exposure are as important as media’s capacity to change attitudes, there has been controversy over to what degree media effects more generally may—or may not—be limited (Compare, e.g., W. Lance Bennett and Shanto Iyengar, “A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication,” *Journal of Communication*, 58, 2008, pp. 707-73, with R. Lance Holbert, R. Kelly Garrett and Laurel Gleason, “A new era of minimal effects? A response to Bennett and Iyengar,” *Journal of Communication* 60, 2010, pp. 15-34. As are studies of media effects more generally, research examining the “limited effects” hypothesis is tied to theories of persuasion likewise relevant to research on incivility, outrage discourse, negative campaigning and deliberative democracy (see Lee and Stryker 2011, *supra* n. 19; Stryker, Brosseau and Schrank 2011, *supra* n. 19; Robin Stryker “Deliberative Democracy and Civil Discourse,” National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 10, University of Arizona, September 7, 2013; J. Taylor Danielson and Robin Stryker, “Deliberative Practice and the Impact of Deliberation on Individuals and Society,” *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 11*, October 3, 2013. While a more general discussion of theory and empirical research pertaining to persuasion is beyond the scope of this brief, future research should exploit synergies of theory and method to link these research areas that, in the past, have been mostly separated from each other.

<sup>133</sup> Prior 2013, *supra* n. 3, p. 122.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.