FRAGMENTED KNOWLEDGE:

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTISAN MEDIA EXPOSURE AND LIBERAL, CONSERVATIVE, AND NONPARTISAN POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between three types of political knowledge—liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan—and exposure to partisan news media. An online survey measuring U.S. adults' news media use and political knowledge was conducted in April of 2012. The survey also asked about respondents' political participation, ideology, and demographics.

The study found a significant positive relationship between exposure to general political news media and all types of knowledge. Further, exposure to partisan news media was positively related to corresponding knowledge type, but no relationship was found for conflicting knowledge types. A regression analysis of all variables of interest found exposure to partisan media to be the strongest predictor of corresponding political knowledge, more so than exposure to general political news, ideology, political participation, or demographic factors.

Although much research has been conducted in the area of partisan media exposure, this study was the first to link partisan selective exposure and different types of political knowledge, a relationship only suggested in past studies. The finding that partisan media exposure, not ideology, is directly linked to adults holding differing types of knowledge about the political system holds strong implications for the future of American participatory democracy.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In a 2009 episode of the popular CBS sitcom, "How I Met Your Mother," Barney stays up all night helping his Canadian girlfriend, Robin, study for a U.S. citizenship test. After quizzing her on basic American civics, the last question Barney asks is the name of the actor who stars in the movie "Earnest Goes to Jail." Robin's answer is Jeff Foxworthy. When told she is wrong (the correct answer being Jim Varney), Robin quickly becomes angry, calling Barney an idiot and loudly insisting that the answer is, in fact, Jeff Foxworthy. Barney's response? He smiles at his indignant girlfriend proudly and says, "Not only are you wrong, but you are belligerently sticking to your guns and insulting me in the process. Congratulations, you are an American" (Tatham, 2009).

In the discourse of U.S. politics of late, this fictional scene often rings true. Screaming matches between conservative and liberal pundits are a staple of the 24-hour cable news networks. Debates during campaign season quickly digress into name-calling, with neighbors venomously labeling one another as fascist or socialist. Political scholar Louis René Beres described the deteriorating state of political communication in a 2011 column for Oxford University Press. "Today, the successful politician is fashioned by a system that is refractory to all wisdom, a system that is sustained by banality, empty chatter, and half knowledge," he wrote. "As for the chorus, we have rehearsed our lines just as well, but we now utter them viscerally, as if by rote" (Beres, 2011, ¶7).

In 2002, PBS's "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" commissioned a study of the news content on CNN, FOX News, and MSNBC. The study found blatant partisanship of journalists, news frames, and commentary to be a growing trend in cable news. The study attributed this, in part, to the industry's appeal to "highly ideological so-called news junkies whose daily entertainment derives from the overheated debates of the political class" (ADT Research, 2002, Conclusion section). Two years later, Bloomburg Businessweek reported that the tendency to "pander to the passionate fringe," as opposed to providing balanced coverage for moderate audience members, was more than a trend in cable news; it was a "hot-growth strategy" (France & Lowry, 2004, ¶ 3). In 2005, the Project for Excellence in Journalism found the strategy still growing on 24-hour news channels and talk radio. The report cited the 2005 launch of liberal-leaning radio network Air America as proof of "a growing desire among liberal audiences for their own brand of unapologetically biased and even angry voices" in the same vein as long-time conservative hosts like Rush Limbaugh (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005, Radio—Content Analysis section). Although Air America proved to be a short-lived enterprise, the market it was meant to serve did not. Phil Griffin, the president of MSNBC, recently attributed a newfound primetime success (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010, Cable TV—Summary Essay Section) to the network's explicit embrace of liberal doctrine saying, "We definitely have a progressive sensibility, a sensibility to the left." (Foxification of news, 2011, ¶2).

What this fragmentation of the mass media into its own two-party system means for the future of American politics is a question on the minds of many. Scholars have long warned of the negative implications of media exposure based on political ideology.

As early as 1979, researchers at Stanford University examined the negative effects of such exposure. The researchers showed participants in the study news coverage tailored to fit

their existing views on capital punishment. This led to an increase in the polarization of attitudes between supporters and opponents, prompting the researchers to conclude that partisan subjects "draw undue support for their initial positions from mixed or random empirical findings" from likeminded sources (Lord, Ross, & Leper, 1979, p. 2098).

In 2001's *Republic.com*, legal scholar Cass Sunstein explored a striking upshot of the Information Age, namely "the growing power for consumers to filter what they see" (p. 8). In the opening lines, he predicted a bleak future for respectful political discourse and an open-minded electorate. "It is some time in the future. Technology has greatly increased people's ability to 'filter' what they want to read, see, and hear," he wrote (p. 3). Sunstein described this environment of highly selective exposure, what he called the "Daily Me," as a micro-divided dystopia in which society has compartmentalized itself by race, religion, nationality, political affiliation, and favorite sports team. The media in this world are characterized by extreme fragmentation and audience polarization with "liberals watching and reading mostly or only liberals; moderates, moderates; conservatives, conservatives; neo-Nazis, neo-Nazis" (2001, p. 4). Warning that such self-insulation would eventually threaten individual freedom and weaken the people's ability to self-govern, Sunstein concluded that the Daily Me would ultimately pose a threat to the very idea of democracy (p. 192-193).

Natalie Stroud, a leader in the field of partisan media research, confirmed Sunstein's warning of fragmentation and polarization in a dissertation that looked at the effects of the Daily Me (Stroud, 2006). Stroud questioned what would become of the duty of journalists to provide the people with "the tools to be good citizens" (p. 1), asking, "Can partisan media fulfill this role?" (p. 277).

The Relationship between Partisan Selective Exposure and Political Knowledge

This study seeks to further explore Stroud's question by examining how political knowledge, one of the necessary "tools" of good citizenship, differs between heavy users of partisan media and their more objectively informed counterparts. Is exposure to partisan media linked to increased or decreased political knowledge? Are people who are heavily exposed to only liberal media more knowledgeable about issues ideologically convergent with those views? Does the same hold true for those heavily exposed to conservative media only? Is political knowledge linked more to exposure to traditional news formats or to exposure to opinionated news media personalities, such as Bill O'Reilly and Rachel Maddow? Finally, when other individual factors are examined, does partisan selective exposure still account for variation in different types of political knowledge?

To answer these questions, this study undertakes an analytical survey examining how partisan media exposure is related to political knowledge. The primary variable of interest is political knowledge, or the degree to which a member of the electorate is knowledgeable of political facts, candidate and party platforms, and current events related to U.S. politics. Three types of political knowledge (liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan) are examined. The other variable of interest is exposure to media with a specific ideological view, often referred to by communication researchers as partisan selective exposure.

Research on partisan selective exposure is extensive, and Americans' political knowledge has long been a hot-button topic. However, few studies have centered on the direct relationship between the two constructs. Instead, studies have examined the effect of partisan selective exposure on such variables as audience polarization (Lord et al., 1979; Stroud, 2010), political

attitudes (Nyhan, 2010), and voting behavior (Dilliplane, 2011). This study is needed in light of the breadth of research indirectly linking these two constructs.

Exploring this link becomes more relevant as modern media become more fragmented. The contemporary media landscape—with its growing legions of ideologically explicit columnists, bloggers, podcasters, investigative reporters, documentary filmmakers, talk show hosts, and late night comedians (ADT Research, 2002; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005)—is not so far removed from the future dictated by the Daily Me (2001). Sunstein held, "In a democracy deserving the name, people often come across views and topics that they have not specifically selected" (p. 9). By studying the relationship between partisan media exposure and fragmented political knowledge, perhaps some insight can be gained into the truth of Sunstein's statement and whether, as he suggested, American participatory democracy is deserving of the name.

The following chapter presents relevant past literature and the theoretical framework that provide context for this research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is provided by the cognitive dissonance theory and, more specifically, the hypothesis of selective exposure the theory proposes.

The concept of selective exposure, the driving force behind Sunstein's the Daily Me, is a tenet of the theory of cognitive dissonance, proposed by social psychologist Leon Festinger more than 50 years ago. The theory states that when a person's actions or opinions do not line up with his existing beliefs, he becomes psychologically distressed and must correct the inconsistency. Festinger referred to this psychological distress as cognitive dissonance and he considered the need to avoid such dissonance, by maintaining cognitive consistency, a basic human necessity (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). Festinger identified three cognitive methods people use to maintain their cognitive consistency: "removing dissonant cognitions, adding new consonant cognitions, or reducing the importance of dissonant cognitions" (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999, p. 4).

The first of these methods, removing dissonant cognitions, focuses on the reactions that stem from exposure to information inconsistent with a person's preconceived notions or beliefs. Known as the selective exposure hypothesis, Festinger described four ways in which this method can manifest itself: refusing to accept the inconsistent information, interpreting the information in such a way as to make it consistent, trying to change the minds of people holding dissonant

views and, relevant to this study, avoiding the inconsistent information all together by "seeking support from those who agree with one's beliefs" (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999, p. 7).

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory was first applied to the study of media effects in 1960, when Joseph Klapper included the selective exposure hypothesis in his model of limited effects of the media. Artfully describing the concept as one of the "protectors of predispositions and the handmaidens of reinforcement" (Klapper, 1960, p. 64), he justified his characterization of selective exposure as a limited media effect by explaining that because of selective exposure, the media may be successful in reinforcing an idea an audience member has already been exposed to but unlikely able to sway him from one (Klapper, 1960). Just a few years later, researchers in the field labeled the selective exposure hypothesis "one of the most widely accepted principles in sociology and social psychology" (Sears & Freedman, 1967, p. 194).

Contemporary applications of the selective exposure hypothesis have credited the concept with more influence, instead characterizing it as a predictor of the stronger effects of the media (Stroud, 2010). For example, Sunstein warned his readers that restricting one's exposure to likeminded people will "breed excessive confidence, extremism, contempt for others, and sometimes even violence" (2001, p. 14). And in a recent study exploring the possibility of a two-way relationship between partisan selective exposure and attitude polarization, Stroud (2010) wrote, "The media are the primary way in which elite opinions are transmitted to the public" (p. 557).

The following literature review explores the contemporary research relevant to the constructs of interest in this study.

Literature Review

Trends in political news coverage. A generation ago, news audiences of all political persuasions obtained their information from the same limited sources, the daily paper and local news broadcasts. Today, circulations and ratings of these traditional outlets are plummeting. Newspaper circulations are at a 70-year low (Ahrens, 2009, ¶1) and local television news has seen its audience steadily declining for a decade (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). Thirty years ago, the three major broadcast networks were pulling in more than 90% of American television audiences (Hollander, 2008, p. 24). Network news programs, which began to report audience decline in the 1980s, saw their local affiliates suffer as well with the launch of MSNBC and the Fox News Channel to compete with the 24-hour cable news outlet CNN, in 1996 (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004, Local TV—Audience section). Today that audience is split, not just among an endless buffet of cable TV channels but a growing selection of online media platforms as well. In 2010, Pew Research Center reported that the number of Americans getting their news online grew from 23% in 2006 to 34% in 2009, and that number jumped to 44% when all digital platforms—"internet, cell phones, social networks, or podcasts"—were included (p. 13). The websites of traditional media outlets remain popular destinations for online news hounds; 16% cited CNN.com as an online news source, and at least 5% listed the websites of FOX News, MSNBC, and *The New York Times* (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 30). But audiences of alternative voices are growing. The same study found that 35% of Internet users reported reading political or news blogs, a trend spread consistently among Republican, Democrat, and Independent audiences (p. 36).

With the increase in media outlets has come an increase in the diversity of voices being heard in the media, particularly in less traditional platforms (ADT Research, 2002; Project for

Excellence in Journalism, 2005). At least one product of this new media landscape is a phenomenon known as partisan selective exposure.

Partisan selective exposure. Partisan selective exposure is the application of Festinger's selective exposure hypothesis to media exposure based on the viewer's political ideology. Researchers of partisan selective exposure have defined it as the selection of media outlets sharing one's political predispositions (Stroud, 2010, p. 556) and as the preference to "approach supportive over non-supportive information" (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009, p. 20). In a 2011 conference paper on partisan selective exposure, one researcher colorfully described modern media as a cereal aisle and partisan selective exposure as eating a "news diet" of only one's own tastes and preferences (Dilliplane, 2011, p. 1).

In 2009, researchers measuring the extent to which partisan viewers chose news sources based on the ideology of the source found partisan selective exposure to be alive and well. The participants of the study, registered Republican, Democrat, and Independent voters, were given a choice between reading news stories attributed to Fox News, National Public Radio (NPR), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and CNN. Participants' preferences were measured for political and nonpolitical stories and hard and soft news stories. The study found that Republicans significantly preferred stories from Fox News and avoided those from CNN and NPR regardless of whether the story was political in nature, while Democrats overwhelmingly avoided stories attributed to Fox News, though "they did not seem to converge on a particular news source" (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009, p. 29). Independents showed no discernible preference of source.

Iyengar and Hahn's conclusions supported those of a study two years earlier (Stroud, 2007) that sought, among other things, to determine if audience members' political beliefs were

related to media exposure. Analyzing 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey data for political predispositions and exposure to partisan media during the 2004 presidential campaign, Stroud found evidence to support the presence of partisan selective exposure. She also determined that selective exposure is a habit that strengthens over time and persists across multiple types of media. "There are quite clear relationships between the political leanings expressed by media outlets and the political leanings of the audience," she wrote (p. 21).

After the Daily Me hit bookshelves at the turn of the century (Sunstein, 2001), studies on the implications of partisan selective exposure swelled, and Stroud has been at the forefront of this research. In 2010, she examined one of Sunstein's darker predictions, the relationship between partisan media and audience polarization.

Defining polarization as "the strengthening of one's original position or attitude" (p. 559), Stroud (2010) set out to determine whether partisan selective exposure lead to increased polarization or if polarization lead to increased partisan selective exposure. Drawing from the same data set as in her 2007 study, Stroud examined respondents' demographic information, political orientation, strength of ideology, political knowledge, and media use. The discrepancy between respondents' opinion of presidential candidates John Kerry and George W. Bush was used to measure polarization. Partisan selective exposure was measured by comparing respondents' political orientation to the ideology of their preferred media sources.

Analysis of the daily average of partisan selective exposure levels and the daily average of polarization levels served as a measure of the direction of causality. According to these measurements, "over the course of the 2004 general election season, partisans became increasingly polarized" (Stroud, 2010, p. 569), leading Stroud to conclude that partisan selective exposure does in fact lead to increased polarization. Although, limited evidence was found to

suggest the inverse might also be true, suggesting the possibility of a "spiral effect" (p. 570), in which the constructs feed off one another to some extent.

The effect of partisan selective exposure on political participation is another relationship that has generated considerable interest in academic research. Using three indicators for political participation—engagement in campaign activities, time of vote decision, and voter turnout—a recent study used National Annenberg Survey data collected during the 2008 presidential election to determine if partisan selective exposure had a positive effect on political participation (Dilliplane, 2011). Much like Stroud in her studies on ideology (2007) and polarization (2010), Dilliplane compared respondents' political orientation to the ideology of the media sources to which they reported the most exposure to determine their level of partisan selective exposure. The three indicators of political participation were measured and analyzed separately. Engagement in campaign activities was determined by respondents' answers when asked if they had given money to a campaign, worked for a campaign, tried to influence someone else's vote, attended a political event, or displayed any campaign memorabilia. Respondents were also asked when it was they decided whom they were voting for and if they voted. The responses were used to measure time of vote decision and voter turnout, respectively.

The researcher's analysis supported her hypotheses that partisan selective exposure increases engagement in campaign activities and speeds up time of vote decision while exposure to dissonant news decreases engagement and slows down vote decision. However, while evidence suggested that partisan selective exposure increases voter turnout, it did not indicate that dissonant news decreased turnout (Dilliplane, 2011).

A third area of study on partisan selective exposure of interest to researchers is its relationship with political attitudes and ideology. A 2010 comparison of partisan misperceptions

surrounding the Clinton and Obama healthcare campaigns examined the role partisan selective exposure played in the persistence of false and misleading information surrounding each campaign (Nyhan, 2010). According to the report, misperceptions of factual political information are "rapidly disseminated to the public via … the growing array of talk radio hosts, cable news shows, and websites that cater to the demand for preference-consistent news and misinformation" (p. 4). The researcher conducted a content analysis of the media coverage surrounding each campaign and analyzed a number of public opinion polls taken over the course of the debate in the media. He determined that partisan selective exposure also contributed to the fact that partisan misperceptions were extremely difficult to unlearn, attributable in part to the way attempts to negate the misinformation were handled by opposing media outlets. The result was a significant effect on the political beliefs of partisan audiences.

This relationship was supported by a 2010 study examining the effect of partisan bias on learning. Analyzing political survey data spanning 20 years, the researchers found that members of political parties are "more likely to learn facts that are congenial to their partisan worldview and less likely to learn facts that challenge their partisan predispositions" (Barabas & Jerit, 2010, p. 5).

Although the relationship between audience polarization, political participation, and political attitudes is certainly relevant to this study, the relationship of primary interest is that between partisan media exposure and political knowledge.

Political knowledge. In 2010, a survey of 3,000 Americans asked respondents to answer four questions on politics and current events: Which party currently controls the House of Representatives, what post is held by Eric Holder, which company is run by Steve Jobs, and which country has an active volcano that disrupted international air travel earlier that year. Only

14% of respondents could answer all four questions correctly. A even higher percentage (15%) got all four questions wrong (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 69).

Despite the spike in political media coverage provided by "a communications revolution that has shattered national and international boundaries" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 133), Americans' political knowledge is relatively the same as it was 50 years ago. One of the most comprehensive works on political knowledge, *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*, examines more than 50 years of political knowledge research and what the findings mean for democracy (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). According to the authors, scholars agree that most citizens are woefully ignorant of political issues. The book cites a 1989 survey that found 91% of respondents were aware of their right to counsel but only 35% could name even one of their First Amendment rights, the explanation being that frequent mentions on TV cop dramas made right to counsel common knowledge (p. 104). But although research supporting America's ill-informed electorate abounds, "there is no consensus on the causes or implications of this state of civic affairs" (p. 22).

Researchers have long been interested in political communication's effect on political knowledge, and they have repeatedly reported the news media to be the most important source of American political information. As one researcher said, "Where else would individuals obtain information about current presidential candidates or the major political issues of the day other than news media?" (Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwok, 2005, p. 425). The agenda-setting theory, a long-held model in the study of media effects, lends support to the media's role in political communication. Introduced in a 1972 article, the theory holds that audiences will decide whether news is important based on how much emphasis the media places on it (McCombs & Shaw).

In a study that examined the causal relationship between exposure to political communication and political knowledge, the "traditional assumption among political communication researchers" (Eveland, et al., 2005, p. 438) was said to be that increased political communication leads to increased political knowledge. To test this assumption, the researchers administered three waves of surveys measuring respondents' exposure to national news in print and broadcast media, frequency of participation in political discussions, and knowledge of the 2000 presidential candidates and party platforms. They determined that their analysis agreed with the general consensus—both political communication via the mass media and personal political communication result in increased political knowledge (Eveland et al., 2005).

A recent survey of American political knowledge offered support for the idea that political knowledge and party affiliation may be linked. The survey found that 70% of Republicans could identify the source of protests in Wisconsin as union rights, compared to 58% of Democrats. That union rights are traditionally supported by liberal policy might serve to explain why Republicans were more informed on the controversy. Likewise, that childhood obesity is one of Democratic First Lady Michelle Obama's personal crusades could be the reason 47% of Democrats correctly identified the percentage of Americans that are overweight compared to 39% of Republicans (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Researchers have come close to testing the possibility of knowledge discrepancies linked to types of media exposure. Early support for the idea was reported in a study on partisan selective avoidance that examined reactions to the Senate Watergate hearings of 1973 (Sweeny & Gruber, 1984). The researchers examined survey responses about voters' exposure to and knowledge of the Watergate hearings gathered before, during, and after the hearings. Findings indicated that supporters of President Richard Nixon (who resigned from office as a result of the

Watergate affair) engaged in selective avoidance of Watergate-related news, showing less interest in what was, for them, a dissonant subject than did supporters of his opponent, Senator George McGovern, or undecided voters. Nixon supporters also were found to possess significantly less knowledge of the event than McGovern supporters and undecided voters, what Sweeney and Gruber (1984) called a "selective ignorance of relevant Watergate-related information" (p. 1218).

In 2005, one study examined the relationship between political knowledge and genre selective exposure (as opposed to partisan selective exposure). Surveying more than 2,300 Americans on their preference of media genre (entertainment versus news) and their political knowledge, the researcher concluded that increased media choice encourages the politically knowledgeable and those interested in becoming politically knowledgeable to continue to increase their knowledge. Those with no interest in politics or news programming, however, use the increase in choice to "tune out of politics completely" (Prior, 2005, p. 587), decreasing their level of political knowledge in the process. The same held true for voter turnout.

A similar European study examined the effect of genre selective exposure on political knowledge and participation but failed to find the negative relationship Prior's research produced (de Vreesea & Boomgaarden, 2006). Researchers in the 2006 study admitted this may have been due to the difference in the two studies' measurement of selective exposure, Prior (2005) basing his measurement on subjects' behavior and de Vreesea and Boomgaarden (2006) basing theirs on subjects' self-reported preferences.

The existing political knowledge research finds that a number of traditional demographic factors can have a significant impact on political knowledge outside of media exposure. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) reported political knowledge gaps in the categories of sex, race,

income, and age. Overall, knowledge levels of men exceeded women, knowledge levels of whites exceeded blacks, upper income earners exceeded lower and middle income earners, and post-baby boomers exceeded pre-baby boomers and baby boomers (p. 163).

Eveland et al. (2005) controlled for these demographic variables, as well as education level, in their study on the relationship between political communication and political knowledge. However, the only significant correlation their research uncovered was that higher income levels were positively associated with higher levels of political knowledge (p. 431).

Research Questions

The literature above suggests that a strong relationship exists between partisan selective exposure and political knowledge. Although the relationship between selective exposure and political knowledge has been examined, the focus has been on genre selective exposure and the political knowledge of audience members who use selective exposure to avoid all news in favor of entertainment media (Prior, 2005; de Vreesea & Boomgaarden, 2006) or on selective avoidance to partisan information (Sweeny & Gruber, 1984). Eveland et al. (2005) studied the relationship of general political communication and political knowledge. Researchers of partisan selective exposure have studied its effect on audiences' adherence to false information, which may contribute to knowledge of politics (Nyhan, 2010). This study seeks to rectify the noticeable shortage of research on the relationship between partisan selective exposure and political knowledge, with a focus on ideologically specific political knowledge. The following hypotheses and research questions are aimed at contributing to this area of study.

The first set of hypotheses tests the direct relationship between political media use and political knowledge with a focus on partisan selective exposure.

H1—Increased exposure to any political news will be related to higher levels of political knowledge overall.

H2—Increased exposure to partisan news will be related to higher levels of political knowledge associated with the ideology espoused.

H2a: Increased exposure to liberal-leaning media will be linked to higher levels of political knowledge associated with liberalism.

H2b: Increased exposure to conservative-leaning media will be linked to higher levels of political knowledge associated with conservatism.

H2c: Increased exposure to nonpartisan media will be linked to higher levels of political knowledge associated with neither liberalism nor conservatism.

RQ1—Is partisan selective exposure (high exposure to one type of ideological news content and low exposure to the other) related to higher levels of liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan political knowledge?

The second group of questions looks at the effect of partisan vs. nonpartisan news exposure on the levels of political knowledge.

RQ2a: Do people with higher exposure to liberal news personalities, such as Chris Matthews, vary from those with higher exposure to liberal news outlets in their political knowledge?

RQ2b: Do people with higher exposure to conservative news personalities, such as Bill O'Reilly, vary from those with higher exposure to conservative news outlets in their political knowledge?

The final question examines which of the constructs of interest and other characteristics measured in the study are most strongly related to political knowledge.

RQ3: Is political knowledge influenced more by interest in political news, time spent following political news, partisanship of the news source, political behavior, political affiliation, demographic factors, etc.?

CHAPTER III

Method

This study set out to answer the proposed research questions and hypotheses through an online analytical survey with links to the survey distributed via social media sites and email. The survey was designed to measures respondents' self-reported media use, political knowledge, and other constructs of interest.

Strengths of Survey Design

The method was dictated by the study's population of interest and the constructs it sought to examine. According to Earl Babbie, a recognized leader in social science research, survey research is "chiefly used in studies that have individual people as the unit of analysis" (2007, p. 244). The survey method also is a strong way to determine attitudes and positions of the public (Babbie, 2007, p. 244). One research team explained that a survey provides "information and insights impossible to obtain in any other way" (Schuman & Presser, 1996, p. 1). A recent assessment of survey research deemed it the dominant method for understanding "preferences, opinions, and motivations of the American electorate" (Atkeson, 2010, p. 10), mentioning political knowledge specifically. In addition to helping uncover attitudes and positions, surveys can also measure the strength and context of these constructs (Schuman & Presser, 1996, p. 249-250).

Surveys are designed to be either descriptive or analytical. The goal of a descriptive survey is to describe a current characteristic of the population of interest, while an analytical survey seeks to find an explanation for that characteristic, often by testing assumed causal

relationships between two or more variables (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 179). This study sought to examine the relationship between individuals' political knowledge and engagement in partisan selective exposure to media content. Therefore, the survey was clearly analytical.

Population and Sample

The study's theoretical population of interest was everyone eligible to vote in U.S. elections. The American electorate, or a population similar to it, is a common theoretical population in studies on political knowledge. One of the definitive works in the field of American political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996) defined its population as adult U.S. residents (p. 292). The Pew Research Center for People and the Press, which conducts surveys throughout the year measuring various political constructs, refers to its population as the general public and specifies that samples are pulled from residents of the continental United States age 18 years or older (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 82).

When a population is too large for direct observation to be feasible, experts agree that a sample is the most effective way to gather data (Babbie, 2007, p. 244). A list of all registered U.S. voters is not a comprehensive list of the population because many eligible voters are not registered. Also, the population as a whole has never been directly observed even in the act that defines it, voting in U.S. elections (Martinez, 2010). As direct observation of the population clearly was not feasible, a sampling frame was employed.

Because of the nature of the questions posed, the study used a convenience sampling frame. Convenience samples—a type of nonprobability sample made up of readily available subjects—while easy to assemble, do face threats to external validity because error rates cannot be calculated (Babbie, 2007, p. 183; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 90). However, because this study was more concerned with looking at the relationship of two variables of interest rather than

describing a population, a convenience sample was an acceptable method as well as the most efficient (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 90). Convenience samples are often used in analytical studies when external validity is less of a concern. One similar study using a convenience sampling frame explored the relationship between media exposure and knowledge gain in the 2008 presidential election (Ran & Ven-hwei, 2008).

The sampling frame of this study consisted of members of the population, the American electorate, who possessed necessary eligibility criteria such as the ability to communicate in English, a way to access the Internet, and the ability to be reached through social media and email. The minimum size of the sample was calculated by an a priori power analysis to ensure statistically reliable results. The power analysis took into account the desired probability level, the estimated effect size, and the number of predictor variables in the study. This study aimed to meet the requirements for statistical significance, usually considered to be a probability level of 95% and a power level of 0.80, the study, and a medium effects size measured at 0.15 (Zhou & Sloan, 2009, p. 187). With nine predictor variables, an online a priori sample size calculator for multiple regressions (danielsloper.com) determined that a sample size of at least 113 was required. However, the researcher set the study's goal for at least 250 respondents to be able to detect smaller effect sizes. Multi-variable studies, by nature, require larger sample sizes to analyze "several measurements on the same subject" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 101). In the past, multi-variable research has based sample size requirements on the number of predictor variables, and at least one study offered a blanket guide where a sample of 50 participants was considered "very poor" and 1,000 was "excellent" (p. 101). With these considerations in mind, the study did not put a cap on the number of survey responses accepted during the timeframe the

survey was open, nor did it scale back promotion on social media once the minimum sample size was met.

Operationalization of Constructs

The online survey consisted of 61 closed-ended questions, each of which fell into one of four constructs of interest: demographics, political variables, media use, or political knowledge (see full survey in Appendix A). The categories of demographics and political variables were measured as control variables, as these factors have been linked to political knowledge in past studies. This allowed for the variables to be isolated when analyzing the main relationship of interest (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 47).

Demographics. Six questions related to respondent demographics (sex, age, race, education level, household income, and geographic location) are variables commonly used in political survey research (Eveland, et al., 2005; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Prior, 2005; Dilliplane, 2011; Nyhan, 2010; Stroud, 2010; Lee & Cappella, 2001). Response set to the question of sex was male or female. Age was reported by filling in a four-digit birth year. Response options for the question of ethnicity were White, Black or African-American, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and from multiple races. The response set for education level was less than high school degree, high school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED), some college but no degree, associate degree, bachelor degree, and graduate degree. Household income was measured in increments of $20,000 starting with less than $20,000 and continuing on to $100,000 or more. And responses to geographic region were South, North, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, West, and do not live in the United States.

Wording of most of the questions and their response sets were chosen from Survey Monkey's question bank (see exact question wording in Appendix A). These items were designed by survey methodologists to minimize bias and provide the most accurate responses (Surveymonkey.com, Answers and FAQs section). Exceptions were the questions of race, geographic region, and income. The option of "Hispanic" was added to the response set of the race question to increase its measure of diversity. Original geography and income questions were written because the question bank did not have a certified question measuring either that was not excessively long.

In the data analysis, only four demographic variables were measured: sex, age, race, and education. Respondents' geographic location was used only to describe the sample, and because income was so highly correlated with age and education level, it was not used as one of the control variables.

Political attitudes and behaviors. Four political constructs, assembled through 18 questions, also were measured for control purposes. These were political ideology, party affiliation, voting behavior, and political engagement. Party affiliation was measured with two items that asked respondents which political party they most often supported in national and then state and local elections. The response set, patterned after a similar question in existing research (Barabas & Jerrit, 2010, p. 28-29), was as follows: Democrat, Independent, Republican, other, or not sure. Eleven items were aimed at measuring political ideology. First, respondents were asked to select the one phrase that best described their political views from the options of very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, and very conservative, measured on a 1-5 response format. Asking respondents to politically self-identify is a consistent item in political survey research.

Other political surveys have asked both party affiliation and ideology (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Respondents also were asked to check organizations and platforms that they identified with or supported. Five items on the list—Tea Party Movement, the NRA, Pro-Life legislation, welfare reform, and the Libertarian Party—are generally considered more conservative. More than half of Fox News viewers and 76% of Rush Limbaugh's audience identify as Tea Party and NRA supporters (Pew, 2010, p. 59). The other five items—Occupy Wall Street, gay rights, legalization of marijuana, universal healthcare, and the Green Party—are generally seen as more liberal. Over half of Rachel Maddow, Chris Matthews, and Jon Stewart's audiences identify as gay rights supporters (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 59), and universal healthcare is a mainstay of liberal doctrine (Varadarajan, Eaves, & Alberts, 2009, ¶2). The drop off for responses to these items turned out to be quite high, with more than a fifth of respondents skipping the section all together, whereas the drop off was only about 10% for other items. Therefore, ideology was measured with one self-reported item in the data analysis. Party affiliation was used only as a descriptor variable of the sample.

Political engagement was measured with six items related to respondents' past and recent experiences. The first three asked whether respondents voted in the last national election and their last state or local election and whether they planned to vote in the upcoming presidential election. The last three questions asked if respondents had ever displayed a piece of political paraphernalia, contributed money to a political campaign, or volunteered on a political campaign. These questions were patterned after those used in Dilliplane's secondary analysis of survey data to measure engagement in campaign activities (2011). Respondents were given one

point each and scores were summed so that higher numbers indicated greater political participation.

Media exposure. Overall general exposure to political news was measured first. These items were designed to gauge interest in political news regardless of media platform, channel, personality, or source. Five questions measured respondents' overall consumption of political news. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they follow news about the federal government, news about state and local government, news about the upcoming presidential election, and news about their upcoming state or local elections by selecting one response from the options of never, once a month or less, several times a month, about once a week, several times a week, daily, or several times a day. This response set was patterned after the partisan selective exposure item used by Lee and Cappalla to measure respondents' exposure to political talk radio (2001, p. 376).

The construct of partisan media exposure was measured by asking respondents to record the frequency of their exposure to sources of liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan media. In total, 17 media exposure items measured respondents' selective exposure to partisan news sources by asking them how often they follow selected media personalities and news outlets of either partisan or nonpartisan persuasion: never, once a month or less, several times a month, about once a week, several times a week, daily, or several times a day.

A multitude of research exists on which to base source partisanship. This study classified several dominant media sources by taking into account the ideology of the sources' audience and public perception of sources' partisan nature (Pew Research Center, 2010). Dilliplane (2011) employed a similar method for identifying partisan media. In her study on partisan selective exposure and political participation, "programs were coded as liberal or conservative if there was

evidence of general public perception of this orientation" (p. 11). The findings of a commonly cited content analysis study on partisan media (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005) were also taken into consideration.

Liberal media. Pew Research Center data from 2010 breaks down numerous media sources' audiences by party affiliation. According to the report, at least half of the audiences of *The New York Times*, MSNBC, Rachel Maddow, and Chris Matthews are Democrats. Audiences of CNN and "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" are predominantly Democrat, and NPR broadcasts appeal more to Democrats than Republicans (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 56). In 2009, an article ranking the country's top 25 liberal journalists included Chris Matthews, Rachel Maddow, Jon Stewart, and founder of *The Huffington Post* Arianna Huffington (Varadarajan, Eaves, & Alberts, 2009). That same year, a report on the public's perception of ideology in network and cable news channels (Pew Research Center, 2009) found that CNN and MSNBC were considered the most liberal television news channels. Taking this into consideration, this study measured exposure to the following liberal media sources: *The New York Times*, Rachel Maddow, Chris Matthews, CNN, MSNBC, Jon Stewart, NPR, and *The Huffington Post.*

Conservative media. The previously cited data on audiences' party breakdown (Pew Research Center, 2010) found that more than half of Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly's audiences are Republican. The Fox News audience is predominantly Republican and readers of *The Wall Street Journal* are more likely to be Republican than Democrat. That same year, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, and Rush Limbaugh were ranked among the country's top 25 conservative journalists, (Varadarajan, 2010). And the same report on public perceptions of network and cable's ideology (Pew Research Center, 2009) reported that Fox News was considered the most ideological channel with 47% of the public ranking it as mostly

conservative. Therefore, this study measured exposure to the following conservative media sources: Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Fox News, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Nonpartisan media. According to the report on public perception of television news, the three networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—were considered nonpartisan by a larger percentage of respondents than considered them liberal or conservative (Pew Research Center, 2009). The breakdown of audience party affiliation found that readers of *USA Today* and local daily newspapers, along with viewers of local TV news and the network news programs, fell somewhere in the middle (Pew Research Center, 2010). Therefore, the nonpartisan measure sources were: network news programs, local broadcast news, local newspapers, and *USA Today*.

Political knowledge. Twelve survey questions were designed to measure three different types of political knowledge—liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan. Although additional questions might have offered a more accurate measure of political knowledge, too many questions would have likely resulted in a lower response rate and survey drop-off (Zhou & Sloan, 2009, p. 157; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 192-193). In a study examining the effect of genre selective exposure on political knowledge (Prior, 2005), between 12 and 15 knowledge questions were considered adequate to measure the construct, and studies in which political knowledge is not the predominant construct of interest tend to use even fewer (Eveland, et al., 2005).

Four of the 12 questions were intended to measure nonpartisan political knowledge, four were intended to measure liberal political knowledge, and four were intended to measure conservative political knowledge. A survey assessing the knowledge of voters in the 1992 presidential election divided its questions similarly, with two-thirds measuring knowledge of party and candidate platforms and a third measuring knowledge of candidates' personal

information, a topic "more arguably factual than issue differences" (Chaffee et al., 1994, p. 306).

Many past studies focus on political knowledge. However, the models are normally designed to measure general political knowledge, what this study refers to as nonpartisan knowledge. This study also sought to identify ideologically liberal and ideologically conservative knowledge questions. Early support for the knowledge types examined here can be seen in Delli Carpini and Keeter's "knowledge domains" (1996, p. 139). The researchers proposed that categories of political knowledge—such as knowledge of political parties or gender-specific issues—are "more directly relevant to certain groups, providing the members of those groups with heightened motivation to learn about these issues" (Dolan, 2011, p. 98). Delli Carpini and Keeter found that, for the most part, those who are knowledgeable in one domain tend to also be knowledgeable in others. However, they did find some evidence that women, African-Americans, and partisans may be relatively more knowledgeable in domains associated with gender, race, and party-specific issues, respectively (p. 145-146). Building on this finding, Dolan (2011) found further support for the idea of gender-related knowledge items, concluding with a call for "the inclusion of a range of knowledge measures that result in more valid representations of what all people know" (p. 105).

To help construct a valid measure of ideologically specific knowledge, the researcher looked to past surveys and literature on the topic. A complete working model for measuring both nonpartisan knowledge and knowledge associated with partisan platforms could not be found. Therefore, original scales of liberal and conservative knowledge were created for this study by pretesting potential political knowledge questions prior to administration of the online survey. After receiving approval from the university's human subjects committee (see Appendix D), undergraduate students in two sections of a communication research course were recruited to

participated in a pretest to develop political knowledge questions for the main survey.

The pretest included 21 questions on current events and political information: seven chosen to identify liberal knowledge, seven to identify conservative knowledge, and seven to identify nonpartisan knowledge (see pretest survey in Appendix B). Justification for the initial ideological identification of these questions was based on an explanation found in a study of voter learning bias (Barabas & Jerit, 2010). The researchers' content analysis of campaign poll questions identified "policy-specific knowledge" (p. 4) by asking, "Would the typical Democrat or Republican identify the topic as a partisan issue, and if so, how would they likely feel toward the issue or policy idea in question?" (p. 8). For instance, liberal knowledge facts are those that liberals support and therefore are inclined to learn, whereas, according to the researchers, conservatives would resist learning these facts.

A few of the pretest questions made a more tangible argument for their initial ideological label. A question regarding the obesity rate of America was taken directly from a knowledge survey, the results of which showed that Democrats were more likely to answer the question correctly than Republicans (Pew Research Center, 2009). A question asking about the success of opposition forces in Syria was based on a question from a poll of New Jersey voters conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson University (PublicMind Poll, 2011, p. 4) that reported Fox News viewers to be the least likely of all news audiences to answer the question correctly. The same poll also provided this study with a question on the Occupy Wall Street protests, this time reporting MSNBC viewers to be the least likely to answer correctly (p. 4).

The pretest's nonpartisan questions were borrowed from one of the definitive studies on American political knowledge. In their comprehensive look at the topic, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) reviewed nearly 3,700 survey questions to determine what were the most common topics

regarding "the processes, participants, and policies of government" (p. 67). Applying their findings to their own surveys, the researchers questioned participants on institutions and processes, people and players, domestic policies, foreign affairs, and general political knowledge (p. 68), saying that together the five categories "provide a reasonably varied pool of data from which to construct a picture" of the American public's level of political knowledge (p. 67). The pretest's nonpartisan knowledge questions were selected to represent these categories. (And in fact, the questions ultimately selected for the online survey cover four of the five categories: institutions and processes—Which institution is responsible for determining whether a law is constitutional?, people and players—Who is the current Speaker of the House?, foreign affairs—What European country is facing severe debt problems and possible default?, and general political knowledge—How many terms of office can the American president serve?)

Students participating in the pretest received an information sheet on the study, a questionnaire containing the 21 knowledge questions, and three questions regarding political orientation and demographics. The results revealed through Chi-square analyses which items were more likely to be answered correctly by respondents in the two dominant U.S. political parties. The four items in each knowledge category (liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan) that showed clear differentiation between the percentage of Democrats and Republicans answering them correctly were used in the main online survey.

A total of 59 pretest questionnaires were collected; 18 (30.5% of the sample) were from men and 41 (69.5%) from women. Ages ranged from 19 (1 respondent or 1.7%) to 25 (2 respondents or 3.4%) with 51 respondents of the sample (86.4%) falling between 20 and 22 years of age. By party, 37 respondents (62.7%) said they most often voted for Republican candidates and 15 (25.4%) most often voted for Democrats. Just one respondent (1.7%) most often voted for

an Independent, one (1.7%) most often voted for an additional unlisted party, and five (8.5%) said they did not know which party's candidates they most often supported.

According to the Chi-square analyses, four of the seven questions intended to measure nonpartisan knowledge did, in fact, have a relatively equal chance of being answered correctly by both Democrats and Republicans (see Appendix B). The first three of those questions asked respondents about the current speaker of the house, the president's terms of office, and the rights protected by the First Amendment. The fourth nonpartisan question selected for the main survey asked about Congress' power to override a presidential veto. Asked on the pretest as a true-or-false question, this question was revised in the online survey as a multiple-choice question with four answer choices for the sake of consistency.

Analyses also revealed that four of the seven pretest questions intended to measure liberal knowledge did stand a significantly better chance of being answered correctly by Democrats than Republicans (see Appendix C). These were about the nation that sent the most money to bail out European countries facing severe debt problems, America's rate of obesity, the percentage of Planned Parenthood's health services made up by abortions, and the success of Syrian opposition groups in bringing down the current regime. The Syrian question was asked on the pretest as a true-or-false question, but for the sake of consistency revised in the online survey as a multiple-choice question.

Of the seven questions intended to measure conservative political knowledge, only two were found to have a significantly better chance of being answered correctly by Republicans (see Appendix B). These two asked about the length of unemployment benefits under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and about states' concealed weapon laws. The weapons question was asked on the pretest as a true-or-false question, but was revised in the online survey

as a multiple-choice question. Although the remaining five conservative questions could not be used as measures of conservative knowledge, the analyses revealed one of the seven nonpartisan questions (concerning the institution that determines a law's constitutionality) and one of the seven liberal questions (concerning Occupy Wall Street) each had a better chance of being answered correctly by Republicans than Democrats. These two questions were the remaining two conservative questions in the online survey.

All 12 knowledge questions selected for the online survey had closed-ended, multiple-choice answer formats with three possible answers and a fourth option of "don't know." Knowledge measures consisting entirely of closed-ended questions with "don't know" options have been used in previous studies (PublicMind Poll, 2011; Eveland, et al., 2005). Luskin and Bullock (2011) found that the closed-ended/don't know combination produced a reasonably accurate measure of political knowledge because, as the researchers argued, "Almost everyone who knows the answer can be expected to give it, which is to say that the vast majority of those saying 'don't know' really don't know" (p. 549).

Procedure

The procedure was designed to reduce the threat of low return rate. The average response rate of online surveys is difficult to determine but it has been estimated to be as low as 1% (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 205) and as high as 44% (Schonlau, Fricker, & Elliot, 2002, p. 20). This study used suggestions from past studies that have attempted to increase response rate by using a short, simple introduction persuading potential respondents to participate (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 189). Low return rate can be compounded by survey abandonment in which a respondent exits the survey before completion, rendering the partial data useless (Zhou & Sloan, 2009, p. 157). Abandonment is a common problem in online surveys because respondents

are volunteers. This study guarded against abandonment by keeping the instrument short and dividing the instrument into short sections.

The online survey was constructed in Survey Monkey. The first page welcomed respondents and requested their informed consent (see full survey and introduction in Appendix A). The first five questions (in matrix format) asked respondents to rate how often they followed five types of political news. Next, on the same page, respondents completed the six political participation items. On the second page, respondents filled out the questions on the 11 news outlets and six news personalities designed to measure exposure to liberal, conservative, and non-partisan news. The next page contained the 12 political knowledge questions, each with three possible answers and a fourth choice of "don't know." The final page contained six demographic questions, the political ideology item, and the party affiliation item. The last section asked respondents to check any of 10 platforms and organizations they supported. Because this section was last, it had the highest non-response rate and was dropped from the study. Upon completion, respondents were directed to a page thanking them for their time and asking them to pass the survey on to other possible respondents.

Once constructed, the survey was distributed as an uncontrolled instrument, meaning it was available online and participation was voluntary and self-selected (Schonlau, et al, 2002, p. 35). While it may be possible to obtain the same data via alternate survey methods such as personal interviews, mail and telephone surveys, or group administration, self-administered online surveys typically deliver the largest rate of response in the widest demographic range, more quickly and inexpensively than any other method (Babbie, 2007; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Using the web for dissemination has the potential to reach a wider audience than mail and telephone surveys because not only are Internet users now reasonably representative of the

population as a whole, but the Internet also provides access to potential respondents who cannot be reached via mail or telephone (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 422-423).

This study used two online channels, formal email and social media networks, to disseminate the link to the survey. Formal email distribution consisted of sending an email to potential respondents containing a link to the online survey and asking them to pass the survey on to other potential respondents (see recruiting materials in Appendix B). After two weeks, a second e-mail was sent to each email recipient thanking those who had completed the survey and encouraging those who had not yet responded to do so (see Appendix B). Social media distribution of the survey consisted of a short message with a link distributed to those in the Facebook and Twitter networks of the researcher and her committee members and close friends. Respondents recruited through these networks were asked to repost or retweet the link so that their Facebook friends or Twitter followers. Finally, the link to the survey was posted on the homepages of the university college site and the department site so that visitors to those pages could be potential respondents. All saw the same information and consent page as soon as they followed the link.

The first level of participants was the researcher's network of contacts and those of her committee members. So as not to limit respondents to the researcher's limited circle of contacts, others in those networks were enlisted to recruit participants. Although this study was not attempting to gain a representative sample of the U.S. voting population, the researcher still sought variety in the sample so as to have variety in the constructs of interest. Also, efforts were made to balance demographic categories as much as possible. For instance, because the researcher and her committee members were living in Alabama, the majority of responses were expected to come from the Southeast region of the country. Therefore, the researcher and her

committee members reached out to networks in other regions of the country—for example, areas where they had lived previously.

The data collected through this method was analyzed. The results of those analyses are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Sample Demographics

To be included in the study's sample, respondents to the online survey had to complete more than half of the questions in both the media use section (9 of 17 questions) and political knowledge section (7 of 12 questions). Of the 584 surveys collected on Survey Monkey from March 31 to April 23, 2012, the period that the survey was open, 544 respondents met these criteria and were retained for analysis.

Of the 533 respondents who gave their gender, 219 were men (40.3%) and 314 (57.7%) were women. Age ranged from 18 (4 respondents or 0.7% of the sample), the youngest age of U.S. voters, to 86 (1 respondent or 0.2%). The mean (*M*) age of all respondents was 41.96 (*N* = 532, *SD* = 14.2). The question of geographic region (*N* = 539) revealed that, as expected, most respondents (434, 79.8%) hailed from the South. The additional 105 respondents said they lived in the following geographic regions: North (5, 0.9%), Northeast (23, 4.2%), Mid-Atlantic (9, 1.7%), Midwest (31, 5.7%), and West (34, 6.3%). Three respondents (0.6%) did not live in the United States. Of the 533 respondents who gave their ethnicity, the vast majority (487, 89.5%) identified themselves as white. The additional 46 respondents identified as follows: 12 (2.2%) as African-American, 10 (1.8%) as Hispanic, 2 (0.4%) as Asian-American, 2 (0.4%) as American Indian or Alaskan, and 1 (0.2%) as a Pacific Islander. An additional 19 respondents (3.5%) identified with multiple races.

For highest education level completed, 3 respondents (0.6%) said they did not finish high school, 31 (5.7%) had a high school degree or its equivalent, 94 respondents (17.3%) had completed some college, 34 (6.3%) had received an associate's degree, 198 (36.4%) had received a bachelor's degree, and 177 (32.5%) had completed a graduate degree. For annual income, 50 respondents (9.2%) said they made less than $20,000 a year, 72 (13.2%) between $20,000 and $39,999 a year, 98 (18%) between $40,000 and $59,999, 65 (11.9%) between $60,000 and $79,999, and 79 (14.5%) between $80,000 and $99,999. The most common annual salary range, with 150 responses (27.6%), was that exceeding $100,000 annually. The median income corresponded to the $60,000 to $79,000 income category.

Of the 536 respondents who indicated political ideology, most (176 or 32.4%) considered themselves moderates. Another 119 (21.9%) considered themselves liberal and 153 (28.1%) considered themselves conservative. Fewer respondents considered themselves very liberal (41 or 7.5%) or very conservative (47 or 8.6%). The 535 respondents indicating which party they most supported in national elections were fairly evenly split between Democrats (204 or 37.5%) and Republicans (233 or 42.8%). Another 66 respondents (12.1%) said they most often voted for Independent candidates, while 24 (4.4%) most often voted for candidates from another party. Eight (1.5%) were not sure which party's candidates they most often supported.

Scale Analyses

Before survey data could be analyzed, scales designed to measure constructs central to the study's hypotheses and research questions had to be analyzed. Scales were used to measure respondents' overall political media use, partisan media use (both liberal and conservative), and political participation. Scales for liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan political knowledge were established in the pretest (see Chapter III) and scores for those were constructed simply by

adding the number of correct responses in each knowledge category. Scores for each could range from 0 (none correct) to 4 (all correct). Mean scores were not equivalent across knowledge types. The mean score of all respondents (N = 544) for liberal knowledge was 1.56 (*SD* = 1.1), conservative knowledge was 2.43 (*SD* = .81), and nonpartisan knowledge was 3.20 (*SD* = .87). Respondents fared best on nonpartisan knowledge questions, with 45.4% of respondents answering all four correctly and only 0.4% answering all four incorrectly. Liberal knowledge was the most difficult, with 4% able to answer all four questions correctly and 21.2% getting all four wrong. Comparatively, 9.6% answered all four conservative knowledge questions correctly, but just 0.9% answered all four wrong. The discrepancies in means by knowledge type is not an issue in this study, however, as all comparisons are made between group within a specific type of knowledge. No comparisons are made among types of knowledge.

Political participation scale. The six survey questions related to political participation all required dichotomous, yes-or-no responses. Therefore, factor analyses could not be completed for these items. Using the Cronbach's alpha statistic for reliability, the six items were found to produce a scale with moderate reliability ($\alpha = 0.64$). Removing any item hurt the reliability. Therefore, responses to the six items were summed, with each answer of yes for a behavior receiving one point. This meant that scores could range from 0 to 6; actual scores ranged from 0 to 6 (*M* = 3.39, *SD* = 1.47). Higher numbers indicated greater participation.

Political news use scale. Five questions related to overall general political news use, measured on a seven-point response format, were analyzed with factor and reliability analyses. One dominant, coherent factor emerged, and the five items produced a highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.93$) scale. Therefore, the items were averaged to create an overall general political news use score,

with theoretical and actual scores ranging from 1 to 7. The mean was 4.85 (*SD* = 1.35), and higher numbers indicated greater political news use.

Partisan media use scale. There were 17 questions asking about specific partisan and nonpartisan media sources measured on the same seven-point response set as the political news questions. To determine if media did separate into liberal and conservative outlets as intended in the study, a factor analysis using Varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalization was employed. Two dominant factors emerged; therefore, two scales were created.

Responses to eight media sources grouped together—*The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, CNN, MSNBC, NPR, Jon Stewart, Rachel Maddow, and Chris Matthews. Reliability analyses determined that removing any of the eight sources hurt the scale's reliability ($\alpha = 0.79$), so all items were retained. The score relating to amount of time viewing each outlet was averaged to create a liberal media use score, with theoretical and actual scores ranging from 1 to 7. The mean liberal media use score was 2.52 (*SD* = 1.13). Responses to four other media sources grouped together—Fox News, Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, and Sean Hannity, and these items created a reliable conservative media use scale ($\alpha = 0.87$). Therefore, time viewing these outlets also was averaged to create a conservative media use score (*M* = 2.21, *SD* = 1.41). *The Wall Street Journal*, originally intended to measure conservative media use, did not align with either subset of items and was dropped. For each ideologically oriented media score, higher numbers indicated more viewing of that media type.

A reliability analysis on the remaining four general media sources—*USA Today*, network news, local newspapers, and local TV news—demonstrated a reliable scale for measuring nonpartisan media use ($\alpha = 0.66$). Therefore, they were averaged to create a nonpartisan media

use score (M = 3.55, SD = 1.26), which also ranged from 1 to 7. Again, higher scores indicated more viewing of these news sources.

Test of Hypotheses and Research Questions

The hypotheses and research questions laid out in Chapter II sought to shed light on the relationship between partisan selective media exposure and political knowledge. The first set of hypotheses focused on the direct relationship between political media use and political knowledge with particular emphasis placed on partisan selective exposure.

H1. H1 posited that increased exposure to general political news (regardless of ideological slant) would be related to higher levels of political knowledge. This was tested with simple bivariate Pearson (r) correlational analyses of general political news use (the five items that measured general interest and viewing time of governmental and political news) and the three types of political knowledge—liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan. All three knowledge types were significantly and positively correlated with general political news exposure. In other words, as exposure to general political news increased, so did liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan political knowledge. The correlation coefficient was strongest for nonpartisan knowledge (r = .302, p < .001). The strength of the correlation for general political news exposure was about the same for liberal knowledge (r = .268, p < .001) as it was for conservative knowledge (r = .269, p < .001). Therefore, H1 was reported for all forms of political knowledge.

H2a, b, and c. H2 stated that increased exposure to partisan media would be related to higher levels of political knowledge associated with the ideology espoused. Again, bivariate Pearson correlational analyses were conducted. For these analyses, liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan media use scores were correlated with liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan political knowledge. As Table 1 shows, data suggest support for both H2a (the liberal media, liberal

knowledge link) and H2b (the conservative media, conservative knowledge link). A significant, positive relationship was found between exposure to liberal media and liberal political knowledge, as well as between exposure to conservative media and conservative political knowledge. It should be noted that the strength of the correlation was higher for the liberal media-knowledge link than it was for the conservative media-knowledge link.

The data analysis did not support H2c, which posited that increased exposure to nonpartisan media would be related to higher levels of nonpartisan political knowledge. Although the relationship was weakly correlated, it was not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, the minimum level set for this portion of the data analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Between Three Types of Political Knowledge and Exposure to Three Types of Media

	Media use		
	Nonpartisan	Liberal	Conservative
Nonpartisan knowledge	.074^{+}	.212***	-.004
Liberal knowledge	.062	.361***	-.132**
Conservative knowledge	.052	.063	.224***

$^{+}$p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001

Looking at the data for other trends not in the hypotheses reveals other significant relationships. Liberal media use was significantly and positively correlated with nonpartisan knowledge. The analysis revealed no relationship between liberal media use and conservative

knowledge, meaning exposure to liberal media was linked to higher levels of both liberal and nonpartisan knowledge but had no effect on conservative knowledge. In contrast, a significant, negative correlation was found between conservative media use and liberal knowledge. In other words, as conservative media use increased, liberal political knowledge decreased. The same pattern was not found for increased liberal media use. Nonpartisan media use did not have a significant relationship with either liberal or conservative political knowledge.

RQ1. RQ1 asked how partisan selective exposure is related to the three types of political knowledge. To answer this question, participants were isolated into two groups: high liberal media users and high conservative media users. Respondents with a liberal media use score above 2.33 (50.4% of the sample) were deemed high consumers of liberal media. Respondents with a conservative media use score above 1.67 (51.7% of the sample) were deemed high consumers of conservative media. Next, those who were high users of both types of media or neither type of media were dropped from the analysis. Of the 537 respondents represented in a crosstab analysis of both high and low consumers of both liberal and conservative media, 150 received a high liberal score and low conservative score, and 157 received a high conservative score and a low liberal score. Those 307 respondents were determined to have the highest engagement in partisan selective exposure and were used in the analyses of RQ1.

The interaction of partisan selective exposure and political knowledge was examined first via a series of t tests (see Table 2). These tests, which isolated only those who watched one type of ideological political media (liberal or conservative) told a slightly different story than the hypotheses, which were tested on all participants with correlation analyses. As Table 2 shows, those with high liberal partisan selective exposure had significantly higher nonpartisan and

liberal knowledge than those with high conservative partisan selective exposure. However, no differences between the two groups were found for conservative knowledge.

Because multiple t tests can often lead to a high rate of Type I error and to control for covariates, a MANCOVA was conducted as well for this research question. Covariates controlled for were political participation and overall general political media use. This model was designed to confirm the findings from the independent samples t tests using a more rigorous statistical analysis.

Table 2

Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) for Political Knowledge Based on Type of Partisan Media Exposure

	High partisan media use		
	Liberal	Conservative	*t*
Nonpartisan knowledge	3.42 (.74)	3.08 (.91)	3.57***
Liberal knowledge	2.06 (1.0)	1.16 (.97)	7.86***
Conservative knowledge	2.46 (.66)	2.48 (.97)	0.25

$^{+}p < .1$, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001

The MANCOVA did support the findings from the t tests reported in Table 2. Even controlling for general political news interest and political participation, those consumers with high levels of liberal media selective exposure on average do have higher scores of nonpartisan and liberal political knowledge than consumers of strictly conservative media (see Table 3). Again, no differences were found between the two groups on the conservative media knowledge

scores, suggesting that those who only watch conservative news are not higher in conservative knowledge (or any type of political knowledge) than those who watch only liberal news.

Table 3

MANCOVA Model Testing Partisan Selective Media Exposure on Three Types of Political Knowledge, with Covariates of Political News Use and Political Participation

	Political knowledge					
	Nonpartisan		Liberal		Conservative	
	F	*Part.*η^2	*F*	*Part.* η^2	*F*	*Part.* η^2
Corrected model	20.7***	0.17	28.6***	0.22	12.2***	0.11
1. Covariates						
Political news use	33.3***	0.10	13.6***	0.04	25.5***	0.08
Political participation	1.75	0.01	1.07	0.00	1.41	0.01
2. Media use						
High partisan	11.3**	.04	60.4***	0.17	0.44	0.00
Error	303		303		303	

$^{+}$p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001

RQ2a and RQ2b. The second group of research questions examined the nonpartisan, liberal, and conservative knowledge of those who relied heavily on specific news personalities (Sean Hannity, Jon Stewart) for information versus those who relied heavily on news outlets (FOX News, *The New York Times*). The same method used to isolate partisan selective exposure was employed to divide respondent into high use by media type (outlet or personality) for both liberal and conservative sources. Respondents with a liberal news outlet score above 2.75 (50.8%

of the sample) were deemed high consumers of liberal news outlets. Respondents with a liberal news personalities score above 1.33 (47.5% of the sample) were deemed high consumers of liberal news personalities. Of the 534 respondents represented in a crosstabs analysis of both high and low consumers of both liberal outlets and liberal personalities, 52 received a high liberal outlets score and low liberal personalities score, and 112 received a high liberal personalities score and a low liberal outlets score. These 167 participants were retained to test liberal personality versus liberal outlet exposure on the three forms of political knowledge.

Respondents with a conservative news outlet score above 2.0 (49.3% of the sample) were deemed high consumers of conservative news outlets. Respondents with a conservative news personalities score above 1.0 (49.1% of the sample) were deemed high consumers of conservative news personalities. Of the 529 respondents represented in a crosstabs analysis of both high and low consumers of both conservative outlets and conservative personalities, 59 received a high conservative outlets score and low conservative personalities score, and an additional 59 also received a high conservative personalities score and a low conservative outlets score. These 118 participants were used to test conservative personality versus conservative outlet exposure for the three forms of political knowledge.

To answer RQ2, independent sample t tests were conducted first comparing liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan knowledge in high consumers of news outlets and high consumers of news personalities both for liberal and conservative media groups.

RQ2a looked at the relationship between political knowledge and liberal media use by type. As Table 4 shows, those who selectively watched liberal news outlets had slightly, but not significantly, higher nonpartisan knowledge than personality-heavy consumers of liberal media.

No significant differences between the two types of media users were found for either liberal or conservative knowledge.

Table 4

Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) for Political Knowledge Based on Type of Media (Liberal)

	High media use by type (liberal)		
	Outlet	Personality	*t*
Nonpartisan knowledge	3.33 (.79)	3.03 (.95)	1.98^{+}
Liberal knowledge	1.62 (1.1)	1.38 (1.1)	1.29
Conservative knowledge	2.46 (.75)	2.34 (.83)	0.91

$^{+}$p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001

RQ2b looked at the relationship between political knowledge and conservative media use by type. As Table 5 shows, no significant differences between outlet-heavy consumers and personality-heavy consumers of conservative media were found for any type of knowledge.

Table 5

Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) for Political Knowledge Based on Type of Media (Conservative)

	High media use by type (conservative)		
	Outlet	Personality	*t*
Nonpartisan knowledge	3.15 (.94)	3.22 (.95)	0.39
Liberal knowledge	1.51 (1.1)	1.51 (1.2)	0.00
Conservative knowledge	2.41 (.89)	2.31 (.70)	0.69

$^{+}p < .1$, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001

RQ3. The final research question examined the relationship between political knowledge and partisan selective exposure in light of other constructs of interest measured by the survey. Regression analyses examining how media use variables, political variables, and demographics related to political knowledge were run to answer RQ3. Diagnostic tests ensured that there were no problems with multicollinearity of predictor variables and to test for tolerance in the regression models. Independent predictor variables that were too highly correlated were dropped from the regression model. For example, income was highly correlated with age and education, so it was not included in the model.

Three models were run, one for each type of political knowledge, and results are reported in Table 6. For each, a blocked hierarchical regression technique was used so that the change in the predictive value of the model could be assessed. Media variables, the main construct of interest in relation to political knowledge in this study, were loaded first. Next, these variables were tested with political variables (participation and ideology), and finally, the media variables

were examined collectively with political and demographic variables. The technique was designed to examine if media variables still mattered with other constructs linked to political knowledge were examined.

For the model examining nonpartisan political knowledge, four variables emerged as predictive of variation in scores. Liberal media use, political participation, and education were positively related to nonpartisan knowledge. Sex also emerged, with men having higher nonpartisan knowledge scores than women. All four variables had relatively equivalent explanatory power based on standardized Beta weights, as the second column of Table 6 shows. However, demographic variables of education and sex accounted for most of the power in the model.

For liberal knowledge, five variables emerged as significantly related to variation in scores. Three—liberal media use, education, and age—positively correlated with liberal knowledge, and nonpartisan media use was negatively correlated. Sex was again predictive with men scoring higher than women. Of the five variables, the strongest predictor of liberal knowledge was by far liberal media use based on the Beta weights. The media use variables explained most of the variance in scores.

Four variables predictive of conservative knowledge emerged in the final model. Three were positively correlated with conservative knowledge: conservative media use, political participation, and education. Also, men again scored higher than women. As with liberal political knowledge, the strongest predictor of conservative knowledge was conservative media use.

As Table 6 indicates, two demographic variables, sex and education, were predictive of higher levels of political knowledge in all three models: Men consistently scored higher than women, and education was positively correlated with liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan

knowledge. However, the goal of the regression analyses was to determine if partisan media use, found to be related to knowledge in the earlier analyses, remained as a predictor of political knowledge when controlling for other factors. These models did indicate that even controlling for demographics and possibly correlated political variables, partisan media use was the strongest predictor of the ideologically corresponding political knowledge.

Table 6

Regression Models for Partisan Media Use Variables, Political Variables, and Demographic Variables on Three Types of Political Knowledge

	Political knowledge		
	Nonpartisan	Liberal	Conservative
	β	β	β
Media use variables			
Liberal media use	.147**	.296***	.028
Conservative media use	.040	-.036	.248***
Nonpartisan media use	-.057	-.131**	-.045
R^2 change	.042	.131	.063
Political variables			
Political participation	.100*	.012	.108*
Political ideology	-.009	-.058	-.040
R^2 change	.027	.010	.023
Demographic variables			
Gender (1 = Men; 2 = Women)	-.157***	-.172***	-.199***
Age	.051	.109*	.011
Education	.171***	.145***	.106*
Race (1 = White; 2 = Minority)	-.009	-.016	-.019
R^2 change	.058	.066	.052
Model summary			
F	8.12***	14.5***	8.93***
R^2 (Adjusted R^2)	.127 (.112)	.207 (.193)	.138 (.123)

$^{+}$p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001; βs are standardized beta weights

CHAPTER V

Discussion

As today's media landscape moves ever closer to the fragmented, hyper-partisan environment of the Daily Me (Sunstein, 2001), partisan selective exposure is increasingly becoming a way of life for news audiences. This study set out to examine what happens when the U.S. news media, intended by the founding fathers to be the fourth estate of government, increasingly reaches only specific segments of a public selecting content that aligns with preexisting ideology. Informing the American electorate has long been considered "a general responsibility of a free press" (Chaffee et al., 1994, p. 305). Stroud (2006) questioned the ability of modern journalism to satisfy their responsibility to provide the public with the tools necessary to be informed, thoughtful voters asking, "Can partisan media fulfill this role?" (p. 277).

This study asked if partisan media could provide its audience with the political knowledge across the ideological spectrum necessary to be informed, thoughtful voters by examining the relationship between exposure to partisan news media and three types of political knowledge. The first—nonpartisan political knowledge—is a common construct of political research. However, this study also investigated two types of ideologically based knowledge (that associated with liberalism and with conservatism). Although the study was chiefly interested in the interactions of exposure to partisan media and these knowledge types, it also looked at the role general news media exposure, political ideology, political participation, and demographic factors play in these interactions.

Chapter V discusses the study's findings and their implications for political journalism, participatory democracy, and research in this area. The limitations of the study are examined, and suggestions are made for future research. The chapter concludes with an overall assessment of the knowledge gained through this study.

Overall Findings

The results of this study, tested with a variety of variables and statistical analyses, consistently found a significant relationship between media exposure and the three types of political knowledge. Some findings, namely those concerning demographic variables, reinforced what was known already from previous research about the influences on political knowledge. But the study broke ground in new areas, most importantly finding a positive and statistically significant link between exposure to partisan media and political knowledge of the corresponding ideology. Examining the relationship between exposure to partisan media and political knowledge of a conflicting ideology revealed, interestingly, that not all partisan media is created equal. Liberal media exposure and conservative media exposure did not produce consistent results across all research questions. The expected and unexpected findings of the study are discussed fully below.

Impact of Media Use. The relationship between media use and knowledge has been examined from several angles in past research. One study (Eveland et al., 2005) found that personal political communication, including water cooler chitchat and dinner table conversations, was related to increased political knowledge. Another study on the relationship between political knowledge and selective exposure based on media genre found that respondents' political knowledge was positively linked with exposure to news media of any kind compared to non-news entertainment media (Prior, 2005).

The results of this study, in that regard, are in line with previous findings. H1, which predicted that increased exposure to political news in general—irrespective of partisan nature—would be related to higher levels of all types of political knowledge, was supported on all levels. All three knowledge types were significantly and positively correlated with general political news exposure, meaning that as exposure to general political news increased, so did liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan knowledge. Such findings were expected because of the history of support for similar premises in the research, although this link had rarely been tested as directly as it was here.

Adding the construct of partisan media exposure to the equation revealed a more complex view of the relationship between media and knowledge. Past research has reported that partisan media use is linked to increased political participation and voter turnout (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2006), as well as adherence to false beliefs (Nyhan, 2010). H2 predicted that increased exposure to news media characterized by its partisan nature (or lack thereof) would be related to higher levels of the corresponding type of knowledge. The two hypotheses dealing with partisan media were supported. There was a significant, positive relationship between exposure to liberal media and liberal political knowledge and a significant, positive relationship between exposure to conservative media and conservative political knowledge. The same relationship was not found between exposure to nonpartisan media and nonpartisan knowledge.

This finding takes previous knowledge to a new level. Not only did it confirm the premise that the more news and information people consume, the higher their level of political knowledge, it found that this exposure leads to an increase of only certain types of knowledge. Further, looking at the relationship between partisan media use and political knowledge of a conflicting nature or nonpartisan nature, the difference is evident. The analysis revealed that

liberal media use was linked to higher levels of nonpartisan knowledge but had no effect on conservative knowledge. Conservative media use, however, had no effect on nonpartisan knowledge and was linked to lower levels of liberal knowledge. In other words, conservative media actually suppressed liberal knowledge in this analysis. Just as nonpartisan media use was not related to nonpartisan political knowledge, neither was it significantly related to liberal or conservative knowledge.

It should be noted that H2 did not measure true partisan selective exposure in the traditional sense in that it didn't control for those who had high (or low) exposure to all types of media. True partisan selective exposure was measured in RQ1, which isolated respondents exposed exclusively to high levels of liberal media and compared them with respondents exposed exclusively to high levels of conservative media. Respondents who were high users or low users of both categories of partisan media were removed from the analysis for RQ1. Thus, the subset of respondents most actively engaged in partisan selective exposure was examined. Independent samples t tests and MANCOVA analyses controlling for general political news use and political participation confirmed the findings for RQ1. Partisan selective exposure to liberal media was linked to higher levels of liberal and nonpartisan knowledge than partisan selective exposure to conservative media. No differences between the two groups were found for conservative knowledge, suggesting that those who watch only conservative news are not higher in conservative knowledge (or any type of political knowledge) than those who watch only liberal news.

The discrepancy between the political knowledge of liberal media users and conservative media users is one of the study's most noteworthy findings. The simplest explanation for the discrepancies is that people who are high users of liberal media have more exposure to

conservative knowledge than high users of conservative media have of liberal knowledge. In other words, those who have high, exclusive levels of liberal media use have equal or higher levels of knowledge across all three areas than to those who have high, exclusive levels of conservative media. This could be attributed to a difference in the degree of partisanship of liberal and conservative news sources included in the study. Despite its "Fair and Balanced" catchphrase, Fox News has a well-documented conservative bent that its executives freely admit (Foxification of news, 2011, ¶1; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). And of course, Rush Limbaugh wears his conservative bias on his sleeve, unapologetically. On the other hand, many of the media sources in the liberal scale still say they strive to adhere to the journalistic standard of objectivity. A study by the Pew Research Center (2009) found that the level of Fox News viewers who perceived the channel as conservative was the same as the level of CNN and MSNBC viewers who judged it to be conservative. CNN and MSNBC, conversely, were just as likely to be perceived as having no bias than as having a liberal bias overall (¶6). The report also found that Fox News viewers were far more likely than viewers of other networks (51% to 36%) to view programming with strong political opinions as positive (¶12). And in 2010, a study measuring the perceived credibly of major news outlets by Republicans, Democrats, and Independents found NPR and CNN to be two of the three most believable sources among Independent voters (as well as Democrats). In fact, NPR was the only source on the survey to actually show increases in credibility ratings over time (Pew Research Center, p. 76).

Another explanation for the finding that liberal viewers had equal or higher levels of all types of knowledge is that perhaps conservative knowledge is more likely than liberal knowledge to be shared in ways other than media exposure, such as social media networks and the personal political communication channels that Eveland, et al. (2005) examined. If so, liberal media users

might learn new knowledge items from their Facebook newsfeed and their personal conversations that they weren't learning from their media exposure. In contrast, these sources for conservative media users would only serve to reinforce the knowledge items learned from conservative media exposure. Given the sample used in this study (a higher number of Republicans than in the general electorate and a large percentage from conservative Southern states), the social and personal networks of respondents might tend to be more vocal in expressing conservative views. This is discussed more fully in the limitations section below.

One finding related to partisan selective exposure (measured in RQ1) conflicted with that of overall partisan media use (measured in H2). The significant negative relationship between conservative media use and liberal knowledge found in H2 was not present when those with true partisan selective exposure were isolated. The explanation for this difference likely lies in the respondents excluded from analysis in RQ1. Included in H2 were respondents who were heavy users of both liberal and conservative media and those who were light users of both. These responses represent a balanced media diet and do not constitute engagement in partisan selective exposure.

Despite the different analyses and portions of the sample used, both H2 and RQ1 found no relationship between nonpartisan media and any type of political knowledge. It is surprising that nonpartisan media would not follow the pattern seen in heavy users of overall media and the two types of partisan media exposure. This unexpected finding may be attributable to the type of content featured in the survey's nonpartisan media sources. Two of the four nonpartisan sources were local newspapers and local news broadcasts, which obviously focus their content heavily on local issues. No local issues were included in the nonpartisan knowledge questions—or any

knowledge questions, for that matter—a necessity due to the nationwide pool from which the survey sample was drawn.

Impact of Ideology. Ideology is a common variable in political knowledge research, and the consensus thus far has been that there is a clear link between voter knowledge and political ideology or party affiliation (Barabas & Jerit, 2010). The tendency to examine political knowledge in terms of what liberals know versus what conservatives know is common in existing research and political polls. In 2011, Pew Research Center reported noticeable differences between what Democrats and Republicans know. For example, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to identify union rights as the source of protests in Wisconsin and Democrats were more likely than Republicans to correctly identify the country's obesity rate (Pew Research Center, 2011). Likewise, Delli Carpini & Keeter (1996) reported that one of their "domains" of political knowledge, the political party scale (Which party controls Congress? Of which party is the president a member?), was significantly and positively correlated with the strength of respondents' party affiliation (p. 145).

This study did not isolate ideology to test its direct effect on political knowledge. Interestingly, though, when examined in the context of several variables of interest, ideology did not emerge as a significant predictor variable of any type of political knowledge. As RQ3 found, the strongest predictor of liberal knowledge was, by far, liberal media use, just as the strongest predictor of conservative knowledge was conservative media use. In fact, ideology did not rank as even one of the model's weaker predictors of knowledge (see Impact of Demographics for secondary predictors). However, what is likely happening with ideology is that its impact on political knowledge is indirect. Past studies have found that conservatives attune more to conservative media (Fox and other personalities) while liberals are more apt to tune into MSNBC

and other more liberal outlets. This study's findings, together with past research, suggest a three-part causal relationship in which ideology drives partisan media exposure, which in turn predicts political knowledge. Further investigation into this possibility is discussed in the chapter's section on suggestions for future research.

Like ideology, political participation was not a significant predictor of variation in political knowledge scores. The one exception was exposure to nonpartisan news. In this case, higher political participation was linked to greater nonpartisan political knowledge. The lack of a significant relationship between political participation and partisan knowledge may be a reflection of the knowledge questions' focus on national politics and current events. As mentioned earlier, local issues were not covered in the knowledge questions. If high levels of political participation reflect participation at the local level, those respondents likely have high levels of knowledge on local political issues, but that wouldn't necessarily translate to high levels of knowledge on national issues. The nonpartisan questions, on the other hand, are not issue-specific and may be more likely to be known to those engaged in politics at any level. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the positive relationship found for political participation paled in comparison to the greater explanatory power in the model of partisan media exposure.

Impact of Demographics. Even more so than ideology, demographic variables have been widely explored in political knowledge studies. Existing research offers explicit and consistent findings on the role of demographics in predicting political knowledge. Knowledge gaps have been found based on education, sex, race, income, and age (Eveland, et al., 2005; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Prior, 2005; Dilliplane, 2011; Nyhan, 2010; Stroud, 2010; Lee & Cappella, 2001). According to regression analyses in RQ3, variables that consistently predicted

higher levels of political knowledge—be it nonpartisan, liberal, or conservative—were sex and education. Men had higher levels of liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan knowledge than women, a finding in line with numerous past studies (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Dolan, 2011). Higher education levels also were related to greater liberal, conservative, and nonpartisan knowledge, not surprising given that the relationship between education and any type of knowledge is intuitive and well documented.

Age was found to be significantly predictive of liberal knowledge only, but this positive relationship also followed the pattern established in past research (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). What is surprising is that being older was not significantly related to greater nonpartisan or conservative knowledge. This finding implies that differences between liberal, nonpartisan and conservative knowledge aren't as apparent in younger respondents. The survey's questions of nonpartisan knowledge are likely similar to those asked on tests in civics and political science classes so perhaps these answers are fresh in the minds of younger respondents giving them an advantage in this area.

The study's lack of findings linking race and political knowledge may result from a lack of racial diversity in the sample. Close to 90% of respondents identified as white, and the remaining 10% were spread across the choices of African-American, Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian or Alaskan, Pacific Islander, and multiple races. For analyses, the researcher combined those 10% into one minority category, which clearly obscures voting patterns and political differences that have been documented among various ethnic groups in the United States.

However, the most significant finding in light of the goals of this study was that, even controlling for other possible variables, media use was significantly and consistently found to be

the most predictive factor of what respondents knew about politics: What people watch matters, more so even than their sex, their level of education, or their political ideology.

Impact of Media Type. The study also looked at media use by type of outlet, that is media outlets versus media personalities, with sources still separated by ideology. Although many studies measured media exposure and partisan media exposure using both outlets and personalities, no other published study making a distinction between the two could be found in the literature. Therefore, the researcher had no comparison for the findings in this area. As it turned out, no statistically significant differences emerged, with the exception of a slight increase in nonpartisan knowledge of outlet-heavy consumers of liberal media over personality-heavy consumers of liberal media. Nonpartisan knowledge did not differ between outlet-heavy consumers of conservative media and personality-heavy consumers of conservative media. Nor were any significant differences between the two groups found for either liberal or conservative knowledge.

A number of factors may contribute to the lack of significant findings for this construct. Differences between outlet-heavy consumers and personality-heavy consumers of conservative knowledge would have been particularly surprising if they had emerged because the conservative outlets and personalities examined in this study were so closely aligned. Fox News was the only outlet included in the conservative media measure, which essentially means outlet-heavy users were Fox News-heavy users. Two of the three conservative personalities—O'Reilly and Hannity—are actually aired on Fox News. More differentiation was built into the liberal measures of outlet and personality-heavy use (although, like O'Reilly and Hannity, liberal personalities Maddow and Matthews have shows on liberal outlet MSNBC). Lack of significant differences in liberal media are more likely to represent an actual comparison of outlets and

personalities. The fact that this comparison revealed little to no significant difference in political knowledge may serve as evidence that a significance difference does not exist in the content of these types of media sources.

Such was the conclusion of a study comparing campaign coverage of network news programs and "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" in the 2004 presidential election (Fox, Koloen, & Sahin, 2007). A content analysis measuring hype in network coverage and humor in "The Daily Show" as compared to their substantive content found the Comedy Central program an equal medium of substantive information and, in fact, suggested that "viewers may actually process and remember substantive information…better than when it is presented on more serious sources of political information" (p. 222). Equivalent knowledge should be expected between outlet-heavy and personality-heavy users in light of this study.

Because programing hosted by a specific personality (such as Jon Stewart or Rush Limbaugh) relies on building a brand to attract an audience and increase ratings, the content is often tends toward the outrageous, controversial, or funny. It might be assumed that such content would lead to lower levels of knowledge, which was not the case here. One other reason for this finding may be that the presentation of personality-driven programming actually serves to increase audience engagement, which studies have suggested may be linked to political knowledge.

Limitations

As with all studies, several limitations must be noted. Because this study relied on self-reported data, the information cannot be independently verified. Issues of selective memory and exaggeration may come into play (Presser, 1990; Newhagen, 2004). One factor consistently cited is the tendency for respondents to answer questions about social behaviors and attitudes so as to

fit what they perceive to be socially acceptable (Newhagen, 2004, p. 3; Pasek, 2010, p. 43). Social desirability bias has implications for this study, particularly because one question ("Did you vote in the last presidential election?") has been specifically noted as an item associated with social desirability bias. One study found that while actual voter turnout was around 50%, between 70 and 80% of respondents reported voting in the last presidential election. Presser (1990) noted that studies as far back as 1948 have found similar results, concluding "few findings are so stable across time and population" (p. 587).

Scholars have agreed that social desirability response bias is decreased by respondents' confidence in their anonymity (Pasek, 2010, p. 44). Respondents in this study were assured of anonymity and informed that all identifying information would be stripped from their data (the ISP address of the computer, for example) before the researcher downloaded it (Surveymonkey.com, Policies section). Although attempts to combat issues with self-reporting were implemented during survey design, the influence of this type of bias is inevitable.

Limitations can also be linked to measurement of constructs. For example, the nonpartisan political knowledge scale likely suffered from a ceiling effect. When attempting to measure aptitude, there is the risk "participants may find the task too easy and score nearly perfect" (Hessling, Traxel, & Schmidt, 2004, p. 106). When responses are concentrated near the highest possible score, as was the case with nonpartisan knowledge (M = 3.2 out of 4), the ceiling effect makes it difficult to observe variation in the data. The questions for nonpartisan knowledge were similar to general U.S. citizenship questions and not tied to current events.

The equality of the liberal and conservative media measures may also be an issue. Sources used to construct the measure of liberal media use (*The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, CNN, MSNBC, NPR, Jon Stewart, Rachel Maddow, and Chris Matthews) vary in several

ways from the sources used to construct the measure of conservative media use (Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, and Fox News). Obvious differences are the number of sources used to build each measure, eight liberal sources versus four conservative, and the diversity of sources represented in each model. Fox News is represented three times in the conservative media scale because it airs Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly's TV programs. As the home of Rachel Maddow and Chris Matthews' programs, MSNBC is also represented three times in the liberal scale. However, six different organizations have voices heard in the liberal scale. In contrast, the conservative model is represented only by Fox News and talk radio personality Rush Limbaugh, who is often quoted on Fox News. The number of unique perspectives available to liberal media users under this model, as opposed to the limited number of views reaching conservative media users, may account for some of the discrepancies observed in knowledge as linked to liberal and conservative media use. The categorical nature of the sources' partisan labels should be taken into consideration as well. The division of media sources into liberal or conservative do not allow for varying degrees of partisanship. For instance, one of the studies used to identify media sources for this study reported that 53% of MSNBC's audience members are Democrats, and only 40% of NPR listeners are Democrats (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 56). However, the measure gave the same weight to NPR as a liberal media source as the presumably more left-leaning MSNBC.

Another limitation is the study's sample, as it is in any study that relies on a convenience sample. For example, because the survey originated from a university in Alabama, respondents from the South and with higher levels of education were readily available. Thus, respondents were skewed toward educated, Southern respondents. It is worth noting, though, that a relatively equal number of Democrats and Republicans responded, and the sample was older and more

educated than the general population, all traits shared with the American voting public. According to U.S. Census Bureau data (2011), 69% of citizens 65 and older voted in the 2004 presidential election, compared with 41% of 18 to 20-year olds. And 74% of citizens with a bachelor's degree or higher went to the polls in 2004, compared to 35% of those without a high school diploma (p. 246). Further, Republicans and Democrats have been relatively equally represented at the polls every year since 1984 (p. 248).

The sampling issues are mitigated, however, because the survey was analytical in nature and sought to establish relationships between variables rather than to describe a population. So although a representative sample is ideal, the findings in this study still provide meaningful insight into how the variables of interest are related. Further, most of the analyses controlled for political and demographic variables that might have skewed the results if uncontrolled for in the sample. RQ1 and RQ2 controlled for general political news use and political participation, and RQ3 controlled for demographic variables. Therefore, the relationships between partisan media exposure and knowledge likely are reflective of real connections that exist in the general population.

Finally, it should be noted that the data is limited by the year in which it was collected, 2012, a presidential election year. Attention to political news was presumably increased and engagement in political communication on the rise. While the timing may have been beneficial to the study, for instance by generating increased interest in a political survey, the findings must be viewed through this limitation.

Contributions and Suggestions for Future Study

Future studies should attempt to improve upon the limitations listed above. Suggestions include repeating the study using a sample more representative of the American electorate and

during a period not characterized by increased interest in the political landscape. It would be beneficial to consider additional media outlets for inclusion in the measures of partisan media that could perhaps offer a more equivalent comparison of liberal and conservative media. That being said, this study's findings make several theoretical and practical contributions to the research fields of political knowledge and partisan media. Suggestions on how these findings can be explored further are discussed here.

Researchers have been flirting with the connection between political knowledge and partisan media exposure for quite some time. Genre selective exposure to news content over entertainment has been found to increase political knowledge (Prior, 2005), as has increased personal political communication (Eveland et al., 2005). And partisan selective exposure has been shown to increase audiences' adherence to false beliefs (Nyhan, 2010), which likely contributes to political knowledge. But prior to this study, the common assumption was a link between ideology and political knowledge (Barabas & Jerit, 2010; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). This study establishes a definite link between political knowledge and partisan media—a link that remains strong and consistent through multiple statistical analyses and various measures of partisan media exposure. By taking into account the numerous studies in existing literature declaring a link between ideology and partisan media exposure (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2007), this study may successfully close the gap between these three constructs.

As previously mentioned, further investigation is warranted into the possibility of the three-part causal relationship proposed here in which ideology drives partisan media exposure, which in turn predicts political knowledge. The data analysis used in this study does not allow for the full model testing necessary to observe such a relationship, unfortunately. Future research should attempt to examine the true causal path of the relationship using structural equation

modeling (SEM). This technique allows for the study of complex relationships among multiple constructs, even those that are hypothetical or unobserved (Kaplan, 2004). Further, causal effects of exposure to partisan media on political knowledge could be explored in a quasi-experimental study in which participants are assigned to watch certain media outlets over a set period and then knowledge on current events is tested. This type of design would help establish the causal link that is elusive when examining survey data.

A secondary contribution of this study is the guidance for researchers seeking to measure fragmented knowledge. Because an existing, reliable measure of ideologically based political knowledge was not available, the researcher constructed her own scales. Although a pretest was used to carefully establish a scale for liberal and conservative knowledge, the validity of the measures must be verified in future studies. Because the knowledge questions used by this study addressed only national issues, and most from a timely angle, further studies could incorporate local issues and events. Also, because this study's pretest was administered to college students, a sample not representative of its population of interest, heightened diversity should be sought when further testing these measures. It should be noted, however, that Democrats and Republicans in the actual sample for the online survey did differentiate on knowledge in the same way as the pretest respondents, bolstering the case that this measure likely was valid at least in part.

Finally, in light of the relationship established between partisan media use and political knowledge across the ideological spectrum, further study into the implications of ideologically fragmented political knowledge on the responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society is warranted. In particular, the effect of this type of partisan media exposure on political efficacy and political alienation are areas ripe for more research.

Conclusion

There have long been concerns among researchers about the effects of an unequally informed citizenry. Calling knowledge "an instrumental good that helps to enlighten one's self-interest and translate it into effective political action" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 218), many experts on the subject believe political knowledge to be a crucial component of democracy. "A broadly and equitably informed citizenry assures that the public will is determined fairly and that government action is viewed as legitimate" (p. 218). This study establishes a firm link between partisan selective exposure and different types of ideological political knowledge, a relationship only hypothetical in previous literature. The implications of the findings hearken back to Sunstein's the Daily Me (2001) and call into question the future of participatory democracy in an era of fragmented knowledge.

Some value can be ascribed to the growing trend of partisan media. Several researchers have suggested that exposure to likeminded news sources can actually promote participatory democracy by encouraging participation among citizens who might otherwise remain unengaged from the political process (Stroud, 2006; Dilliplane, 2011). As Dilliplane explained, "a partisan lens may thus encourage people to see politics as more relevant to their lives and, as a result, foster greater participation in politics" (p. 24). And this study did find that partisan selective exposure is linked to increased knowledge in certain areas—namely exposure to liberal media leading to more knowledge of liberal and nonpartisan issues.

Of course, just as documented in the literature is partisan media's promotion of audience polarization (Lord, 1979; Stroud, 2010), which Stroud warned, "may engender a less tolerant and more fragmented public" (p. 571). Such warnings are personified in the extreme fragmentation, uncivil discourse, and dissipating collective knowledge that characterized Sunstein's dystopian

vision, and which the author said carried "large lessons about some neglected requirements of democratic self-government" (p. 192).

Certainly both sides make a sound argument, and this study is not intended to pass judgment on the inherent value or harm of the partisan media on the future of participatory democracy. However, with news audiences' choice of ideology ever expanding and in light of the strength of the study's findings on the relationship between partisan media and political knowledge, it is important to understand the role today's increasingly fragmented media play in the fragmented knowledge of the American electorate.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Instrument

Political News Media Survey

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Thank you for agreeing to share your opinions.

Brooke Carbo of the University of Alabama is conducting a study on the political news media. It will take about 10 minutes to complete this survey. You will answer questions about political media use, consistency of media coverage, political participation, and demographics. Your answers are confidential. Your information will be stored on a secure server and no identifying information about you or your computer is being gathered. Only summarized data will be presented at meetings or in publications.

There are no benefits to you for particpating in this study, and the anticipated risks of participating are no greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the investigator at tbcarbo@crimson.ua.edu or you may contact her adviser, Dr. Jennifer Greer at jdgreer@ua.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Ms. Tanta Myles (the University Compliance Officer) at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. If you have complaints or concerns about this study, file them through the UA IRB outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY. You are free not to participate or stop participating any time before you submit your answers. You may also skip answers if you chose not to answer a quesiton.

If you understand the statements above, are at least 18 years old, and freely consent to be in this study, click on the NEXT button to begin.

Page 1

Political News Media Survey

How often do you follow each of the following news topics? (Check one button for each row).

News can be any information about the topic and can come from any source. This can include traditional outlets like newspapers, television, and radio as well as talk show hosts, blogs, search engines, messages from candidates, political ads, documentaries, books and magazines, social media, etc.

	Never	Once a Month or Less	Several Times a Month	About Once a Week	Several Times a Week	Daily	Several Times a Day
Political news	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
News about the federal government	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
News about your state/local government	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
News about the upcoming presidential election	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
News about your upcoming state/local elections	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The following question refers to your participation in politics and government elections during both the current campaign season and past elections. Check all that apply

- ☐ I voted in the last presidential election
- ☐ I voted in the last local/state election
- ☐ I plan to vote in the upcoming election
- ☐ I have displayed my support for a candidate or party (political sign, bumper sticker, button, a Wall post on Facebook)
- ☐ I have contributed money to a party or a candidate's campaign
- ☐ I have served as a volunteer for a party or a candidate's campaign

Political News Media Survey

How often do you get news or information from each of the following news outlets? (Check one button per row)

Remember that many news outlets distribute content through more than one medium. For example, you may get news from CNN by watching the CNN television network or by going on their website, CNN.com.

	Never	Once a Month or Less	Several Times a Month	About Once a Week	Several Times a Week	Daily	Several Times a Day
Local Newspaper	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
MSNBC	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The New York Times	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
CNN	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
NPR (National Public Radio)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The Wall Street Journal	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Local TV News	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
USA Today	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Network News (CBS, ABC, NBC)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Fox News Network	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The Huffington Post	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

How often do you get news or information from each of the following news personalities? (Check one button per row)

Remember that many news personalities distribute content through more than one medium. For example, you may get news from Sean Hannity by watching his TV show on Fox News, listening to his radio program, reading one of the books he has written, or by going on his website, Hannity.com.

	Never	Once a Month or Less	Several Times a Month	About Once a Week	Several Times a Week	Daily	Several Times a Day
Rush Limbaugh	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Bill O'Reilly	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Rachel Maddow	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sean Hannity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jon Stewart	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Chris Matthews	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please help us determine the consistency of news coverage in the media by answering the following questions about U.S politics and current events. It's OK if you do not know the correct answer. Just choose what you think is the best response or select *Don't Know*.

Political News Media Survey

How many terms of office can the American president serve?

○ Unlimited ○ Two ○ One ○ Don't know

What are members of the Occupy Wall Street movement protesting against?

○ Republicans ○ Corprate America ○ Illegal immigration ○ Don't know

Who is the current Speaker of the House?

○ John Boehner ○ Eric Cantor ○ Nancy Pelosi ○ Don't know

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the obesity rate of Americans is closer to...

○ 50% ○ 33% ○ 25% ○ Don't know

Which nation sent the most money to bail out European countries facing severe debt problems?

○ United States ○ Germany ○ Greece ○ Don't know

Which institution is responsible for determining whether a law is constitutional?

○ President ○ Congress ○ Supreme Court ○ Don't know

Abortions make up ___% of health services provided by Planned Parenthood.

○ 3% ○ 9% ○ 18% ○ Don't know

How successful have opposition groups been in bringing down the Syrian regime?

○ Regime is no longer in power ○ Regime has been run out of some areas of the country ○ Opposition groups have had no effect on regime's power ○ Don't know

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allowed unemployment benefits to be extended for how long?

○ 52 weeks ○ 26 weeks ○ 99 weeks ○ Don't know

Political News Media Survey

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution DOES NOT protect...

- ○ freedom of the press
- ○ against unreasonable search and seizure
- ○ the right to peaceably assemble
- ○ Don't know

What are the only two areas of the country that prohibit individual citizens from carrying concealed weapons?

- ○ Illinois and Washington D.C.
- ○ Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico
- ○ Puerto Rico and Illinois
- ○ Don't know

If the president vetoes a bill passed by Congress, Congress can vote to override that veto.

- ○ True
- ○ False
- ○ Only for budget issues
- ○ Don't know

We would like to know how you compare with the other respondents to this survey. Please tell us a little more about yourself by answering the following questions. Remember that your answers are confidential.

Are you male or female?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female

In what year were you born? (enter 4-digit birth year; for example, 1976)

Which phrase most closely describes your political views?

- ○ Very Liberal
- ○ Liberal
- ○ Moderate
- ○ Conservative
- ○ Very Conservative

Which political party do you most often support in national elections?

- ○ Democrat
- ○ Independent
- ○ Republican
- ○ Other
- ○ Don't Know

Political News Media Survey

Which region of the country do you live in?

- Northeast
- Mid-Atlantic
- North
- South
- Midwest
- West
- I do not live in the United States

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

Are you White, Black or African-American, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander, or some other race?

- White
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- From multiple races

What is your household's level of income?

- Less than $20,000
- $20,000 to $39,999
- $40,000 to $59,999
- $60,000 to $79,999
- $80,000 to $99,999
- $100,000+

Political News Media Survey

Which of the following platforms/organizations do you support? Check all that apply

- ☐ ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)
- ☐ Universal healthcare
- ☐ Tea Party movement
- ☐ Green Party
- ☐ NRA (National Rifle Association)
- ☐ Ban on same-sex marriage
- ☐ Legalization of marijuana
- ☐ Occupy Wall Street
- ☐ Ban on abortion
- ☐ Libertarian Party

Thank you for participating in this survey sponsored by the University of Alabama. Your responses will help us better understand the role of the political news media. Please consider passing the link to this survey on to your friends, family and members of your social network who might be interested in participating. Thank you!

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Materials

1. First Recruitment Email:

Dear (NAME),

I am a student at the University of Alabama conducting an online survey on the news media, political behaviors (such as voting) and political knowledge. I am inviting you to participate in this survey, which will take about 10 minutes to complete. Your responses to this survey will help us understand how Americans use political news.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may stop at any time. The information you submit will go to a secure server that does not collect any information about the sending computer. The survey also does not ask for any information that could identify you. Therefore, your responses are confidential. Further, your responses will be aggregated with others' responses and no individual answers will be reported in any published materials.

You must be 18 years of age to participate.

To begin this survey, please follow this link:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/politicsandmediasurvey

Please also consider passing this e-mail along to your friends who might be interested in participating. I'd like to reach as wide a population as possible.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at tbcarbo@crimson.ua.edu. You may also contact my adviser, Dr. Jennifer Greer at (205) 348-6304. For questions regarding research participants' rights, please contact The University of Alabama Research Compliance Office at (205) 348-8461 or toll free at
1-877-820-3066.

Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful responses!

Sincerely,

Brooke Carbo
MA Candidate, Department of Journalism
The University of Alabama
tbcarbo@crimson.ua.edu

2. Second Recruitment Email:

Dear (NAME),

Two weeks ago, I emailed you asking for your participation in an online survey I am conducting at the University of Alabama on political news media.

If you have already taken this survey, thank you very much.

If you have not yet completed the survey, please consider doing so at this time. Your responses will help us understand how Americans use political news.

As I said in my last email, your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may stop at any time. Your answers will be only reported in aggregate form and the information you provide will not be linked to you in any way.

You must be 18 years of age to participate.

To begin this survey, please follow this link:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/politicsandmediasurvey

It should take about 10 minutes for you to complete.

Please also consider passing this e-mail along to your friends who might be interested in participating. I'd like to reach as wide a population as possible.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at tbcarbo@crimson.ua.edu or contact my adviser, Dr. Jennifer Greer at 205-348-6304. For questions regarding research participants' rights, please contact The University of Alabama Research Compliance Office at 205-348-8461 or toll free at 1-877-820-3066.

Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful responses!

Sincerely,

Brooke Carbo
MA Candidate, Department of Journalism
The University of Alabama
tbcarbo@crimson.ua.edu

3. Wall Post for Recruitment on Facebook:
I'm researching political news media, and I'm hoping you will help me by completing a short survey. Full details about the study are on the first page of the survey. Please follow this link to a 10 min. survey and tell me how you use political news so we can better understand media in the political process. Also consider reposting this link for your friends and followers as I'd like to reach as wide a population as possible. Thank you!
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/politicsandmediasurvey

4. Tweet for Recruitment on Twitter:
How do you use political news? Share your opinion in a survey I'm conducting at UA. Full details here: http://goo.gl/DJZla Please RT!

APPENDIX C

Pretest Knowledge Questions Chi-square Data

Nonpartisan Knowledge Questions

	% Correct			
	Dems	Reps	X^2	Action taken
Which government institution is responsible for determining whether a law is constitutional?	26.7%	40.5%	0.87	Retained—conservative
There are concerns about Israel bombing…?	46.7%	27%	1.87	Rejected
Which state did U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords represent before resigning following an assignation attempt in which she was shot in the head?	60%	40.5%	1.63	Rejected
Who is the current Speaker of the House?	26.7%	18.9%	0.38	Retained—nonpartisan
How many terms of office can the American president serve?	93.3%	94.6%	0.03	Retained—nonpartisan
Fill in the Blank: The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution DOES NOT protect_____.	80%	75.7%	0.11	Retained—nonpartisan
True or False: If the president vetoes a bill passed by Congress, Congress can vote to override that veto.	80%	56.8%	2.49	Retained w/ revisions—nonpartisan

Liberal Knowledge Questions

	% Correct			
	Dem	Rep	X^2	Action taken
What are members of Occupy Wall Street protesting against?	73.3%	89.2%	2.06	Retained—conservative
Approximately how many Americans do not have health insurance?	46.7%	32.4%	0.93	Rejected
True or False: Opposition groups in Syria have been successful in bringing down the current regime.	73.3%	64.9%	0.35	Retained w/ revisions—liberal
In which state did voters recently vote to legalize same-sex marriage?	26.7%	21.6%	0.15	Rejected
Which nation sent the most money to bail out European countries facing severe debt problems?	26.7%	10.8%	2.06	Retained—liberal
According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the obesity rate of Americans is closer to…?	53.3%	27%	3.26	Retained—liberal
Fill in the Blank: Abortions make up ___% of health services provided by Planned Parenthood.	26.7%	5.4%	4.73	Retained—liberal

Conservative Knowledge Questions

	% Correct			
	Dem	Reps	X^2	Action taken
Which Republican candidate opposes U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan?	40%	24.3%	1.28	Rejected
The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allowed unemployment benefits to be extended for how long?	0.0%	10.8%	1.76	Retained—conservative
The federal government has challenged state legislation in Arizona and Alabama regarding what issue?	86.7%	73%	1.13	Rejected
True or False: Illinois is the only state that prohibits individual citizens from carrying concealed weapons.	33.3%	24.3%	0.44	Retained w/ revisions—conservative
A federal lawsuit filed in Montana in February focuses on…?	26.7%	21.6%	0.15	Rejected
Fill in the Blank: Operation Fast and Furious involved smuggling stolen _____.	13.3%	21.6%	0.47	Rejected
Solar panel maker Solyndra LLC has been in the news recently because it…?	33.3%	16.2%	1.88	Rejected

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval

Office for Research

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA RESEARCH

March 9, 2012

Tracey Carbo
Department of Journalism
College of Communication & Information Sciences
Box 870172

Re: IRB # 12-OR-096, "The Relationship Between Partisan Selective Exposure to Political Media and the Political Knowledge of the American Electorate"

Dear Ms. Carbo:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on March 7, 2013. If the study continues beyond that date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this application, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Signature Removed

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