MEDIA BIAS AND PUBLIC OPINION

by

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Abstract

This research focuses specifically on media outlets that are considered to be biased and partisan such as Fox News and MSNBC. Understanding how media might affect public opinion is important because it helps us understand how political opinions are formed. With the increasing amount of biased media, especially since around the time of the 2016 presidential campaign, individuals are subject to being persuaded by the media they consume. This research examines these questions because those with strong party identities are less likely to be persuaded by the media. Conversely, those with weaker party attachments might be more easily persuaded. Results show that there are significant relationships between viewing partisan media and that influencing the opinion of presidential candidates. There is not a significant relationship between opinions of presidential candidates and then selecting partisan media

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Introduction

Does being exposed to partisan media lead to partisan attitudes? Individuals consume various types of media, including partisan news channels such as Fox News and MSNBC as well as other biased media outlets. Are individual viewpoints altered based on the various media exposure and the people around them?

This research focuses specifically on media outlets that are considered to be biased and partisan such as Fox News and MSNBC. Understanding how media might affect public opinion is important because it helps us understand how political opinions are formed. With the increasing amount of biased media, especially since around the time of the 2016 presidential campaign, individuals are subject to being persuaded by the media they consume. This research examines these questions because those with strong party identities are less likely to be persuaded by the media. Conversely, those with weaker party attachments might be more easily persuaded.

In the next section, I will discuss relevant literature and state my hypotheses. Following that, the methods section will discuss the variables used to test my hypotheses as well as the way in which they were coded. Finally, I will discuss my findings from the data.

Review

The media are often expected to remain neutral and unbiased when discussing news and presidential candidates. In recent years, media outlets have become more polarized, leading to more bias. One scholar researched the amount of priming and framing in each of the four major media outlets from 1997-2007. These were ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox News with the research focusing on coverage of approval polls of the president (Groeling 2008). By testing the same story across all four outlets, researchers were able to see the ways in which they differ.

The researcher concluded there was a considerable amount of bias in all of these networks. The scholar also concluded that the influence of major networks is much stronger than local networks. The results showed that ABC, CBS, and NBC all had favorable coverage of Bill Clinton, a Democrat. The same three outlets showed unfavorable coverage for George W. Bush, a Republican. Thus, they had a left-leaning bias. MSNBC was created as a left-leaning outlet in contrast to Fox News. Only Fox News, a conservative-leaning outlet, had favorable coverage for Bush (Groeling 2008). Thus, Fox News had a right-leaning bias.

With this increase in biased media, there is a greater possibility that the media will persuade public opinion. Some scholars suggest that people's beliefs are influenced by the media they consume. For example, scholars agree that viewing political humor moves attitudes in a message consistent direction (Baumgartner 2018). Several studies have discussed this theory. One study researched the effects of Tina Fey's impersonation of the 2008 Republican vice-presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, on *Saturday Night Live*. Results concluded that viewing the impersonation of Sarah Palin led to a change in attitudes towards her as a vice presidential candidate and vote choice. The effects were seen the most in Independents and Republicans

(Baumgartner, Morris and Walth 2012). Another study also researched the effects of political humor on television through jokes made on *The Daily Show*. This study researched the effects on candidate evaluation by showing respondents jokes about George W. Bush and John Kerry during the 2004 presidential election. There was a negative effect on candidate evaluations for both candidates regardless of demographic or ideology (Baumgartner and Morris 2006).

A similar study was conducted where participants were shown four animated video clips that criticized candidates at the end of the 2008 presidential elections. This also led to a negative effect on candidate evaluations. Results showed that viewing the clips primed the viewers to have a negative view of the candidates featured. Participants were found to have a lower evaluation of public officials, government and the news than those that did not participate in the study (Baumgartner 2013). Editorial cartoons of presidential candidates were also used in a 2008 study to research the same notion. Results showed that viewing such cartoons led to negative evaluations of the presidential candidates (Baumgartner 2008). These studies all show that viewing partisan media can affect candidate evaluations.

There are various theories attempting to explain or account for the idea that media can affect attitudes. The first is priming. This theory explains how media outlets choose the news they wish to publish in order to influence an individual's evaluation of an issue or candidate. With priming, outlets will select news that fits their agenda, and will also focus on certain issues in the news but not others (McCombs et al. 2011). Priming moves individuals to make comparisons and view some issues as more important than others (Domke, David, Dhavan V. Shah, and Daniel B. Wackman 1998).

Priming can also be defined as the changes that occur in the guideline's individuals use to evaluate politics. One scholar argues that by the media paying more attention to certain stories

than others, they are influencing the political standards an individual may have (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). This can be viewpoints on policy and legislation or candidate evaluation. Priming has a bigger effect on those that consider themselves to be less politically knowledgeable (Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

Some state that there are two main issues usually affected by priming in political coverage. The first is violence and war (Roskos-Ewoldsen, David, Marks Klinger, and Beverly Roskos-Ewoldsen 2011). For example, Fox News may only choose to publish news about the Iraq War that is positive for conservatives in office rather than negative (McCombs et al. 2011). This leads to a one-sided view on an issue that can eventually condition a viewer to believe only what the media outlet is saying rather than the full story (McCombs et al. 2011).

The second issue affected by priming is the coverage of the president and candidates (Roskos-Ewoldsen, David, Marks Klinger, and Beverly Roskos-Ewoldsen 2011). One scholar states that a candidate's electoral success or failure is partially caused by the media coverage they receive. Certain media outlets give candidates more favorable coverage than others. For example, Fox News shows conservative candidates more favorably than it does liberal candidates. MSNBC shows liberal candidates more favorably than conservative candidates. If an individual only watches one outlet, they may only be getting one perspective of the candidate. (Dewenter, Ralf, Melissa Linder, and Tobias Thomas 2018).

Framing explains the way media outlets publish news in order to fit their agenda. Much like priming, the news an outlet chooses to publish may be factual, but it may be missing details or presented in a different way (McCombs et al. 2011). Media outlets often coordinate what details about candidates and campaigns they want their viewers to see. This ultimately alters the perception an individual may have of a candidate or policy issue (Luo 2017; Larcinese,

Valentino, Riccardo Puglisi and James M. Snyder 2011). For example, a liberal-leaning newspaper may write more stories on the increase in the unemployment rate if there is a Republican president but may not give as much coverage when the president is a Democrat (Larcinese, Valentino, Riccardo Puglisi and James M. Snyder 2011). On the other hand, a conservative-leaning newspaper may write more stories on the Republican candidate and discuss their platform more than the Democratic candidate (Luo 2017). With framing, the story or candidate is discussed with a certain narrative in order to better fit their view on the issue (McCombs et al. 2011). For example, during the Iraq War, Fox News focused on being pro-military and pro-war while leaving out details that could have led an individual to oppose the war (McCombs et al. 2011).

Some suggest that because of the increase in framing in the media, there has been a decrease in the amount of similarity on the news (Morris 2007). Many outlets have either grown to become partisan in recent years or were started on partisan foundations. Fox News, a conservative-leaning network channel, did not exist until 1996. MSNBC, a liberal-leaning network channel, was also created in 1996. These were both created with partisan intentions in mind (DellaViga and Kaplan 2007). Because of this decrease in the similarity between the networks, political polarization and media bias have become more and more apparent (Morris 2007).

Many scholars have researched biased media and the effects it has on voting behavior. One study, focusing on the priming theory, showed the effects of the conservative-leaning Fox News media outlet being introduced into small towns before the 2000 presidential election (DellaViga and Kaplan 2007). This was done in order to see if Fox News would cause viewers to vote Republican than before Fox News was introduced. The researcher's hypothesis was correct.

The data showed an increase in votes for the Republican party from the 1996 presidential election, which was before Fox News was introduced, to the 2000 presidential election which was after it was introduced. Votes for Republicans in these small towns where Fox News was introduced increased by about five percent (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007). There was also an increase in votes for the Republican party in the Senate race. Researchers suggest that the increase in votes was because of the editorial slant of Fox News as well as Fox News showing viewers what they wanted their viewers to see (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007; Eberl, Jakob-Moritz, Haio G. Boomgarden, and Markus Wagner 2015). This shows biased media can persuade voters to vote in their favor (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007).

A similar experiment was conducted in order to show the effects of framing. In this study, randomly selected citizens of Virginia were given free subscriptions to newspapers before that states' 2005 gubernatorial election. One group was given a subscription to the liberal-leaning *Washington Post*. Another group was subscribed to the conservative-leaning *Washington Times*. Finally, the last group was not given a subscription, and so they read neither newspaper. Researchers found that there was an increase in support for the Democratic candidate regardless of whether voters were given a subscription to the *Washington Post* or *Washington Times* (Gerber, Alan and Donald Gree 2009). The researchers believe this happened because those subscribed to the *Washington Times* were more likely to be liberal-leaning and receiving a newspaper from an opposing opinion led them to strengthen their beliefs. Those who received neither newspaper did not show any increases for a particular party (Gerber, Alan and Donald Gree 2009). This shows biased media has an effect on the way citizens vote.

Other scholars' research focuses on the effect framing and editorial slant have on voting through Election Day exit polls during the 2000 Minnesota Senate race (Druckman 2005;

Druckman and Parkin 2005). The researchers randomly selected polling places in the Minneapolis- Saint Paul metropolitan area and asked every third voter a series of questions in exchange for $3. The questions asked whether or not the respondent read or watched various media outlets and how often. This was particularly important because one scholar stated that the effect of media bias is stronger for those who read the newspaper rather than those receiving the same coverage on the television news (Druckman 2005) The interview also had questions that could be factors in influences an individual's candidate evaluation. This included their views on certain issues such as taxes and health care. The research showed the media the respondents watched was an influence on their vote choice. The researchers also found the endorsement of one candidate from their preferred media outlet weighed heavily on their decision for whom to cast their vote for (Druckman and Parkin 2005).

Some scholars argue the effects of media may be stronger on younger people. This is because younger people are more impressionable than older generations (Turcotte et al. 2015; Hoffner 2011). One scholar found that an increase in exposure to higher levels of political communication while young, can lead to high socialization gains (Valentino 1998). Younger generations consume more media than most older individuals. Thus, their likelihood of being persuaded is much higher (Dunne, Aine, Margaret-Anne Lawlor, and Jennifer Rowley 2010). This only serves to emphasize the importance of this research, inasmuch most political beliefs are formed in one's youth.

The preceding discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Individuals who view conservative media will be more likely to have positive opinions of Republican political candidates.

H2: Individuals who view liberal media will be more likely to have positive opinions of Democratic political candidates.

The preceding discussion assumes the relationship between media viewership and attitudes is one directional and the media shapes public opinion. However, it might be the case that causation between these two variables goes in the other direction. In other words, political views may shape opinions of media outlets and the selection of news. This is especially true with the rise of social media. Specifically, people are now able to access a wider variety of news. This now often occurs on social media. Once an individual finds news they agree with, they are more likely to start following that outlet more closely. Individuals will begin to choose the media they agree with rather than media with opposing views.

Unlike the previous theory, the uses and gratifications theory suggest people select media according to how well it fits with their existing beliefs. There are four main concepts to explain the patterns of selective behavior. Selective exposure is the first of the four concepts that explain patterns of selective behavior. This concept explains why individuals chose the media they want to consume. Scholars write that individuals are more likely to choose media that fits into their perspective and political beliefs rather than media that may oppose it (McCombs et al. 2011; Stroud 2008). Individuals are highly selective in the media they choose. They will rarely select media that opposes their beliefs (Iydenar and Kinder 1987). Selective exposure has led to an increase in partisan media (Stroud 2008).

Selective attention is the second concept. Besides choosing what media to consume, individuals also choose media to which they pay more attention (McCombs et al. 2011). Scholars write that one may turn on the news or glance at an article but may not remember the information since it is impossible to pay attention to everything (Iyendar and Kinder 1987; McCombs et al.

2011). Selective attention leads to a bottleneck effect where individuals are not receiving all available information but instead what is filtered through the 'top of the bottle' (McCombs et al. 2011). Unless the individual is paying specific attention to the news and not multitasking, they will not remember the information. This can negatively affect the way one evaluates candidates because they could potentially be missing information that could change their view.

Selective retention is the third concept used to explain patterns of selective behavior. Scholars write that individuals are more likely to retain information from the news that is strengthening their beliefs rather than opposing them (McCombs et al. 2011). For example, a conservative will be more likely to choose Fox News rather than MSNBC and they will retain the information learned from Fox News more than they would from MSNBC. One scholar says that congruency bias is an aspect of selective retention. Congruency bias is when an individual remembers more positive information about their preferred candidate than negative information. The individual will also remember more negative information about the opponent rather than positive information (Meffert et al. 2006). This is because the information is reinforcing their beliefs.

Selective perception is the fourth concept. This final concept explains how individuals perceive information differently than others (McCombs et al. 2011). Some media may reinforce an individual's beliefs while it opposes another's. No two individuals will have the same view on all media. There are even disagreements about the news in each party. Selective perception also states that individuals will ignore media that opposes their point of view. Because of this, their beliefs are being strengthened and no negative information about their preferred candidate is seen. Individuals also receive more misinformation. This leads to a higher negative evaluation of

candidates they oppose and a higher positive evaluation of candidates they support (McCombs et al. 2011).

In short, uses and gratifications suggest that what people believe determines what they watch.

The preceding discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

H3: Republicans will be more likely to view conservative media.

H4: Democrats will be more likely to view liberal media.

Methodology

This research utilizes 2012 and 2016 American National Election Survey (ANES) data. The American National Election Survey has been conducted before and after every presidential election since 1948 in partnership with the University of Michigan and Stanford University. It is considered the gold standard by political scientists in the study of political behavior.

For the first set of analyses, which tests H1 and H2, my dependent variables will be the pre-election and post-election feeling thermometer scores for both the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates. In 2012, these candidates were Democrat Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney. In 2016, they included Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump. These variables measure the respondents' evaluation of the candidates on a scale of 0-100, with 0 being least favorable and 100 being most favorable. These same variables also serve as the primary independent variables in the analyses that test H3 and H4.

The primary independent variables used to test H1 and H2 were viewership of various cable television programs. In 2012, these included the liberal-leaning *Chris Matthews Show* (MSNBC) and the conservative *Hannity* and *The O'Reilly Factor* (Fox News). In 2016, the programs used were the liberal *Hardball with Chris Matthews* and *The Rachel Maddow Show* (MSNBC) and the conservative *Hannity* and *The O'Reilly Factor* (Fox News). All of these variables were coded as dummy variables, where 1=the viewer indicated they watched the program and 0=indicated they did not. In the analysis of H3 and H4, these variables will be used as dependent variables.

Other independent variables used in all tests of my hypotheses include education, gender, race, age, attention to the news, party identification, and ideological self-placement. Education was originally measured as a 16-point scale, ranging from 1= no education to 16=doctorate

degree. It was recoded into 1=high school or less, 2=some college, 3=bachelor's degree, and 4=graduate and beyond. Gender was originally measured as 1=male and 2=female and was recoded as 0=male and 1=female. Race was originally measured as 1=White, 2=Black, 3=American Indian or Alaska Native, 4=Asian, 5=Pacific Islander or Hawaiian and 95=other and was recoded to 1=white and 0=other. The respondents' age was used as entered. Finally, the attention to political news variable was originally measured with lower values representing more attention (1=always to 5=never). This was recoded to be more easily interpreted, where 1=never, 2=some of the time, 3=about half of the time, 4=most of the time, and 5=always.

Party identification was originally coded as 1=strong Democrat, 2=not very strong Democrat, 3=Independent-Democrat, 4=Independent, 5=Independent-Republican, 6=not very strong Republican, 7=strong Republican. I recoded party identification into two separate variables in order to better test each party. The first was to represent Democrats where 1-3 was represented by 1=Democrat and 4-7 was represented by 0=all else. The second was to represent Republicans. 1-4 was represented by 1=Republican and 5-7 were represented by 0=all else. Ideological self-placement was measured as 1= extremely liberal, 2= liberal, 3=slightly liberal, 4=moderate, 5=slightly conservative, 6=conservative, and 7=extremely conservative.

Findings

Tables 1 through 6 present the results of the analysis testing H1 and H2. Tables 1 and 2 show results for the 2012 election while 3 through 6 show results for the 2016 election. In each case, the dependent variables are feeling thermometer scores for the Republican presidential candidate and the Democratic presidential candidate before and after the election. Because these thermometer scores are measured on a score of 0-100, ordinary least squares regression was used.

Table 1 presents the findings using the viewership of *Hannity* as the primary independent variable. Results show there is a significant relationship between viewing *Hannity* and the thermometer scores. *Hannity* viewers were more likely to have a negative opinion of Barack Obama and a positive view of Mitt Romney both before and after the election. This is consistent with expectations. *Hannity* is a right-leaning program, so, we would expect there to be a more favorable opinion of the Republican candidate than the Democratic candidate. Partisanship and ideology had a significant relationship in each model. Race also had a significant relationship with each thermometer score. Gender showed a significant relationship in each model except for the pre-election thermometer scores of Barack Obama.

Table 1. Thermometer Scores of Pres. Candidates by *Hannity* Viewership (2012)

	Pre-therm DPC	*Pre-therm RPC*	*Post-therm DPC*	*Post-therm RPC*
Hannity	-3.05 (1.44)*	4.53 (1.41) ***	-3.47 (1.74)*	4.32 (1.64)**
Ideology	-3.86 (4.5)***	3.90 (.46) ***	-4.46 (.56)***	4.47 (.53)***
Democrat	21.22 (2.42)***	-11.94 (2.38)***	12.95 (2.92)***	-8.83 (2.76)***
Republican	-15.93 (2.51)***	20.92 (2.47)***	-20.05 (3.03)***	15.89 (2.86)***
Gender	1.75 (1.21)	-2.61 (1.19)*	4.06 (1.46)**	.76 (1.38)***
Race	-15.93 (1.45)***	5.55 (1.43)***	-14.45 (1.75)***	5.65 (1.66)***
Age	-.07 (.17)	.16 (.17)	-.03 (.21)	.12 (1.9)
Education	.09 (.62)	-.18 (.61)	.21 (.75)	.70 (.71)
Attn. pol. news	-.22 (.56)	-.14 (.55)	.60 (.68)	.06 (.64)
N	5914	5914	5914	5914
R^2	.56	.49	.44	.33

Cell values are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses
***p≤ .001, **p≤ .01, *p≤.05

Table 2 shows each of the thermometer scores with the viewership of the conservative *The O'Reilly Factor*. Like previous analysis, the data shows that there is a significant relationship between watching *The O'Reilly Factor* and a positive view of Mitt Romney before and after the election. However, there was no significant relationship between watching *The O'Reilly Factor* and opinions of Barack Obama. This table shows that viewing conservative media relates to having a favorable opinion of conservative candidates. Partisanship and ideology again were also significant in this mode. Race had a significant relationship with each of the thermometer scores. The gender variable only showed a significant relationship with the pre-election opinion of Mitt Romney and the post-election opinion of Barack Obama.

Table 2. Thermometer Scores of Pres. Candidates by *O'Reilly* Viewership (2012)

	Pre-therm DPC	*Pre-therm RPC*	*Post-therm DPC*	*Post-therm RPC*
O'Reilly	-2.38 (1.29)	4.20 (1.27)***	-2.67 (1.56)	4.04 (1.47) **
Ideology	-3.87 (.46)***	3.91 (.46)***	-4.47 (1.56)***	4.48 (.53)***
Democrat	21.18 (2.42)***	-11.95 (2.38)***	12.90 (2.92)***	-8.84 (2.76)***
Republican	-15.93 (1.445)***	20.88 (2.47)***	-20.16 (3.03)***	15.84 (2.86)***
Gender	1.70 (1.21)	-2.53 (1.19)*	4.0 (1.46)**	.84 (1.38)
Race	-15.93 (1.45)***	5.56 (1.43)***	-14.45 (1.75)***	5.66 (1.66)***
Age	-.08 (.17)	.17 (.17)	-.05 (.20)	.13 (.64)
Education	.06 (.62)	-.14 (.61)	.18 (.75)	.74 (.71)
Attn. pol. news	-.21(.56)	-.19 (.55)	.60 (.68)	.01 (.64)
N	5914	5914	5914	5914
R^2	.56	.48	.44	.34

Cell values are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses
***p≤ .001, **p≤ .01, *p≤.05

These results suggest that there is an association between viewership of conservative television programming and the evaluation of presidential candidates for conservative media. However, no relationship was found between viewership of liberal television programming and evaluations of presidential candidates in 2012 (tables not shown).

Table 3 shows the findings for *Hannity* viewership in 2016 as the primary independent variable. Only the pre-election thermometer score for Mitt Romney showed a significant relationship with the viewership of this program. This also shows that viewing partisan media can have an effect on the opinions of candidates. Ideology and partisanship all showed a significant relationship except for Republicans with the post-election thermometer of Barack Obama showing a weaker significant relationship. Race and education did not have a significant relationship in the previous analysis but did have a relationship now. Race had a strong significant relationship with all variables. Education also had a significant relationship with all variables.

Table 3. Thermometer Scores of Pres. Candidates by *Hannity* Viewership (2016)

	Pre-therm DPC	*Pre-therm RPC*	*Post-therm DPC*	*Post-therm RPC*
Hannity	-.12 (.50)	1.53 (.51)*	-.01 (.55)	.81 (.59)
Ideology	-5.30 (.45)***	5.59 (.46)***	-4.96 (.50)***	4.80 (.53)***
Democrat	27.43 (1.80)***	-15.60 (1.87)***	27.18 (2.00)***	-12.74 (2.14)***
Republican	-10.13 (1.83)***	21.31 (1.90)***	-5.83 (2.03)*	18.42 (2.17)***
Gender	1.91 (1.05)	-1.50 (1.09)	1.55 (1.16)	-2.91 (1.24)*
Race	-11.83 (1.24)***	8.03 (1.28)***	-9.44 (1.37)***	6.10 (1.47)***
Age	.62 (.15)***	.25 (.16)	.20 (1.69)	.18 (.18)
Education	1.25 (.42)*	-2.63 (.43)***	1.34 (.46)*	-2.83 (.50)***
Attn. pol. news	.41 (.66)	1.40 (.68)*	.25 (.73)	-.18 (.78)
N	4270	4270	4270	4270
R^2	.52	.51	.42	.36

Cell values are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses
***p≤ .001, **p≤ .01, *p≤.05

Table 4 shows each of the thermometer scores with *The O'Reilly Factor* in 2016. The pre-election thermometer score for Donald Trump was the only variable to have a significant relationship. Partisanship and ideology were significant with all variables. Race also had a strong significant relationship with all thermometer scores. Education had a significant relationship with all of the thermometer scores as well. This table also supports my hypothesis that viewing partisan media can affect the way one evaluates a presidential candidate.

Table 4. Thermometer Scores of Pres. Candidates by *O'Reilly* Viewership (2016)

	Pre-therm DPC	*Pre-therm RPC*	*Post-therm DPC*	*Post-therm RPC*
O'Reilly	-.24 (.49)	1.64 (.51)**	-.32 (.54)	.78 (.58)
Ideology	-5.29 (.45)***	5.59 (.46)***	-4.96 (.50)***	4.80 (.53)***
Democrat	27.44 (1.80)***	-15.60 (1.87)***	27.21 (2.00)***	-12.73 (2.14)***
Republican	-10.10 (1.83)***	21.22 (1.90)***	-5.75 (2.03)*	18.40 (2.17)***
Gender	1.90 (1.05)	-1.47 (1.09)	1.56 (1.16)	-2.89 (1.24)*
Race	-11.83 (1.24)***	8.05 (1.28)***	-9.44 (1.37)***	6.11 (1.47)***
Age	.63 (.15)***	.24 (.16)	.22 (.17)	.17 (.18)
Education	1.25 (.42)*	-2.63 (.43)***	1.35 (.46)*	-2.83 (.50)***
Attn. to pol. news	.43 (.66)	1.36 (.68)*	.28 (.73)	-.19 (.78)
N	4270	4270	4270	4270
R^2	.52	.51	.42	.36

Cell values are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses
***p≤ .001, **p≤ .01, *p≤.05

Table 5 presents the findings from *Hardball with Chris Matthews* as the primary independent variable in 2016. Only the pre-election thermometer score of Hillary Clinton was significant. This table shows that viewing liberal media relates to viewing a liberal candidate more favorably than a conservative candidate. Partisanship and ideology had a significant relationship with all variables. Race and education were significant with all variables except for the pre-election thermometer score of Hillary Clinton. The gender variable shows a significant relationship with the pre-election thermometer score of Hillary Clinton and the post-election thermometer score of Donald Trump.

Table 5. Thermometer Scores of Pres. Candidates by *Hardball with Chris Matthews* Viewership (2016)

	Pre-therm DPC	*Pre-therm RPC*	*Post-therm DPC*	*Post-therm RPC*
Chris Matthews	1.50 (.55)*	.46 (.53)	.92 (.56)	-.07 (.60)
Ideology	4.38 (.48)***	5.62 (.46)***	-4.92 (.50)***	4.80 (.53)***
Democrat	-4.62 (1.94)*	-15.50 (1.87)***	27.01 (2.00)***	-12.63 (2.14)***
Republican	21.36 (1.97)***	21.58 (1.90)***	-5.96 (2.03)*	18.61 (2.17)***
Gender	2.25 (1.13)*	-1.47 (1.09)	1.53 (1.16)	-2.89 (1.24)*
Race	1.43 (1.33)	8.07 (1.28)***	-9.44 (1.37)***	6.12 (1.47)***
Age	.05 (.16)	.29 (.16)	.17 (.17)	.21 (.18)
Education	-.76 (.45)	-2.63 (.43)***	1.34 (.46)*	-2.88 (1.24)***
Attn. to pol. news	-.94 (.71)	1.50 (.69)*	.19 (.73)	-.11 (.78)
N	4270	4270	4270	4270
R^2	.31	.51	.42	.36

Cell values are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses
***p≤ .001, **p≤ .01, *p≤.05

Table 6 shows findings of viewership of *The Rachel Maddow Show* in the 2016 election. The pre and post-election thermometer scores for Hillary Clinton were significant. This is noteworthy because it shows that viewing liberal media can lead to a more favorable opinion of a Democratic candidate. Like other analyses, ideology and partisanship had a significant relationship with all of the thermometer scores. Race also had a strong significant relationship with all thermometer scores. Education was significant with all variables as well.

Table 6. Thermometer Scores of Pres. Candidates by *The Rachel Maddow Show* Viewership (2016)

	Pre-therm DPC	*Pre-therm RPC*	*Post-therm DPC*	*Post-therm RPC*
Rachel Maddow	1.07 (.51)*	.35 (.53)	1.11 (.56)*	-.21 (.60)
Ideology	-5. 23 (.45)***	5.63 (.47)***	-4.89 (.50)***	4.79 (.53)***
Democrat	27.21 (1.80)***	-15.49 (1.87)***	26.96 (2.00)***	-12.60 (2.14)***
Republican	-10.31 (1.83)***	21.60 (1.90)***	-5.99 (2.03)*	18.63 (2.17)***
Gender	1.88 (1.05)	-1.47 (1.09)	1.52 (1.16)	-2.88 (1.24)*
Race	-11.84 (1.24)***	8.07 (1.28)***	-9.45 (1.37)***	6.12 (1.47)***
Age	.58 (.15)***	.30 (.16)	.17 (.17)	.21 (.18)
Education	1.24 (.42)*	-2.63 (.43)***	1.34 (.46)*	-2.82 (1.24)*
Attn. to pol. news	.34 (.66)	1.50 (.69)*	.18 (.73)	-.10 (.78)
N	4270	4270	4270	4270
R^2	.52	.51	.42	.36

Cell values are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses
***p≤ .001, **p≤ .01, *p≤.05

Tables 7 and 8 show the results of the analysis of H3 and H4 by using *Hannity* and *Hardball with Chris Matthews* as the dependent variables and the thermometer scores as the independent variables.

Table 7. *Hannity* and *Hardball with Chris Matthews* Viewership by Thermometer Scores of Pres. Candidates (2012)

	Hannity				*Matthews*			
Pre-DPC	--	--	--	.00 (.00)	--	--	--	.00 (.00)
Pre-RPC	--	--	.00 (.00)*	--	--	--	.00 (.00)	--
Post-DPC	--	.00 (.00)	--	--	--	.00 (.00)*	--	--
Post-RPC	.00 (.00)*	--	--	--	.00 (.00)	--	--	--
Ideology	.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.01)	-.03 (.02)*	-.02 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	-.03 (.02)
Democrat	.34 (.08)***	.32 (.08)***	.34 (.08)***	.35 (.08)***	.30 (.08)***	.28 (.08)**	.30 (.08)***	.28 (.08)**
Republican	.40 (.08)***	.42 (.09)***	.37 (.08)***	.39 (.08)***	.30 (.08)***	.35 (.09)***	.30 (.09)**	.32 (.09)***
Gender	-.02 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Race	-.03 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	-.04 (.05)	-.13 (.04)*	-.09 (.04)*	-.12 (.04)*	-.11 (.05)*
Age	.02 (.01)**	.02 (.00)***	.02 (.01)**	.02 (.00)***	.03 (.01)***	.03 (.00)***	.03 (.01)***	.03 (.01)***
Education	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)
Attn. pol. News	.00 (.00)*	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.02 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.02 (.01)	-.02 (.01)
N	5914	5914	5914	5914	5914	5914	5914	5914
R^2	.10	.09	.11	.10	.10	.11	.10	.10

Cell values are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

***p≤ .001, **p≤ .01, *p≤.05

Table 8. *Hannity* and *Hardball with Chris Matthews* Viewership by Thermometer Scores of Pres. Candidates (2016)

	Hannity				*Matthews*			
Pre-DPC	--	--	--	.00 (.00)	--	--	--	.00 (.00)
Pre-RPC	--	--	.00 (.00)*	--	--	--	.00 (.00)	--
Post-DPC	--	-6.86 (.00)	--	--	--	.00 (.00)	--	--
Post-RPC	.00 (.00)	--	--	--	-8.48 (.00)	--	--	--
Ideology	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.04 (.01)*	-.04 (.02)	-.05 (.02)*	-.03 (.02)
Democrat	.13 (.08)	.12 (.08)	.16 (.08)*	.13 (.08)	.18 (.07)*	.15 (.08)	.19 (.07)*	.13 (.08)
Republican	.20 (.08)*	.22 (.08)*	.17 (.08)*	.22 (.08)*	.14 (.08)	.15 (.07)*	.12 (.08)	.16 (.08)*
Gender	.03 (.04)	.03 (.04)	.03 (.04)	.03 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)
Race	.02 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.01 (.05)	.02 (.05)	.00 (.05)	.01 (.05)	-.01 (.05)	.02 (.05)
Age	.04 (.01)***	.04 (.01)***	.04 (.01)***	.04 (.01)***	.03 (.01)***	.03 (.01)***	.03 (.01)***	.03 (.01)***
Education	.00 (.02)*	.00 (.02)*	.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)
Attn. pol. News	.08 (.03)*	.08 (.03)*	.08 (.03)*	.08 (.03)*	.06 (.03)*	.06 (.03)*	.06 (.03)*	.06 (.03)*
N	4270	4270	4270	4270	4270	4270	4270	4270
R^2	.03	.03	.04	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03

Cell values are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses
***p≤ .001, **p≤ .01, *p.00

The results from Table 7 show that there is a significant relationship between having a favorable opinion for Mitt Romney and choosing *Hannity* before the 2012 election. There was no significant relationship between a favorable opinion of Barack Obama before or after the election and choosing *Hannity*. Race had no significant relationship in this model. Table 7 also shows there is a significant relationship between having a favorable opinion of Barack Obama post-

election and viewing *Hardball with Chris Matthews* in 2012. There were no significant relationships with the other thermometer scores and viewing *Hardball with Chris Matthews*. Race had a significant relationship in this model. For both *Hannity* and *Hardball with Chris Matthews,* there were significant relationships with both of the partisan variables. Age was also significant with both *Hannity* and *Hardball with Chris Matthews*.

The findings in Table 8 show that *Hannity* only had a significant relationship with the pre-election thermometer scores of Donald Trump. The Republican variable had a significant relationship with each thermometer score and *Hannity*. The Democratic variable only had a significant relationship with the pre-election thermometer score of Donald Trump and *Hannity*. There was no significant relationship between the thermometer scores and viewing *Hardball with Chris Matthews.* With *Hardball with Chris Matthews,* the Democratic variable was significant with the pre and post-election thermometer scores of Donald Trump. The Republican variable was significant with the pre and post-election thermometer scores of Hillary Clinton and *Hardball with Chris Matthews*. For both *Hannity* and *Hardball with Chris Matthews,* age showed a significant relationship with all variables as did attention to political news.

Conclusion

In this paper, I tested four hypotheses. H1 and H2 used media as an independent variable in order to test if viewing partisan media had an effect on the evaluation of a candidate. In 2012, Table 1 was especially notable as it supported my hypothesis and showed a significant relationship with all variables and the conservative *Hannity.* There was a relationship between having a negative opinion of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama both before and after the election in relation to viewing conservative media. There also was a significant relationship between having a positive opinion of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney before and after the election. Table 2 showed there were no significant relationships with viewing liberal media and the evaluation of presidential candidates.

In 2016, there was a significant relationship between viewing liberal *Hardball with Chris Matthews* and *The Rachel Maddow Show* and having a positive opinion of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Table 5 showed *Hardball with Chris Matthews* having a significant relationship with the pre-election thermometer scores of Hillary Clinton. *The Rachel Maddow Show* had a significant relationship with Hillary Clinton before and after the election as shown in Table 6. This again shows that there is a relationship between viewing partisan media and candidate evaluations. There was also a significant relationship between viewing conservative *Hannity* and *The O'Reilly Factor.* Viewing both *Hannity* and *The O'Reilly Factor* had a positive influence on the opinion of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney before the election as seen in Table 3 and Table 4.

H3 and H4 used media as a dependent variable in order to test if partisan views influence what media an individual selects. Table 7 (2012) showed there was only a significant relationship between finding Hillary Clinton a favorable candidate after the election and viewing

Hardball with Chris Matthews. There was also only a significant relationship between finding Donald Trump favorable before and after the election and then viewing *Hannity.* In Table 8 (2016), the relationship between having a favorable opinion of Donald Trump before the election and then viewing *Hannity* was shown to have a significant relationship. There were no significant relationships between the opinions of candidates and then choosing liberal media. This shows that there is little evidence that the opinions of candidates can have an effect on the media one chooses.

In conclusion, H1 and H2 were supported in that viewing partisan media results in partisan attitudes towards presidential candidates. As referenced in Table 1, viewing conservative media leads to a positive opinion of the Republican candidate and a negative opinion of the Democratic candidate. Alternatively, H3 and H4 were not supported in that the opinions of individual candidates did not result in choosing certain media outlets.

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