RED STATE, BLUE STATE, RED NEWS, BLUE NEWS

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Communication, Culture and Technology

By

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Washington, DC
April 28, 2006
The phrase “red state, blue state” has set off a debate as divisive as the social trend it describes. This thesis not only recognizes the disparity in defining red states and blue states, but aims to both separate and bridge these differences while introducing a powerful explanatory variable to the discussion – the news media, or what will be referred to as “red news, blue news.” Scholars have approached the topic of American polarization in a variety of ways, namely by looking at the public’s differences on salient issues, the public’s electoral voting habits and the differences among political elites. While the “culture war” and the “red state, blue state” maps of the 2000 and 2004 elections are illustrative of the general debate over political polarization, these theories have ignored the impact of both the mass media and the alternative media. Since the news media is where most Americans gather their information on world, national and local affairs, this seems an obvious place to look for polarizing messages.

This research is organized by an investigation of the demand-side and supply-side of media polarization. The demand-side study looks at ideological news audiences through a series of path analysis models using the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2004 media consumption survey. On the “supply side,”
media polarization is demonstrated through a content analysis of 44 television news transcripts to quantify the amount of partisan news framing during the Senate confirmation hearings for Samuel Alito’s nomination to the Supreme Court. Through both of these quantitative studies, and complimented by a review of polarization literature, as well as interviews with political communication experts, the case is quite strong for the politically polarizing effects of the news media.

Search terms: political polarization, “red state, blue state,” culture war, mass media, Fox News, Samuel Alito hearings
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am happy to take this opportunity to thank the many people who have accompanied me in so many different ways along this journey.

First, I would like to thank my thesis advisor and academic guru, Dr. Diana Owen. From day one, she has been a source of guidance throughout my two years as a graduate student in the Communication, Culture and Technology program. Her wealth of patience and wisdom has been invaluable.

I would also like to thank Dr. Stephen Farnsworth for luring me into the field of political communication in my first semester as a graduate student, and encouraging me in my endeavors ever since. Additional thanks go to Dr. Michael Coventry for introducing me to the creative world of film editing in his Pop Culture course. He was also an essential guide in the initial development of this thesis topic.

I also extend my immense gratitude to Noelle McAffee, Scott Keeter, Ben Scott and Jim Lengle for kindly offering me their time and expertise for the documentary component of this thesis.

A hearty thanks goes to my parents, Dan and Bonni Woodard, for instilling in me the moral conviction to aim for lofty goals, and the determination to achieve them. “Give me 100 push-ups, Dad.”

I must also thank my friends and co-workers who have patiently dealt with my occasional lapses of grace in handling stress. And to all those who silently endured my sometimes zealous battles with SPSS in the computer lab, I’m sorry.

And last, but certainly not least, I am grateful to both CCT and Georgetown University for equipping me with a well-rounded (though expensive) education and skill-set.

Onward!
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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

During the 2000 and 2004 elections, journalists, politicians and academics used the phrase “red state, blue state” like a battle cry. In the interim, and ever since, it may be more likened to a constant and irritating radio buzz. As it has been normalized into our colloquial speech, the majority of the population may grasp the general meaning of the catch phrase, but its true implication remains elusive. Many debate whether the driving distinction between red and blue states is the urban and rural divide ripping through America, the voter distribution among Republicans and Democrats, the ideological difference between conservatives and liberals, the divide between secular and religious America, or the disparity in moral convictions that Americans hold dear, underscored particularly in the 2004 election. Still others debate whether or not this division is actually real. Drawing the line between red and blue is simple enough on a map, even when heterogeneous areas are shaded purple, but pinpointing the definition is not as indiscriminate a task as implicated by the manner in which the phrase has been used.

After a careful evaluation of the dimensions and inflections of the phrase “red state, blue state”, I have determined that the most accurate meaning is an umbrella term for the political division that is running rampant across the nation. It is the colorful incarnation of the polarization of America’s political identity. Political identity, as it will be understood in this paper, is comprised of ideology, party identification (Republican, Democrat or Independent), geography, and moral views. For simplicity’s sake, the term will henceforth be interchangeable with “polarization,” unless otherwise stated.
Polarization is a phenomenon, not new to the present day, that implicates more than the mere minority of citizens who are considered “ideologues” (Converse, 1964) or party leaders. Polarization also implicates the majority of Americans who rely on the broad swath of heuristic cues offered in a democracy to citizens determining their vote choice and issue positions. These cues include party identification, family values, community values and religious values. While these are all formative and substantive, the news media, as the leading institution informing our civic deliberation, is also influential to the equation. Much of that information derives from slogans, soundbites, images and spin, all of which are increasingly dominating American news sources. In the fast-paced, networked world of dual primary-income generators, where participation in community organizations has plummeted (Putnam, 2000), television and talk radio pundits and the swelling ranks of highly opinionated bloggers take the place of opinion leaders. Are the news media to blame for adopting a market model that accommodates the busy lives of the nation’s democratic citizens? This analysis does not seek to answer that question, though many media critics have made this the foundation of their research. Rather, this study looks at the foundation and growth of the gap between ideological partisans, and the manner in which Americans proudly wear their red and blue war paint in matters of civic deliberation.

The buzz of partisan division is prolific. This study not only seeks to qualify the characteristics of this division and quantify the extent of such political polarization, but also to examine the relationship between such a public trend and the “niching down”, or fragmentation of American news outlets.
In 2004, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released their biennial news consumption report under the headline, “News Audiences Increasingly Politicized.” From their survey, they discovered that the audience for Fox News is growing increasingly more Republican and conservative, while the audience for CNN maintains a Democratic and liberal base. Whereas the public once trusted the three national news networks – ABC, CBS and NBC – to deliver objective reporting, Americans have steadily been departing from those vast media spaces. “Thanks to the proliferation of new cable channels and the rise of digital and wireless technology, the disaggregating of the old mass audience has taken on a furious momentum” (Powers, 2005). And as the following analysis illustrates, this disaggregation is polarizing people’s news choices and political ideologies.

While the Pew Research Center and others have found a correlation between news consumption habits and political polarization, my research will expand upon this relationship to ask: Does political orientation affect the news consumption choices of Americans? Do these news consumption choices reinforce political identity? Employing a multi-method research approach, this study explains the nuances suggested by these questions to establish causal links and explore the implications of such a trend. Using the Pew biennial news consumption dataset, I have investigated the existence of news audience polarization from a partisan, ideological and geographical standpoint. I have also performed content analysis on 44 television news transcripts to quantify the amount of partisan framing of news coverage in the first two days of the Senate hearings to confirm Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court. To investigate the implications of the
relationship between politically polarized news and the political polarization of our nation, I also conducted interviews with four political media experts. Footage from these interviews and data summaries of my quantitative research is presented as a short documentary to accompany the paper format of this thesis in an effort to spread awareness on the subject through a visual and accessible medium.

If the foundation of a healthy and effective democracy is an informed and participatory citizenry, then raising a discussion about the political polarization of America’s news sources is of paramount importance. To be informed participants, citizens require ethical and investigative news sources to deliver the information by which they make the decisions that define the nation’s collective welfare. As audience trust in news media steadily slips, the competence of our democratic system suffers. The media should inspire, not deter people from participating in the decisions of our nation. But as recent polls and research demonstrate, this is increasingly not the case. Based on my conviction that a robust and informative news media is a requirement to a viable democracy, I have proceeded with this research.

My thesis begins with a general overview of literature and research about American political polarization. Chapter two advances the work of several scholars who support the theory that polarization in America today is a cause of ideological fissures rooted in divisive issues like abortion and gay marriage. Others say that the American public is polarizing by sorting themselves into communities that are homogenizing in political, ideological and religious beliefs. Still others claim that the polarization evident in America is a result of the political polarization of government elites. I present these
arguments to assert that, regardless of how it is defined, polarization is a real force dividing Americans.

Chapter three moves away from the general discussion of “red state, blue state” and hones in on the news media’s role in the polarization discussed in chapter two. This chapter looks at some of the structural characteristics of the modern news media that may contribute to its role in perpetuating divisiveness in the country. These characteristics include the fragmentation of news audiences and news sources, media consolidation, the market structure of the news and the proliferation of the talking head culture of American news.

Bridging the suspected causes of media polarization and the evidence of media polarization, chapter four presents the seminal works of several media scholars who have promoted what is known as a “media effects” model of mass communication, in which news media messages are shown to have measurable effects on public opinion and civic deliberation.

Taking the media effects model as the theoretical framework supporting my quantitative data, chapters five and six present measurable evidence of media polarization. Chapter five makes this analysis from what I call a “demand side” approach to media polarization study. Here, I have taken data surveyed by the Pew Research Center to compile a series of path analysis models that demonstrate how ideology, party identification, geography and news that purports the same viewpoint as its audience affect the public’s news consumption choices. I also have reversed the model to demonstrate that news consumption choices also influence political identity.
Chapter six presents the “supply side” of media polarization. Upon conducting an in-depth content analysis of 44 television news transcripts, coding for seven distinct information frames, I show that the news media are suppliers of political divisiveness, heavily employing a red team, blue team news frame.

In order to assess the trends found in this analysis, chapter seven provides a discussion of the data and insight from four respected Washington D.C. political communication experts. This discussion brings a qualitative dimension to the issues revealed in this thesis, and directly raises both questions and answers about the implications of the trend toward news media politicization.

For more information on the topic, I invite you to view the short documentary that accompanies this thesis. In the film, I’ve provided summaries of the quantitative data found in this thesis, underscored by footage from the interviews discussed in chapter seven.
CHAPTER TWO: Red State, Blue State: Political Polarization in America

“The fastest-growing kind of segregation in the United States isn’t racial. It is the segregation between Republicans and Democrats.”
--Bill Bishop

The Seeds of Division

Divisiveness defined by colors is clearly not new to America as history has shown through divisions drawn between blacks and whites and between blue and white collared workers. The notion of “red state, blue state” is just the latest in dichotomous fads, reminding us that the United States is not a color-blind nation.

Arriving at a definition of red state, blue state, however, is an ambiguous and contentious task, debated by scholars, journalists and citizens alike. The most familiar representation of red and blue states is the 2000 and 2004 electoral maps that the news media tattooed into our consciousness. This version of polarization, depicted in Figure 2.1, is based on partisan identification and vote choice. Alternatively, voter maps have presented the electoral distribution of United States counties on a red and blue continuum that employs shades of purple for counties that were closely divided between George W. Bush and John Kerry, as shown in Figure 2.2. Still another way to visualize the “red state,
blue state” divide is the map depicted in Figure 2.3, in which the percentage of red and blue vote choice is depicted as a state within the state.

[Insert Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 about here]

But Morris Fiorina, professor of political science at Stanford University, uses the red and blue palate to demonstrate a different kind of polarization, one based on the debated ideological division of America, also known as the “culture war.” In his book, *Culture War: The Myth of Polarization in America*, he quite emphatically debunks this division based upon an evaluation of the public’s opinions on a bevy of cultural issues. He concludes that the public is generally in agreement, even on seemingly divisive issues like abortion, gun control, the death penalty and homosexuality (Fiorina, 2005).

The notion of the culture war was first asserted by James Davison Hunter in his 1991 book entitled just that, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. The major difference between the culture war and the electoral map division, however, is difficult to reconcile. It fuels the ongoing debate of whether polarization is a myth or reality and whether it is driven by ideological or partisan differences among Americans.

In late 2004, Princeton University hosted a two-day conference with a telling title, “The Polarization of American Politics: Myth or Reality?” in which scholars, politicians and journalists discussed the existence, causes and implications of red state, blue state. During this conference, the real contention was not whether polarization was myth or
reality, but rather in how to define it. Media scholars focused on the nation’s rude political discourse, while presidential scholars and politicians critiqued congressional and White House partisanship, and political scientists noted the absence of centrism and compromise in government (Cannon, 2006).

If we understand partisan polarization to be the sorting out of people’s beliefs by extremes, and partisanship to indicate the political party preference held by individuals, then partisan polarization ergo indicates the extremism of people’s political beliefs. James Q. Wilson, professor of public policy at Pepperdine University, expands this definition and writes that polarization is an “intense commitment to a candidate, a culture, or an ideology that sets people in one group definitively apart from people in another, rival group” (Wilson, 2006). He goes on to say that in its extreme incarnation, polarization can lead some to believe that the other side is involved in conspiracy against them (Wilson, 2006).

Scholars, journalists and politicians locate the origins of the division from a vast and diverse field of possibilities and discuss the implications in an equally varied manner. Some of the explanations for the genesis of the division include political elite polarization (congressional), presidential polarization, polarization of the electorate, extreme and powerful special interest groups, issue-based division, residential balkanization, income disparity and education gaps.
Though each of these arguments are sound and contribute to the red state-blue state phenomenon in varying degrees, I will only touch upon them in order to situate my own research within the context of a growing body of literature and research on the topic of polarization. As implicated by the title of my research, “Red State, Blue State, Red News, Blue News”, I will focus on the role of the news media in exacerbating the ideological and partisan polarization of the public, a topic largely ignored by other scholars and studies. While my research reveals strong support for such a case, it is important to examine the research of scholars who have investigated other causes and contributors to partisan polarization.

**Making The Case For Partisan Polarization**

Nationally, it appears that America is evenly split among Republicans and Democrats, as near 50-50 elections have remarkably shown in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 summarize the presidential results of the 2000 and 2004 elections.

[Insert Table 2.1 and 2.2 about here]

An even split may not appear hostile, but several scholars conclude that the nation is not peaceably divided along the 50-50 line. Still others say that partisan division has reached a climax (Bishop, 2004, Cameron, 2002). “The fastest-growing kind of
segregation in the United States isn’t racial. It is the segregation between Republicans and Democrats” (Bishop, 4/4/2004). According to Bill Bishop, author of the Austin American-Statesman’s award-winning newspaper series, “The Great Divide”, “it’s as though a social centrifuge has been at work separating people into Democratic groups and Republican groups, spinning communities away from the political middle” (Bishop, 8/29/2004). Unlike the picture neatly painted by the red state-blue state map, Bill Bishop asserts that it is not at the national level where the division is truly polarized but at the community level, where “this grouping of like-minded people is feeding the nation’s increasingly rancorous partisan politics” (Bishop, 4/4/2004).

However, scholars such as John Evans at the University of California at San Diego claim that the United States is not polarizing (see also Fiorina, 2005, 2006). Evans stated at the Princeton University conference on polarization in December 2004, “no matter how you slice and dice this, there really is no polarization, with the exception of one issue – abortion” (Evans, 2004). Like Fiorina, Evans focuses on the myth of polarization based on the public’s attitudes toward a selection of issues.

But in the same Princeton speech where he denied the effects of partisan polarization, Evans went on to say that there is evidence of polarization between strong Republicans and strong Democrats as well as within American Protestantism. The polarization in the latter, Evans notes is between black Protestants who are becoming
more liberal and evangelical Protestants who are becoming more conservative. James Davison Hunter, in large part, began this debate, rooted in religious polarization, in 1991 with his renowned book, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*.

Coinciding with the theory of religious polarization is the primarily qualitative research advanced by Thomas Frank, in his bestselling novel, *What's the Matter with Kansas*. In this book, he systematically demonstrates the rise of the Republican Party in rural areas like Kansas where Republican financial policies clash with the economic interests of those switching over to the Republican Party (Frank, 2004).

Frank finds that abortion and other such divisive moral issues hold immense explanatory power in determining why poorer areas of the religious south have turned toward the Republican Party despite clear economic incentives in favor of them voting Democratic. While Fiorina and Evans’ earlier work seem to downplay the importance of the polarization they uncovered on the issue of abortion, Thomas Frank’s research shows that abortion and other moral issues like gay marriage are a driving force for the GOP’s support base in much of rural red-state America.

**Residential Balkanization**

Several scholars point to 1976 as a benchmark year against which to compare current trends in partisan polarization (Bishop, 2004; Gimpel, 2004; Cameron, 2002).
According to James Gimpel, professor at the University of Maryland, in 1976 46 percent of the population lived in “purple” counties, that is to say, counties where the margin between Democrat and Republican voters was within a 45-55 spread (Gimpel, 2004). In 2004, the share of purple counties had dropped to 31 percent of total voters (Gimpel, 2004). Of particular note, California and the South have grown more partisan, with the South being shaded a darker red and California defined by partisan segregation in counties that have become both bluer and redder (Gimpel, 2004).  

Similarly, the overarching thesis of the 15-piece *Austin American-Statesman* series, “The Great Divide” is that the country is dividing at the community level, not the state or national level. According to Robert Cushing, statistician for the Texas newspaper, political segregation in U.S. counties grew by 47 percent from 1976 to 2000 (Cushing, Bishop, 4/2004). Cushing’s analysis also shows that since the 1970’s, the number of people living in politically monolithic communities nationally has increased by 69 percent (Bishop, 5/2/04). This trend is of particular concern because as Bishop says, “Like-minded people have a peculiar effect on each other. In groups, they become more extreme versions of what they were before” (Bishop, 4/8/04). In essence, conservatives become more conservative and liberals become more liberal.

The scenario of polarization begs the question: what happens to the moderate folks in the middle? As Bishop notes, one of the ironies of democracy is that citizens who
see both sides of an issue are less likely to vote and become politically active than those people who are angry, partisan and unsympathetic to those who think differently (Bishop, 5/2/04). This creates an environment of hostility where people can be lambasted for holding a different opinion.

An example of such partisan volatility is reflected in the 2004 election coverage. I performed a content analysis study of newspaper coverage in the three days prior to the 2004 election to find a startling presence of articles discussing political rage within communities, families and relationships. On October 31, three of the five analyzed sources – the AP, The New York Times and the St. Petersburg Times – ran stories about heightened tension and even violence, among friends, family and communities as a result of partisan disagreement. Within three days, seven headlines addressed the partisan division explicitly. Table 2.3 highlights the common themes presented by each of the papers with respect to stories about national divisiveness.

[Table 2.3 about here]

As communities concentrate based on partisan and ideological views, the residents of those communities become less socially networked with those of differing opinions. As people become less socially networked, the chance to engage in the necessary democratic element of public deliberation is dramatically and dangerously weakened. In his book, Bowling Alone, Robert Putnam (2000) powerfully demonstrates
the dramatic decline of community organizations and how that decline affects people’s ability and willingness to engage with people on a regular basis. With residential balkanization, the homogeneity of opinion is exacerbated because not only are people engaging with others less than they did prior to the 1970’s when Putnam notes that the shift began to take place, but the public is also not engaging with people who hold views dissonant to their own.

Political theorists are nearly unanimous in their assessment of democracy’s need for its citizens to be exposed to diverse political views (Mutz and Martin, 2001: 97). Alternatively, scholars show that the health of the public sphere is actually weakened when people engage in political discussion only with those who share their same viewpoint (Mutz and Martin, 2001: 97). As communities are increasingly defined as true blue or red, the opportunity for exposure to diverse opinions is made scarce, thereby weakening the cognitive base of America’s civic structure.

Yet some say that political homogeneity of communities can help to engage people in the political process by inciting people to join the red or blue team. James Gimpel asks whether increased levels of participation brought on by stridency are at odds with the American virtue of tolerance. While he does not arrive at an answer to this question, the juxtaposition of stridency and tolerance as mutually exclusive virtues is an important democratic conundrum to consider. Ideally, democracy rests on a balance
between the two, though as political polarization becomes more extreme, the tipping point seems inevitable.

Yet another implication of residential balkanization is that as communities concentrate in identifiably partisan shades of red and blue, Congress can more easily determine the boundaries by which they would like to craft congressional districts. Redistricting, also known as gerrymandering, was built into our democracy as a means of ensuring that congressional districts remain competitive, not less competitive as it has seemed to be designed in the current Congress, under Republican control. As Justin Buchler notes, “redistricting plans…protect incumbents by drawing districts that are relatively homogeneous with respect to the partisanship of their voters” (Buchler, 2005). As in the marketplace, competition keeps the power balance in check (Buchler, 2005). But as communities homogenize, squeezing out the median voter, and as gerrymandering becomes more common, our democracy seems to be heading down a path of tipping the power balance not only in favor of the party in control of Congress, but also toward more polarized political candidates. As former Republican Party chief William Brock told The National Journal in an interview, “What they’ve done is make the real election the primary. Well, only 15 percent of Americans vote in primaries. Those who do are the hyperactives” (Cannon, 2006).
Partisan Politics

Charles M. Cameron, professor of political science and public affairs at Columbia University, employs the term “partisan politics” to identify the “politics of periods when elites, especially congressional elites, resemble two armed camps at the ends of the American ideological spectrum” (Cameron, 2002).

Using Poole and Rosenthal’s NOMINATE scores, which are based on congressional roll call votes, one can calculate the degree of polarization present in each congressional year. Scores range from -1.5 (the most liberal) to 1.5 (the most conservative). From these scores, scholars have shown that the low point for congressional polarization occurred in the early 1970’s, while the high point of Congressional polarization occurred around the turn of the twentieth century in the Forty-ninth Congress of 1905-06 (Cameron, 2002, based on Poole-Rosenthal NOMINATE scores).

Both Cameron and Gary Jacobson, professor of political science at University of California at San Diego, contradict the theories of numerous political scientists who, since the 1970’s, have been documenting and characterizing the “dealignment” of the American public, which is to say the decreasing levels of partisanship and ideologically defined politics among the electorate (Jacobson, 2004).³ Jacobson challenges these older views in his 2000 and 2004 work, claiming that “ordinary voters, like the leaders they
elect, have actually been growing more, rather than less, polarized along party and ideological lines in recent decades” (Jacobson, 2000). He notes that the seventies were a rare time in U.S. politics, defined by split-party voting on the part of the electorate and split-party governments, both of which signaled peace between the parties and a decline in partisanship, and that that era has ended. Conversely, in a time of unified party government, as we see now, there is more polarization. “It’s polarization on steroids,” says Gary J. Andres, political scientist who worked in President George H.W. Bush’s White House (Andres as cited in Cannon, 2006).

In V.O. Key’s posthumous work, The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting 1936–60, Key discusses the power of the echo chamber, which is to say, exposure to information that reinforces one’s political predispositions. As Marc Hetherington points out, elite behavior sets the terms by which the masses think about politics (Key, 1966, Hetherington, 2001). If political elites provide the heuristic cues for how the electorate perceives issues and politics, and this elite is polarizing, as indicated by Charles Cameron, then it is reasonable to believe that the electorate will head the persuasions of their leaders and gravitate toward the more extreme right or left of the spectrum. In performing a regression analysis of partisanship as affected by elites, with regressed variables of age and education, Hetherington finds that people with more formal education are most affected by elite polarization. “In sum, these results should
increase confidence that elite polarization is driving the impressive increase in party-centric thinking on the mass level” (Hetherington, 2001).

As Cameron notes, “the story of the past thirty years is steadily increasing polarization, a dramatic reversal of six decades of increased moderation” (Cameron, 2002). Based on NES party thermometers, the percentage of the highly partisan electorate has increased 40 percent from 1980 to 1996, rising from 35 percent to nearly 50 percent (Hetherington, 2001). 4

Others specifically lay blame for the evidence of polarizing electoral partisanship on the rise of the Republican Party. In the Washington Monthly article, “Perverse Polarity,” Paul Glastris, editor-in-chief of the magazine, boldly states, “Republican radicalism is driving the polarization off American politics” (Glastris, 2004). He cites a litany of evidence, from hardliner campaign-funding groups like the Club of Growth, the dearth of Republican moderates in Congress, gerrymandering, Republican polarization of the lobbying culture on K Street in Washington, D.C., an exploitation of divisive, moral issues, and a common practice of party-line voting on legislation in Congress (Glastris, 2004). But Glastris also says that the Republicans’ vehement style of enforcing their agenda is in large part a response to the sustained Democratic control of both Congress and the White House for the previous 40 years (Glastris, 2004). Like George W. Bush, Bill Clinton was also a polarizing president. Though Clinton gave Democrats the
executive branch for eight years, his presidency served to further agitate and inflame the strong Republicans on the right who were concerned with their president’s moral shortcomings.

Scholars, journalists and citizens have all noted the polarizing effects of George W. Bush’s presidency, with or without hard facts. But Jacobson succinctly illustrates this assertion by showing that Bush has enjoyed the highest job approval ratings within his own party of any president in the more than fifty years that pollsters have been asking the questions (Jacobson, 2005). On the other hand, Gallup polls showed Democrats giving President Bush the lowest ratings that any rival party had ever given a president in poll history, reaching a low of 8% on the eve of the 2004 election (Jacobson, 2005). “Before Bush and going back to Eisenhower, the partisan difference in approval ratings had never exceeded 70 percentage points in any Gallup poll. In the twelve Gallup polls taken during the three months leading up to the election, the gap never fell below 70 points, averaging 79 and peaking at 83,” with the spread being 94-11 (Jacobson, 2005).

Of course, no discussion of the polarizing trends of American politics can be had without the disclaimer that polarization has historically been the norm of American politics rather than the exception. The United States has witnessed several eras of intense polarization, none as remarkable as the Civil War. In an interview with The National Journal, Dwight Pitcaithley, chief historian for the National Park Service and former U.S.
In the 1850’s, Americans stopped talking to each other and started talking at each other – and across each other. They stopped listening too” (Cannon, 2006). While he is referencing a time when we were amid a war within our own nation, the sentiment bears much weight in today’s culture, particularly considering the war of words and shout matches on talk television and radio (this discussion to be continued in the next chapter).

**Issue Polarization**

The clearest distinction between the two parties and between liberals and conservatives is on the issue of the war in Iraq. A Gallup poll taken on March 22-25, 2003 showed that 93 percent of Republicans favor the war, while only 5 percent oppose it. On the other side, Democrats favor the war by 53 percent and oppose it by 44%. From an ideological perspective, the Gallup poll shows that 84 percent of conservatives support the war and 44 percent of liberals support it, or conversely, 13 percent of conservatives oppose the war and over half of liberals, 54 percent, oppose it (Gallup, March 2003).

According to the poll, which lists 31 demographical categories such as party identification, ideology, geographical residence, income, gender, education and age, Republicans demonstrated themselves as the greatest cohort of supporters for the war, followed by conservatives. Democrats and liberals were two of three cohorts with the
least support for the war, with blacks being the lowest with only 29 percent supporting the war. Charles Cameron notes that the polarization of the public’s beliefs on the war in Iraq is stronger than at the height of the Vietnam War (Cameron, 2002). James Q. Wilson also makes the claim, citing poll numbers from 1968 in which nearly equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans thought the intervention in Vietnam was a mistake (Wilson, 2006).

Morris Fiorina, political science professor at Stanford University, is the most emphatic voice against the theory of partisan polarization, devoting an entire book to its exposure as a myth. The book, titled *Culture War: The Myth of a Polarized America*, begins by citing the work of several scholars, journalists and political analysts who endorse the theory of polarization and then dismisses them as exaggerations, myths and "sheer nonsense." Fiorina debunks the theory of polarization as myth by presenting a variety of public opinion polls on such divisive moral issues as abortion and homosexuality to show that there is very little difference of opinion between the red and blue states. He also claims that electoral shifts have been relatively small.

The growth of the interest group community defined by crusades for moral issues and human rights is staggering. As Wilson notes in “How Divided Are We?” these groups, rather than material interest groups like the National Association of Manufacturers, the Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO, have the most vociferous
and powerful voices. The difference between the two groups, Wilson says, is “interest
groups preoccupied with material concerns can readily find ways to arrive at compromise
solutions to their differences; interest groups divided by issues of rights or morality find
compromise very difficult” (Wilson, 2006). That these rights-groups are large campaign
donors also shapes the structure of politics by making candidates cater to the more
extreme positions of single issues, rather than the more moderate electorate on the whole.

Additionally, with the proliferation of the internet these special interest groups not
only shape the nominations of political candidates, but similarly shape the views of the
general public. With 68 percent of the total American public online (Pew Internet, May
2005), 91 percent of whom receive and send email (Pew Internet, May 2005), 72 percent
of whom check news online (Pew Internet, March 2005), and 66 percent of whom go
online “just for fun or to pass the time” (Pew Internet, November 2004), a large
percentage of the public is likely receiving email announcements from special interest
groups, who have made a heavy presence online, that express very polarized positions on
particular issues. This variable, as a factor contributing to partisan polarization, will
likely increase over time as more people go online and broadband spreads into more
homes.

There are several dangers associated with issue-focused politics, namely that
political candidates cater to special interest groups, abandoning the middle, and that the
electorate polarizes in opinion on these issues. As Carl Cannon notes in an article for the

*The National Journal*, “too much partisanship obscures issues, instead of clarifying them. Pure partisanship leaves no room for compromise, and does little other than sustain itself” (Cannon, 2006).

**Conclusion**

Based on a thorough examination of arguments that both support and contradict the theory of a polarized America, the arguments and quantitative data in favor of polarization are certainly more compelling. The strongest quantitative indicators of polarization are revealed by the Gallup polls that show the discrepancy between Republicans and Democrats in their support or opposition to the war in Iraq as well as their job approval ratings for President George W. Bush. Based on these measures as well as anecdotal assessments, support for the position of political polarization is the guiding framework for the chapters that follow.
Figure 2.1: 2004 Electoral College Map

Source: University of Michigan,
http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/
Figure 2.2: 2004 Electoral Map, States within States

Source: Bob Ninja, available at,
Figure 2.3: 2004 Electoral Map with Counties Shaded Purple

Source: University of Michigan,
http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/
Table 2.1: Popular Vote, 2000, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>62,039,073</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>59,027,478</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>1,157,859</td>
<td>122,284,939</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>50,456,062</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>50,996,582</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>3,610,654</td>
<td>105,363,298</td>
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</tbody>
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Compiled from the Office of the Federal Register, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration,
Table 2.2: Electoral College Votes, 1980-2004

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>266</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>379</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>370</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>49</td>
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</table>

Compiled from the Office of the Federal Register, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration,
Table 2.3: Polarized Messages in Newspapers on Election Eve, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“A Nation Divided”</th>
<th>ap 1</th>
<th>ap 3</th>
<th>nyt 2</th>
<th>nyt 3</th>
<th>spt 1</th>
<th>cd 2.1</th>
<th>cd 2.2</th>
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<tr>
<td>family division</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>highly polarized</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>too divisive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL -- threatens to stab girlfriend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couples breaking up</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>interviews with divided community members</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>interviews with experts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>unique importance of this election</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>avoid political conversation</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative feelings about election system</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I'm worried”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I'm afraid”</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I'm concerned”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>PEAD</td>
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<td>anger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>tension</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stolen/vandalized yard signs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dead heat/ close election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ap 1 (1660 words): "America, on Election's Brink, Is At Odds With Itself"
ap 3 (1050 words): "As Americans Go To Polls, This Time It's So Personal"
nyt 2 (1681 words): "Politics Makes Estranged Bedfellows"
nyt 3 (1791 words): "In Final Days Before Vote, Divided Electorate Expresses Anxiety"
spt 1 "Politics Producing a Partisan Delirium"
cd 2.1: "Clash Nears Climax; Race Polarizes and Energizes American Electorate During Elections"

AP=Associated Press
NYT=New York Times
SP=St. Petersburg Times
CD=Columbus Dispatch

Notes

1 Wilson, James Q., “How Divided Are We?” (Wilson’s definition of partisan polarization is based on the work of Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*)

2 For more information, see Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2002, “Reconsidering Political Regionalism in the American States” in which they illustrate the concentration of Democrats and Republicans in a sample of four states: Georgia, Texas, California and Illinois.

3 For more information on the dealignment of the electorate, see Wattenberg, 1994; Ladd 1995, 1997; Shea 1999; White and Shea, 2000.

4 Hetherington bases these measures on the NES feeling thermometer, which asks how people feel about the Republican and Democrat parties (before 1978, the question was phrased not as the party, but simply as Republicans or Democrats) on a 100-point scale. He classified those who responded in the middle of the scale for both categories as neutral-neutral, and those who responded above 50 degrees for one party and below 50 degrees for the other party as positive-negative. It is the latter variable that increased by 40% from 1980 to 1996.
CHAPTER THREE
Red News, Blue News:
Why The News Media Has Become Politically Polarized

Within the scope of political polarization research and commentary, the role of news media polarization is treated with only marginal attention or as a brief anecdote in a grander scheme of quantifiable data on partisan division. My thesis argues that this is a myopic view of the effects of the news media on partisan and ideological belief systems. In chapter four, I will go into more detail about how this topic fits into the theoretical framework of some seminal media studies and political communication research. In this chapter, however, I will highlight how the emergent structure of the modern news media exhibits politically polarizing tendencies. The characteristics of the modern media structure that will be discussed are the fragmentation of news outlets, media consolidation, the media as a marketplace and the proliferation of the talking head culture.

The Fragmentation of News Outlets

A good place to begin an analysis of political polarization in the news media is where many researchers have gone in support of such a hypothesis, which is, toward the notion of the fragmentation, or disaggregation of the mass media. To establish a link between political polarization and the news media, a host of scholars cite the diminishing viewership of the original three national news networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) and the rise of audience fragmenting news outlets such as cable television, talk radio and the
Internet. In 1978, over 90 percent of prime time television viewers tuned into the traditional three networks, and in 1997, that number had dropped to half and was continuing to fall (Bennett, 2005: 84). According to a 2004 study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, those who regularly watch network news has dropped to 34 percent of the adult American public. The same trend is occurring in cable news. The proliferation of cable news channels like Fox News, MSNBC and CNBC “has slammed cable news pioneer CNN’s already thin audience share by one-third between 1992 and 1997, despite the fact that the number of households receiving CNN tripled during the same period (Bennett, 2005: 84-85).” Pew shows that CNN’s audience represented only 22 percent of the adult American population in 2004, down from approximately one-third in 1994.

In sum, we are no longer a nation united by a trusted news system that feeds us a generally agreed upon objective view of the local, national and global state of affairs. Instead, our news consumption choices have splintered as individual needs align with a growing supply of news sources that appeal to targeted audiences. Additionally, with the Internet becoming a more sought-after news source for much of the public, the effects of blogs and audience-personalizing news tools like RSS feeds is yet to be determined.

Because the number of news outlets has increased, news organizations have been forced to adopt branding techniques that differentiate their products in order to attract distinct audiences. As Marshall McLuhan famously observed, “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1964.) But in the “era of increasing news outlets, however, it can also be said that the messenger becomes part of the medium” (Hamilton, 2004: 218).
These messengers, whether news anchors, reporters or talk show hosts, are strategically placed in news shows as the centerpiece and branding technique for attracting segmented audiences. More and more, these messengers are defined not only by their personality, but also by their political ideology, most notably in television and radio talk shows.

“When news becomes fragmented, people are likely to be socialized in disparate ways” (Graber, 1993: 423). The threat of fragmenting the mass media and mass audience is that people lose exposure to the overall picture of international, national and local news as they tune into only what they prefer to hear. In such a situation, as is distinctly being made clear over the years, people’s interests become more acute, at the expense of a tolerantly obtuse view of the world and its many different viewpoints. Michael Schudson, on the other hand, does not see this as a problem. In The Good Citizen, he claims that the public has always tuned into only a small slice of current events, those that interest and affect them most (Schudson, 1998).

Another ill-effect of the diversification of news sources is what Kathleen Schmitt, Albert Gunther and Janice Liebhart refer to as the hostile media effect, in which partisan individuals interpret mass media information through the filters of their own partisan framework. “These partisan individuals pose a particular problem for mass media, for recent research has shown that neutral news reports—news reports an impartial observer would assess as fair and balanced—will be seen by partisans on opposing sides of the issue as biased in favor of the other side.” (Vallone, Ross and Lepper, 1985, as cited by Schmitt, et al., 2004). In the Schmitt study, called "Why Partisans See Mass Media as Biased," the authors explain that “selective categorization” is what causes partisan
groups, as highly important actors in public discourse and the democratic process, to view the mass media as biased against their ideological position. The mechanism of selective categorization suggests that “partisans on opposing sides might attend to, process, and recall the same content in an article; however, each side tends to categorize the same aspects of a story differently – as contrary to their own position” (Schmitt, et al., 2004). The authors also suggest that media bias may be explained by two other mechanisms: 1) “selective recall,” in which partisans remember only certain aspects of media content as hostile to their opinion and 2) “different standards,” in which opposing partisans agree on the content of a mass mediated message but interpret information favoring the opposing side as invalid (Schmitt, et al., 2004). However, their study concludes that only selective categorization explains the hostility of opposing partisan views toward the media.

Schmitt, et al.’s analysis of the hostile media effect likely explains why partisans on both sides of the spectrum are devoted to criticizing the news media for ideological bias. Entire organizations have been established for doing just that, notably, *Accuracy in Media* on the right and *Media Matters for America* on the left of the ideological spectrum. While these organizations serve as a valuable check on the media, they also aggravate and accentuate partisan tension in the news media by emphasizing political bias that may or may not be present. By calling attention to bias, these types of organizations degrade people’s trust in the institution of news, which also serves to undermine an essential component of democracy, that is, informing its citizens.
In the *Atlantic* article, “The Massless Media,” William Powers explores the issue of how the mass media are losing their audience to smaller, more targeted, and arguably more partisan, outlets. For this reason, he claims, the American public is headed for an era of "noisy, contentious press reminiscent of the 1800's" (Powers, 2005). He cites the 2000 and 2004 Pew news consumption surveys as fodder for his argument that the public's news viewing habits are increasingly polarized. He claims that the centralized, homogenous mass-media environment of the past 45 years is a fading memory, and that the public is tribalizing not just by political ideology, but also by ethnicity, language, religion, profession, socioeconomic status, and sexual representation among other factors (Powers, 2005).

The tribalizing of the public that Powers speaks of is certainly evident in the blogosphere. As of now, the blogosphere seems to be utilized primarily by strong partisans and news junkies. The potential for its audience to expand, however, is certainly a reasonable expectation for the not-so-distant future, particularly as high-speed broadband penetrates more households. The Pew Internet and American Life Project shows that the recent increase in online news consumption coincides with the expansion of broadband. “For broadband internet users, online news is a more regular part of the daily news diet than is the local paper” and “it is nearly as much of a daily habit as is getting news from national TV newscasts and radio” (Horrigan, Pew Internet, 2006). Dial-up users, on the other hand, do not express such daily consumption of online news. With such identifiably political bloggers as Markos Moulitsas Züniga of dailykos.com and Glenn Reynolds of instapundit.com gaining public notoriety, visions of the partisan
press of old resemble vivid premonitions of the future. As Republican strategist Ralph Reed notes, “these media echo chambers energize their participants but also tend to exaggerate differences” (Reed, 2004).

Yet in a 2004 study of online election news, the Pew Internet & American Life Project finds, “Internet users have greater overall exposure to political arguments” (Pew Internet, October 2004). The study concluded that despite the 2004 election’s unprecedented polarization, Internet users “are not insulating themselves in information echo chambers. Instead, they are exposed to more political arguments than non-users.” (Pew Internet, October 2004).

Doris Graber offers yet another hopeful sign about the current disaggregation of the mass media. “On the positive side of the ledger, specialization raises the possibility of a better fit between audience needs and public messages” (Graber, 1993: 424). Specialization in news media, particularly with the Internet, can offer both one and two-way communication with audiences and government. The interactive component of the Internet has been an effective tool in engaging citizens as demonstrated in the 2004 election cycle. The Howard Dean failed to earn the presidential nomination in 2004, his Internet-driven campaign is a testimony to the power of the Internet, as he jumpstarted his candidacy from doomed to frontrunner, largely through Internet organized MeetUp meetings, Internet fundraising and interactive blogs. Other examples of citizen engagement via the Internet include MoveOn.org and the stunning online fundraising efforts for Hurricane Katrina victims.
Media Consolidation

Yet in the face of the good that news outlet diversification brings, the question should be raised – how much new news content is generated by the proliferation of news outlets? As the Project for Excellence in Journalism concluded in their 2006 “State of the Media Report,” the answer is very little. The paradox inherent in the boom of more news outlets is that the audiences for each news source shrinks, which results in a decrease in the number of journalists to investigate new stories. The end result is that “we tend to see more accounts of the same handful of stories each day. And when big stories break, they are often covered in a similar fashion by general-assignment reporters working with a limited list of sources and a tight time-frame” (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006).

Several scholars highlight the trend in the homogenizing content, or “narrowcasting” of news content. Timothy Cook, in “The Future of the Institutional Media,” concludes that the multiplication of different news outlets has not been matched by a diversification of approaches to journalism. “More fully, the homogeneity of the news across different news outlets, if anything, has probably been strengthened rather than weakened by recent developments” (Cook, 2001, p. 187). In other words, the proliferation of news content has ironically led to a decrease in news-gathering. “While literally billions of speculative dollars are being amassed, invested and turned into overnight fortunes…investments in the actual gathering of information by conventional journalistic means is in apparent decline” (Tal Sanit, 1992, as cited by Bennett, 2005: 98).
While the problem of news repetition is a problem in and of itself, it also feeds into a potentially larger problem, which is, the Federal Communication Commission’s (FCC) recent push to relax media ownership regulations. The FCC, in addition to regulating the allocation of valuable spectrum among competing interests, is the enforcement body behind communication organizations’ obligation to serve the public interest, as mandated by the 1934 Communications Act. Under the FCC’s guidance, Congress has enacted several laws on public broadcasters and media organizations to ensure that the public interest obligation of localism, diversity of viewpoint, and competition is satisfied. But under recent Chairman Michael Powell’s leadership, those regulations have been severely relaxed and threaten to be relaxed even more so. The argument used to justify the relaxation of media ownership regulations, which could allow media companies to serve as duopoly owners of television, radio and newspaper media outlets, is that the rise of cable television, talk radio and the internet has increased the diversity index disproportionately to the ownership caps on media outlets. However, as the Project for Excellence in Journalism and Timothy Cook demonstrate, the opposite is true. The FCC’s faulty reasoning jeopardizes the foundations of the public interest, namely the public’s interest in diverse voices of opinion.

If fragmentation is bad and consolidation is bad, then what is good? The notion of news media fragmentation and media consolidation may seem at odds with one another, but they are actually two sides of the same coin, and the coin is divisiveness. What the former does is provide the public with choice. But in the face of studies like the Project for Excellence in Journalism’s “State of the Media 2006,” diversity is not reflected by the
array of choices offered to the public. Media consolidation, on the other hand, stifles choice by putting a seeming diversity of voices into the hands of only a few large corporate entities. To choose between the CBS network, MTV, Infinity broadcasting, Simon & Schuster publishers, Blockbuster video rentals and Paramount Pictures may seem like choice, but when they are all owned by the same organization, Viacom, one has to question whether or not this is diversity. Within two years of passing the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting merged into the world’s largest media company, and shortly thereafter, AOL bought Time Warner, to make it even larger. Gannett Newspaper Group bought Multimedia Entertainment to expand its newspaper chain to ninety-two, its TV stations to fifteen, its radio stations to thirteen, and its cable operations to five states, and still growing (Neil Hickey, 1997, as cited by Bennett, 2005: 88). If the regulations on media ownership continue to be relaxed, evidence supports the conclusion that these mergers will continue to happen, further restricting the diversity of content in the media. With a handful of multi-billion dollar corporations in control of the channels of information flow, we must be concerned not only with what messages are being articulated, but also with what messages are not.

Though these corporations cannot be blamed for using a market model to do business, it must be asserted that the corporate interest is not equivalent to the public interest. “The gist of the charges is that the media do not serve the public interest and that they fail to nourish a viable democratic political order” (Graber, 1993: 405).

Linked to this debate is the 1987 eradication of the Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcast stations to provide airtime for opposing voices in controversial matters
of public importance. This was an important safeguard for the public interest. Its absence has created a vacuum of regulatory control over presenting news in a balanced manner, opening up the floodgates for partisan-style news, which will be addressed in the final section of this chapter.

**Media as a Marketplace**

What news source fragmentation, news repetition and media consolidation all have in common is the bottom line, which is profit. With more news outlets, there is more competition between organizations to get the “scoop” and to be the first to get it. What was once a marketplace for ideas is now simply a marketplace.

Business-driven news formulas dictate manufacturing the most dramatic audience-grabbing stories for the least cost and with a minimum of attention-distracting complexity. At the end of the day, stories often end up looking much the same from one news outlet to another” (Bennett, 2005, p. 68).

As targeted by the title of James Hamilton’s book, *All the News That’s Fit to Sell*, and elucidated in its content, news is information that sells. Like any entrepreneurial endeavor, market forces do, and always have, motivated changes in the American press. Just as economic incentives spawned the rise of objective news reporting, which became the norm in the early twentieth century at the close of the penny press era, economic incentives are again catalyzing the reversal of that trend. Recently, media conglomerates, in response to high fixed costs, have evolved as an obvious market attempt to achieve economies of scale.
With increased efficiency, profit margins expand. What is puzzling is how, given this trend, newsgathering budgets are actually shrinking. At the onset of the media-merging decade of the 1990’s, the average profit margin for the newspaper industry was 14.8 percent, and by the end of the decade, that profit margin had grown to 21.5 percent (Laventhol, 2001). However, the benefit of increasing profits is not being extended to the budgets of gathering news.

According to Lance Bennett, professor of communication at the University of Washington, the first effect of media mergers is budget cuts, then a re-branding of the news in order to attract a younger, more affluent target audience for advertisers (Bennett, 2005: 77). Though we may wish to think of news as a public good, in that it is in the public’s interest for everyone to be informed citizens, both observation and research indicates that the news has become a market good.

James Hamilton opens up his book with an alternative interpretation of the “five W’s” of journalism:

*Who* cares about a particular piece of information?
*What* are they willing to pay to find it, or what are others willing to pay to reach them?
*Where* can media outlets or advertisers reach these people?
*When* is it profitable to provide the information?
*Why* is it profitable?

(Hamilton, 2004: 7)

These questions underscore the market imperative of news that forsakes the investigative objective of news for one of economic power. Although it is a cynical position to take, the public also echoes this view. In 2005, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that 75 percent of the public believes that the media is
concerned more about attracting the biggest audience than about keeping the public informed (Pew, June 2005). Media power now comes not from the public’s trust in the media, but rather from the interest group activists and political elites’ use of the media as a way to navigate the increasingly “complex and balky political system” and deliver their message to the public. (Cook, 2001: 195).

As Oscar Gandy shows, the market approach to news also results in segmentation and audience targeting. Segmentation is the division of a population into smaller groups based on their preferences, interests and responses to different persuasive appeals. “Segments are not naturally occurring. Segments are the products of theoretical models and analytical techniques that vary from simple classification by political party, or registration status, to sophisticated psychographic assessments” (Gandy, 2001: 146).

Targeting is the delivery of specially tailored messages to particular audiences. In such a situation, the public is treated as a sea of eyeballs for advertising revenue, rather than citizen with vested interests in being informed.

In order to attract more eyeballs, media organizations have traded hard news for soft news and investigative reporting for news frames that involve conflict and human interest. The distinction between these styles of news is not easy to draw, and has become more difficult over time as the two become morphed into one all-encompassing category of “infotainment.” Hamilton defines hard news as news that shows high levels of public affairs information, and soft news as news with low levels of public affairs information (Hamilton, 2004: 15). Hamilton’s research on the proliferation of soft news is guided by
two overarching hypotheses: 1) soft news attracts a younger audience, more attractive to advertisers, and 2) soft news is cheaper to produce for media organizations.

Hamilton asserts that advertisers value a younger demographic of viewers, namely women between the ages of 18-34 because they are particularly likely to make the majority of purchasing decisions in their households (Hamilton, 2004: 71).

“Advertisers divide the adult population into groups based on age and gender. They often place a higher value, other things being equal, on reaching younger viewers or female viewers” (Hamilton, 2004: 82). Just as this demographic tends to buy more, they also tend to favor soft news like entertainment, health and crime news over hard news about public affairs.

As easily as news organizations and advertisers can segment the population into demographic categories organized by gender, age and income, they can also divide the public by ideology, party identification and positions on particular issues. For better or worse, the transparency of the public’s interests forces them into an equation that allows advertisers and media organizations to increase revenue dollars, and, whether implicitly or explicitly, to further divide the public based on these criteria.

In sum, the corporatization of the news media creates niche news programming that attracts segmented populations to particular news outlets. As mentioned earlier, branding is an essential component of defining these niches to the public. According to Hamilton, political pundits, as a subset of journalists, play a crucial role in branding because they have “strong incentives to develop brand names for delivering different combinations of entertainment, insight and ideology” (Hamilton: 117). This leads us to
the next section about how the modern media structure fosters division among Americans.

A Talking Head Culture

In conjunction with the emergent market model of the news industry, talk show news programs have supplanted the neutral or objective form of news reporting once found in the mass media. The news now seems to shout at us instead of talking to us. The cacophony of acrimony dominates the airwaves, which in large part, is due to the need to fill the news agenda of 24-hour news channels. Pundits, or what Howard Kurtz refers to as “opinion-mongers,” on both sides of the spectrum tend to drown out everyone else. They push the boundaries of extremism in pursuit of higher ratings (Kurtz, 1996).

Howard Kurtz, a bit of pundit himself, is a respected expert on media trends, host of CNN’s “Reliable Sources” and columnist for the Washington Post’s “Media Notes.” He is also the author of the book, *Hot Air: All Talk All the Time*, an exposé of America’s talk show culture. The book, already ten years old, begins with, “America is awash in talk.” He goes on to say, “They [pundits] analyze, interpret, elucidate, expound, pontificate, and predict, an unprecedented barrage of blather and bluster that has dramatically ratcheted up the noise level of political debate” (Kurtz, 1996: 3).

The striking growth of talk shows and the pundit industry, or what is commonly referred to as the “punditocracy,” is undeniable (Fallows, 1996: 116). Kurtz explains the rise in talk shows as a product of the information revolution and the popularity of the tawdry environment of tabloid television where crime and scandal are sensationalized
Eric Alterman claims that the punditocracy has its roots tangled in “personal journalism, political commentary and television production values” (Alterman, 2000: 13). Though Alterman recognizes the renowned Walter Lippmann as the first pundit, he asserts that the punditocracy as we’ve come to know it was never able to develop a code of ethics, precisely because of its tangled roots and confounded identity.

But more importantly, this adversarial style of news fosters acrimonious, extreme political views in the public (Wilson, 2006). As Annie Lange, professor of telecommunications at Indiana University, told Bill Bishop in an interview for “The Great Divide” series, “people like to watch TV that’s arousing. But what they remember is the negative event, not the details” (Lange, as quoted by Bishop, 9/27/04).

Diana Mutz echoes this opinion, claiming that people’s levels of arousal go up as they view high levels of conflict. She goes on to say, “on the one hand, people hate it; the conflict makes their skin crawl. But at the same time they are drawn to it. They can’t take their eyes off it.” (Mutz, as quoted by Bishop, 9/27/04). The incendiary debates on television and radio play on people’s innate attraction to conflict, whether it’s violence, disaster or shout matches between liberal and conservative pundits. Like a car accident on the side of the highway, people are unwittingly attracted to the antagonistic style of delivering news. It is more exciting, which attracts more eyeballs. As the news media continue down a path of corporatization and consolidation, it seems unlikely that the unfettered growth of politically aggressive punditry in the news will abate.

Mutz also said in the same interview, “you remember more of the stuff you agree with. So it polarizes people into different camps. Your intensity for those you like or
dislike is increased” (Mutz, as quoted by Bishop, 9/27/04). The issues raised by Mutz and Lange bring more meaning to the study by Schmitt, et al. on the hostile media effect. If, as Schmitt, et al. found, partisans interpret the media as biased against them, then this effect becomes even more hostile in a media environment saturated by inflammatory partisan language.

Over seven decades ago, Walter Lippmann astutely predicted the impending crisis of Western Democracy as a crisis in journalism (Alterman, 2000: 281). The public’s political thought is shaped by “what somebody asserts, not what actually is,” where the public loses its “grip upon the relevant facts of their environment” and becomes the “inevitable victims of agitation and propaganda” (Lippmann, as cited by Alterman, 2000: 281).

Bill Bishop draws a very potent correlation between such a trend and its effects on voters. “Our modern form of democratic debate, however, does more to increase division among voters than to educate, enticing viewers with stylized conflict that simultaneously causes them to think politicians are wackos and politics are out of whack” (Bishop, 9/27/04). He goes on to say that this has the effect of both polarizing the politically active and depoliticizing those in the middle who lose faith in the system because they feel estranged from the ideologically charged debate that dominates their television screens and talk radio news waves.

Former journalist-turned media critic, James Fallows, criticizes the talk show programs for their ethic of polarization and overstatement. In his book, Breaking the News, he recounts that during tapings of Crossfire, producers would shout mandates like
“Cut him off!” to the hosts through their earphones. “This makes for lively talk TV. But the culture of artificial polarization and overstatement spills over into the rest of journalism” (Fallows, 1996: 118).

Fallows also criticizes talk show programs for their predictability. He compares debate shows like *Crossfire* to sitcoms, in which the public tunes in to see familiar faces with familiar personality traits, responding to news events and talk show guests through a predictable ideological lens. He condemns this as typecasting, which “is exactly contrary to the way a reporter should think. People bring their own relatively constant personalities and their own accumulated biases to each subject they approach, but the entire point of reporting is to allow yourself to be influenced by new material you see.” (Fallows, 1996: 117).

As in the era of the muckrakers of the mid-nineteenth century, the news media are again drawing upon themselves to reflect opinion rather than fact. But unlike the muckrakers of the past, new journalists and pundits are not pushing an issue-oriented agenda. Rather, they seem to be advancing an unabashedly ideological and partisan agenda. In talk show news programs, objective reporting is traded for speculation, otherwise known as spin, which is based on the political interpretation of the reporter. “With the barest possible pause to note the events of the previous week, the talk turns quickly to what these events mean for future power struggles, future votes in Congress, future candidates for the presidency” (Fallows, 1996: 119). “The way to get attention, to climb the ladder of talk success, is to shout, to polarize, to ridicule, to condemn, to corral the most outrageous or vilified guests” (Kurtz, 1996: 13). This is not to lay blame on
journalists per se, but rather on the evolved structure of news, as a product of market imperatives.

Talk shows are also a forum for politicians to access the public, further politicizing the news. Not only do talk shows provide an arena for shouting matches between partisan pundits, but they also serve to showcase the tailored agendas of politicians. “It’s an insatiable market” (Kurtz, 1996:11). And as the punditocracy’s dominance continues to swell, so does their political importance as politicians look to the punditocracy for approval and affirmation, rather than the general public (Alterman: 279).

Kurtz draws the distinction between the Old Media that still cling to “some vestige of objectivity” and the talk shows that “revel in their one-sided pugnacity, spreading wild theories, delicious gossip, and angry denunciations with gleeful abandon” (Kurtz, 1996: 3). Prolific pundit, Robert Novak, said of the McLaughlin Group that people watch it “for the same reason people were going to stock car races: not to see who wins but to see who crashes.” (Novak as quoted by Kurtz, 1996: 24).

Talk radio, perhaps the most clearly delineated media format for propagating spin, has been the focus of much research. Talk radio programs, particularly Rush Limbaugh’s show, are now viewed as a major political force of national scope. “In the 1994 election, Republicans successfully used conservative talk radio to reach voters directly, bypassing the so-called liberal media in the process” (Jones, 2002). Even Newt Gingrich gave talk radio shows and alternative media credit for their 1994 success with the Contract for America campaign that put Republicans in control of both houses of Congress (Jones,
Studies show that talk radio plays an agenda-setting function (Traugott, 1996 as cited by Jones, 2002). It is also associated with a greater likelihood of contacting elected officials, especially among conservatives (Hollander, 1996, as cited by Jones, 2002). Exposure to talk radio also seems to bolster ideological and partisan leanings and leads to more extreme attitudes and more negative feelings about government (Jones, 2002).

“By allowing the punditocracy to determine the content of its political dialogue, the American political system has committed itself to a path that all but guarantees the acceleration of the destructive pathologies threatening our common future.” (Alterman, 2000: 16-17).

**Conclusion**

According to Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center, the media are reaping what they’ve sown. “The cable news shows in particular have become increasingly contentious…The audience has come to view these programs as reflecting a point of view” (Kohut, as cited by Brookings Institute, June, 8, 2004). As chapter five illustrates, audiences do show signs of demanding ideological news programs. And, as will be demonstrated in chapter six, the news media are dutiful suppliers of such partisan-framed news. In many ways, it is an unsolvable chicken-and-egg argument: which came first, the audience’s demand for ideologically inspired news, or the news media’s supply of it?
Notes

1 Bennett, citing Nielsen data reported in Bill Carter, “TV Networks Are Scrambling to Deal with Era of New Media,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1999.
3 See [http://www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org) for the full news media consumption reports. I will use Pew’s 2004 media consumption survey to tease out more complex findings through path analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR
“Framing” the Red and Blue
The Theoretical Framework

At its best the press is a servant and guardian of institutions; at its worst it is a means by which a few exploit social disorganization to their own ends (Lippmann, 1922: 363-364).

This chapter builds upon the specific trends in modern media that were identified in the last chapter to provide the theoretical framework guiding my research. Here, I examine a core of influential research conducted by media scholars and political scientists in the fields of media effects studies, media uses and gratifications approaches and agenda-setting. It is at the intersection of these areas of research where the issue of news media partisan polarization is grounded as both an academic area of inquiry and an observable reality.

Media Effects

Studies dating back to the early 1920’s have examined the role of mass media effects on public perception and public opinion. Walter Lippman, who, in many ways was the founding father of modern political communication studies, was the frontrunner in asserting the impact of mass media on public opinion. His seminal work, Public Opinion (1922), opens with the chapter, “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads.” In this chapter and throughout the book, he asserts that the news media are the artists who sketch those pictures in our heads (Bryant and Zillmann, 1994: 2). While Lippmann credits the press for the responsibility of shaping the public’s view of the world, he also notes that there are limits to even a perfect press. “The press is no
substitute for institutions. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. Men cannot do the work of the world by this light alone” (Lippmann, 1922: 364).

The theory of direct media effects burst onto the scene with intense but brief notoriety in 1938, when Orson Welles and Howard Koch aired over the radio an adaption of H.G. Wells’ War of the Worlds, depicting a Martian invasion. In response to hearing the radio broadcast that was peppered with simulated news bulletins and on site reporting, Americans believed the broadcasts to be true and fled their homes in panic. The intense public reaction to the broadcast established a media theory known the hypodermic effects model, or bullet theory (Welles and Koch, 1938). Within the academic discipline of mass communication, the Welles and Koch experiment led to a proliferation of empirical media effects testing.

In 1944, sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet of Columbia University issued the first major media effects study, know as The People’s Choice (1944). The study, which took place in Erie, OH, examined whether or not the public’s vote choices changed as a result of presidential election coverage. Their findings indicated that media effects were minimal, which steered political communication research away from media effects studies.

The two-step flow model emerged out of research that, like The People’s Choice, found only limited media effects. The two-step flow model demonstrates that the mass public is affected by the news media, not directly, but as mediated through community opinion leaders. The model is powerful, particularly considering the era of American
social networking of the 1950’s when these studies first took place. The two-step flow model is still an explicative and meaningful theoretical framework today, particularly considering the evolution of opinion leaders in an American society that has insulated itself from the community involvement prevalent in the 1950’s. I would argue that modern opinion leaders, rather than community organizers of fifty years ago, are more commonly television and radio pundits, and bloggers. Considering Fallows’ argument (1997) that people embrace television hosts as familiar and trustworthy personalities, this argument is all the more plausible. The role of these media personalities then, as both opinion leaders and news disseminators, markedly increases the effects of the two-step flow model in influencing public opinion.

It should be noted however, that mass media effects are difficult to measure. Because they are usually based on survey research, media effects conclusions are sensitive to question phrasing. It is also difficult to test mass media effects because people already possess “a fund of knowledge that they bring to bear on new information” (Graber, 1993: 15). Dissecting the impact of pre-existing perspectives of the world from the interpretations gleaned from the media is not a straightforward task.

But as John Zaller points out, media effects studies have often been understated. In most matters of importance (i.e. elections, wars and social conflicts), the media keep “a stable flow of competing messages that makes it all but impossible to detect the extent to which citizens are responsive, in a dynamic sense, to the flow of political communication (Zaller, 1996: 48). Thus, we can expect that actual mass media affects on public behavior and opinion are actually quite strong. In short, according to Zaller, within
“the domain of political communication, the true magnitude of the persuasive effect of mass communication is closer to ‘massive’ than to ‘small to negligible’ and that the frequency of such effects is ‘often’” (Zaller, 1996: 3).

Media effects theories, despite an unstable history, are employed widely in political communication and political deliberation studies to exemplify the news media’s necessary role in facilitating the viability of American democracy. In “Facilitating Communication across Lines of Political Difference” (2001), Diana Mutz and Paul Martin endorse a media effects theory to assert that an enormous burden is placed on the mass media to bring diverse perspective to the public attention. Their work is rooted in the assumptions that exposure to diverse political views is essential to democracy and that social interaction with people of diverse opinions is declining.

Jurgen Habermas, often cited by political communication scholars for his analyses of public deliberation claims that deliberation is a means of arriving at the public will. But in order to serve its democratic function, deliberation is required to be inclusive, not exclusive.” (Habermas, as cited by Entman and Bennett, 2001: 305). Among political theorists, “there is near unanimous agreement that exposure to diverse political views is good for democracy and should be encouraged” (Mutz and Martin, 2001). But in the face of evidence supporting residential balkanization and the decline of social networking (Putnam, 2000), opportunity for exposure to diverse views is vanishing (Mutz and Martin, 2001; Bishop, 2004). Additionally, Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) have found that people have a tendency to engage in political discussions with people who share their
same views (Mutz and Martin, 2001), further mitigating the benefits of an ebbing trend in social networking, and thus, exposure to diverse views.

The Mutz and Martin study shows that Republicans, Independents and Democrats are quite different in their perception of how interpersonal and mediated messages of political dissonance affect them. “Democrats tend to find mainstream news sources more agreeable, whereas Republicans have significantly more homogeneous interpersonal networks” (Mutz and Martin, 2001: 105). They also conclude, in accordance with their hypotheses, that the mainstream media indeed do offer more dissonant opinions than social networks, empowering the media with ever more responsibility. In light of chapter three’s findings, it seems that the emergent modern media structure is only becoming less equipped to handle such a demand despite the increase in news outlets.

Due to the proliferation of news sources, some claim that the media effects model asserts more power because there are more points of access by which to assert that power. Mutz and Martin (2001) note that as national network viewership is fractionalized by the introduction of competing media like cable television, talk radio and the Internet, our once broadcasted messages are being narrow-casted, giving consumers more choice to select news messages that are consonant with their political views. “Although media observers have long lamented the lack of choice in news sources, the proliferation of choice creates new problems” (Mutz and Martin, 2001: 111). Similar to the notion of residential balkanization, the mass media audience seems to not only be fragmenting, but also balkanizing. The implications of such a shift are grand, and we can only compare it to the era of the partisan press.
Uses and Gratifications Approach

The uses-and-gratifications approach to media studies is another effective method of analysis for social scientists, particularly for those researching political communication. The basic premises of this approach are that people have identifiable motivations for tuning into particular media programming, and that they experience particular gratifications after having watched these programs. Though a media user’s gratification may not be the same as his or her motivation to consume the media, this is part of the flexibility of working with the uses-and-gratifications model. The model works under the assumptions that media audiences are active viewers and goal-oriented, and it assumes that there is unintentional learning involved in the process. Its popularity, in large part is due to the fact that it counteracts the premise in many media studies (such as the hypodermic effects model and two-step flow model) that the public is a passive media audience. In contrast,

By emphasizing the gratifications that people derive from consumption of media materials, and the uses to which they put them in the circumstances of their own lives, this approach draws attention to the significance of what the audience member contributes to the interaction between him and a mass medium” (Blumler and McQuail, 1968: 12).

Jay Blumler and Denis McQuail are notable for reviving the uses-and-gratifications approach with the publication of their seminal studies on the effects of television election coverage on the public in the 1959 and 1964 British General Elections.
They initiated their research out of a curiosity to define the democratic objective for political television and to determine how it might contribute to citizenship (Blumler, McQuail, 1968: 3). In performing their study, they took a media uses-and-gratifications approach “to find out why people watch or avoid broadcasts; what uses they wish to make of them; and what their preferences are between alternative ways of presenting politicians on television (Blumler, McQuail, 1968: 11). They conclude that there are a vast array of reasons, or uses and gratifications, explaining why the public seeks election news coverage from the television.

Blumler (1979) went on to categorize the primary motivations for attending to particular mass media as: cognition (information gathering), diversion, and self-identity definition. Blumler’s latter finding, that media are used to define personal identity, is of particular concern to this thesis. He asserts that the primary motivation for this latter category is to reinforce pre-existing beliefs.

**Agenda-Setting**

The theory of media agenda-setting asserts that the media selects certain news items to cover, in a particular way, which influences public opinion. According to media scholar Doris Graber, “Media not only survey the events of the day and make them the focus of public and private attention, but they also interpret their meanings, put them into context, and speculate about their consequences.” (Graber, 1993: 9). Because most events lend themselves to a variety of interpretations, the media is faced with determining which interpretation to present.
Kurt and Gladys Lang made the first advances in defining the agenda-setting function of the mass media in their analyses of the presidential campaigns of 1948 and 1952. They concluded that the media played an important role in defining the scope of political debate, identifying the issues upon which voters would decide how to vote (Gandy, 1982: 5). McCombs and Shaw built upon Lang’s findings to establish a high correlation between what the media treated as important, and what the undecided voters considered to be important. Like the Langs, McCombs and Shaw concluded that the media influenced issue salience during the campaign, and thus set the public agenda. (Gandy, 1982: 6).

Doris Graber asserts that because of the media’s ability to interpret the meaning of events, this makes them major contributors to agenda building, the process whereby news stories influence how people perceive and evaluate issues and policies. Agenda building goes beyond agenda setting. “The media set the public agenda when news stories rivet attention on a problem and make it seem important to many people” (Graber, p. 182). As Bernard Cohen (1963) is frequently quoted, the press may not be very successful in telling us what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling us what to think about (Bryant and Zillmann, 1994: 14).

When an issue becomes a matter of controversy among political elites, the media frequently zero in on it. They “supply the context that….gives people reasons for taking sides and converts the problem into a serious political issue” (Graber, 1993:182). In this sense the public agenda is not so much set by the media as built up through a cycle of media activity that transforms an elite issue into a public controversy.
Not only do media organizations select the news items for any given day, but so do the media’s sources. Considering the shrinking news budgets of many corporatized news organizations, political news is increasingly gathered from a highly regulated and orchestrated supply of press releases and press conferences that come to the media largely from government officials and institutions. As Herbert Gans notes:

The relationship between sources and journalists resembles a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources. Although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading (Gandy, 1982: 11).

In 1961, Walter Gieber and Walter Johnson demonstrated that although the ideal model of journalism would have journalists acting independently as the impartial disseminators of information to satisfy the public’s interest in knowing, reality reveals journalists to be less dependent. Gieber and Johnson (1961) conclude that sources and journalists are mutually dependent on each other and as thus, their frames of reference overlap (McQuail and Windahl, 1993: 163).

We can deduce, therefore, that political sources are also substantial news agenda-setters. As political elites have become more extreme in their ideological identity, it is reasonable to expect that the messages they impart on the press are also more extreme. In light of recent government scandals in the Bush Administration, which have exposed the government’s use of pre-packaged news sources like video news releases (VNR’s), the media’s agenda setting function is more politicized. Considering the media’s effects on
public opinion, we can also assume that these politically exaggerated messages will affect the public by polarizing their views.

However, it should be mentioned that the media effect of agenda-setting is still a limited effect. The electorate’s opinions on issues are indeed influenced by the issues defined by the media, but they are also influenced by the real-world situations that surround them day by day, which includes, namely, who they interact with and how they interpret the economy’s performance as a function of their own pocketbook status.

The major problem with talking about the media as agenda-setters, particularly in the modern media structure of mass media fragmentation, is that it lumps the media into one category of force. The media, in actuality, are a collection of disparate formats, outlets and programming. Fox may push a slightly more conservative agenda, while Bill O’Reilly pushes an even narrower conservative agenda. Similarly, CNN may have its own agenda, pushed onto its reporters from the ownership hierarchy, and ultimately pushed upon the public.

**Synthesizing the Effects**

The study that proceeds in the next two chapters is grounded in the assumptions that the media indeed do affect public opinion, that the media perform an agenda-setting function and that the roles of sources and journalists are assimilated.

Chapter five illustrates the effects of a uses and gratifications model. As evidenced, ideological preferences exert great influence on which news people consume. According to Blumler’s assessment of media use, this indicates that a news consumer is
motivated to attend to a particular news outlet in order to gratify their sense of self-definition, which succeeds in reinforcing their beliefs. I go one step further to argue that such motivations and gratifications for using particular media not only reinforce people’s predisposed ideological positions, but also polarize them to create starker division in the American public.

Based on the evidence in chapter three, I argue that the media, in both mass and niche markets, have established a news structure that makes politically polarizing messages advantageous to their goal of boosting ratings and profit. In chapter six, the content analysis quantifiably demonstrates that the news media do in fact frame the news by presenting conflict between ideology and partisanship. In other words, they set the agenda of conflict. In light of at least a limited media effects model of agenda-setting, and arguably a more profound media effects model, I purport that these polarized messages from the media contribute to political polarization of the electorate.
Overview: Partisan or Ideological?

American National Election Studies show that the gap between conservative and liberal ideological identity is growing, and that members of the American public are also identifying themselves more frequently as strong partisans. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate these trends. Though Figure 5.1 does not show a remarkable increase in the gap between conservatives and liberals, it does show that the percentage of the population who doesn’t have an opinion of whether or not they are liberal or conservative has dropped. In its place, conservative and liberal self-identification has risen, particularly since 1996. Also, the gap between self-declared moderates and self-declared ideological positions is closing, underscoring the fact that the public is becoming more ideological.

More notable is that, contrary to the justification used by many that partisan ties are weakening due to the rise of the Independent Party, partisan ties are actually strengthening (see Figure 5.2). Echoing the findings by James Gimpel and Bill Bishop, these data indicate that after an era of weaker partisanship in the sixties and seventies, the decade of the 1980’s began a steady trend of strong partisanship overtaking those with
weak partisan ties. Strong partisanship eclipsed weak partisanship in 2004 for the first time since ANES has been collecting this data.

[Insert Figure 5.1, 5.2]

What this chapter aims to do is to differentiate between the effects of party identification (Republican, Democrat, Independent) and ideology (conservative, liberal, moderate) in determining which news media the American public consumes. In sum, both party identification and ideology contribute to the predictability of how regularly people watch or listen to certain news programs. As the results of this analysis demonstrate, ideology does a better job than party ID at such predictions. In line with the notion of “red state, blue state,” I have also introduced a variable that looks at how a person’s city size (whether rural or a large city) affects their news consumption habits. Contrary to my hypothesis, this variable demonstrates itself a weak predictor. Overall, the findings of this analysis reveal evidence that demand for politicized media exists.

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press has already asserted the relationship between news audiences and polarization in their 2004 biennial news consumption report, issued under the headline, “News Audiences Increasingly Politicized.” This is based largely on the diverging audience of Fox News, 35 percent of which describe themselves as Republicans and only 21 percent describing themselves as Democrats (Pew People and the Press, 2004). See Figure 5.3 for an illustration of this trend.

[Insert Figure 5.3 about here]
My research builds upon this study to examine how the political identifiers of not only party ID, but also ideology, rural versus city dwellers and people who prefer to consume news that shares their same opinion work together as a model to predict the regularity with which different audiences consume particular news programs.

**Hypotheses**

H1: Republicans and Democrats will show differences in which news programs they watch.
   - H1a: Republicans will watch Fox News more than network news and CNN.
   - H1b: Democrats will watch network news more than Fox News.
   - H1c: Democrats will watch CNN more than Fox News.
   - H1d: Republicans will watch Bill O’Reilly more than Jim Lehrer.
   - H1e: Democrats will watch Jim Lehrer more than Bill O’Reilly.
   - H1f: Republicans will listen to Rush Limbaugh more than NPR.
   - H1g: Democrats will listen to NPR more than Rush Limbaugh.

H2: Conservatives and liberals will show differences in which news programs they watch.
   - H2a: Conservatives will watch Fox News more than network news, CNN.
   - H2b: Liberals will watch network news more than Fox News.
   - H2c: Liberals will watch CNN more than Fox News.
   - H2d: Conservatives will watch Bill O’Reilly more than Jim Lehrer.
   - H2e: Liberals will watch Jim Lehrer more than Bill O’Reilly.
   - H2f: Conservatives will listen to Rush Limbaugh more than NPR.
   - H2g: Liberals will listen to NPR more than Rush Limbaugh.

H3: Americans who live in rural parts of the country will show differences in which news programs they watch.
   - H3a: Rural dwellers will watch Fox News more than network news and CNN.
   - H3b: City dwellers will watch network news more than Fox News.
   - H3c: City dwellers will watch CNN more than Fox News.
   - H3d: Rural dwellers will watch Bill O’Reilly more than Jim Lehrer.
   - H3e: City dwellers will watch Jim Lehrer more than Bill O’Reilly.
   - H3f: Rural dwellers will listen to Rush Limbaugh more than NPR.
   - H3g: City dwellers will listen to NPR more than Rush Limbaugh.

H4: Americans who express a preference for watching news that shares their same view will be more likely to consume news programs that are partisan and ideological.
H4a: Consumption of Fox News will be more influenced by a preference for watching news that shares the same view than network news and CNN.
H4b: Consumption of Bill O’Reilly will be more influenced by a preference for watching news that shares the same view than Lehrer.
H4c: Consumption of Rush Limbaugh will be more influenced by a preference for watching news that shares the same view than NPR.

H5: Consumption of Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh can be predicted by ideology more than network news, CNN, Jim Lehrer or NPR.

H6: Consumption of Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh can be predicted by party ID more than network news, CNN, Jim Lehrer or NPR.

H7: Consumption of Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh can be predicted by rural city size more than network news, CNN, Jim Lehrer or NPR.

H8: Consumption of network news, CNN, Jim Lehrer and NPR can be predicted by large city size more than Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh.

H9: Ideology is a stronger predictor of news consumption choices than party ID, city size or news with the same view.

H10: Not only is ideology a strong predictor for news consumption choices, but the inverse relationship holds as well.
   H10a. Watching Fox news is a predictor of conservatism.
   H10b. Listening to Rush Limbaugh is a predictor of conservatism.
   H10c. Watching Bill O’Reilly is a predictor of conservatism.

H11. Consumption of network news, CNN, Jim Lehrer and NPR is not a predictor of ideology.
   H11a. Watching network news does not predict being conservative or liberal.
   H11b. Watching CNN does not predict being conservative or liberal.
   H11c. Watching Jim Lehrer does not predict being conservative or liberal.
   H11d. Listening to NPR does not predict being conservative or liberal.

Methodology

Analyzing statistics that involve both party identification and ideology as independent variables introduces a quandary for determining which effects are most important due to the fact that they are correlated. This quandary, however, is a large part
of what this research seeks to sort out. That said, the issue of multicollinearity must be addressed. Multicollinearity indicates that two or more variables are highly correlated. When such variables are entered together in a regression model, there is a tendency that the predictive effect of one or more of the independent variables on the dependent variable will be masked. In running a correlation matrix for all of the variables in this analysis, I found that the correlation value between ideology and party ID is .289 (p=.000). While this doesn’t indicate multicollinearity on its own, it does demonstrate that the two measures are correlated. In other words, conservative ideology is correlated with being Republican and liberal ideology is correlated with being Democratic, as one would expect. At the same time, the overall OLS models are weakened when one is removed, indicating that they work together to predict the dependent variable, which in this analysis, is news consumption. Through path analysis, however, I will demonstrate their individual effects. Interestingly enough, Rush Limbaugh listeners and ideology have an even higher correlation value at .295 (p=.000), indicating that people who regularly listen to Limbaugh are conservative. If these two variables were used in the same regression model as independent variables, there is a chance that either ideology or Limbaugh listening would mask the predictability of one the variables on the dependent variable. My analysis does not make such an analysis. Based on the correlation matrix, there are no other suspicious variables (see Appendix A for full correlation matrix).

Using the Pew Research Center People and the Press 2004 biennial news consumption choices, I have established a three-part statistical analysis to determine to what extent news consumption choices are affected by ideology, party ID, city size (rural
or large city) and whether or not people like news that shares their same point of view. In step one, I have regressed five independent variables ("party ID," "ideology," "rural," "large city" and "same view") on the dependent variable of frequency in consuming particular news outlets using the ordinal least squares regression analysis (OLS). OLS regression is a valuable statistical tool that demonstrates the relative strength of each independent variable in predicting the outcome of the dependent variable. Standardized regression coefficients (beta) can be compared from one independent variable to the other in order to identify the variable that is the strongest predictor in the model. OLS also gives an R-square value that expresses the overall goodness-of-fit for the model, or otherwise stated, the overall percentage of how much the set of independent variables in the model can predict the outcome of the dependent variable, in this case, the regularity that one watches a particular news outlet. Depending on the model, these statistics may not yield startlingly high values, but they are still meaningful in demonstrating trends in the data. In my research, I have performed eleven such OLS analyses, regressing the five independent variables on eleven news outlets: network news, Fox News, CNN, the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer (Lehrer), The O’Reilly Factor (O’Reilly), NPR, Rush Limbaugh’s radio show (Limbaugh), Sunday news shows, morning news programs, C-SPAN and MSNBC. Based on the results of these models, I have narrowed the range of my analysis in the next two steps of my statistical research to seven news outlets.

Step two in the analysis takes the seven news programs that show the greatest effects of ideology and party ID in predicting news consumption choices and teases out the differences in how partisanship and ideology distinctly affect the models. To do so, I
have run separate path analyses for party ID and ideology on the seven different news sources, which again, have been treated as the dependent variable. Path analysis builds upon OLS regression to more clearly distinguish the effects of the model’s independent variables as run in unique direct and indirect “pathways” to the dependent variable through the use of graphic models. Figure 5.4 and 5.5 illustrate the two models that I used.

[Insert Figures 5.4 and 5.5 about here]

In step three, having discovered that ideology is more effective in predicting news consumption choices, I flipped the original OLS model in step one of the analysis to move ideology into the position of being predicted by the seven different news outlets, taking the other four independent variables into consideration. The results of these models show the ability of news consumption choices to contribute to the prediction of one’s ideology, profoundly demonstrating that not only do ideology and party ID affect news consumption choices, but news consumption choices also affect ideology. Before analyzing the data, however, the following section defines the variables used in the study.

**Description of Data/Variables**

The variables used in this study are found in the 2004 Pew biennial news consumption dataset. Under the guidance of the Princeton Survey Research Associates International, the interviews were conducted in a nationwide, random-digit telephone sample of 3,000 adults between April 19 and May 12, 2004. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling is
plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based on either Form 1 (N=1,493) or Form 2 (N=1,507), the sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The variables I have selected to use in this study are as follows (for data frequencies and exact wording of the survey questions, see Appendix A):

- **“News consumption”**—This variable refers to a battery of questions in which respondents were asked to answer how often they watch, listen or read a selection of news sources. The range of answers is, “regularly,” “sometimes,” “hardly ever,” “never” and “don’t know.” I assigned missing values to respondents who replied “don’t know,” resulting in a range from one to four, with lower values indicating regular consumption of the particular news outlet. See Table 5.1 for mean percentages of how frequently people consume each program.

- **“PID”**—This variable is derived from a question that asks people whether they consider themselves a Republican, Democrat or Independent. Respondents could also voluntarily state that they had “no preference” or “other.” I transformed these latter two categories into one category called “other,” and assigned missing values to respondents who said that they “didn’t know.”

- **“Ideology”**—This variable asks if people consider their political views as “very conservative,” “conservative,” “moderate,” “liberal” or “very liberal,” which results in a five-point scale that I have treated as an ordinal scale, like “PID.” Again I have made a transformation on those who responded “don’t know,” coding them as missing values.
• “Rural” and “Large city” (“large city” will also be referenced as “city” in tables and analysis)—These variables are two of the four categories asked by Pew regarding the best description for “the place where you now live.” Respondents were asked to decide between “a large city,” ‘a suburb near a large city,” “a small city or town” and “a rural area.” I transformed this variable to create two dummy variables in order to use them in linear regression models. In order to illustrate the greatest amount of variance, I elected to use only “large city” and “rural” in an effort to depict the geographical implications of “red state, blue state.”

• “Same view”—This variable gauges whether or not people generally like it when a news source “shares your point of view on politics and issues.” Respondents could answer “like it,” “dislike it” or “doesn’t matter.” However, to make this variable ordinal-level data, I recoded the responses so that “doesn’t matter” forms the middle of a scale from one to three with “like it” being one and “dislike it” being three.

**Data Analysis**

1. **OLS Regression**

In running the first round of regressions on eleven news outlets, the data show that news consumption of Rush Limbaugh is most affected by the five independent variables, as determined by the R-square values. Fox News and “The O’Reilly Factor” are relatively distant followers, succeeded still further behind by NPR and CNN. The independent variables of party ID, ideology, city size (rural and large city) and same view
collectively influence consumption of Rush Limbaugh by 11.5 percent, Fox News by 5.7 percent, Bill O’Reilly by 5.5 percent, NPR by 2.4 percent, CNN by 1.6 percent, Jim Lehrer by 1 percent, and network news by .08 percent

[Insert Table 5.2 about here]

Within these results, as indicated by the beta coefficients listed in Table 5.2, ideology is the strongest predictor of news consumption for Rush Limbaugh (.255), Fox News (.183) and the O’Reilly Factor (.153). That these values are positive indicates that conservatives are regular consumers of these news programs. Each of these relationships is statistically significant at the .000 level. Ideology also proves itself a strong predictor in the NPR model, with a beta-value of -.124 (p=.000), demonstrating that liberals are regular consumers of NPR. A negative relationship also shows up between ideology and viewers of CNN, Jim Lehrer and network news whose audiences also tend to lean toward the liberal side of the spectrum. This supports my second hypothesis that liberals and conservatives show differences in the news that they watch. Each sub-hypothesis is also supported in that the audiences for Fox News, Rush Limbaugh and the O’Reilly Factor are conservative, while the audiences for CNN (p=.034), network news (p=.073, approaching statistical significance), Jim Lehrer (p=.032) and NPR lean liberal.

Similar patterns hold true for the independent variable of party ID, in that Fox News, O’Reilly and Limbaugh attract a Republican audience. These relationships are statistically significant, therefore supporting my first hypothesis, that party identification influences what news people watch. However, party ID has only a slight negative influence on Lehrer, network news and NPR. These relationships are not significant,
though the p-value for Lehrer approaches significance. The CNN beta coefficient is slightly positive (0.024), indicating that it does not attract a decidedly Democratic audience, though its p-value is insignificant. Therefore, I cannot support the research sub-hypotheses, with certainty, that Democrats watch CNN and network news more than Fox, Jim Lehrer more than O’Reilly, and listen to NPR more than Limbaugh. However the trend, though insignificant based on the beta coefficients, clearly suggests that these relationships exist.

The rural versus city debate inherent in “red state, blue state” shows little support in the argument about news media polarization, and therefore, little support for my third set of research hypotheses. City dwellers do prefer Jim Lehrer to Bill O’Reilly for their news, and city dwellers also show a statistically significant relationship to listening to NPR. However, it is also statistically significant that Fox news and CNN viewers are not rural dwellers, nor are O’Reilly or C-SPAN viewers. My theory that viewers of the more conservative news programming will show a relationship to rural residence is not supported. However the hypothesis that NPR and Jim Lehrer news consumers are city dwellers is supported. Such a trend could be explained by rural lack of access to cable television.

The final variable in the OLS model – people who prefer to consume news that shares their same view – shows itself to be an interesting though weak predictor. As suggested by my hypotheses, Fox News and Bill O’Reilly do attract viewers who seem to want their views reinforced by their news stations. However, these stations are closely followed by CNN, NPR, C-SPAN and network news, suggesting that these news stations
also express a political viewpoint with which its viewers are in agreement. The previous data regarding these news programs and their partisan and ideological audience, however, suggest only weak Democratic or liberal relationships, excepting NPR that does show a substantial liberal ideological relationship (-.124, compared to CNN at -.061 and C-SPAN and network news’ statistically insignificant beta-values of -.037 and -.051).

II. Path Analysis

To illustrate these relationships in a clearer, more holistic manner, I have employed the same variables in fourteen path analysis models that look at how party identification and ideology distinctly drive people’s news consumption choices. The advantages of performing path analyses on the data is to graphically illustrate the relationships between the variables and to identify the strength of the independent variables by creating unique direct and indirect pathways from, distinctly, party ID and ideology, to the dependent variable of news consumption. Indirect paths are calculated by multiplying the standardized (beta) coefficients for each variable and adding those values to the beta-values of the direct paths to arrive at the total effects of each model. Tables 5.3 through 5.16 show the direct, indirect and total effects for each path analysis model.

What is most striking about these results is that in their separate models, both party ID and ideology are driving factors of the analysis. This is evinced by the strong direct path values from party ID to the dependent variable of news consumption, and from ideology to the dependent variable of news consumption. [Figures 5.4 and 5.5 show the visual illustration of the path models.] Also of note is the relatively larger impact of
the indirect paths when Fox News, O’Reilly and Limbaugh serve as the dependent variable. Respectively, these values add .011, .012 and .009 to the total effects for party ID and .017, .017 and .018 to ideology. This compares to the ignorable values added to network news (-.001 for party ID and -.003 for ideology), CNN (.002 for party ID and - .004 for ideology), Lehrer (-.003 for both party ID and ideology) and NPR (-.003 for party ID and -.002 for ideology).

Additionally, in looking at the R-square values of these models, we see that the strongest path models are those in which ideology and same view are regressed on Limbaugh and O’Reilly, resulting in an R-square value of .092 for Limbaugh listeners and .047 for O’Reilly viewers. Because R-square values are the percentage of variance in the dependent variable as explained by the independent variables, these appear to be small estimates of total explanatory power. However, when compared to the other models, these values are substantially higher and statistically significant. Except in the cases of CNN (in both the party ID and ideology models) and NPR (in both the party ID and ideology models) the overall fitness of the model is stronger when same view and party ID/ideology are regressed onto the dependent variable. In the CNN and NPR models, the path from party ID/ideology to rural dwellers to city dwellers is a stronger model, explained by the stronger and significant effects of living in a large city. In the case of Lehrer, the effects of the two indirect paths are equal, though weak at R-square values of .005 for party ID and .006 for ideology.

Tables 5.17 and 5.18 summarize the total effects for the party ID and ideology models, respectively, to concisely demonstrate the overall impact of the independent
variables of party ID, ideology, rural, city and same view on the dependent variable of news consumption. From these tables, I find support for the ninth hypothesis to conclude that for each of the seven news sources, ideology is a stronger predictor than party ID, city size or same view. These findings strongly reinforce those found in the basic OLS regressions in Table 5.2, and can demonstrate clear support for hypotheses five, six and eight. Hypothesis seven, that consumption of Fox News, O’Reilly and Limbaugh can be predicted by rural city size more than network news, CNN, Lehrer or NPR, does not find support from the data.

[Insert Tables 5.17 and 5.18 about here]

In comparing the summary findings of these path analysis models to the original OLS regression statistics in table 5.2, we get a purer and more refined look at the data. In support of hypothesis five, that ideology is a stronger predictor for Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh, Table 5.19 demonstrates that the total effects of ideology on each of these news sources is, respectively, .218, .213 and .313, all of which are statistically significant at the .000 level. These values are substantially larger than the values for network news, CNN, Lehrer and NPR, though NPR shows the highest predictive power from ideology with a beta-value of -.121. And excepting the case of NPR, these values are all higher than the OLS model statistics, further showcasing the strength of the predictor of ideology when given a chance to perform in indirect and direct paths to the dependent variable.

[Insert Table 5.19 about here]
The sixth hypothesis, that Fox News, O’Reilly and Limbaugh will be more influenced by party ID than the other four news sources is also supported. The path analysis summary statistics show beta coefficients for Fox at .144, O’Reilly at .175 and Limbaugh at .242, again all statistically significant at the .000 level. These values far surpass the beta coefficients for network news (-.016, not significant), CNN (.040, not significant), Lehrer (-.036, significant at the .05 level) and NPR (-.030, significant at the .05 level), in support of my hypothesis. While the beta-values of these latter news sources did not increase much from the OLS analysis (or even decreased in the case of network news), the finding that the values of Fox News, O’Reilly and Limbaugh increased substantially in the path analyses shows that the variables working in these models are, in fact, real predictors of how often these news programs are consumed.

The path analyses do not demonstrate support for the seventh hypothesis that consumers of Fox News, O’Reilly and Limbaugh will hail from rural parts of the country. In fact, there is no evidence of such a relationship. Fox viewers and CNN viewers are just as likely to not be from rural areas, with statistically significant beta-values of .083 and .081. For evidence of rural viewers, Table 5.19 would need to demonstrate negative values. However, there is support for hypothesis eight, in that consumers of CNN, Lehrer and NPR will hail from large cities. In the case of Lehrer and NPR, these values are significant at the .01 level. Additionally, these values are slightly higher when ideology is the primary predictor in the model, rather than party ID.

III. Reversing the Model
Thus far, the data presented support the first nine hypotheses of my research. In support of the tenth and eleventh hypotheses, I used the same variables in the original OLS model, but made ideology the dependent variable, and moved the seven news consumption choices to the independent variable in seven distinct regression equations.

[Insert Table 5.20 about here]

These data show that not only does ideology predict the news people consume, but news consumption choices also predict ideology. With all five independent variables regressed on ideology, Fox and O’Reilly and Limbaugh show the greatest beta-values at .170, .146 and .249, respectively. To reiterate, these values indicate the amount of predictive power that news consumption choices (the specific program identified in the models) exert on the dependent variable of ideology. Compared to the results found in step one of my analysis – the effect of ideology on the same programs, .218 (Fox), .213 (O’Reilly), .313 (Limbaugh) – we see that the inverse relationships found here are weaker, but statistically significant. In essence, there is a reciprocal, or politically reinforcing effect occurring between news consumption and ideology, with respect to Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh. This analysis shows support for the tenth hypothesis and sub-hypotheses, that consumption of Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh predict conservative ideology.

The beta-values for network news, CNN, NPR and Lehrer, on the other hand, are meager at -.048 (approaching significance) for network news, -.055 (significant at the .05 level) for CNN, -.040 (significant at the .05 level) for Jim Lehrer and -.115 (significant at the .01 level) for NPR. Though these values are small, they show a negative relationship
to ideology, which means that in fact, they do predict being liberal. Hypothesis eleven predicted that these shows would show no influence on ideology, and thus, cannot be supported. In fact, NPR consumption is a relatively strong predictor of being liberal.

The overall percentage of variance explained in ideology by the independent variables, including news consumption is highest in the more ideologically driven models that were discovered in both the OLS regressions and path analyses models above. Listening to Limbaugh, in conjunction with the other four independent variables, explains 13.6 percent of the variance in ideology. This is followed by Fox News, which explains 12.7 percent of the variance and O’Reilly, which explains 10.2 percent of the variance in ideology. Of note in these models also, is the newfound importance of living in rural areas, which now shows a statistically significant relationship to being conservative in all of the models except network news, O’Reilly and Limbaugh. The latter two findings are perplexing, though the substantial and significant beta-value of -.086 for the Fox news model does fit the “red state, blue state” expectations.

**Summary of findings**

Overall, there is some strong statistical support for the notion of “red news, blue news,” from a demand-side perspective. Fox News, The O’Reilly Factor and Rush Limbaugh are not only attracting conservative and Republican audiences to their news programming, but they are also helping to predict people’s ideological position as conservative.
From the OLS regression models, I find that Rush Limbaugh is the news source that can be most predicted by such characteristically red state, blue state qualities as ideology, party ID, rural versus urban living and whether or not one has a preference for news that shares their same view. Ultimately, 11.5 percent of Rush’s audience can be predicted based on these five independent variables. Comparatively, the same variables predict nearly 6 percent of both Fox News and O’Reilly audiences. The predictability of the model falls off sharply for the remaining news outlets, though NPR shows some influence by the model’s variables with 2.4 percent of its audience explained by the predictors.

The path analysis models, however, give us a deeper look at these relationships, exposing that ideology rather than party ID is the driving force for each of these models. For every news outlet except network news, the path analysis model emphasizes the effects of both party ID and ideology on the dependent variable. This increase is even stronger in the cases of Fox News, The O’Reilly Factor and Rush Limbaugh, underscoring the substantial correlation between ideology and these particular outlets, rather than the other four. Based on the evidence in the Pew survey, it is difficult to discern why this is the case. The ‘same view’ variable shows little effect, indicating that people aren’t consciously choosing news that shares their same view. However, people are likely reluctant to admit that they behold such a narrow view.

The consequences of these findings indicate that according to a media effects view of uses and gratifications, people’s views are likely being reinforced by such news consumption choices, whether consciously or subconsciously. The data show that there is
clearly a news outlet that conservatives prefer in the media. Without such a preference being seen on the liberal side, the reinforcement effects of a uses and gratifications model tip unequally to one side. It is likely, however, that there are other news outlets, such as blogs and opinion magazines, on both sides of the spectrum that would show even stronger ideological effects. But these media appeal to smaller niche audiences and have not been asked in the Pew survey.

Though the mass media serve an ever-decreasing segment of the mass population, the truth is that they still serve the largest collective audience. Chapter six now turns to the content of the mass media’s news supply.
Figure 5.1: ANES Ideology over Time
Figure 5.2: ANES Strength of Partisanship over Time
Figure 5.3: “News Audiences Increasingly Politicized,” 2004

Figure 5.4
Path Analysis Illustration for PID, rural, city, same view regressed on news consumption

Path 1: News consumption = b11(PID)
Path 2: News consumption = b21 (PID) + b22 (rural) + b23 (city)
Path 3: News consumption = b31 (PID) + b32 (same view)
Figure 5.5
Path Analysis Illustration for ideology, rural, city, same view regressed on news consumption

Path 1: News consumption = $b_{11}$ (ideology)
Path 2: News consumption = $b_{21}$ (ideology) + $b_{22}$ (rural) + $b_{23}$ (city)
Path 3: News consumption = $b_{31}$ (ideology) + $b_{32}$ (same view)
Table 5.1: Mean Percentages of News Media Consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Hardly</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lehrer</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Reilly</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limbaugh</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>73.2</td>
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</table>
Table 5.2: OLS Summary
DV= News Consumption; IV=PID, Ideology, Rural, Large City, Same View

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PID</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Large City</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Same View</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>R2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network News</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>0.409</td>
<td>-0.051^</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.531</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.008</td>
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<td>FOX</td>
<td>0.061*</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.183**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.082**</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.899</td>
<td>0.071**</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.057</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.403</td>
<td>-0.061*</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.08**</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td>0.062*</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lehrer</td>
<td>-0.038^</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>-0.044*</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.632</td>
<td>-0.052**</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.054**</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.010</td>
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<td>O'Reilly</td>
<td>0.098**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.153**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.048^</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.056*</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.074**</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.055</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.888</td>
<td>-0.124**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.739</td>
<td>-0.070**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.062**</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limbaugh</td>
<td>0.153**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.255**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.413</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.252</td>
<td>0.04^</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.115</td>
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<td>Sunday</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>-0.036^</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.173</td>
<td>-0.038^</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.057**</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
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<td>Morning</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.653</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.240</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>-0.036^</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.043*</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.004</td>
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<td>C-SPAN</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.925</td>
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<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.045*</td>
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<td>-0.018</td>
<td>0.376</td>
<td>0.060**</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.008</td>
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<td>MSNBC</td>
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<td>0.242</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.154</td>
<td>0.051^</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>0.511</td>
<td>0.073**</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  
** p < .01  
^ .051<p>.125
Table 5.3: Path Analysis--Network News/ PID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>p</th>
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* p < .05  ** p < .01  ^ .051 < p < .125
Table 5.4: Path Analysis--Network News/Ideology

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* p < .05    ** p < .01    ^ .051 < p < .125
Table 5.13: Path Analysis--NPR/ PID

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<td></td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05       ** p < .01      ^ .051 < p < .125
## Table 5.17: Path Analysis Summary, PID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PID</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Same View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network news</strong></td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.064*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fox</strong></td>
<td>.144**</td>
<td>.070**</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.094**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CNN</strong></td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.081**</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.071**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lehrer</strong></td>
<td>-.036*</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>-.052**</td>
<td>.064**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>O'Reilly</strong></td>
<td>.175**</td>
<td>.047^</td>
<td>.054*</td>
<td>.081**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NPR</strong></td>
<td>-.030*</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.074**</td>
<td>.066**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limbaugh</strong></td>
<td>.242**</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.043^</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05
** p < .01
^ .051 < p < .125
Table 5.18: Path Analysis Summary, IDEOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Ideology</th>
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<th>City</th>
<th>Same View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network news</strong></td>
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<td>.020</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.055*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fox</strong></td>
<td>.218**</td>
<td>.083**</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.086**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CNN</strong></td>
<td>-.069*</td>
<td>.081**</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.069*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lehrer</strong></td>
<td>-.056**</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>-.055**</td>
<td>.054**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>O'Reilly</strong></td>
<td>.213**</td>
<td>.051^</td>
<td>.062*</td>
<td>.087**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NPR</strong></td>
<td>-.121**</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>-.074**</td>
<td>.062**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limbaugh</strong></td>
<td>.313**</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.060*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  
** p < .01  
^ .051 < p < .125
### Table 5.19: Path Analysis/OLS Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Ind. Var.</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Fox</th>
<th>CNN</th>
<th>Lehrer</th>
<th>O'Reilly</th>
<th>NPR</th>
<th>Limbaugh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OLS PID</td>
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<td>0.061*</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>-0.038^</td>
<td>0.098**</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.153**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path PID</td>
<td>PID</td>
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<td>0.144**</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>-0.036*</td>
<td>0.175**</td>
<td>-0.030*</td>
<td>0.242**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLS Ideology</td>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-0.051^</td>
<td>0.183**</td>
<td>-0.061*</td>
<td>-0.044*</td>
<td>0.153**</td>
<td>-0.124**</td>
<td>0.255**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path Ideology</td>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-0.052^</td>
<td>0.218**</td>
<td>-0.069*</td>
<td>-0.056**</td>
<td>0.213**</td>
<td>-0.121**</td>
<td>0.313**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLS Rural</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.082**</td>
<td>0.080**</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.048^</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path-PID Rural</td>
<td>Rural</td>
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<td>0.070**</td>
<td>0.081**</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.047^</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path-Ideology Rural</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.083**</td>
<td>0.081**</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.051^</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLS City</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>-0.052**</td>
<td>0.056*</td>
<td>-0.070**</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path-PID City</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.052**</td>
<td>0.054*</td>
<td>-0.074**</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path-Ideology City</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-0.055**</td>
<td>0.062*</td>
<td>-0.074**</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLS Same View</td>
<td>Same View</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.071**</td>
<td>0.062*</td>
<td>0.054**</td>
<td>0.074**</td>
<td>0.062**</td>
<td>0.040^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path-PID Same View</td>
<td>Same View</td>
<td>0.064*</td>
<td>0.094**</td>
<td>0.071**</td>
<td>0.064**</td>
<td>0.081**</td>
<td>0.066**</td>
<td>0.043^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path-Ideology Same View</td>
<td>Same View</td>
<td>0.055*</td>
<td>0.086**</td>
<td>0.069*</td>
<td>0.054**</td>
<td>0.087**</td>
<td>0.062**</td>
<td>0.060*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05     ** p < .01     ^ .051 < p < .125
Table 5.20: OLS Summaries, Reversed
DV=Ideology; IV=News Source, PID, Rural, Large City, Same View

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PID</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Large City</th>
<th>Same View</th>
<th>R2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network News</td>
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<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
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<td>0.183**</td>
<td>0.082**</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.071**</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
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<td>-0.061*</td>
<td>0.08**</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.062*</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lehrer</td>
<td>-0.038^</td>
<td>-0.044*</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>-0.052**</td>
<td>0.054**</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Reilly</td>
<td>0.098**</td>
<td>0.153**</td>
<td>0.048^</td>
<td>0.056*</td>
<td>0.074**</td>
<td>0.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.124**</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.070**</td>
<td>0.062**</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limbaugh</td>
<td>0.153**</td>
<td>0.255**</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.04^</td>
<td>0.115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  
** p < .01  
^ .051 < p < .125
That’s the way partisanship operates, both to maintain and to exacerbate differences in people’s political views, by presenting a kind of partisan filter on all sorts of events.”

-Larry Bartels, in interview with Carl Cannon of *The National Journal*

“Drama is a defining characteristic of news. An event is particularly newsworthy if it has some elements of a dramatic narrative.”

– Paletz and Entman, *Media Power Politics*, p. 17

**Overview**

Upon demonstrating how the public seems to demand a degree of political polarization from their news media, in this section, I aim to illustrate the supply side of such polarization through a content analysis study.

For this content analysis, I have chosen to analyze television news coverage of the Senate confirmation hearings for Samuel Alito’s nomination to the United States Supreme Court that took place between January 9, 2006 and January 13, 2006. Due to the time and resource constraints of this study, I coded only the first two days of hearing coverage, on Monday, January 9 and Tuesday, January 10 of 2006. I selected this particular news event because, without being as naturally divisive as an election or war, it demonstrates the manner in which the news media frame news as conflict. Additionally, this news event drew much attention from the public who is invested in the outcome of the ideological make-up of the high court.

The results of this study illustrate a tendency for the news media to report the news in a dramatized fashion. I have found that all of the six networks that I analyzed, as
well as standard news reporting, morning news shows and interview shows draw fuel from the notion of a red team and a blue team, whether employing direct partisan or ideological comparisons, or more subtle inferences to such a division. As Lance Bennett says, “The temptation for news organizations is to look for the most extreme cases rather than the most representative examples of a subject” (Bennett, 2005). Evidence of such a trend is clearly represented in a content analysis of the Samuel Alito Senate hearings that took place between January 9, 2006 and January 13, 2006.

**Hypotheses**

H1: For the two-day period of television news coverage of the Samuel Alito hearings, overall, the partisan frame is employed at least as much as other important news frames.

H2: Fox News will exhibit the greatest use of the partisan frame.

H3: PBS will exhibit the least use of the partisan frame.

H4: Interview format news coverage delivers more discussion of the partisan frame than standard news reporting and morning news programs.

H5: Fox guests will employ the partisan news frame more than guests from other news programs.

H6: Fox hosts will employ the partisan news frame more than hosts/anchors from other news programs.

H7: Reporters on ABC, CBS and NBC will show higher mean percentages of partisan framing than anchors, analysts, guests or Senator sound clips.

H8: Both guests and hosts on interview format news shows will demonstrate more usage of the partisan frame than reporters, analysts and Senator sound clips.

**Methodology**
The primary concept guiding this content analysis research is that the news media, both cable and network news, employ the inciting news frame of partisan/ideological teams in their delivery of the news. To test such a claim, I have performed a content analysis study on 44 television news transcripts, which resulted in 75,065 analyzed words. These transcripts are the result of a Lexis Nexis search for “Alito” and “hearings” in news transcripts for ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox News, CNN and PBS on January 9, 2006 and January 10, 2006. In performing a search for these articles, the total number of transcripts, excluding articles archived for CNN’s website, www.cnn.com, yielded 77 transcripts (thirteen for ABC, eighteen for CBS, ten for NBC, nine for Fox News and 27 for CNN). However, transcripts have been catalogued by Lexis Nexis not as entire shows, but rather as segments. Therefore, for several of the news programs, Lexis Nexis yielded more than one transcript. Additionally, some transcripts for ABC, CBS and NBC contained less than 100 words, and were not coded. Also, one CBS transcript and two CNN transcripts are duplicates of segments already archived by Lexis Nexis, or repeated by the news source in the course of the news program.

Because I analyzed the written transcripts of the television news programs, the unit of analysis for this study is word count rather than seconds or minutes as is employed in some content analysis studies such as those at the Center for Media and Public Affairs. Because I am concerned with mean percentages of content, the results of the analysis are equally as telling as a time-based study.

The primary method of analysis used in this study is a descriptive evaluation of the mean percentages of each variable. I’ve also employed mean comparison tests –
independent t-tests and ANOVA – to determine whether or not the differences between the units of analysis are significant and did not occur by chance. However, because the numbers of cases for each of the six news sources are low (minimum of two for PBS and maximum of seventeen for CNN), the significance tests often did not produce strong evidence that the comparative relationships between the variables are conclusive and did not occur by chance. But based on the trends discerned in this study, it is reasonable to expect that with more cases, the results would demonstrate higher levels of statistical significance.

The coding system employed in this study is a novel approach. Based on the seven information frames described in the next section, I color coded each transcript. I employed this system in order to provide a record of how each frame was coded. The coding system permits any given word to be coded for only one news information frame. This naturally leads to instances in which the coder had to decide between two and sometimes three different frames. In this case, a frame was coded only for the dominant frame being conveyed by the messenger, taking into consideration the context of the discussion. (See Appendix B for examples of coded transcripts)

In addition to providing samples of coded transcripts in the appendix, I have tested for the objectivity and replication standards of this study by comparing the results of another coder’s content analysis with my own. Based on the coder guidelines found in Appendix B, the inter-coder reliability percentage for the eight cross-examined transcripts is 92.3 percent. In other words, the two coders coded the same information frames for 92.3 percent of the total word count for all eight articles.
**Description of Data/Variabls**

In order to find evidence of partisan polarization in the press, I have devised a coding system that takes into account six television news outlets, seven information-framing variables, five “messengers” and three news formats. See Appendix B for a summary of each news show (“Show Summary at a Glance”).

**News Outlets:**

- **ABC** – Eight news show transcripts were yielded for a Lexis Nexis search for ABC transcripts during the two days of analysis. New programs include *Nightline, World News Tonight, Special Report, Good Morning America* and *ABC News Now*.
- **CBS** – Six CBS news show transcripts have been coded over the two days, which include the following news programs: *CBS Morning News, The Osgood File, CBS Evening News* and *The Early Show*.
- **NBC** – Four NBC news show transcripts have been coded over the two days, which include the following news programs: *Today* and *NBC Nightly News*.
- **FOX** – Seven Fox news show transcripts have been coded over the two days, which include the following news programs: *Fox on the Record with Greta Van Susteren, Hannity and Colmes, Fox Special Report with Brit Hume* and *The Big Story with John Gibson*.
- **CNN** – Seventeen CNN news show transcripts have been coded over the two days, which include the following news programs: *Larry King Live, The Paula Zahn Show,*
PBS – Two PBS news show transcripts have been coded over the two days, which include the following news programs: *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*.

**News show format:**

In order to analyze the hypothesized differences in coverage between different types of news programs, I define the following the variables:

- **“Standard news format”** – This variable encompasses all news shows that deliver their news in a standard news format, in which a news anchor and reporter deliver the majority of the news messages, sometimes augmented by analysis from news analysts. In this format, the anchor typically asks the reporter or analyst questions. This study classifies 26 of the 44 shows as employing the standard news format.
- **“Interview news format”** – The interview show format defines any news program whose show consists of interviews with someone who is considered an expert on the subject. Shows were only classified here if at least one-third of their entire word count consisted of interviews with guests. This study classifies eleven of the 44 shows as interview format news programming.
- **“Morning news format”** – This variable distinguishes news programs based on whether or not they are delivered before noon, unless they are special reports, as commonly used on CNN. While the structure of their programming is similar to the
standard news format, I posit that their coverage is different because they appeal to a
different audience. This study classifies seven of the 44 shows as a morning show.

*Information-framing variables:*

The following variables are the seven information frames used to categorize
coverage of the Alito hearings for each show. A detailed codebook is found in Appendix B.

- **“General/Hearings”** – This variable is the catchall category for any direct discussion
  of the hearings that do not pertain to the other variables in the study.
- **“Alito Record”** – This variable quantifies how often Samuel Alito’s qualifications to
  be Supreme Court Justice are discussed. This includes his background, his case rulings,
  his record, and discussion of his overall suitability to be a justice on the high court.
- **“Alito Performance”** – This variable looks at how often news programs spend
  discussing or evaluating Samuel Alito’s performance in the hearing. This includes
  referencing things he said during the hearings and how people reacted to what he said. It
  also encompasses speculation about whether or not Alito will be confirmed.
- **“Alito Characterization”** – This variable looks at how much news content is devoted
  to discussing Alito’s character rather than his record or what he said in the hearings.
- **“Abortion”** – This variable codes for any direct or indirect mention of abortion, as the
  issue that seemed to dominate the discussion of Alito’s confirmation and whether or not
  he would overturn “Roe v Wade”.
• “Executive Power” – This variable codes for how often the issue of executive power is discussed in the news coverage of the Alito hearings. Subtopics included in this variable include wiretapping, domestic spying and the president’s role in going to war.

• “Partisan Frame” – This variable quantifies the amount of news coverage devoted to partisan or ideological differences in the Senate, Congress, judges, interest groups or the public. It includes any discussion that pits Republicans against Democrats or conservatives against liberals. It also includes any disputes between ideologically opposed guests, hosts, reporters and/or news analysts. Talk about the possibility of a filibuster is included in this variable.

The last of these seven frames is the principle variable that will be considered in this study, though the other six variables, or information news frames, serve as points of reference against which to compare the quantity of partisan coverage. The first four variables were chosen as substantive news frames, while “abortion” and “executive power” were chosen as the dominant issues discussed in the news media during the Alito Senate hearings.

Messengers:

In the analysis of data, I have named the following seven categories, collectively, as the “messengers.” The messengers are the people who deliver the news messages, whether news anchors, television hosts, reporters, analysts, talk show guests or news clips. (See appendix for full listing of news shows and messengers).
• “Host/anchor” – This variable is defined as the messenger who, in the case of standard news shows and morning shows, anchors the newscast, or in the case of interview shows, is the host or moderator of the program.

• “Reporter” – The reporter is generally employed in standard news format shows as the messenger who reports the news, often on site from where the news has taken place.

• “Analyst” – News analysts are additional voices in the news who deliver more in-depth analysis of the news events. They are regular contributors to the news programs.

• “Guest” – Guests are defined here as people who have been invited on the news programs for in-person interviews, either in the news studio, by cameras, or on site at the Senate hearings.

• “Senator Clips” – Clips are defined as the sum of how many words each senator spoke in sound clips replayed by the news shows.

• “Alito” – This variable is defined as the total word count for sound clips from Alito’s hearing statements, as replayed by each news program.

• “Other” – This variable includes any other person who delivered commentary during the newscasts who has not already been coded. Few messengers fall into this category, but they include interview clips with people from Alito’s hometown, George Bush and replays of television advertising for or against Alito’s nomination.

Data Analysis and Findings

The analysis of the data proceeds in three parts. In part one, I will address the overall use of the seven information frames. In part two, I will compare the use of the
partisan frame by messengers across the six news outlets examined in this study. And in part three, I will make the same comparisons of partisan news frames employed by the messengers in part two, but analyzed from the perspective of the three news format variables: interview show, standard news format and morning shows.

I. Information Frames

Figure 6.1 illustrates the mean percentages of word counts for each of the seven information frames as employed by all 44 news programs. The data indicate that the partisan frame was employed for a mean percentage of just over twenty percent of total coverage. The second most commonly employed frame, at 17.3 percent, was the catchall frame that covered general discussions of the hearings and the senators. This indicates support for my first hypothesis.

[Insert Figure 6.1 about here]

In looking at how each network covered the hearings according to the seven information frames, I find support for my second hypothesis, that the Fox News Network made use of the partisan frame more than other networks, with a mean percentage of 25.3 percent. Fox’s lead, however, is followed closely by NBC at 22.8 percent and ABC at 20.4 percent. Figure 6.2 illustrates the support for my second hypothesis, that Fox News will employ the partisan frame more than other networks. Compared to the values of the second most frequent frame, Fox used the general frame for 17.8 percent of their programming for a mean difference of 7.5 percent. For NBC and ABC, the mean
differences between the partisan frame and the general frame are similar at 7.8 percent and 6.5 percent.

Figure 6.2 also elicits support for my third hypothesis, that PBS will show the least use of the partisan frame. The mean percentage of partisan framing for The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer is just shy of ten percent. Out of the seven frames, PBS employed the partisan frame less than all but the frame that characterized Alito.

Overall, in four of the six networks, the partisan frame was the most commonly employed news frame of the seven information frames. In addition to PBS, the general frame nudges out the partisan frame for CBS’s coverage of the Alito hearings. CNN’s use of the partisan frame was slightly below the average, at 19.2 percent, fully six percentage points lower than its cable competitor, Fox News Network.

Alternatively, a look at the partisan frames by news show format demonstrates that, as hypothesized, interview shows employ the partisan frame (23.96 percent) more than standard news shows (18 percent). However, the fourth hypothesis is only partially supported because interview shows actually used the partisan frame ever so slightly less than morning shows (24.05 percent). See Appendix B for precise mean percentages for each category of comparison.

Standard news shows spend more time talking about the general features of the hearing (20.2 percent), while interview shows use the partisan frame almost twice as much as the general informational frame (11.2 percent). In all three news show formats,
abortion, as the more inciting of the two issue-based frames analyzed is also more common. Morning shows, as expected, also spend more time employing the soft news frame of talking about Alito’s personal characteristics (11.7 percent), unrelated to his role as Supreme Court nominee. Surprisingly, these morning shows also reported more news through the hard news frame of Alito’s record and qualifications (12.2 percent) than the other two news formats. Of note also, the news show formats reported more on the horserace frame of the hearings (9.8 percent) than the other two news formats.

Ultimately, the mean distribution of frames for both networks and news show formats indicates that Fox uses the partisan frame most. However, there is not strong support that interview news formats deliver more partisan framing than the standard news programs and morning news shows. Other than Fox News, there seems to be no clear leader of partisan framing, as all but PBS engages in the practice at relatively high levels.

II. Networks

To take a closer look at who, within the news segments, are advancing the partisan frame, I have organized the data by messenger: host/anchor, reporter, news analyst, Senator sound clips, other, and sound clips from Alito. Figure 6.4, “Who’s the Talking Head?” demonstrates the differences between news networks. For the three broadcast networks, ABC, CBS and NBC, the reporter delivers the greatest percentage of total word count, followed by the host. CNN is characterized similarly, though the host spends nearly as much time talking as the reporters (25 percent for hosts versus 28 percent for reporters). Only on Fox News and the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer do guests
surpass any network messenger as the talking head. In this study, Fox guests spoke approximately 42 percent of the time, while Lehrer guests spoke approximately 36 percent of the time. Of note is the startling amount of time given to direct sound clips from Alito on the Lehrer show, which shows unusually high levels of direct information from the newsmaker rather than the news messenger. Here, Alito himself, was the second most dominant talking head, with more than 28 percent of the news program spent replaying his direct statements in the hearing.

[Insert Figure 6.4 about here]

To facilitate an examination of like messengers across the networks, Figure 6.5 presents the same information, but grouped by the messenger type. Here, it is clear to see that the host, as compared to other networks, talks most at Fox News, making very little use of reporters; the reporter dominates the delivery of news at ABC; CNN employs news analysts the most; guests speak most on Fox, followed by Lehrer; CBS and Lehrer used Senator sound clips the most; Alito was granted a chance to appeal directly to the public most on Lehrer; and all networks generally gave little coverage to messengers outside of these parameters.

[Insert Figure 6.5 about here]

Figures 6.6 and 6.7 show mean percentages of how much the seven different messengers from the six news networks discussed the partisan frame. The mean value is derived from the total partisan word count for each messenger divided by the total word count of the partisan frame employed. These data answer the question: who, in each station, is driving the overall employment of the partisan frame. Figure 6.6 illustrates that
in ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN news programming, the reporter is responsible for the majority of partisan talk with mean values of, respectively, 63.1 percent, 38.7 percent, 48.5 percent and 49.6 percent. Alternatively, on the Fox news channel and Lehrer news program, the guests deliver the highest percentage of overall partisan framing at 40 percent and 89.4 percent, respectively. It must be considered here, however, that the mean percentage for the Lehrer show is based on a very small mean percentage of partisan framing, on the whole, which inflates the value of the guest’s delivery of such framing. Of note, also, is that Fox News hosts fall only a bit behind the guests in delivering the partisan frame. This may be explained by the structure of the news programs that this study analyzed for Fox, based on the Lexis Nexis search. There was relatively little use of reporters in the Fox News shows examined here, which might indicate that news hosts compensate for the partisan talk that reporters might have contributed to the dialogue. Fox News, like other cable stations, uses the interview style news format more than the original three broadcast networks, and in the case of news coverage on the Alito hearings, more than CNN.

[Insert Figure 6.6 and 6.7 about here]

Alternatively, it is interesting to study the use of the partisan frame by messengers as a function of how much each messenger actually spoke. Such an analysis looks at how often the messengers in each program talked about the partisan frame, as a percentage of their own speech. Figures 6.8 and 6.9 illustrate these comparisons across the networks, and as grouped by messenger type. Similar to the trends revealed in Figures 6.5, the reporters of ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN still demonstrate themselves to be the
messengers who deliver the most partisan framing. However, the percentage of CNN’s reporters, relative to how much they report, rises significantly. Of note also, is that even though the “other” category accounts for very little of overall discussion, NBC makes use of these other speakers to disseminate the partisan frame in their newscasts.

Overall, these data indicate support for my hypotheses five, six and seven that both guests and hosts on Fox News will use the partisan frame most, and that reporters on ABC, CBS and NBC will use the partisan frame most in conveying information to the public about the confirmation hearings of Samuel Alito.

[Insert Figures 6.8 and 6.9 about here]

III. Show Format

As Figure 6.10 illustrates, the talking heads for both news show formats and morning news programs are reporters at mean percentage values of 32.1 percent and 48.4 percent. For interview shows, the primary talking heads are the interview guests themselves, at a mean percentage of 51 percent, representing over half of the total word count for interview show format news coverage of the Alito hearings. In each of the three formats, the host or anchor is the messenger who is the secondary talking head.

Figures 6.11 and 6.12 show that in the case of each of these news show formats, the primary talking head is also the messenger responsible for employing the greatest amount of partisan framing. As a percentage of the total partisan word count for each news format, reporters in morning shows and standard news shows deliver a startling amount of partisan framing at 53.4 percent and 49.1. For interview format news shows,
the guest is the talking head, also delivering a very high 48.5 percent of the partisan framing. These results support my eighth hypothesis, that guests and hosts would use the partisan frame more than other messengers in interview news formats.

[Insert Figures 6.11 and 6.12 about here]

These trends hold up when the messenger’s use of the partisan frame is taken as a percentage of the amount of words that they spoke during each program. In Figure 6.12, 28 percent of the reporters words in a news show are characterized by partisan framing, compared to 16.5 percent of the anchor’s total word count. For morning show reporters, that number is even higher at 30.9 percent, compared to 22.5 percent of partisan framing by anchors.

Guests on interview talk shows are actually less eager in their pursuit of framing things in a “red team, blue team” manner at 22.3 percent. This indicates that it may be a conscious decision by news producers to inject the conflict-wrought frame of partisanship in their news delivery. However, both hosts and reporters are not-so-distant runners-up in the talking head title for partisan talk at 14.5 percent and 13.5 percent, respectively.

Of note is that morning shows used messengers other than news anchors, reporters, analysts, guests or Senator clips to introduce the partisan frame (16.4 percent), though this is a relatively small influence when analyzed as a percentage of the total partisan count (4.5 percent).

Conclusion
This content analysis shows strong support for my overarching hypothesis that the news media make regular usage of the partisan frame. In analyzing a news event that was of national interest and not explicitly a partisan or ideological issue, this study demonstrates how the media transform issues into a “red team, blue team” conflict. Though the confirmation hearings do imply some ideological division, the fact that the partisan/ideological conflict was employed much more than the salient frame of presenting Alito’s record and background is a telling indicator of the news media’s tendency to emphasize politicized conflict. Additionally, it should be noted that any words referencing abortion were coded as such, even though the issue lends itself to political divisiveness. If these values were added to the partisan frame, the mean percentage for the partisan frame would be substantially higher. In the interest of not inflating the data, I kept the partisan conflict frame separate from the issue-based frame of abortion, regardless of their overlapping implications for conflict.

Major conclusions within the findings that partisan framing is dominant in the media are:

• Reporters for ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN are the primary messengers who deliver the partisan frame.

• Guests on Fox News and the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer are the primary messengers who deliver the partisan frame.

• On Fox News, news hosts/anchors are a close second as messengers delivering the partisan frame. They also use the partisan frame more than hosts or anchors on any other news network.
• CBS anchors show more use of the partisan frame than anchors/hosts on ABC, CBS NBC, CNN and Lehrer.

• Reporters for standard news shows use the partisan frame more than twice as much as news show anchors/hosts and over three times more than analysts or guests. The same trend is evident for morning show programs.

• In interview news show formats, guests are largely responsible for delivering the partisan frame.

• Interview show hosts use the partisan frame more than anchors/hosts in standard news shows and morning shows.

The study would be improved if more interview and debate programs were analyzed, particularly if the Sunday talk show circuit was included. One can only speculate, based on the results found here, that a more inclusive study would make these conclusions stronger.

Additionally, with more resources, I am interested in seeing how print news, radio news programs and blogs would compare to the conclusions found here.
Figure 6.1: Overall Mean Percentage of the Seven Information Frames

Mean Percentage

Information Frame

Partisan
General
Record
Performance
Character
Abortion
Executive
Figure 6.2: Information Frames, by Network

![Bar chart showing information frames by network. The chart compares mean percentages across different networks for various types of frames, such as Partisan, General, Record, Performance, Character, Abortion, and Executive. The networks include ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CNN, PBS, and ALL.](chart_image)
Figure 6.4: Who’s the Talking Head, I?
Mean Percentage of Messenger’s Word Count, by Network
Figure 6.5: Who’s the Talking Head, Part II?
Mean Percentage of Messenger’s Word Count, by Network

The Messenger

ABC
CBS
NBC
FOX
CNN
PBS

Mean Percentage of Words

Host  Reporter  Analyst  Guest  Senator clips  Other  Alto
Figure 6.6: Partisan Frame Employed by Messenger, as Mean Percentage of Partisan Word Count, I
Figure 6.7: Partisan Frame Employed by Messenger, as Mean Percentage of Partisan Word Count, II
Figure 6.8: Partisan Frame Employed by Messenger, as Mean Percentage of Messenger Word Count
Figure 6.9: Partisan Frame Employed by Messenger, as Mean Percentage of Messenger Word Count, II
Figure 6.10: Who’s the Talking Head?  
Mean Percentage of Messenger’s Word Count, by News Format

[Bar chart showing the mean percentage of messenger’s word count for different news formats (News Show, Morning Show, Interview Show) and roles (Host, Reporter, Analyst, Guest, Senator, Other, Alto, Live).]
Figure 6.11: Partisan Frame Employed by Messenger, as Percentage of Partisan Word Count

Mean Percentage

News Show | Morning Show | Interview Show

News Format

Host | Reporter | Analyst | Guest | Senator | Other
Figure 6.12: Partisan Frame Employed by Messenger, as Percentage of Messenger Word Count

![Bar chart showing partisan frame percentage by news format: News Show, Morning Show, Interview Show.](chart.png)
CHAPTER SEVEN  
Discussion with Experts

To compliment the findings in the quantitative research of this study, I also conducted interviews with four politics and media experts on the political polarization of America and the news media. Scott Keeter is the Director of Survey Research at the Pew Research Center. Jim Lengle is a Georgetown University professor in the Government Department with a research focus on American presidential elections. Noelle McAfee is a Research Professor at the Center for Social Media, within the Department of Communication at American University. Ben Scott is Policy Director at Free Press.

Red State, Blue State, or Something Else?

In an effort to go full circle on this research, I began each interview by asking the interviewees how they defined red state, blue state and whether or not the divide truly exists. While they all agreed that polarization of the American public exists, they differed some on the definition of polarization and to what extent the division is present. McAfee, Keeter and Scott all asserted that the divide implicates the differences between rural and urban America.

While Scott believes that the state-by-state division of red and blue is overblown, he claims that the urban and rural divide indeed is a sociological reality that is akin to sports team allegiances. “It’s very difficult to shake the allegiance from that team. It takes something very substantial that hits a deeper nerve than that surface level identification with a particular party. They mask the heterogeneity that’s beneath the surface.” He also
says that the red and blue trope is “a shorthand sloganized version of polarization in our American political structure.”

Similarly, Keeter suggests that the idea of red and blue states invokes considerable exaggeration, but that there is a real division between those in the heartland of America with strong religious values who vote Republican and those in the coastal, secular states who vote Democratic. “The phenomenon itself -- the idea that the public is increasingly dividing itself along party lines, and that certain kinds of values especially relating to religious traditions and attitudes toward social issues -- those divisions are growing, and we’ve documented that quite clearly in our polling over the years.”

McAfee also defines the split as an urban and rural phenomenon. However, she also believes that “people are not hard core right or hard core left, red or blue, but have some general discomfort with the whole package on either side.” She also believes that, fundamentally, Americans share similar core values. “If we had more opportunities to talk with people form different backgrounds, it would make us a more civil country.”

Asked whether the red and blue divide is an accurate depiction of the United States, Lengle said, “in some ways it is accurate and in some ways it is inaccurate.” He claims that the dramatic changes that we are currently witnessing now are in elite behavior rather than mass behavior. “The political elite are more polarized, but the American population is just as mainstream and centrist as it’s always been.” He also notes that the consequence of this extremism is “increasing the distressed cynicism and alienation of the electorate.”
Lengle terms the elite polarization as a phenomenon of the “the elite going nuclear,” which is to say, “resorting to extreme political behaviors that are atypical of American politics.” He lists these behaviors as talk of impeaching presidents, gerrymandering in the middle of the decade, omission of opposition parties from conference committees, and the growing lack of civility in the dialogue between the Democrats and Republicans. “All of this is a manifestation of a ‘win at all costs’ strategy,” or “going nuclear.”

**The Role of the Press in Perpetuating Polarization**

Concerning the media’s depiction of the red and blue state divide, Lengle said that the press has gotten it half-right in some ways and half-wrong in other ways. In so much as the press covers politics, “the press perpetuates the perception that the country is polarized, not making the distinction that the elites are polarized.”

The consequences of the press perpetuating such a half-truth about the public’s divisiveness is that it creates an attitude of being ‘for us or against us,’ leaving the vast middle out of the equation. According to McAfee, “the polarization in the news – the way people go to Fox News or NPR, choosing their sources more and more to confirm their own views – exacerbates the separateness or alienation that we experience.” She says that it is unfortunate when the media cling to one kind of story and don’t open it up. “My worry is that Fox has a pretty rigid notion of what the true story is. The better media will try to get more people’s stories.”
Lengle asserts that much of the trend in a polarized perception of the press is driven by the 24-hour cable news shows that have “latched onto the format where you get the fanatic right wing spokesman and the fanatic left wing spokesman” battling out the issues. Instead of educating the American public about American politics, Lengle believes that the media are “distorting American politics for the American public…because what they see is politics in its most extreme form.”

This is also a function of news organizations attending to the need for higher ratings rather than the goal of educating the public. Scott said, “owning a broadcasting station is a license to print money. They make 40 and 50% margins every quarter.” Because nearly all media organizations are publicly traded companies, “Wall Street demands, every quarter, an increase in earning and profits. And to meet those kinds of demands, they continually slash their budgets… and put programming on that increases their attractiveness to advertisers.” Scott qualifies this as rational behavior for a market in a capitalist society. However, the market model does not work for the public interest, which is why the Federal Communications Commission was established to ensure the preservation of the public interest. Scott says, “It seems to me a fundamentally disingenuous argument to say that we need a free market in communications.”

According to Keeter, the shortcomings of the news media’s performance are quite obvious to the public. Going back to the late 1970’s, the public has expressed this dissatisfaction with the press, “but in recent years, we’ve seen even more people saying that they believe the press is interested only in attracting audiences and not at getting to the facts or getting it right.”
On the other hand, Keeter notes that if a news organization goes too far in interpreting the news in a particular way, “where it’s obvious that they are slanting or ignoring evidence that goes the other way, then they’re going to be self-limiting in their audience. It doesn’t seem to make sense to go too far in those directions.”

According to Lengle, news, by definition is something that is new. However, the news media has supplanted the notion of news with the notion of conflict. “The news media loves conflict. It’s a story about conflict.” Noelle McAfee illuminates Lengle’s argument, asserting that people are drawn to the polarization. “It gets people’s attention. It’s exciting. In the short run, it can pay off. But in the long run, people get tired of it. And then they tune out.” In discussing the news media’s attraction to presenting conflict, Keeter also agrees that conflict is inherently more interesting, and also inherent to reporting political news. “Politics is the mechanism we have for resolving conflict. Politics is conflict. It’s natural that the press would be focused on the places where people have passions about things. There’s nothing insidious about that.”

*Back to the Future: A Partisan Press?*

When asked to respond to the question, “Are we returning to a partisan press model of news delivery?” Keeter responded, “I’m not pulling the alarm bell yet.” He goes on to say that it is “important to keep in mind that the audience for Fox News and CNN remains relatively small compared to the audiences overall for news. We’re not talking about the entire public suddenly going to the left or the right in search of news that gratifies their ideological point of view. That would be an over-reading of the trends.”
Though Fox News boldly asserts itself as “fair and balanced,” the truth of their bias certainly is not a secret to many. Scott, McAfee, Keeter and Lengle all agree that Fox is a conservative television network, with a conservative cable news program, and a highly ideological CEO, Rupert Murdoch. Keeter said, “the rise of Fox News is an interesting change, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that audiences increasingly want to have a point of view.” In his survey research at Pew People and the Press, he finds no mandate that the” public is thirsting for news that only has their point of view.”

Ben Scott of Free Press says that returning to something resembling the partisan press model of the early republic may not be such a bad thing. He cautions, however, that if it were to happen, then the media would have to make an effort to ensure that both sides of the spectrum be fairly represented. “So long as we don’t get to a place where the parameters of the partisanship in the media are between the right and the center, so long as we have a full scope of recognized, legitimate media, then I don’t have any difficulties with a partisan press. The problem is when we have consolidation and control over the media system in such a way that a transition to a partisan press is nothing more than the transition to a very limited debate between a small set of elites, none of whom represent the full spectrum of American political public opinion.”

Keeter draws a link between perceptions of polarization in the media to the polarizing effects of the president, primarily George W. Bush, but also former president Bill Clinton. The fact that you “have a president, who has, by all objective measurements, been extremely polarizing in the public reaction to him puts the press in a very difficult position in attempting to do their normal job of reporting. In the face of partisan
supporters of the president who believe that any criticism of the president is inappropriate, and partisan opponents of the president who believe that no criticism is severe enough.” In the end, Keeter asserts that no one is happy.

Phrased another way, Keeter says it is a matter of asking, “Who’s ox is being gored?” According to Pew polls, Republicans were relatively satisfied with the press’ aggressiveness in pursuing Bill Clinton during his series of presidential scandals. But Keeter says that there is now a very different kind of reaction from the Republicans who believe that the press is being unfairly critical of the president. “Republicans are mad at the press and believe they are biased against the president, and Democrats believe the press is more of a lapdog and not a watchdog. So the combination of those two things has led to even greater criticism of the performance of the press, even when the press is doing about what it was doing in the Clinton days.”

**Implications and Resolutions**

Of political polarization, Lengle says that it is a chicken and an egg question: “will more polarized parties create a more polarized electorate or will more polarized parties alienate a centrist electorate which then forces the two political parties back to the center?” Regarding the news media’s role in perpetuating such division, he says that “the more the press reports this divide, the greater the chance that the electorate will begin dividing themselves as well, but I don’t see that.” His assertion is that the electorate is centrist and pragmatic. However, he notes, “It’ll be interesting to see what the end result
of this tension between the centrist electorate and the elite polarization will be… it could have big implications for the future of American politics.”

McAfee finds trouble in the fragmentation of news outlets and its fragmenting affects on the public, drawing a distinction between the mass media of old and the current media structure. “The nice thing is that we had a common culture experience because we all tuned into one of the three networks. Now we don’t have the same experience as our immediate neighbors because there’s so much media. So it’s troubling in the sense that we don’t have a shared cultural experience. It’s also troubling in the sense that we might just gravitate toward a very narrow view of things.”

But for the most part, the scholars agree that more news outlets are better. “I think on the whole it’s better to have a mix of news outlets and a mix of information, than to have either limited information or limited outlets. The more information that’s out there, the better it is for democracy,” said Lengle. However, drawing on the results of the Pew Excellence for Journalism report, “The State of the Media 2006,” more news outlets do not implicate more diversity.

The notion of the burgeoning blogosphere holds both promise of resolution and further agitation of the polarizing trends of the news media. Lengle compares blogs to the 19th century American newspapers, which were highly partisan, mud-slinging and also crusaders of noble causes. While this is positive in that it brings more voices to the public dialogue, it also promulgates the elitist, talking head culture that is out of touch with average Americans. As McAfee remarked, “political blogs look a lot like political
television or radio, with your smart, upper middle class person, pontificating and blowing his own horn. It seems elitist and not very productive.”

On the other hand, blogs, in a larger sense, do encourage the expression of unique and dissonant voices. McAfee says that people also seem to be “using blogs to express themselves and create public conversations with other people. The wonderful thing about these new media is that they allow this public sphere… to develop a voice and become more robust and audible. It holds possibility for being a real boom for public life.”

McAfee also endorses the role of public media in bridging the differences opened up by the antagonistic and polarizing trends in the news media. Public radio and social documentaries bring people glimpses of peoples’ lives that they wouldn’t otherwise hear. She cites public media like PBS’ POV (Point of View) and NPR’s Story Core as doing a “great job investigating different aspects of American lives. It gives people more perspective on everyone else.” According to McAfee, understanding people’s perspectives is the key to a healthy democracy.

But re-establishing diversity in the face of media consolidation presents itself as an uphill battle. As Ben Scott says, the FCC “makes a fundamental mistake in mistaking duplication for diversity.” Free Press proposes a 10-voice test that mandates a minimum of ten unique media voices for any local media market. Additionally, reinstating the Fairness Doctrine, or a similar regulation, would help bring balance to the news. Since the FCC eliminated the Fairness Doctrine, Scott says, “it’s not even a goal to have balance. Not only did we lose balance, we lost the mandate to be journalists.” He went on to say, “the sins of omission are greater than the sins of commission.” In other words,
choosing not to cover a story is as bad, or worse, than choosing to cover it only from a single perspective.

Overall, despite criticism of the press, Keeter says that the American public still believes that mass media organizations are meeting their needs of being informed citizens. Though Pew polls show low believability ratings for the press, the public still maintains relatively high ratings of press favorability.

**Conclusion**

These interviews highlight and expand upon the themes discussed in the first four chapters of this thesis. They provide confirmation that polarization is still on the rise. Only Professor Jim Lengle strays from this assertion, claiming that the mass public is still as centrist as they have always been. However, he does note the increasing political polarization of the political elite. As Marc Hetherington and Larry Bartels have shown in their studies (see chapter two), public opinion is affected by political elite behavior, indicating that Lengle’s assertions will have an increasing effect on the polarization of the centrist public.

All four scholars also noted the existence of polarizing trends in the media, citing differences between Fox News, CNN and public broadcasting as well as the proliferation of incendiary talk television and radio. Scott Keeter, Ben Scott and Noelle McAfee each implied the effects of a uses and gratifications approach to news media consumption, claiming that people are drawn to particular news outlets as a means of reinforcing their
political predispositions. These observations support my findings in chapter five, that Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh attract distinctly conservative audiences.

Ben Scott, as an advocate for media reform, spoke extensively on the structure of the modern news media as a profit machine. His in-depth analysis of the public interest imperative of the news media goes beyond the scope of this thesis as laid out in chapter three. However, these arguments are intricately imbedded in the implications of the notion of red and blue news. He eloquently demonstrates the inequality of the public interest versus the corporate interest to assert that the corporate interest in increasing profit margins is detrimental to the public’s interest in being informed citizens. Any attempt to remediate these trends lies in the regulatory power of the FCC.

Noelle McAfee on the other hand, believes that an encouragement of citizen operated media – through public broadcasting, documentaries and blogs – is the solution to trends in media polarization. She concludes that an increase in the diversity of opinion in the public sphere can remediate the effects of the conflict-obsessed news media that increasingly present news in a black and white, red and blue frame.
CHAPTER EIGHT
Conclusion

This thesis does not aim to endorse a position about whether political polarization is good or bad for the American public. Rather, the goal has been to articulate the dimensions of political polarization, both broadly and specifically, in an effort to understand the trends. Distinctly, I have investigated the ways in which the news media contribute to this division.

The literature review presented in chapter two shows that political polarization is indeed a reality. Not only do ANES data show that people are growing more ideological, but also that the strength of their partisanship is increasing contrary to those who would reject such an argument based on the increasing ranks of Independents. Though scholars disagree about the definition, causes and extent of polarization, they concur that some version of it exists. In compiling their research, I found that the following characteristics collectively confirm that the American public is becoming more polarized: issue polarization, ideological polarization, partisan elite polarization and residential balkanization. Some of the strongest quantitative support for a polarized America, however, is in poll numbers that have asked the public to assess the war in Iraq and to rate George W. Bush’s performance as president. Responses, as parsed out by partisan and ideological identification, demonstrate dramatic differences. Though the United States is certainly not as polarized as it was during the Civil War, evidence of the growing trend is difficult to deny.
The research questions guiding this study have asked if the news media contribute to such polarization, and to what extent. Through a demand-side analysis that looked at ideological and partisan orientations to different news media (chapter five), and a supply-side analysis of television news content (chapter six), I can conclude that political polarization in the media is occurring. Chapter five presented a multi-method statistical approach using survey data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Using key variables that define the “red state, blue state” divide, the goal of this analysis was to discern which variables were the strongest predictors of news consumption choices. Ideology was the strongest variable in the model, over party identification, geographical city size and preferring news that shares the same viewpoint. Ideology held the strongest predictive power in determining news consumption for Fox News, The O’Reilly Factor, and Rush Limbaugh, far exceeding the predictive power for consumption of network news, CNN, The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer and NPR. It can be concluded therefore that news audiences are exhibiting a demand for ideological news, and that they are finding it in what most people agree are conservative news programs. To a lesser but statistically significant degree, NPR also exhibits evidence of attracting an ideologically liberal audience. Beta coefficients for network news, CNN and The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer fall well within the realm of attracting a moderate audience, though they do slightly favor a liberal ideology. From the data, I am unable to assert whether people’s demand for ideological news came before or after the news media’s supply of it. Regardless of which came first, this thesis does expose the fact that people are sorting themselves ideologically in their news consumption choices. According to a
uses and gratifications approach to media effects, such a sorting out of the public results in the reinforcement of belief systems, which will have the effect of making people’s ideological positions stronger, thereby exacerbating the polarization evident in the American public.

Another element in this debate is the question of what kind of news content the media are supplying to the public. To answer this question, I did a content analysis of two days of news coverage during the Samuel Alito Senate confirmation hearings. Rather than code for liberal and conservative bias or Republican and Democrat bias, I coded for the amount of news content that framed the Alito hearings by partisan/ideological conflict or disagreement. Out of the seven news information frames that were coded, I found that the predominant news frame employed by the news media during the first two days of the Alito hearings was the divisive partisan frame. As the literature in chapter two and the interviews in chapter seven reveal, the presentation of conflict in the news is a means of attracting higher audience ratings. In “The State of the News Media 2006,” the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) finds that the primetime audience for Fox News is at least twice as large as the primetime CNN audience. This trend has been fairly consistent for the last three years, since the middle of 2003. The PEJ study, in conjunction with the results of my content analysis that showed Fox News to be the primary user of the partisan frame, provide support for the suggestion that news media employ contentious news frames as a means of earning higher ratings.

This study, therefore, finds support of the political polarization of the news media, from an ideological perspective, as well as from a content analysis perspective of the
news media’s role in setting an agenda of divisiveness. The underlying explanation for such evidence is the emergent structure of modern media. As news sources continue to fragment, segmentation of the mass news audience occurs to further exacerbate differences in the public. While diversity of opinion is a goal for facilitating meaningful public deliberation as a fundamental of democracy, recent studies show that the expansion of news sources has not led to an increase in news stories. The debate over media consolidation exhibits the tension inherent to this paradox of the modern media structure. As Ben Scott noted, the FCC makes a fundamental error in “mistaking duplication for diversity.” Ultimately, the proliferation of media outlets has failed to enhance diversity. Rather, the fragmentation of the mass media has succeeded in segmenting the public based on audience potential for advertising revenue.

At the root of these problems is the dominating market imperative of news organizations. Several scholars assert that the delivery of conflict is a selling strategy to attract more audience eyeballs to the news. And as I revealed in the content analysis study in chapter six, this conflict is quite often framed as tension between the partisan and ideological extremes. Enforcement of the partisan and ideological team mentality is clearly evidenced in the growth and success of television and radio talk shows. On the surface it appears that ideologically opposed talk show hosts will present both sides of an issue, but instead of balance, they simply tend to present an antagonistic debate between the polar extremes, disengaging the vast middle of the spectrum. In these polarized debates, news is ignored and speculation dominates.
In essence, the structure of the modern mass media has delivered two major blows to the goals of public deliberation – it has fragmented the mass media while convincing the public that there is a diversity of opinion, and it has filled the news channels with infotainment and red team-blue team conflict that fails to educate the public for civil, civic dialogue.

The notion of a politically polarized media presents numerous implications. First, as indicated above, a media that focuses on conflict will instill in the public a similarly conflict-saturated view of the world. As the public is increasingly subject to partisan framing, and increasingly tuned into acrimonious debate style news programming, conflict becomes the salient filter by which the public views civic engagement. In the face of declining opportunities for social networking (Putnam, 2000), exposure to dissonant viewpoints has decreased, which increases the role of the news media in providing such diversity of opinion. In other words, the potential effects of the media on public opinion are greater than ever. As the history of media effects theory indicates, measuring the effects of the media on public opinion is a difficult task. Regardless, many scholars have proven the legitimacy of the media’s effect in reinforcing political beliefs. As media outlets polarize, their purported objectivity gets traded for partisan agenda-setting. As shown in chapters five and six, this agenda demonstrates itself in two ways: 1) news audiences perceive news sources as ideological and gravitate toward those ideological agendas, and 2) news organizations set an agenda that frames news content by partisan conflict.
More dramatically, such polarization can affect vote choice. Stefano DellaVigna of UC Berkeley and Ethan Kaplan of Stockholm University demonstrate that Fox News causes people to vote Republican. They performed a study that analyzed over 9,000 towns where Fox News entered the cable market by 2000. By comparing voting results from the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, they estimate that “Fox News convinced 3 to 8 percent of its viewers to vote Republican” (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2006). As the authors indicate, “whether Fox News represents the political center and the rest of the media the liberal wing, or Fox News represents the right and the rest of the media the middle”, the effects of media market expansion are “systematic and significant” (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2006).

Certainly Fox News represents an ideologically distinct form of news media. And if we are a public interested in a diversity of opinion, then this is a good thing for public deliberation. However, the danger of the situation arises when such an alteration of the media structure, once understood as independent and objective, happens absence of transparency. Rush Limbaugh makes it abundantly clear that he is a right-wing advocate and entertainer, as does Air America on the left. But it is unclear that most of America understands the ideological leaning of Fox News when it presents itself as “fair and balanced.” Though the discussion of Fox News and political media polarization in general certainly implicates the notion of media bias, I’ve tried to present my argument in such a way that it remains tangential. Most media scholars would agree that Fox News has a conservative agenda, but I cannot assert this conclusion based on my research. However, I can assert that Fox News’ audience is comprised of a substantially
conservative-leaning audience, which does indicate a trend of polarization in the news media, regardless of its cause.

Ultimately, the bottom line is that the public be informed that the structure of the news media is and has been changing for some time. If we, as a nation, are concerned about the implications of political polarization, then American citizens and legislators should reevaluate the policy direction and public interest standards regulating our media structure. We should begin with a careful scrutiny of the FCC’s push toward the deregulation of media ownership limits. To conclude that more media consolidation is acceptable simply because we have more media outlets does not seem an accurate assessment of media diversity. Based on the evidence revealed in chapter three, the corporate structure of news is causing a degradation of news quality, in addition to news media polarization. Communication policy, because it promotes a public good, cannot be based on a free-market principle in the same way as other market goods. According to Ben Scott, there should be a cap on media profits, requiring any revenue over that cap to be reinvested in the product. Such a measure would curtail the cutbacks in newsgathering budgets to revitalize investigative journalism and as such, a diversity of news stories and news voices.

Additionally, a rebirth of the Fairness Doctrine is in order to safeguard against the possible lop-sided emergence of a polarized news media, whether or not a true partisan press looms in our future. If either the conservative or liberal voices on television, radio, print and the Internet become dominate the public sphere, then the public interest in diversity is imperiled and the health of civic deliberation suffers. In the face of
conservative claims of a liberal press and the current evidence of popular conservative news programming, drafting the language for a new Fairness Doctrine will not be an easy task. However, an attempt to reconcile the issue should be a concern for communication policy-makers on both sides of the spectrum.
REFERENCES

Works Cited


Additional References


McCombs, Max, and Donald Shaw (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. Public Opinion Quarterly 36 (Summer).


Datasets


Interviews


McAfee, Noelle, Research Professor at the Center for Social Media, within the Department of Communication at American University March 17, 2006.

Scott, Ben, Policy Director at Free Press March 20, 2006.
APPENDIX A: Statistical Methods

Appendix A.1:
Survey Question Phrasing: 2004 Pew Biennial News Consumption Survey

The variables used in this study come from the Pews Research Center 2004 biennial news consumption survey. Exact question phrasing for the variables are as follows:

News Consumption: nationalnews, cnn, fox, npr, lehrer, limbaugh, o’reilly, cspan, msnbc, am shows, sunday shows:
Q22. Now I’d like to know how often you watch or listen to certain TV and radio programs. For each that I read, tell me if you watch or listen to it regularly, sometimes, hardly ever, or never. (First) how often do you…

a. F1. Watch the national nightly network news on CBS, ABC or NBC? This is different from local news shows about the area where you live

g. F2. Watch Cable News Network

h. F2. Watch the Fox News CABLE Channel

m. Listen to National Public Radio (NPR)

o. Watch the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer

c. F1. Listen to Rush Limbaugh’s radio show

e. F1. Watch “The O’Reilly Factor” with Bill O’Reilly

l. Watch C-SPAN

i. F2 Watch MSNBC

t. Watch the Today Show, Good Morning America or The Early Show

v. Watch Sunday morning news shows such as Meet the Press, This Week or Face the Nation

Coding for the above questions was rank-ordered:
1. Regularly
2. Sometimes
3. Hardly ever
4. Never
9. Don’t know/Refused
Party ID
PARTY: In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat or Independent?
1. Republican
2. Democrat
3. Independent
4. No Preference
5. Other
9. Don’t know

Ideology
IDEO: In general, would you describe your political views as
1. Very conservative
2. Conservative
3. Moderate
4. Liberal
5. Very Liberal
9. Don’t know/Refused

Rural and Large City
CITYSIZE: Which of the following BEST describes the place where you now live?
1. A large city
2. A suburb near a large city
3. A small city or town
4. OR a rural area
9. Don’t know/Refused

Same view
Q.54d. There are a lot of different ways the news is presented these days. Do you generally LIKE it or DISLIKE it when a news source shares your point of view on politics and issues, or doesn’t it matter to you?
1. Like it
2. Dislike it
3. Doesn’t matter
9. Don’t know/Refused
## Appendix A.2: Frequencies

### Party Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>32.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>35.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>26.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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N= 3000, Missing= 117

### Ideology

<table>
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<td>Very conservative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>33.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>40.06%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very liberal</td>
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N=3000, Missing=207

### Rural

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N=3000, Missing=47

### Large City

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<td>Yes</td>
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### Same View

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<tr>
<td>Doesn't matter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't like it</td>
<td>4.94%</td>
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N=3000, Missing=43
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<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National News</td>
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<td>8.0%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lehrer</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Reilly</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
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<td>NPR</td>
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165
<table>
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<tr>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
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N=2974, Missing=26

**Limbaugh**

<table>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
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N=1491, Missing=2
### Appendix A.3: Correlations

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<td>nat'l news</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.108</td>
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<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>1,488</td>
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<td>Sameview</td>
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**Notes:**
- Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
- Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
- Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.
## APPENDIX B: Content Analysis

### Appendix B.1: Show Summary at a Glance

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<th>Day/Time</th>
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<td>Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nightline</td>
<td>1/10/06</td>
<td>11:55pm</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>World News Tonight</td>
<td>1/10/06</td>
<td>6:34pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Special Report</td>
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<td>9:23am</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Good Morning America</td>
<td>1/10/06</td>
<td>7:04am</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>1/9/06</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>ABC News Now</td>
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<td>10:27am</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>1/9/06</td>
<td>7:08am</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1/9/06</td>
<td>7:00am</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Today</td>
<td>1/10/06</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>1/9/06</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>5:30pm</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Larry King Live</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Paula Zahn Show</td>
<td>1/10/06</td>
<td>8:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>1/10/06</td>
<td>6:00pm</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
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<td>4:04pm</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>7:00am</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>36</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>American Morning</td>
<td>1/9/06</td>
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</table>

**PBS**

|43 |71 |NewsHour with Jim Lehrer|1/10/06|7:00pm|   |5903|
|44 |72 |NewsHour with Jim Lehrer|1/9/06 |7:00pm|   |4229|
### Appendix B.2: SUMMARY OF MESSENGERS

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<th>Analyst</th>
<th>Guest</th>
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<td>M. Medrano</td>
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<td>L. Denniston</td>
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<td>J. Chen</td>
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Appendix B.3: Contenet Analysis Framework – Samuel Alito Senate Hearings

### The Hearing
This variable codes for how often the news messengers discuss details related to the Alito Senate hearings in general, and without reference to Alito’s performance, his record or his strategy. This variable includes general discussion of and by the Senators, unless specific reference is made to or from the Senators about partisan interests, Alito’s performance, Alito’s record, characterizations of Alito, abortion or the issue of executive power. This is the catch-all category for any discussion of the hearing that does not pertain to the other variables in this study. If news coverage includes live coverage of the hearings, this is also coded here, but will not be computed into the analysis.

Ex. “All those issues and a lot more were covered in the opening statements of the senators today.”

### Alito Performance
This variable codes for the percentage of word count that messengers in each news show discuss or evaluate Samuel Alito’s performance in the hearing. This category is the equivalent of “horserace coverage,” in which messengers predict his odds of being confirmed. It also encapsulates the assessment of his performance in the hearings and reactions to his statements. Polls and surveys with the public will also be coded here.

Ex. “Instead, what we have seen is this sort of very blunt and straightforward forward, almost monotonous and boring approach, a professorial approach. It seems to be working a bit.”

### Alito Record/Qualifications
This variable looks at how often the messengers engage in discussion of Alito’s qualifications to be Supreme Court Justice. This includes his background, case rulings, record, and any discussion of his overall suitability to be a justice on the high court. This variable addresses more substantial coverage of Alito rather than characterizations and his status in the hearings.

Ex. “Well, that was a correct statement of what I thought in 1985 from my vantage point in 1985, and that was as a line attorney in the Department of Justice in the Reagan administration.”

Note: This is an example of Alito discussing a statement he made in 1985. Anything that references his decisions/record/qualifications, regardless of the messenger, is coded here.

### Alito Characterization
This variable codes for how often messengers frame the newscast in terms of Alito’s character rather than his record or what he said in the hearings. This variable encompasses the soft news angle of the story, where news messengers look at Alito in ways that are not related to his fitness as a judge.

Ex. “The son of poor immigrants who made it to the Ivy League where he joined ROTC during Vietnam and learned a lasting lesson.”

### Partisan/Ideological References
This variable codes for how often messengers frame news of the Alito hearings by the partisan or ideological differences. Sometimes these differences are portrayed between Senators, within Congress in general, between judges, or interest groups. It includes any discussion that pits Republicans against Democrats, whether it is strategy or opinion. It also includes any disputes between ideologically opposed guests and/or hosts about partisan or ideological divisions. Talk about the filibuster is included here.

Ex. “Predictably, some of the Democrats on the committee immediately took a confrontational tone. What a shock! Let's take a look.”

### Abortion
This variable codes for any mention of abortion, whether explicitly or within the context of such heuristic devices as “Roe v Wade”. Any discussion of abortion trumps the other frames.
“Take a look at how Judge Alito handled some very tough, vigorous questions on the issue of abortion from the Republican chairman, Arlen Specter, who supports abortion rights.”

Note: Even though Specter is characterized as a Republican, which might hint at partisan framing, the abortion variable is coded.

**Executive Power/Wiretapping**

This variable codes for how often the issue of executive power and wiretapping is mentioned in the news discussions of the Alito hearings.

Ex. “What about the policy that's gotten a lot of attention recently, warrantless wiretaps?”
Appendix B.4: Coding Example 1

Copyright 2006 American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.
ABC News Transcripts

SHOW: Good Morning America 7:04 AM EST ABC
January 10, 2006 Tuesday

LENGTH: 729 words

HEADLINE: IN THE HOT SEAT;
TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR ALITO

ANCHORS: CHARLES GIBSON, DIANE SAWYER, ROBIN ROBERTS

REPORTERS: CLAIRE SHIPMAN (WASHINGTON, DC USA)

BODY:

TOPIC: SUPREME COURT CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

CONTENT: SENATOR TED KENNEDY, SENATOR ARLEN SPECTER, SENATOR CHARLES SCHUMER

DIANE SAWYER (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Great to see you, Mellody. Well, coming up today on -Capitol Hill, as we know, they resume the Supreme Court confirmation hearings. Kind of a showdown there. 22/27

DIANE SAWYER (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) Could be a tough day for Samuel Alito.8 Democrats saying they want him to answer their questions on abortion, presidential power, some other very contentious topics. 18 And a new ABC News poll finds most Americans are on his side, 53 percent supporting Judge Alito. 18/44

GRAPHICS: ABC NEWS/WASHINGTON POST POLL

GRAPHICS: ALITO NOMINATION 53% SUPPORT 27% OPPOSE 20% DON'T KNOW 9

DIANE SAWYER (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) The rest either opposed or don't know. ABC News senior -correspondent Claire Shipman is in Washington. Claire? 17

CLAIRE SHIPMAN (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Diane, the gloves will be off today, the questioning could make the John Roberts hearings look like a tea party. Democrats are emboldened by President Bush's political troubles in Iraq, by the failed Harriet Miers' nomination and they're also genuinely concerned that Judge Alito, in taking the seat of Sandra Day O'Connor, so often a moderate vote, could push the court significantly to the right. 65
His opening statement meant to paint a moderate, flexible nominee. 10

A judge can’t have any agenda. A judge can’t have any preferred outcome in any particular case. Good judges are always open to the possibility of changing their minds. 29

And he will have a lot of minds to change today. 11

To put it plainly, average Americans have had a hard time getting a fair shake in his courtroom. 18

Two issues loom large. Presidential power, President Bush’s decision to secretly wiretap Americans on US soil has troubled even Republicans. 20

The president’s Constitutional powers as Commander-in-Chief to conduct electronic surveillance appear to conflict with what Congress has said. 18

In a 1984 memo, Alito argued that the attorney general should be immune from lawsuits, even if they involved illegal wiretapping. 21 And Roe v. Wade. 3 / 24

So, we’ll ask you, do you still personally believe very strongly that the Constitution does not protect a right to an abortion? 22

Judge Alito wrote in 1985, while at the Justice Department, that he believed there is no Constitutional right to abortion. He’s told senators privately that was only an effort to secure a job in the Reagan administration. And his opening statement offered other clues as to how he’ll explain those memos. 51

When I became a judge, I stopped being a practicing attorney, and that was a big change in role. A judge’s only obligation, and it’s a solemn obligation, is to the rule of law. 34

And, Diane, what everyone will be watching today, how specifically he’ll explain himself on those issues. 16
(Off-camera) Right. Well, that's what I was going to ask you, because is all of this just ritual? Because he says that he has to retain his privacy on his opinions in order to judge case by case. The Congressmen keep pushing, the senators keep pushing. What, what's going to happen today, really? 15/52

CLAIRE SHIPMAN (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Well, it's interesting. I mean, I think, Diane, there's good reason to expect he'll be a bit more specific than John Roberts. First of all, it is his nature. He's not as artful at dodging questions as John Roberts. And in some of the practice sessions he apparently not only preferred to answer questions he even got a little bit argumentative. But also, he has a 15-year written record as a federal judge. That will not only invite more specific questions but it might require more specific answers. 27/87
Appendix B.5: Coding Example 2

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Fox News Network

SHOW: FOX HANNITY & CO 9:00 PM EST
January 9, 2006 Monday

TRANSCRIPT: 010901cb.253
SECTION: NEWS; Domestic
LENGTH: 2953 words
HEADLINE: Analysis With Robert Novak
BYLINE: Sean Hannity, Alan Colmes, Robert Novak

BODY:

ALAN COLMES, CO-HOST: This is a FOX News alert.

Now to our top story tonight, confirmation hearings for Judge Samuel Alito began on Capitol Hill today, with both sides of the Senate Judiciary Committee giving their opening statements. The tone could turn really nasty tomorrow when senators begin questioning the nominee. But even today, the differences in opinion were obvious. 34/54

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SEN. CHUCK SCHUMER (D), NEW YORK: While every Supreme Court nominee has great burden, yours, Judge Alito, is triply high. First, because you’ve been named to replace Sandra Day O’Connor, the pivotal swing vote on a divided court. Second, because you seem to have been picked to placate the extreme right-wing after the hasty withdrawal of Harriet Miers. And finally and most importantly, because your record of opinions and statements on a number of critical constitutional questions seems quite extreme. 74

SEN. ORRIN HATCH (R), UTAH: I know that there is a pitched battle going on outside the Senate with dueling press conferences, television ads, e-mail petition drives, and stacks of reports and press releases. The Senate can rise above that battle, if we remember the proper role for the Senate and the proper role for judges. 51

SEN. EDWARD KENNEDY (D), MASSACHUSETTS: In an era where the White House is abusing power, is excusing and authorizing torture, and is spying on American citizens, I find Judge Alito’s support for an all-powerful executive branch to be genuinely troubling. 35

SEN. JOHN CORNYN (R), TEXAS: The reason why these groups are trying to defeat your nomination, because you won’t support their liberal agenda, is precisely why I support it. I want judges on the Supreme Court who will not use that position to impose their personal policy preferences or political agenda on the American people. 50

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COLMES: Now, throughout this segment, pay close attention to the bottom of your screen, because we’ll be recapping the day’s events and what some key senators said in today’s hearing.
Joining us now with reaction, syndicated columnist and our newest FOX News contributor, Robert Novak. Bob, welcome to FOX News.49

ROBERT NOVAK, FOX NEWS CONTRIBUTOR: Nice to be here. Thank you. 6

COLMES: How's it going for you so far? Is the green room OK? Do they give you good snacks and everything? 20

NOVAK: They treated me like a king. 6

COLMES: All right. That's important. 4

All right, look, I know you work the phones. You're still a hard-working journalist. What are you hearing about Alito? How ugly do you think it's going to get, if at all? 18/37

NOVAK: It could get very ugly, because there is an all-out attempt to deny him confirmation. They're not messing around like they did with Chief Justice Roberts. This is going to be -- any weakness they can find, they're going to attack him on.

But the principle issue, and the thing that some of his supporters are worried about is they're going to say he's bad on civil rights. That is a crime in America in the 21st century, to be weak on civil rights, and that's what they're going to assail him on. But I think this is going to be one of the -- this is going to be a potentially as nasty a hearing as you've seen since Clarence Thomas. 122

COLMES: But do they have a point about civil rights? For example, it turns out he was a member of Concerned Alumni of Princeton. The story is that that group tried to challenge the admission of women and minorities, not friendly to the disabled. (34) Bill Bradley spoke out against this group, as did Bill Frist. Will issues like that cause him big trouble? (17/62)

NOVAK: I think they could. They've done some statistical things on how many times he didn't vote for so-called black civil rights proposals in the court. The CAP, the concerned -- the Princeton alumni group, they're just trying to get Princeton off the left-wing bias. 10

And there's no signs at all, no evidence that they were against women. But that -- I think anything that they can find -- you see, the way it works is they try to find the things -- they decide in the first place that they're attacking him, they're against him, and then they try to find matters to try to substantiate that assault. 51/107

COLMES: But aren't there some -- I mean, you look at his record on abortion. He talked about 1985 in a memo, wanting to work toward overturning Roe vs. Wade. We've got issues of deference to government institutions, like the right of a police officer to shoot a fleeing, unarmed 15-year-old, strip-searching a 10-year-old girls. These are issues that Americans have every right to be concerned about, do they not, especially in a time of increasing executive branch power in this country? (27)/ 80

NOVAK: Well, I don't think that is a very good issue for his opponents. I think the danger the Democrats have is they're going to be looking weak on law enforcement and weak on national security. 35 And those are issues that Americans feel very strongly about. I think that is one of Judge Alito's strengths. 9

The weaknesses, as I say, is a possibility that he's going to be looking weak on civil rights. But that isn't going to be enough to defeat him for confirmation. 30 They have got to find something else, some mistake, something that's hidden. And, boy, they have done a terrific job of trying to find anything at all on this man that would resound against his confirmation.36 He looks squeaky clean. 4/124

SEAN HANNITY, CO-HOST: Hey, by the way, Bob, Sean Hannity. Welcome to the program. 11
NOVAK: Thank you, Sean. 3

HANNITY: And I think you more than anybody else in America, having sat next to Carville and Begala, you know what I go through here every night. 26

COLMES: Oh, you poor thing. He's complaining after nine years. 9

HANNITY: By the way, in the strip-search case, which I think is very, very important, because they're distorting his record on a whole variety of issues, he did write at the time that he shared the visceral dislike of the intrusive search of the young daughter, but he pointed out that dealers, drug dealers, sometimes use little children to carry out their business. And that is overlooked in the analysis here. 70

NOVAK: I don't think that's a very good issue for his opponents. And I don't think they're going to press that very much. They seem to have attached onto this... 29

HANNITY: Race?

NOVAK: ... Princeton alumni group. You know, the idea -- I think that is really the liberal mind at work, the idea that people are going to really be worried about being too conservative at Princeton. That may be one of the worst -- least worries in the world. They've got to find something that hits a little harder than that, and they're looking for it still. 65

HANNITY: Well, they're looking for it. But they're running out of time very quickly here. 14

I had Lindsey Graham on my radio show earlier today. And he said it's going to be a party-line vote in committee. He thinks it may be -- Ben Nelson is the only one on the Democratic side that would vote in favor of confirmation. And he thinks there will be a couple of Republican defections. Do you agree with that assessment? 6/62

NOVAK: That sound about right. And then you have -- the defections are probably Senator Chafee of Rhode Island. And he's got a Republican primary, so that may be a very costly vote, if he votes against Alito. And then the two senators from Maine are possibilities.

That's still is a majority vote, a small majority vote for Judge Alito. The question is, would the Democrats then wage a filibuster? I think the so-called nuclear option, now called the constitutional option, would be exercised if that is the case, because that would violate the little agreement that they had of the Group of 14 that, boy, oh, boy, we are not going to do any filibusters, except in exceptional circumstances. And this is not an exceptional circumstance. 126

HANNITY: I guess, in a liberal's mind, an extraordinary circumstance is when a conservative president follows through on his promise to appoint conservative judges.

You know, I just wonder how far they go -- and I wonder why there's this double-standard, Bob, with Republicans. Because you go back to Bork in 1987 and Ted Kennedy saying Bork's America is a land in which women are going to be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters. He gets away with that type of rhetoric. They're trying... 88

NOVAK: Because the press... 3

HANNITY: Go ahead. 2

NOVAK: Because the media is liberal. That's why. But the big difference, Sean, is that, in those days, they weren't ready for Teddy Kennedy's attack. That was -- I was covering that story, and everybody was just stunned. Oh, man, it was like a body blow in the first round.
You couldn't do that today. I thought Senator Kennedy in his opening statement today tried something like that, but it didn't come over at all. 74

HANNITY: You know, even on the abortion issue, they won't point that Judge Alito sided with Planned Parenthood and voted to invalidate New Jersey's partial-birth abortion statute. That doesn't seem to get much press. Just the opposite impression is given. 39

NOVAK: There's also the question of personality. He is a soft, mild-mannered person, Italian immigrant family. So he doesn't come over as somebody who's really... 25

COLMES: All right, Bob, you... 4

NOVAK: It's going to be very difficult to make a case against him. 12
Appendix B Tables: The data behind the charts of chapter six

Table B.1: The mean percentage of words that each network spent discussing each of the seven frames.

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*Total does not equal 100 because not all words are coded, only those that pertain to a particular frame.

Table B2: Mean percentage of word count for each messenger (Who's the talking head?)

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*Numbers do not sum to 100 due to some margin of error in coding.

Table B3: Mean percentage that messengers employed partisan frame, as percentage of total partisan word count

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Table B.4: Mean percentage that messengers employed partisan frame, as percentage of total messenger word count

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<td>16.67</td>
<td>14.04</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>5.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>21.19</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>20.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td>12.09</td>
<td>16.22</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34.59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers do not sum to 100 due to some margin of error in coding.

Table B.5: Mean percentage of the word count that each of the three news formats employed the seven frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>News Show</th>
<th>Morning Show</th>
<th>Interview Show</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>17.95</td>
<td><strong>24.05</strong></td>
<td><strong>23.96</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td><strong>20.23</strong></td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>11.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record</td>
<td>8.68</td>
<td>12.23</td>
<td>11.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>11.69</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>12.92</td>
<td>10.56</td>
<td>10.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>9.98</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUM</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>83.02</strong></td>
<td><strong>91.52</strong></td>
<td><strong>71.33</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sums don't equal 100 because not all words are coded as a particular frame

Table B.6: Mean percentage of word count for each messenger, by news format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>News Show</th>
<th>Morning Show</th>
<th>Interview Show</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Host</td>
<td>26.07</td>
<td>19.12</td>
<td><strong>29.77</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.7: Mean percentage of word count that each messenger employed the partisan frame, as a percentage of the total partisan word count

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messenger</th>
<th>News Show</th>
<th>Morning Show</th>
<th>Interview Show</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Host</td>
<td>18.89</td>
<td>19.47</td>
<td>24.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>49.09</td>
<td>53.44</td>
<td>16.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>12.45</td>
<td>11.61</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>48.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum*</td>
<td>101.39</td>
<td>97.72</td>
<td>98.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sums don't equal 100 because there is some margin of error

Table B.8: Mean percentage of word count that each messenger employed the partisan frame, as a percentage of the total word for the messenger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messenger</th>
<th>News Show</th>
<th>Morning Show</th>
<th>Interview Show</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Host</td>
<td>16.54</td>
<td>22.53</td>
<td>14.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>27.97</td>
<td>30.85</td>
<td>13.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>22.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>6.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>16.36</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sums don't equal 100 because there is some margin of error