

Summer 2011

## The Message or The Messenger: The Effects of Political Attitudes and Source on Perceptions of Media Bias

Emily E. Eisenhart

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd>

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Eisenhart, Emily E., "The Message or The Messenger: The Effects of Political Attitudes and Source on Perceptions of Media Bias" (2011). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 620. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/620>

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies, Jack N. Averitt College of at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

THE MESSAGE OR THE MESSENGER: THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL  
ATTITUDES AND SOURCE ON PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA BIAS

by

EMILY E. EISENHART

Under the Direction of Ted Brimeyer

ABSTRACT

As the televised news media market becomes increasingly diversified, the evidence available suggests that news media audiences are more fragmented than ever, audiences trust the media less and less, and that news consumers tend to seek outlets that they believe share their political attitudes and worldview (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009, Tsfaty & Capella 2003, Niven 2002, Stalder, 2009, Pew Center, 2009). Researchers Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) were some of the first to describe empirically an observation they call the “hostile media phenomenon.” This phenomenon draws from social judgment theory and assumes that “individuals evaluate the legitimacy of an object from a personally determined latitude of acceptance” (Vallone, Ross and Lepper, 1985).

Since the classic study, several researchers have tested further implications of the hostile media phenomenon. Among those researchers, a number of them have found that Republicans and political conservatives usually hold stronger hostile media perceptions than Democrats or the politically liberal (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Lee 2005; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Stalder, 2009; Morris, 2007). This paper reviews the current literature on media trust, media bias, and the hostile media phenomenon, and presents a new method for studying the effects of these phenomena. The study explores the effects political

attitudes have on source selection and perceptions of media bias, and poses the research question: What holds more weight when evaluating news messages: the message (content) or the messenger (source)?

INDEX WORDS: News media, Political attitudes, Media bias, Hostile media phenomenon, Media trust, Social judgment theory, News media audience perceptions

THE MESSAGE OR THE MESSENGER: THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL  
ATTITUDES AND SOURCE ON PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA BIAS

by

EMILY E. EISENHART

B.A. Journalism, University of Georgia, 2007

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2011

© 2011

EMILY E. EISENHART

All Rights Reserved

THE MESSAGE OR THE MESSENGER: THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL  
ATTITUDES AND SOURCE ON PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA BIAS

by

EMILY E. EISENHART

Major Professor: Dr. Ted Brimeyer  
Committee: Dr. F. Eric Brooks  
Dr. Eric Silva

Electronic Version Approved:  
July 2011

DEDICATION

To Ashby Eliza,

I hope that our earth and your world will grow in knowledge, hope, and political  
enlightenment.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude to Dr. Ted Brimeyer, without whom this work wouldn't have been possible. His patience, expertise, and direction was vital to this whole endeavor. I am also extremely grateful for my thesis committee members, Dr. Eric Brooks and Dr. Eric Silva. I appreciate all of your time, your suggestions, and your encouragement. The support of Dr. Peggy Hargis has been crucial to my success at Georgia Southern. She is one of the wisest and most extraordinary professionals I know. I have been very blessed by her friendship and guidance during my tenure here, and I feel honored to know her. Thank you also to Dr. Robert Shanafelt and Dr. Pidi Zhang, whose unique perspectives added to my research approach.

A huge thank-you to “Ms. Janet” and “Ms Alicia”, who have given Ashby the best possible start in her long academic career. Their talent in early childhood education made it possible for me to feel at ease throughout the research process

I never could've even attempted this thesis without the unconditional love and support of my husband, Jeff, my parents, Nanette & Henry, and my little brother, Thomas. You guys are my world and I feel like the luckiest person alive to have such a smart, kind, and beautiful family. Thank you and I love you all.

I give God all the glory and hope that this work and all that I do can be of usefulness to Him and my fellow man.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	7
LIST OF TABLES.....	9
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	10
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	12
Hostile Media Phenomenon .....	13
Research Questions and Hypotheses .....	16
3 DATA & METHODOLOGY .....	18
4. RESULTS .....	30
5. DISCUSSION.....	44
APPENDICES	
A SURVEY OF POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND NEWS HABITS .....	48
B FOX/CNN CLIMATE CHANGEARTICLE AND QUESTIONNAIRE .....	52
REFERENCES .....	54

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: METHODS: Frequency of Watching Different News Programs .....	27
Table 2: METHODS: Perceived Trustworthiness of Each Source.....	28
Table 3: METHODS: Descriptive Statistics: Independent Variables.....	29
Table 4: RESULTS: Frequency of Viewership by Political Affiliation.....	38
Table 5: RESULTS: Trust of Media Source by Political Affiliation .....	39
Table 6: RESULTS: Regression, Frequency of Watching CNN by Political Affiliation..	40
Table 7: RESULTS: Regression, Frequency of Watching Fox by Political Affiliation....	40
Table 8: RESULTS: Regression of Trust of CNN by Political Affiliation .....	41
Table 9: RESULTS: Regression of Trust of Fox by Political Affiliation .....	41
Table 10: RESULTS: Crosstabulation of "How Trustworthy is the Article?" .....	42
Table 11: RESULTS: Regression of Article for Fox Sample.....	42
Table 12: RESULTS: Regression of Article for CNN Sample .....	43

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The journalistic field has evolved considerably over centuries of political, economic, social, and technological change. In American society, the dominant views regarding journalism and “hard” news dissemination are undoubtedly tied to the democratic notion of its “fourth estate” or “watchdog” duties (Niven, 2002). Historian Mitchell Stevens (2007) argues that many historians believe that the very structure of modern American society is tightly linked to its relationship with the First Amendment, and that one of the chief motivations for creating and sustaining these freedoms were and are to ensure the vitality of an informed electorate. While peoples’ perceptions of the news media have changed drastically over the years, a majority of news consumers still say that they *value* the role of a “watchdog press” (Pew Center, 2007).

However, as the televised news media market becomes increasingly diversified, the evidence available suggests that news media audiences are more fragmented than ever (Morris, 2007; Stalder, 2009; Pew Center, 2009), that audiences trust the media less and less (Pew Center, 2007; Gallup, 2002; Morris, 2007; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009), and news consumers tend to seek outlets that they believe share their political attitudes and worldview (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Tsfati & Capella, 2003; Niven, 2002; Stalder, 2009; Pew Center, 2009).

A 2009 study conducted by Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng found that regardless of the issue, participants in an experiment spent 36% more time reading attitude-consistent news stories than non attitude-consistent stories. Morris (2007) found

that consumers of different media sources had marked differences in their perceptions of political candidates and issues, and that consumers of one news medium had negative views of other news sources. Similarly, a 2009 study conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that 72% of Republicans viewed network television news organization Fox News positively, but only 43% of Democrats felt this way (compared to 2007, when 73% of Republicans and 61% of Democrats felt this way). In addition, 75% of Democrats viewed cable network television news organization CNN favorably, while just 44% of Republicans reported favorable views. These Pew Research Center statistics suggest that Democrats and Republicans are not only sharply divided in their views of media networks, but that the gaps are getting wider—suggesting a new level of media politicization.

The purpose of the proposed research is to examine the effects that political attitudes and source selection have on people's media trust and perceptions of media bias. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on media trust, media bias, and the hostile media phenomenon. Chapter 3 presents methods for studying the hostile media phenomenon and describes the two-part study. Study one seeks to confirm evidence of the hostile media phenomenon in the sample, and study two seeks to answer the question: What carries more weight when evaluating news information—the message (content of news) or the messenger (source from which the news comes). Chapter 4 presents the findings of the current research. The final chapter discusses the implications of these findings and suggests future directions this research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The existence of news media skepticism is not new. Politicians and political pundits have been claiming bias in various political directions for decades. Media content analyses conducted in the past decade have identified there to be *actual* evidence of bias, and that it occurs along both political ideological ends of the spectrum, depending on the medium of communication (D'Alessio and Allen, 2000; Niven, 1999; 2002). Still, the majority of analyses reveal that when *taken as a whole*, the political condition of the news industry is relatively “balanced” (for several studies either way see: Eveland & Shah 2003; Morris, 2007; Covert & Washburn, 2007).

Still, the data available suggest that the public's *perceived* bias and media distrust has intensified over the past two decades. A September 2009 study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that in 1985, a majority of Americans (55%) reported believing that most news organizations “get the facts straight”, now an increasing majority (63%) strongly believe that news organizations are often “inaccurate” (Pew Center, 2009). Additionally, this study revealed that only 26% of respondents believed that news organizations are careful not to be politically biased. Morris (2007) argues that this level of distrust and skepticism towards the media, “has intensified to unhealthy levels” (708). Furthermore, a 2002 Gallup Honesty and Ethics poll of American adults found that journalists were viewed as less honest than lawyers, real estate agents, U.S. senators, and labor union leaders.

While no empirical evidence exists claiming that the overall state of the media is rampantly politically biased one way or the other, the public perception of the news media has continued to deteriorate (Niven, 2002). Interestingly, amidst this skepticism exists an even deeper division based on political identification. In 1985 the Pew Center for People and the Press found that 93% of Democrats and 88% of Republicans expressed “favorable” opinions of television news media (2007). However, in 2007 they found that that 84% of Democrats could express favorable views on the general television news media, but only 56% of Republicans rated television news positively. Morris (2007) and others speculatively attribute this to the widespread yet empirically unfounded claims of an overall “liberal” news bias that have driven conservatives to pledge their loyalties to the Fox News channel, which derives most of its viewership from a conservative or Republican leaning audience (Alterman, 2003; Bozell, 2004; Brock, 2004; Collins, 2004). While research supporting *the reasoning behind* the move to Fox News is scarce, in 2008 the Pew Research Center’s Biennial Media Consumption study found that more than one-third (36%) of all Republicans watch Fox News on a regular basis. This is more than double the 14% that reported watching Fox News on a regular basis ten years prior (Pew Center, 2009).

#### Hostile Media Phenomenon

Researchers Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) were some of the first to describe empirically an observation they call the “hostile media phenomenon.” This phenomenon draws from social psychological social judgment theory and assumes that individuals evaluate the validity of an object from what Sherif, Muzafer, and Hovland (1961) called in their classic social judgment study, “a personally determined latitude of acceptance”

(35). The “object” of judgment here would be the news medium being judged, and the theory hypothesizes that those whose personal viewpoints were threatened by a news outlet are more likely to evaluate the news outlet negatively. Broadly, social judgment theory relies on easily conjured heuristics, suggesting an egocentric model of viewing the world using one’s own social identity as an anchor, which calls upon the core motives of self-preservation, self-maintenance, or self-enhancement (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Dunning, 1996; David et. al, 2004; Fiske, 2004; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004).

For example, in the classic study Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) analyzed television coverage of the 1982 Beirut massacre and found that both pro-Arab and pro-Israeli subjects felt that the same news stories on the massacre were hostile to their personal opinions. Evidently, even though both the pro-Arab and pro-Israeli groups viewed the exact same news stories, both groups recalled the news stories reporting more negative things about their groups than the opposing group, and both groups saw the news programs as a potential threat to their respective causes. Both pro-Arab and pro-Israeli participants reported thinking that the news program would sway opinion away from their political camp. In essence, the hostile media phenomenon suggests that when the stakes of personal opinion are high, people actually *perceive* completely different versions of the same reality.

According to prominent social psychologist Susan T. Fiske ( 2004: 398), social judgment is an active form of social bias, which involves: “category-based responses, reacting to another person as an interchangeable member of a social group. People have the clearest category-based responses to members of outgroups, that is, groups to which they do not personally belong”. Fiske’s definition unmistakably pertains to the hostile

media phenomenon. Therefore, in Vallone, Ross and Lepper's study, each political group appeared to be making judgments based on any information that *might* be interpreted as hostile to their cause because they were evaluating or perceiving the information through the social-psychological lens of their own ingroup status.

This hostile media phenomenon appears to shed some light upon the Pew Research Center's statistics describing the reported bias between members of different political groups (e.g. Democrats watching CNN versus Republicans watching Fox News, and each group's propensity to respond unfavorably to the opposite news medium).

Since Vallone, Ross and Lepper's landmark study several researchers have tested further implications of this phenomenon. Among those researchers, a number of them have found that Republicans and political conservatives usually hold stronger hostile media perceptions than Democrats or the politically liberal, (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Lee 2005; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Stalder, 2009; Morris, 2007). Among these studies, Eveland and Shah's 2003 study based on national survey data found that the greater identification one had with the Republican party and the more politically involved individuals were with the Republican party, the more likely these participants were to perceive the news to be biased against their own beliefs. While a correlation was found between strong affiliates of the Democratic party and a perception of media biased against their views, the strongest associations were those between strength of Republican association, participation and hostile media perceptions. In addition to these findings, study 2 of Stalder's 3-part research endeavor (2009), found that both Democrats and Republicans developed their perceptions of how they viewed the media based on what they'd "heard" (from members of their ingroups and from their preferred media sources) rather than how



the actual media reports “sounded” when they read or viewed a program. In Stalder’s third study, he was able to provide support for the assertion that Republicans and conservatives not only held stronger hostile media perceptions, but scored higher on in-group favoritism and group centricism scales. This means that Republicans were more likely to attribute media reports that reported positively on their party to their party being actually “superior” than to the media report being biased. While Democrats, like Republicans, also blamed the media for cases of the *other* political party sounding better, they did not take credit in the way that Republicans did for their own party sounding better (Stalder, 2009).

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of the current research is two-fold. Based on previous research and informed by the results of Vallone, Ross, & Lepper’s classic study, the current study first seeks to find evidence for the hostile media phenomenon among the study’s population. However, this study differs from the original hostile media phenomenon study as well as several subsequent studies because, like Eveland and Shah (2003), it measures political attitudes on more than one scale. The current study measures political beliefs on three scales: political party, political ideology, and political activism. However, the measures of the current study are slightly different from Eveland and Shah’s study. Multiple other independent variables were tested for other possible significant effects.

Stage 2: The data gathered in the survey during stage one should help to inform the existence of the hostile media phenomenon. It is hypothesized that:

1. Democrats and Republicans will vary from one another in the frequency of watching and trustworthiness of the various television programs. It is predicted

that Democrats will be more likely to watch and trust CNN and less likely to watch/trust Fox News, and that Republicans will be more likely to watch and trust Fox News and much less likely to watch/trust CNN.

2. Additionally, it is predicted that political ideology will interact with political affiliation in that those who score high in social and economic liberalism will be more likely to watch/trust CNN and less likely to watch/trust Fox News.
3. Students' level of political activism should also interact with their political affiliation. It is predicted that students who are politically active Republicans will exhibit the lowest levels of trust and frequency of watching CNN and the highest levels of trust and frequency of watching Fox.

Stage 2: The data gathered from the survey during stage two of the study addresses another gap in the research on source and media perception. The second part of this research explores the question: What carries more weight when evaluating news information—the message (content of news) or the messenger (source from which the news comes)? Because the article given will contain a controversial message that is often rejected by the politically conservative, the intention of the second survey will be to create a test condition in which conservatives will receive a message from Fox News that conflicts with messages traditionally thought to be more “liberal”. The participants' reported attitudes about the article should be able to provide evidence as to how students are basing their attitudes about news sources or messages.

## CHAPTER 3

### DATA & METHODOLOGY

#### Participants

Data for this project came from two surveys (see Appendices A & B) conducted in the spring 2011 semester at a mid-sized Southeastern university. IDS 2110 Turning Points and Connections courses were selected in which to conduct the survey. While this group classifies as a convenience sample, these courses are required interdisciplinary courses that closely reflect the population of the school and are usually taken in the sophomore, junior or senior year (Smith & Pino, 2005). The instructors were contacted via e-mail and asked if their students could be surveyed at the beginning of class on the first day of the semester, and then surveyed again at the beginning of class one week after the first survey is given. A total of 2 classes were used to conduct both surveys for a total possible convenience sampling of 480 students. Students read a statement of informed consent, and were reminded that their participation in the survey was voluntary. Students were asked to write the last four digits of their student identification number at the top of each survey so the results of the first survey could be matched with the second. 438 (of 480 possible) total undergraduate students completed the surveys, and surveys from time one were combined with time two.

Stage 1: The dependent variables for survey one include how often students watch a television news source, and how much a student trusts each news source. Frequency and Trust were each measured using a five-item scale. To get an overall picture of how often the group of students watched each news program, the participants were asked, “How often do you watch the following news programs or channels”? The items were

scored as follows: 1= “Never Watch”, 2= “Watches 1-2 Times a Month”, 3= “Once a week”, 4= “2-3 times a week”, and 5= “4 or more days a week”).

Table 1 shows the frequency of watching different news programs. The first column of table 1 lists all of the sources chosen to include in the analysis. For purposes of the analysis, each source or program can fit into one of three news show categories: (1) The 24 hour news channels (CNN, Fox, MSNBC), (2) The traditional press (NBC, ABC, CBS, PBS, Local News) and, (3) Satirical or “fake” news shows, (The Colbert Report, The Daily Show). The second column shows the means and standard deviation of the frequencies of each source. Columns 3-7 list the percentages of students who report watching the various news programs.

Table 1 shows that of all those surveyed, the traditional press was the least watched overall, and had the lowest percentage of students reporting to watch the show “4 or more days a week” [NBC (.5%) CBS (.7%) ABC (.7%) PBS (1.6%)]. Two of the 24-hour news channels (Fox and CNN) were the most-watched overall, along with traditional Local News. The fake news shows had the highest percentage of students who reported watching these shows the most often. For example, 8.7% of students reported watching The Daily Show with Jon Stewart “4 or more days a week”, and 7.8% of students reported watching the The Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert “4 or more days a week”. After the fake news shows, Local News had the next highest percentage of people (6.9%) who say they watch “4 or more times a week”.

Essentially, Table 1 shows that people watch “fake” news more often than “traditional” news, and for the purposes of this study, we were especially focused on Fox

News and CNN. In general, people report watching Fox News only slightly more often than they watch CNN.

Overall trustworthiness was measured by asking the students: “How much do you trust each news source”? On a five point scale from: 1= “Never trust this source”, 2= “Sometimes trust this source” 3-“Usually Trust this source”, 4= “Always Trust this source”, 5= “Not Sure”. As in Table 1, column one in Table 2 lists the various news programs included in the analysis, column two lists the means and standard deviations of trustworthiness for each program, and columns three through seven list the various levels of trust and show the percentages of students who reported varying levels of trust in each show. In order to calculate overall trust, the “Not Sure” category was factored out when calculating the mean and standard deviation.

Table 2 shows that of all those surveyed, Fox News had the lowest percentage (14.8%) of students who were “Not Sure” about how much they trusted Fox. Following Fox, CNN had the second lowest number of people (16.7%) who were “Not Sure” about how much they trusted CNN. This means that of all of the sources, people are *more certain* of their opinions when judging Fox and CNN for trustworthiness than all other sources. This validates that these were two interesting sources on which to focus.

Table 2 shows that CNN and the generic “Local News Programming” had the lowest percentage (7.6%) of students who reported that they “Never Trust” these sources, while significantly more people reported (17.1%) that they “Never Trust” Fox News. Still, Fox News had the highest percentage (11.9%) of people who reported that they “Always Trust this source”, compared with 10% who “Always Trust” CNN and 10.8% who “Always Trust” the Local News. The Daily Show with Jon Stewart had the highest

number of people 26.4% who said they “Never trust this source”, followed closely by the Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert which had 25.2% of respondents who said they “Never Trust” this source. So, while Local News (traditional) and Fox and CNN (24-news) have the greatest number of people who “always trust” these sources, the least trusted sources (“fake news” shows) are the most often watched.

Table 3 describes the means and standard deviations or percentages for all of the independent and control variables used in the analysis. The first column of table 3 lists the independent variables used in the analysis, and the second column of table 3 lists the means and standard deviations or the number and percentages of each independent variable. Of the 438 people to complete the surveys, 214 or 48.9% were men and 224 or 51.1% were women. There were 5 freshmen (1.1%), 213 sophomores (48.5%), 157 juniors (38.5%) and 64 seniors (14.6%). There were 292 (66.5%) white students, 108 (24.6%) black students, and 39 (9.6%) students of other races.

To measure political party affiliation respondents were asked, “What is your political party affiliation?” Table 3 shows that 99 (22.6%) respondents identified themselves as Democrat, 165 (37.6%) identified themselves as Republican, 108 participants (24.6%) claimed “None” as their political party affiliation, 42 (9.6%) identified as Independents, 15 (3.4%) participants identified as Libertarian, and 5 (1.1%) said they were part of an “other” political affiliation.

To measure political ideology, the survey asked a series of questions measuring social and economic conservatism/liberalism. This was measured this way because people often have more “conservative” views on some political issues and more “liberal” views on others. To assess views on social issues (i.e. social liberalism) students were

asked two questions about how much they agreed with the following statements: (1) Abortion should be legalized and; (2) Gay marriage should be legalized. Students then rated the statement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. The two questions were combined for a ten-point total scale where 10 equaled the highest possible social liberalism. Economic views (i.e. economic liberalism was measured) by asking students how much they agreed/disagreed with the following two statements:

1. The government should end unemployment by hiring everybody without a job.
2. The government should see to it that every family has enough money for a decent standard of living.

Students then rated the statement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. The two questions were combined for a ten-point total scale where 10 equaled the highest possible economic liberalism.

Table 3 shows that the social liberalism mean of the students surveyed was 6.04 and the standard deviation was 2.36. The alpha coefficient for these scores was .673, which seemed adequate for subsequent tests of the hypothesis. The economic liberalism mean of the students surveyed was 5.16 and the standard deviation was 1.80. The alpha coefficient for the reliability of these variables was .619.

Political involvement was measured using a six-item question asking students whether or not they have participated in various types of political activities such as volunteering for a political campaign, attending political gathering, worn political apparel or buttons, among others. Respondents could circle 1 = Yes or 0 = No. The questions

were combined to create a 6-point scale. Table 3 shows that the mean for political involvement was .78 with a standard deviation of 1.18.

Another measure of political involvement, measured how frequently students talked about politics. To measure this, we asked: “How often do you do the following? (1) Talk with your parents about political issues and (2) Talk with your friends about political issues. Respondents had the choices of answering with 1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often. The scores from the two questions were combined for a lowest possible score of 2 (answering both questions with “Never”) and with the highest possible score being 8 (answering both questions with “Often”). Table 3 shows that the mean score of measuring frequency of political conversation was 5.40 with a standard deviation of 1.46.

Parents’ education and family income were included in the analysis as control variables indicative of social class. Students were asked the level of education received by both their father/male guardian and mother/female guardian. The variable was coded 1 if a parent/guardian had a college degree and 0 for those with less than a BA degree. The education for both parents was added together. Table 3 shows that the mean for parents’ education was .91 and the standard deviation was .88.

To measure family income, students were told that “the typical family income in the state was \$49,000 and to please indicate what their family’s income was when they were 18, compared to the typical family in the state by circling the appropriate X.” The ratings were coded on a 7-point scale with a bottom X (1) labeled “\$20,000 or less” the middle X (4) labeled “\$43,000” and the top X (7) labeled “\$100,000 or more.” Table 3



shows that the mean income for this analysis was 5.1 and the standard deviation was 1.74.

Students' religious views were measured by asking students two questions about (1) religious upbringing and (2) interpretations of the Bible. First, students were asked to identify what religion they were raised in: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other, and none were their options. They were then asked their view the Bible with options of (1) the actual word of God and it is to be taken literally word for word, (2) the inspired word of God but not taken literally, (3) an ancient book of fables, (4) other, and (5) none of the above. The two items were combined to form five groups: Protestants who take a literal interpretation of the Bible, Protestants who view the Bible as an inspired book but not to be taken literally, Protestants to who hold other interpretations of the Bible (e.g. book of fables), Catholics, and Non-Christians (e.g. Jewish, Muslim, no religion). Table 3 shows the statistics of students' religious categories: 111 (30.8%) participants were identified to be Protestant Literalists (literal views of the Bible), 157 (31.7%) participants were identified as Protestant Inspired (Bible as inspiration, not literal translation), 45 (9.1%) participants were identified as the Protestant Other (protestant unspecified) category, 66 (15%) of participants identified as Catholic, and 59 (13.4%) of participants identified as being Non-Christian or having No Religion.

Stage 2: Part two of the proposed research tackled the underlying thesis of this paper: What holds more weight—is it the message or the messenger?

The most current research (Pew Center for People and the Press, October 2010) on global warming and climate change reveals that opinions about global warming are sharply divided along political party lines. The Pew study, conducted in early October,

surveyed 2,251 Americans adults and found that 59% of all Americans say there is “solid evidence that the average temperature on earth has been increasing over the past few decades”. The same study found that 79% of Democrats say this same thing, and 53% percent of these Democrats report thinking the earth is warming “mostly because of human activity”. Among Republicans, only 38% agree the earth is warming and just 16% say that “warming is caused by humans”. Roughly half of Republicans (53%) say there is no solid evidence of warming.

These patterns are little changed from a year ago, however this same study conducted in 2006 found that far more Americans said there was solid evidence that the average temperature has been rising over the past few decades. In July of that year, 79% of Americans reported that they believed there was evidence of global warming, and half (50%) said it was mostly caused by human activity. According to the 2009 Pew Study conducted about attitudes about global warming, the big change in attitudes about global warming occurred between 2006 and April 2008, with the decline coming mostly, though not entirely, among Republicans and independents (Pew Center, October 2009).

Based on this data, it was decided that using a news story confirming the existence of global warming would be a valid way to test to see what is driving attitudes—source or content? To test this research question, before the second survey is given, all students read a news story about climate change. The article reported on how climate change is a real phenomenon, and that it is caused mostly by human activity. An article containing information about other popular politicized topics such as abortion or gay marriage rights was not used because research shows that these issues are “purity-related” issues, therefore eliciting stronger opinions from the politically conservative than

any other political issues, (Inbar, Pizzaro, & Bloom, 2009). Because this phenomenon, dubbed “disgust sensitivity”, assumes that individuals judge these objects from a moral perspective, it is assumed that all participants would be even less likely to critically examine the facts contained in the articles, (Inbar, Pizarro, & Bloom, 2009). Climate change is a relative “newcomer” to the political debate, and less linked to moral attitudes than the aforementioned topics.

The news article given to the participants taking survey 2 was the *exact same article* given to all participants. However, at the top half of the participants’ articles, there was a line suggesting that the article was obtained from CNN News, and the other half of the participants’ articles will read that it was taken from Fox News, (see Fig. 2) The students then took the second survey, which asked them questions about the article they just read. The dependent variable for this analysis is how much the participant trusts the article. To measure this, students were asked to “Please circle the number that corresponds with how trustworthy you believe the article is”. Answers were then scored on a five-point scale in which 1= “Completely untrustworthy”; 2= “Somewhat trustworthy”; 3= “Mostly trustworthy”; 4= “Completely trustworthy”; and 5= “Not sure”. The total mean for this measurement was 2.7 and the standard deviation was .97.

The independent variables in this analysis include whether the article read is from Fox or CNN as well as whatever the student scored on the first survey’s political liberalism scale, the student’s political party affiliation, the students’ political participation, and how often a person talks about politics with their parents and peers. Control variables such as sex, race, parents education, and family income were also included in the analysis.

Table 1: DATA & METHODOLOGY: Frequency of Watching Different News Program

VARIABLE	Mean (SD)	Never Watch	Watches 1-2 Times a Month	Watches Once a Week	Watches 2-3 times a week	Watches 4 or more days a week
CBS Evening News with Katie Couric	1.46 (.81)	68	22.3	5.5	3.4	.7
NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams	1.42 (.79)	72.1	18.4	5.5	3.5	.5
ABC World News with Diane Sawyer	1.53 (.85)	64.1	23.4	8	3.7	.7
CNN News	2.29 (1.19)	31.3	32.9	16.1	15.4	4.4
Fox News	2.44 (1.21)	26.6	30.7	21.3	14.9	6.4
MSNBC News	1.89 (1.05)	47.7	26.7	16.3	7.4	1.9
Your Local News	2.43 (1.26)	29.7	28.3	18.2	16.8	6.9
Programming PBS	1.60 (.92)	60.5	26.7	6.5	4.7	1.6
The Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert	2.19 (1.33)	42.8	24.5	11	14	7.8
The Daily Show with Jon Stewart	2.09 (1.34)	48.7	22	9.8	10.8	8.7

Table 2: DATA & METHODOLOGY: Perceived Trustworthiness of Each Source

VARIABLE	Mean (SD)	Never Trust this source	Sometimes Trust this source	Usually Trust this Source	Always Trust This Source	Not Sure
CBS	1.64 (.90)	10.8	23.3	27.2	3.9	34.8
NBC	1.63 (.89)	11.3	20.3	24.9	3.2	40.3
ABC	1.75 (.94)	10.4	20.5	28.1	5.5	35.5
CNN	2.47 (1.17)	7.6	25.6	40	10	16.7
Fox	2.58 (1.19)	17.1	20.8	35.4	11.9	14.8
MSNBC	2.11 (1.06)	11.7	23.9	33.7	4.1	26.6
Local News	2.62 (1.24)	7.6	17.9	43.7	10.8	20
PBS	1.76 (1.00)	12.8	14.8	30.9	9.0	32.5
The Colbert Report	2.48 (1.36)	25.2	25.4	16	7.3	26.1
The Daily Show	2.40 (1.40)	26.4	23.4	14.7	6.7	28.9

Table 3: DATA & METHODOLOGY: Descriptive Statistics: Independent Variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean (S.D.) or N (%)</b>
Male	214 (48.9)
Female	224 (51.1)
White	292 (66.5)
Black	108 (24.6)
Other	39 (8.9)
Democrat	99 (22.6)
Republican	165 (37.6)
Independent	42 (9.6)
Libertarian	15 (3.4)
None	108 (24.6)
Other	5 (1.1)
Social Liberal	6.04 (2.36)
Econ Liberal	5.16 (1.80)
Political Involvement	.78 (1.18)
Parents' Education	.91 (.88)
Family Income	2.21 (.84)
Year in College: Freshmen; Sophomores; Juniors; Seniors	F: 5 (1.1); S: 213 (48.5); J: 157 (38.5) S: 64 (14.6)
Protestant-Literal	111 (30.8)
Protestant-Inspired	157 (31.7)
Protestant-Other	45 (9.1)
Catholic	66 (15)
Non-Christian or No Religion	59 (13.4)

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Table 4 describes the frequency of watching different news programs by political affiliation. These statistics begin to show the differences in news-watching habits that exist between members of different political parties and begin to address the hostile media phenomenon. Column one in table 4 lists the news programs used in the analysis. Column two lists the means and standard deviations broken down by the three largest political party categories identified in the analysis. “Democrat” is denoted with a “D”, “Republican” with an “R”, and “None” with an “N”. The means are the numbers on top, and the numbers on bottom in parentheses are the standard deviations. The third through fifth columns describe the three main levels of frequency and each column shows the percentage of Democrats, Republicans, and None (D/R/N) who reported each level of frequency of watching each show.

Table 4 shows that Democrats were significantly more likely to watch ABC World News than Republicans and those in the None category. Democrats were also significantly more likely to watch CNN than Republicans and those in the None category. Table 4 also shows that Republicans were significantly more likely to watch Fox News than Democrats and the None group. Democrats and Republicans were both significantly more likely to watch their Local News programs than were the None group. Democrats were also significantly more likely to watch PBS than Republicans and those in the none category. As was expected, political party affiliation did affect the CNN and Fox News viewership rates as suggested by the existing literature on political orientation and news sources. The results of this analysis begin to suggest the hostile media phenomenon in

that Democrats and Republicans reported significantly different source news watching habits.

Table 5 shows the perceived trustworthiness in each source broken down by political party affiliation. As in table 4, column one in Table 5 lists the news outlets used in the analysis, and column two lists the means (the top numbers) and standard deviations (the bottom numbers) as broken down by political party (Democrat/Republican/No Affiliation, or “None”). Columns three through six list the percentages broken down by political party affiliation of people who reported each level of trust of each news source.

Table 5 shows that Democrats were significantly more likely to trust ABC World News with Diane Sawyer than both Republicans and the None category. As expected, Democrats were significantly more likely to trust CNN News than both Republicans and those in the None category. Also as expected, Republicans were significantly more likely to trust Fox News than both Democrats and those in the None category. Table 5 shows that of those who trust Fox News, almost twenty-one percent (20.7%) of Republicans said that they “always trust this source” compared with 6.1% of Democrats who reported the same. However, more than ten percent (10.2%) of the None category reported that they also “always trust” Fox News.

Table 5 shows that of those who trust CNN News, 16.3% of Democrats reported that they “Always Trust this Source”, compared with 8.5% of Republicans. However, 11.1% of the None category reported that they “Always Trust” CNN. CNN had the highest number of people from the Democratic and None categories to report that they “Always Trust this source”. Democrats and the None category did not report higher percentages for “always trusting” any other source.



Table 5 shows that Republicans were significantly more likely to trust the local news than the None group. Democrats report a higher percentage of people who report to “always trust” the “fake news” shows (The Daily Show- 11.1%; Colbert Report-10.1%) than they do ABC (5.1%), CBS (6.1%), NBC (2.0%), MSNBC (2.0%), and Fox News (6.1%). The same percentage of Democrats who report to “always trust” The Daily Show also report to “always trust” the local news (11.1%).

Table 5 also shows that Democrats had the highest trust scores across all sources, and the None category had the lowest. The None category remained the most skeptical of the three major political categories overall.

The next tables show the results of the regressions which explain some of the variables that interact with political party affiliation. These tables begin to address the hypotheses that political activism and political ideology will interact with political party which could help explain some of the variance between political groups and news-watching frequency and trust. Table 6 shows the regression of frequency of watching CNN by political affiliation on the independent variables. Each political affiliation was run separately to see if variables had differential effects. Column one in Table 6 lists the independent variables included in the regressions. Column two shows the regressions for the Democrats who reported statistics about watching CNN (N: 89). In general, these variables explained 15.5% of the variance for Democrats. According to the data, Column two in Table 6 shows that Democrats who talk with their parents and friends about political issues and who are more economically liberal are significantly more likely to watch CNN than other Democrats. Column three in Table 6 shows the regressions of Republicans watching CNN (N: 156). Column three shows that 6.9% of the variance for

Republicans is explained by these variables. Column three shows that similarly to Democrats, the more economically liberal Republicans scored, the more likely they are to watch CNN. However, white Republicans were significantly less likely to watch CNN than their counterparts of other races. Column four in Table 6 describes the regressions for those watching CNN with No Political Affiliation (N: 99). Column four shows that these independent variables explain 15.9% of the variance for those with no political affiliation. Column four in table 6 shows that white participants with no political affiliation were significantly less likely to watch CNN than their counterparts of other races. According to Table 6, college students with no political affiliation are significantly more likely to watch CNN if they talk with their parents and friends about political issues. In addition, this regression shows that college students with no political affiliation are significantly more likely to watch CNN if they are socially liberal.

Table 7 describes the possible variables that affect each political affiliation's frequency of watching Fox News. Column one in Table 7 lists the independent variables included in the regression analyses. Column two shows the regressions for the Democrats who reported statistics about watching Fox (N: 90). In general, column two shows that none of these variables were significant in explaining the Democrats' behavior. Column three in Table 7 shows the regression for frequency of Fox watching by Republicans (N: 155). These variables explained 20.9% of the variance for Republicans' Fox News watching behavior. According to the data, column three shows that Republicans who participate in politically-driven activities are more likely to watch Fox News. Republicans who talk to their friends and family about political issues are also more likely ( $p < .001$ ) to watch Fox News than other groups. Column three in Table 7 also

shows that Republicans whose parents had a higher level of education were less likely to watch Fox News than other groups. Column four in Table 7 shows the regression for frequencies of watching Fox by those with no political affiliation (N=100). In general, column four shows that 8.5% of the variance is explained by these independent variables for those with no political affiliation. Column four shows that of those with no political affiliation, white participants were significantly less likely to watch Fox News.

Table 8 lists the possible variables that affect each political group's trust of CNN. Column one in Table 8 lists the independent variables included in the regression analyses. Column two shows the regressions for the Democrats who reported statistics about trusting CNN (N: 79). In general, column two in Table 8 shows that none of the variables were significant in explaining Democrats' levels of trust. Column three shows the regressions for the Republicans who reported statistics about trusting CNN (N: 132). Column three shows that these independent variables explained 8.3% of the variance for Republican's trust. Republicans who reported greater amounts of political talk with their parents and peers were much less likely to trust CNN than other Republicans. White Republicans were significantly less likely to trust CNN. Column four in Table 8 shows the regressions for college students with no political affiliation who reported statistics about trusting CNN (N: 77). In general, column four shows that these variables explained 13.6% of the variance for those with No political affiliation's trust of CNN. These statistics show that socially liberal participants with no political affiliation were significantly more likely to trust CNN. Column four also shows that college students with no political affiliation whose parents have a higher education are less likely to trust

CNN. Additionally, as was the case with Republicans, white respondents with no political affiliation were significantly less likely to trust CNN.

Table 9 shows the regression of trust of Fox News by political party. Column one lists the independent variables included in the regressions. Column two shows the regression for Democrats' trust of Fox. It shows that these variables explained only .9% of the variance for Democrats' trust. Column three shows the regression for Republicans' trust of Fox (N: 140). It shows that these variables explained 5.5% of the variance for Republican's trust. Column three shows that Republican women college students were significantly more likely to trust Fox News than any other group. Column four in Table 9 shows the regression for those with No political affiliation (N: 77). Column four shows that 5.6% of the variance for those with No political affiliation's trust is explained by these independent variables. According to these statistics, college students with no political affiliation and whose parents have a higher level of education are less likely to trust Fox News.

Stage 2: Tables 10, 11, and 12 address the final research question which was: When it comes to trusting CNN and FOX News, what do students rely on more when evaluating a news article—the message (content) or the messenger (source?) Previous research would suggest that political ideology and party might have some interaction with participants' trust in either the message and the messenger. Table 10 shows the crosstabulation of the total of the responses to the question: “How trustworthy is the article” for each group (CNN and FOX). Column one in Table 10 lists the two variables: (1) Whether the article was reported by CNN and (2) Whether the article was reported by Fox. Columns two through six report the numbers of people and percentages of the group

who reported each level of trusting the article after reading it. Column five in Table 10 shows that twice as many students said that the CNN article was “completely trustworthy” than did the number of students who thought that Fox was “completely trustworthy”. Additionally, column two shows that three times as many students said that the Fox article was “completely untrustworthy” than did the number of students who said the CNN article was “completely untrustworthy.”

Tables 11 and 12 show the regressions describing the variables affecting the reported trustworthiness of the article given in the second survey during stage two of the study. (All participants were rating the same article, however half believed it was reported by CNN and the other half believed it was reported by FOX News). Table 11 shows the regressions of the participants who received the article labeled Fox News. Table 12 shows the regressions of the participants who received the article labeled CNN News.

Column one in Table 11 lists the independent variables included in the analysis of the participants who received the Fox sample. The second column shows the results of the regressions. The variables included in the Fox regressions explain only 2% of the variance for people’s overall trust in the article. Table 11 shows that while women as a group are more likely to trust Fox News and evaluate an article reported by Fox based on the fact it came from Fox, people’s reported trust in Fox on the first measure did not have a significant effect with how much people trusted the article when they thought it came from Fox News. Therefore, Table 11 shows that overall, people tend to look at the message being given on Fox News, and evaluated the article based on other factors rather than how much they trusted Fox as a source.

Column one in Table 12 lists the independent variables included in the analysis of the participants who received the CNN sample during stage two of the study. Column two shows the results of the regressions. These variables explained 11.8% of the variance when it came to trusting the article participants believed came from CNN. Table 12 shows that when it comes to CNN, women are also more likely than all other groups to trust the article. Other than sex, people's trust in CNN at the initial measure was the only other variable included in the analysis that had a significant effect on how participants rated the article they believed came from CNN. Therefore, when it comes to CNN, the data suggests that this sampling of college students did evaluate the legitimacy of the message based on the messenger or source (CNN), whereas when they believed the same article was reported by Fox, they relied more on other factors not explored.

Table 4: RESULTS: Frequency of Viewership by Political Affiliation

VARIABLE	Mean(SD) D/R/N (D)/I/(N)	Never Watch	Watches 1-2 Times a Month	Watches once a week or more
CBS	1.62/1.43/1.34 (.93)/(.71)/(.74)	58.6/67.1/76.9	27.6/26.2/15.7	13.2/6.7/7.4
NBC	1.60/1.42/1.30 (.97)/(.78)/(.63)	63.3/71.8/77.8	23.5/17.8/16.7	13.3/10.5/5.6
ABC	1.87/1.42/1.44 (1.06)/(.74)/(.77)	48.5/68.7/69.4	29.3/24.5/19.4	22.2/6.7/11.1
CNN	2.85/2.01/2.1 (1.25)/(1.08)/(1.13)	12.2/40.2/40.2	36.7/33.5/26.2	50.9/26.2/33.7
Fox	2.28/2.86/2.0 (1.19)/(1.26)/(1.05)	33.3/14.7/39.8	27.3/30.7/31.5	39.3/54.6/28.7
MSNBC	2.17/1.79/1.7 (1.18)/(.96)/(.98)	37.8/50.3/57	26.5/28.3/25.2	35.7/21.4/17.8
Local News	2.57/2.74/1.94 (1.25)/(1.26)/(1.18)	23.5/20.1/48.1	30.6/25.6/27.8	45.9/54.2/24.1
PBS	1.88/1.48/1.55 (1.13)/(.81)/(.78)	50.5/66/59.4	27.8/25.9/30.2	21.6/8.0/10.4
The Colbert Report	1.92/2.12/2.15 (1.27)/(1.23)/(1.35)	56.1/42.7/46.3	17.3/26.2/22.2	26.5/31.1/31.5
The Daily Show	1.94/1.90/2.07 (1.35)/(1.19)/(1.31)	58.2/53/48.1	16.3/22.6/22.2	25.6/24.4/29.6

Table 5: RESULTS: Trust of Media Source by Political Affiliation

VARIABLE	Mean (SD) D/R/N (D)/I/(N)	Never Trust this source	Sometimes or Usually Trust This Source	Always Trust this source	Not Sure D/R/N
CBS	1.88/1.55/1.55 (1.0)/(.79)/(.90)	10.2/10.4/9.3	54.1/52.1/43.9	6.1/3.7/4.7	29.6/33.7/42.1
NBC	1.9/1.63/1.48 (1.02)/(.91)/(.77)	9.2/10.5/10.3	51/45.7/39.3	2.0/4.3/4.7	37.8/39.5/45.8
ABC	2.17/1.58/1.65 (1.10)/(.84)/(.87)	9.2/10.5/9.3	57.1/46.3/44.9	5.1/6.8/7.5	28.6/36.4/38.3
CNN	2.93/2.17/2.37 (1.18)/(1.10)/(1.13)	3.1/10.4/7.4	70.4/64.8/57.4	16.3/8.5/11.1	10.2/16.5/24.1
Fox	2.40/2.97/2.21 (1.17)/(1.25)/(1.02)	27.3/4.9/20.4	54.5/62.2/45.3	6.1/20.7/10.2	12.1/12.2/24.1
MSNBC	2.38/2.00/1.88 (1.14)/(1.00)/(1.01)	8.1/12.2/11.2	68.7/53.6/51.4	2.0/4.9/6.5	21.2/29.3/30.8
Local News	2.72/2.91/2.19 (1.22)/(1.19)/(1.26)	5.1/6.1/11.2	68.7/63.8/51.4	11.1/14.1/7.5	15.2/16/29.9
PBS	2.06/1.60/1.67 (1.19)/(.90)/(.86)	12.2/12.4/13.2	43.9/49.1/43.4	14.3/5/8.5	29.6/33.5/34.9
The Colbert Report	2.18/2.40/2.41 (1.36)/(1.25)/(1.43)	29.3/23.2/25.2	35.3/45.8/39.3	10.1/4.3/5.6	25.3/26.8/29.9
The Daily Show	2.27/2.19/2.38 (1.45)/(1.26)/(1.41)	29.3/26.4/25.2	32.3/39.9/38.4	11.1/3.1/4.7	27.3/30.7/31.8



TABLE 6: RESULTS: Regression, Frequency of Watching CNN by Political Affiliation

Variable	Dem	Rep	None
White	.022/.358	-1.14*/.436	-.516*/.233
Sex	-.559/.290	-.241/.178	-.395/.227
Parents Ed	.019/.169	-.121/.098	-0.92/.129
Family Income	.068/.159	-.064/.118	.085/.064
Political Talk	.266**/.100	-.026/.064	.177*/.071
Political Participation	.066/.105	.109/.069	.259/.146
Social Liberal	-.140/.070	.024/.043	.160**/.056
Economic Liberal	.172*/.076	.137*/.063	.037/.066
Protestant Literalist	-.580/.305	-.110/.198	.124/.316
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.155	.069	.159
F	2.814**	2.275*	3.09***
N	89	156	99

TABLE 7: RESULTS: Regression, Frequency of Watching Fox by Political Affiliation

Variable	Dem	Rep	None
White	-2.06/.351	-.854/.471	-.757**/.223
Sex	-.100/.293	-.086/.192	-.133/.218
Parents Ed	-.112/.175	-.247*/.106	-.167/.124
Family Income	-.018/.163	-.041/.127	.094/.132
Political Talk	.155/.103	.305***/.069	.071/.068
Political Participation	.052/.109	.167*/.076	-.062/.14
Social Liberal	-.063/.072	-.074/.046	.065/.052
Economic Liberal	.095/.076	.070/.068	-.102/.064
Protestant Literalist	.016/.309	-.308/.215	-.011/.300
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-.007	.209	.085
F	.935	5.561***	2.026*
N	90	155	100

TABLE 8: RESULTS: Regression of Trust of CNN by Political Affiliation

Variable	Dem	Rep	None
White	.049/.223	-.781*/.341	-.538*/.203
Sex	.021/.189	.024/.151	.246/.210
Parents Ed	-.029/.113	-.019/.082	-.278*/.106
Family Income	.191/.108	.139/.100	-.003/.113
Political Talk	-.085/.065	-.154**/.053	-.036/.061
Political Participation	-.033/.070	-.031/.056	.215/.117
Social Liberal	.056/.047	-.023/.037	.118*/.045
Economic Liberal	.051/.050	.102/.053	-.004/.055
Protestant Literalist	.004/.206	.044/.167	-.081/.284
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.003	.083	.136
F	1.030	2.319*	2.347*
N	79	132	77

TABLE 9: RESULTS: Regression of Trust of Fox by Political Affiliation

Variable	Dem	Rep	None
White	-.342/.296	-.421/.348	-.386/.252
Sex	.334/.259	.351*/.140	.445/.256
Parents Ed	-.195/.152	.000/.076	-.283*/.133
Family Income	.145/.148	.171/.093	-.020/.142
Political Talk	-.032/.086	.087/.050	-.122/.077
Political Participation	-.089/.092	.034/.053	.164/.144
Social Liberal	-.001/.063	-.047/.034	-.004/.058
Economic Liberal	.028/.065	-.048/.049	-.055/.071
Protestant Literalist	.154/.274	-.005/.156	.011/.358
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.009	.055	.056
F	1.078	1.908	1.505
N	78	140	77

Table 10: RESULTS: Crosstabulation of How Trustworthy is the Article?

Variable	Completely Untrustworthy N(%)	Somewhat Trustworthy	Mostly Trustworthy	Completely Trustworthy	Not Sure
Reported by CNN	6 (3.2)	78 (41.3)	79 (41.8)	12 (6.3)	14 (7.4)
Reported by FOX	19 (9.2)	75 (36.4)	86 (41.7)	6 (2.9)	20 (9.7)

TABLE 11: RESULTS: Regression of article for Fox sample

Variable	B/Std. E
White	.078/.163
Sex	.297*/.129
Parents Ed	.043/.077
Family Income	-.053/.080
Social Liberal	-.018/.031
Economic Liberal	.021/.036
Protestant Literalist	-.265/.170
Democrat	.030/.201
Independent	-.140/.220
Libertarian	-.307/.337
No Pol. Party	.126/.174
Trust Fox	.075/.073
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.020
F	1.250
N	147

TABLE 12: RESULTS: Regression of article for CNN sample

Variable	B/Std. E
White	.233/.149
Sex	.234*/.116
Parents Ed	.117/.066
Family Income	-.108/.068
Social Liberal	-.047/.030
Economic Liberal	.051/.036
Protestant Literalist	-.061/.133
Democrat	.322/.211
Independent	.268/.186
Libertarian	-.159/.349
No Pol. Party	.287/.172
Other Pol party	-.085/.391
Trust CNN	.186*/.072
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.118
F	2.463**

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The results of these analyses provide support for all of the hypotheses outlined at the outset of the study. Vast differences in news-watching habits of people of various political parties and political ideologies do exist, and this study provides data in support of claims that the gaps between the news-watching habits of members of the dominant political parties in the U.S are continuing to widen as time wears on (when compared with the Pew Center's statistics from 1985).

Stage one of the current study provides strong evidence for existence of the hostile media phenomenon in this sample, and the data also suggests (as others have found) that it occurs more strongly in republicans/conservative. This research indicated that the Republican group surveyed had more hostile attitudes towards a source perceived to be Democrat-sympathetic (CNN) when compared with how Democrats perceived a source traditionally identified to be a "Republican-sympathetic" source (FOX).

Some of variables measured and chosen for regressions give new evidence for explaining variance in the reported data. Individuals' political ideologies (measured by social and economic issues) did have some effect on perceptions and trust of source. For example, the more socially liberal college students with no political affiliation were, the more likely they were to watch and trust CNN. Additionally, economically liberal Republicans and Democrats alike were more likely to watch CNN. Individuals' political party affiliation considerably affected perceptions of source as well as trust. How much an individual talked about and participated in political affairs had significant interactions on how much people trusted and watched various sources as well. Therefore, this study

used new measures to suggest, much like Eveland and Shah (2003), that social networks have an affect on shaping perceptions of the news media. In other words, those who identified with the Republican party, strong identifiers of any party, and the politically involved all felt that the news media were biased against their views.

Additionally supporting this theory is the attitudes towards CNN and FOX of the group who reported “no political affiliation”. While this “none” group tends to score the lowest on levels of watching and trusting all other sources, they score higher on trust and watching of CNN than the Republicans do, which suggests that the Republicans are more hostile towards a source and message that *may* be contradictory to their own attitudes and beliefs. The behavior of this “none” group is something that further research should address. Roughly one-third of this study’s sample of college students had no political affiliation, and as a whole they behaved more skeptical, apathetic, or “tuned-out” than any other group. Is the number of apathetic and tuned-out people greater because the current sample is of college students, or can this trend be found in the general population as well? Are these people only tuned-out from television news or does this trend extend to radio and Internet news? Available data suggests that Americans are, in general, tuned out more than ever before (Mindich, 2005), however subsequent research should address attitudes behind this behavior, and look into what, if any, political outlets these people seek. If this type of group is found to exist in other populations at a similar scale, this data suggests one of two things: (1.) Either this group of people is totally disengaged in all political matters across all political outlets and does not participate in the current system of government, or: (2.) This group of people seeks out non-traditional ways of getting their political information and non-traditional ways of getting involved in the Democratic

process. It could be a combination of both explanations. Regardless, further research on this population could add yet another dimension to the literature on political attitudes and news media source perceptions.

Stage 2 of the current study suggests that when it comes to evaluating news media messages, trust of CNN as a source does have an effect on students' trust of a news media message. However, across all political orientations, trust of Fox News did not have an effect on student's evaluation of the *same* message when it came from Fox. This data suggests a few things. Because the message in the article was controversial, it is assumed that students who already had an opinion on the message would be faced with taking the information they had and evaluating the message based on (1.) what they know about the source and (2.) what they know about the message already. The culmination of the findings shows that students tended to take a closer look at the information when it was suggested that the article was reported by Fox. Surprisingly, this means that the lower credibility of a source may mean that college students are more likely to critically evaluate what is actually contained in the message. It also suggests that many students are much more likely to just rely on source to trust a message when they believe it came from CNN. This suggests that more people truly believe CNN to be a credible source.

Admittedly, the fact that our sample was only comprised of college students is a limitation of the current study. Another limitation is that it focused on only television news sources, and only Fox and CNN were analyzed in stage two of the study. Further studies should measure attitudes on Internet, radio news, and newspaper consumers, and expand the message or the messenger discussion to other television sources rumored to

be partisan such as MSNBC, PBS, and of course, various models of “local news” (as news models and coverage trends vary across locations and regions).

Another interesting finding was the high levels of trust (across all groups) of local news. Explanations as to why this finding occurs should be examined. Is it because people feel this information is easier to personally verify? Studies such as one done on perceptions of local news programming would provide great insight to the existing literature. Having information about trustworthy news models can help those in the news industry to implement practices aimed towards having a better reputation of credibility and depth with viewers of all political views and orientations.



## APPENDIX A

### “SURVEY OF POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND NEWS HABITS”

Please circle the number below or next to your answer, LAST 4 DIGITS OF EAGLE ID \_\_\_\_\_  
 or write in the information requested.

1. What is your sex?

Male	Female
1	2

2. What is your race or ethnic background? (Circle all that apply)

White	Black	Hispanic or Latino	Native American	Asian	Other
1	2	3	4	5	_____
					(Please write in above)

3. What year in school are you?

Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
1	2	3	4

4. What is/are your major(s)?

\_\_\_\_\_ (please write in major)

5. What is your political party affiliation?

Democrat	Republican	Libertarian	None	Other
1	2	3	4	_____
				(please write in)

6. What religion, if any, were you raised in?

- a. Protestant (Which Denomination?) \_\_\_\_\_  
(e.g. Southern Baptist, Methodist. Please be specific)
- b. Catholic
- c. Jewish
- d. Other (Please write in) \_\_\_\_\_
- e. None

7. Which of the statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?

- a. The Bible is the actual word of God and it is to be taken literally, word for word.
- b. The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything should be taken literally, word for word.
- c. The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man.
- d. Other. (Please write in) \_\_\_\_\_
- e. None

**8. Have you ever done any of the following?**

	Yes	No
a. Worn clothing, buttons, or other items with a political party or candidate's name.	1	2
b. Volunteered for a political campaign.	1	2
c. Attended a political gathering (e.g. rally, protest)	1	2
d. Joined a political organization or plan to join (e.g. College Republicans or Democrats, etc.)	1	2
e. Written or posted a political blog	1	2
f. Called a political radio/television show	1	2

**9. Please circle the number that corresponds with how often you watch the following television news programs or channels.**

	Never	1-2 times a month	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4 or more days a week
a. CBS Evening News with Katie Couric	1	2	3	4	5
b. NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams	1	2	3	4	5
c. ABC World News with Diane Sawyer	1	2	3	4	5
d. CNN NEWS	1	2	3	4	5
e. FOX NEWS	1	2	3	4	5
f. MSNBC NEWS	1	2	3	4	5
g. Your Local News programming	1	2	3	4	5
h. PBS	1	2	3	4	5
i. The Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert	1	2	3	4	5
j. The Daily Show with Jon Stewart	1	2	3	4	5

10. Please circle the number that corresponds with how much you TRUST the following news programs

	I NEVER TRUST this news source	I SOMET TIMES TRUST this news source	I USUAL LY TRUST this news source	I ALWA YS TRUST this news source	I'm Not Sure
a. CBS Evening News with Katie Couric	1	2	3	4	5
b. NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams	1	2	3	4	5
c. ABC World News with Diane Sawyer	1	2	3	4	5
d. CNN NEWS	1	2	3	4	5
e. FOX NEWS	1	2	3	4	5
f. MSNBC NEWS	1	2	3	4	5
g. Your Local News programming	1	2	3	4	5
h. PBS	1	2	3	4	5
i. The Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert	1	2	3	4	5
j. The Daily Show with Jon Stewart	1	2	3	4	5

11. How often do you do the following?

	Never	Rarely	Sometim es	Often
a. Talk with your parents about political issues.	1	2	3	4
b. Talk with your friends about political issues.	1	2	3	4

12. Please indicate how much you agree/disagree with the following statements about social issues:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Marijuana usage should be legalized	1	2	3	4	5
b. Gay marriage should be legalized	1	2	3	4	5
c. Prostitution should be legalized	1	2	3	4	5
d. Abortion should be legalized	1	2	3	4	5

13. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the government.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. The government should reduce taxes for big business	1	2	3	4	5
b. The government should reduce welfare spending	1	2	3	4	5
c. The government should end unemployment by hiring everybody without a job.	1	2	3	4	5
d. The government should see to it that every family has enough money for a decent standard of living	1	2	3	4	5

14. What is the highest level of education your MOTHER or primary female guardian completed in school?	Less than High School	High School Diploma or GED	Some College	2 Year College Degree	Bachelor's Degree or higher
	1	2	3	4	5

15. What is the highest level of education your FATHER or primary male guardian completed in school?	Less than High School	High School Diploma or GED	Some College	2 Year College Degree	Bachelor's Degree or higher
	1	2	3	4	5

16. In the state of Georgia, the typical household income in 2009 was \$50,000. Please indicate where your family's income was, when you were 18, compared to the typical Georgia family by circling the appropriate X.

\$20,000 or less	\$20,000 or more and less than \$29,000	\$30,000 or more and less than \$39,000	\$40,000 or more and less than \$49,000	\$50,000 or more and less than \$59,000	\$60,000 or more and less than \$69,000	\$70,000 or more and less than \$79,000	\$80,000 or more and less than \$89,000	\$90,000 or more and less than \$99,000	\$100,000 or more
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

## APPENDIX B

### “FOX/CNN CLIMATE CHANGEARTICLE AND QUESTIONNAIRE”

## Scientists: Pace of Climate Change Exceeds Estimates

### **FOX NEWS/CNN NEWS**

Sunday, February 15, 2009

CHICAGO, Feb. 14 -- The pace of global warming is much faster than recent predictions, because industrial greenhouse gas emissions have increased more quickly than expected and higher temperatures are triggering self-reinforcing feedback mechanisms in global ecosystems, scientists said Saturday.

"We are basically looking now at a future climate that's beyond anything we've considered seriously in climate model simulations," Christopher Field, founding director of the Carnegie Institution's Department of Global Ecology at Stanford University, said at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Field, a member of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said emissions from burning fossil fuels since 2000 have largely outpaced the estimates used in the U.N. panel's 2007 reports. The higher emissions are largely the result of human activity, he said.

Unexpectedly large amounts of carbon dioxide are being released into the atmosphere as the result of "feedback loops" that are speeding up natural processes. Prominent among these, evidence indicates, is a cycle in which higher temperatures are beginning to melt the arctic permafrost, which could release hundreds of billions of tons of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere, said several scientists on a panel at the meeting.

Evidence is also accumulating that terrestrial and marine ecosystems cannot remove as much carbon from the atmosphere as earlier estimates suggested, Field said.

Preventing deforestation in the tropics is more important than in northern latitudes, the panel agreed, since lush tropical forests sequester more carbon than sparser northern forests. And deforestation in northern areas has benefits, since larger areas end up covered in exposed, heat-reflecting snow.

Many scientists and policymakers are advocating increased incentives for preserving tropical forests, especially in the face of demand for clearing forest to grow biofuel crops such as soy. Promoting biofuels without also creating forest-preservation incentives would be "like weatherizing your house and deliberately keeping your windows open," said Peter Frumhoff, chief of the Union of Concerned Scientists' climate program. "It's just not a smart policy."

Field said the U.N. panel's next assessment of Earth's climate trends, scheduled for release in 2014, will for the first time incorporate policy proposals. It will also include complicated models of interconnected ecosystem feedbacks.

The panel's last report noted that preliminary knowledge of such feedbacks suggested that an additional 100 billion to 500 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions would have to be prevented in the next century to avoid dangerous global warming. Currently, about 10 billion tons of carbon are emitted each year.

Last 4 digits of Eagle ID \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the number that corresponds with how trustworthy you believe the article is:

---

1. Completely

untrustworthy

2. Somewhat trustworthy

3. Mostly trustworthy

4. Completely trustworthy

5. Not Sure

---

In the space below please tell us why you trust this article is as trustworthy as you do:

## REFERENCES

- Alterman, Eric. 2003. *What Liberal Media? The Truth about BIAS and the News*. New York: Basic Books
- Bozell, L. Brent. 2004. *Weapons of Mass Distortion: The Coming Meltdown of the Liberal Media*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Brock, David. 2004. *The Republican Noise Machine: Right-Wing Media and How it Corrupts Democracy*. New York: Crown Publishers
- D'Alessio, D. a. (2000). Media bias in presidential elections: A meta analysis. *Journal of Communication* , 50, 133-56.
- David, P. a. (2004). Methodological artifact or persistent bias? Testing the robustness of the third-person and reverse third-person effects for alcohol messages. *Communication Research* , 31 (2), 206-233.
- Dunning, D. a. (1996). Evidence for egocentric comparison in social judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* , 71 (2), 213-229.
- Eveland, William a. (2003). "The Impact of Individual and Interpersonal Factors on Perceived News Media Bias. *Political Psychology* 24 (1):101-17.
- Fein, S. a. (1997). Prejudice as self-image maintenance: Affirming the self through derogating others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* , 73 (1), 31-44.
- Fiske, S. T. (2004). *Social beings: A core motives approach to social psychology*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Pantheon.
- Inbar, Y. a. (2009). Conservatives are more easily disgusted than liberals. *Cognition & Emotion*, 23 (4). 714-725.
- Lee, T. (2005). The liberal media myth revisited: An examination of factors influencing perceptions of media bias. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 49, 43-64.
- Mindich, D. (2005). *Tuned out: Why Americans under 40 don't follow the news*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morris, J. S. (2007). Slanted objectivity? Perceived media bias, cable news exposure, and political attitudes. *Social Science Quarterly* , 88 (3), 707-728.

- Mutz, D.C., & Martin, P.S. (2001). Facilitating communication across lines of political difference: The role of mass media. *The American Political Science Review*, 95, 97-114.
- Nisbett, R.E. & Ross, L. (1980). *Human inference: Strategies and shortcomings of social judgment*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Niven, D. (2002). *Tilt? The Search for media bias*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Pew Research Center for People and the Press. (2007, August 9). *Survey reports: Internet news audience highly critical of news organizations*. Retrieved November 12, 2009, from The Pew Research Center for People and the Press: <http://people-press.org/report/348/internet-news-audience-highly-critical-of-news-organizations>
- Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2009, September 13). Press accuracy rating hits two decade low: Public evaluations of the news media: 1985-2009. Retrieved, November 12, 2009 from the Pew Research Center for People and the Press: <http://people-press.org/report/543/>
- Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2010, October 27). Little change in opinions about global warming: Increasing partisan divide on energy policies. Retrieved, November 12, 2010 from the Pew Research Center for People and the Press: <http://people-press.org/report/669/>
- Smith, W. L. and Nathan Pino. 2005. College students, the academic ethic, and academic achievement. *Virginia Social Science Journal*, 40:52-67
- Sherif, Muzafer, and Carl L. Hovland. 1961. *Social Judgment: Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Communication and Attitude Change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Stalder, D.R. (2009). Political orientation, hostile media perceptions, and group-centrism. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 11 (2), 383-400.
- Stephens, M. (2007). *A history of news* (3rd Edition ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tajfel, H. (1982). Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations. *Annual Review of Psychology* (33), 1-39.
- Tsfati, Y. a. (2003). Do people watch what they do not trust? Exploring the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Communication Research* , 30 (5), 504-29.



Vallone, R. P. (1985). The hostile media phenomenon: biased perception and perceptions of media bias in coverage of the beirut massacre. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* , 49, 577-85.

Van Vugt, M. a. (2004). Social identity as social glue: The origins of group loyalty. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* , 86 (4), 585-598.