Political Communication

New Media and the Polarization of American Political Discourse

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Scholars of political communication have long examined newsworthiness by focusing on the news choices of media organizations (Lewin, 1947; White, 1950; Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979). However, in recent years these traditional arbiters of the news have increasingly been joined or even supplanted in affecting the public agenda by "new media" competitors, including cable news, talk radio, and even amateur bloggers. The standards by which this new class of decision makers evaluates news are at best only partially explained by prior studies focused on professional journalists and organizations. In this study, we seek to correct this oversight by content analyzing five online news sources— including wire services, cable news, and political blog sites—in order to compare their news judgments in the months prior to, and immediately following, the 2006 midterm election. We collected all stories from Reuters' and AP's "top political news" sections. We then investigated whether a given story was also chosen to appear on each wire's top news page (indicating greater perceived newsworthiness than those that were not chosen) and compared the wires' editorial choices to those of more partisan blogs (from the left: DailyKos.com; from the right: FreeRepublic.com) and cable outlets (FoxNews.com). We find evidence of greater partisan filtering for the latter three Web sources, and relatively greater reliance on traditional newsworthiness criteria for the news wires.

Keywords new media, media bias, polarization, blogs, agenda setting, political communication

In August 2007, the FBI asked media organizations in Seattle, Washington, to help in identifying two men who were seen behaving unusually aboard several ferries in the area. The FBI asked the news outlets to publicize descriptions of the men, including photos taken by suspicious ferry employees. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* published an article noting the FBI's search, but refused to include either physical descriptions or photos of the men. This refusal ignited a firestorm of criticism. In response, the paper's managing editor acknowledged the controversy but dismissed its significance, commenting: "I understand that people have a hard time with the concept that we get to decide what is news and what isn't, and what is fair and what isn't" (McCumber, 2007).

Less than a decade earlier John Chambers, the CEO of Cisco Systems, famously stated, "What people have not grasped is that the Internet will change everything" (Friedman, 1998). While some scholars have searched for evidence of such effects in the conduct of 21st-century political campaigning and governance,[1] the impact of the Internet as a

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communication medium often seems hidden in plain sight. Indeed, many traditional journalists—including the managing editor of the *Post-Intelligencer*—apparently failed to grasp that the Internet's comparatively modest production and distribution costs (Hamilton, 2004) removed the decision of "what is news and what isn't" from the exclusive province of professionals who spoke on the nation's networks or "bought ink by the barrel."

Many online media enthusiasts trumpet their new power, arguing that the new technology will "empower ordinary people to beat 'big media'" and "crash the gates of power" (Armstrong & Zúniga, 2006; Reynolds, 2006). Conversely, others worry that such a trend will fragment audiences and society and deprive the nation of a "common diet" of news that, they argue, is essential for the proper functioning of modern democracy (Sunstein, 2001; Katz, 1996). As Blumler and Kavanagh (1999, pp. 221–222) argue, "the presumption of mass exposure to relatively uniform political content, which has underpinned each of the three leading paradigms of political effect—agenda setting, the spiral of silence, and the cultivation hypothesis—can no longer be taken for granted."

That said, while prior research has shown that the public has changed its consumption patterns online in a manner consistent with this sort of fragmentation (Tewksbury, 2005), it remains unclear whether and to what extent the content and impact of Internet news reporting might actually differ from those of traditional media. If Internet news outlets lack their own independent newsgathering apparatus or are primarily echo chambers, repeating—albeit perhaps magnifying—the "relatively uniform political content" of the traditional news media, then it would be difficult to justify claims of revolution, disaster, or nirvana.

This project attempts to rectify this gap in the literature by systematically examining the strategies for choosing news employed by Internet news providers to determine whether they differ significantly from those of the traditional news media in politically important ways, such as partisan filtering. Consequently, the present study addresses the extent to which partisan new media editorial judgments systematically skew the content of news on partisan political, relative to nonpartisan, Web sites.[2]

To address this question, we analyzed the news content from five Web sites: DailyKos.com, FreeRepublic.com, FoxNews.com, AssociatedPress.com, and Reuters.com. The first two sites are commonly viewed as overtly pro-Democratic/liberal and pro-Republican/conservative, respectively. FoxNews.com is produced by a major cable TV news network with a reputation (at least among liberals and Democrats) for favoring Republican and conservative issues and candidates. Finally, Associated Press (AP) and Reuters are news wires—one U.S.-based and the other based in the United Kingdom—devoted to offering a comprehensive stream of news stories from around the world. In theory, the news wires ought to represent the essence of objective news coverage, as they self-consciously *avoid* politically based editorial judgments in their news content. Indeed, to avoid even the appearance of political conflicts of interest, AP prohibits its employees from contributing personal funds to political candidates.[3]

Of course, even the news wires must make *some* editorial judgments concerning the relative importance of stories, and thus which stories are featured relatively more or less prominently. However, so long as such judgments are not based on U.S. partisan politics—which seems especially likely for a non-American outlet such as Reuters—the news wires can, for our purposes, serve as an effective baseline estimate of the actual universe of potential news stories.

We investigate which of the stories appearing on the news wires—that is, the full population of *potential* news stories—are selected by the various Internet outlets to appear on their most prominent location: the "top news" summaries. We content analyzed the features of each story appearing on the news wires for a 5-month period (July through

November 2006). We thus investigate the correlates of selection by each outlet. In particular, we explore whether and to what extent these outlets choose stories based on their partisan implications (i.e., whether they are relatively more favorable to one or the other party).

Partisan News Selection

As noted above, one clear manner in which the Internet appears to differ from other mass media is the degree of niche targeting of political information-oriented Web sites. To be sure, some Internet outlets seek mass audiences. Yet these sites tend to represent the online versions of traditional mainstream news media, such as the *New York Times* or CBS News.[4] Many other Internet outlets—including, but not limited to, blogs—are overtly niche-oriented, seeking to attract a smaller, but more loyal, segment of the overall audience.[5] While political partisanship is by no means the only dimension upon which niche-marketing strategies might be based, in the realm of political information, partisanship is one of the key lines of demarcation allowing Web sites to attract a relatively loyal audience. It is therefore not surprising that many of the most widely visited political blog sites—and certainly among those with the most loyal audiences—tend to be overtly partisan, ranging from sites such as MoveOn.org and DailyKos.com on the left to FreeRepublic.com and InstaPundit.com on the right.

Compared to traditional news outlets such as network evening newscasts—which still routinely attract over 25 million viewers per day—the audiences for political Web sites are small. For instance, according to comScore, Inc., a global Internet information service, the total volume of traffic to political Web sites in May 2007 was about 9 million unique viewers (Wheaton, 2007), about the same as the typical audience for a single broadcast of *ABC World News Tonight* (see Table 1). According to a July 2006 Pew survey, in turn, only about 12% of respondents report "regularly" (4%) or "sometimes" (8%) visiting news-oriented blogs, while 8% cited FoxNews.com as one of the Web sites they visit "most often" (Pew Center, 2006). A February 2007 report by PBS's *Frontline* offers a "snapshot" (Table 1) of a typical daily audience breakdown across a variety of media sources (supplemented by the authors).

These data appear consistent with the aforementioned Pew survey; that is, the audiences for Internet news sites, including blogs, are considerably smaller than those for traditional news outlets.[6] But is the content on these Web sites as "biased" as commonly assumed? Establishing the presence or absence of partisan bias in news content has proven difficult. Self-described media watchdog groups such as the Media Research Center (MRC), the Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA), and Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) claim to objectively analyze media content, yet they routinely disagree on the incidence, severity, and direction of bias in the media. Scholarly attempts to assess media bias are similarly inconclusive (e.g., Efron, 1971; Patterson, 1993; Sutter, 2001).

Among the principal difficulties in establishing the presence or absence of media bias is establishing a clear definition of what exactly constitutes bias. Several recent studies (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006) have sought to empirically measure mainstream news media content against various standards, and have done so with varying results. However, few, if any, have successfully surmounted the so-called "baseline" or "unobserved population" problem (Hofstetter, 1976; Groeling & Kernell, 1998; Niven, 2002), especially with regard to online media. In other words, finding an ideological slant in media content is one thing; attributing such a slant to politically biased editorial judgment by the media is another. After all, the observed patterns of

Table 1
Typical daily audience snapshot

News outlet	Daily audience (millions)
NPR *Morning Edition*[a]	13.000
ABC World News Tonight[a]	9.000
The Daily Show with Jon Stewart[a]	1.600
The O'Reilly Factor on Fox News[a]	2.400
NYTimes.com[a]	1.400
New York Times print edition[a]	1.000
Washington Post print edition[a]	0.715
DailyKos.com[a]	0.500
CNN *American Morning*[a]	0.350
Moveon.org[b]	0.222
FreeRepublic.com[c]	0.052

[a]From http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newswar/part3/stats.html.
[b]From Wheaton (2007).
[c]From comScore (2006), http://www.imediaconnection.com/content/10359.asp
(figure is from May 2006).
   Note. For Internet sites, figures represent the number of unique visitors per day.

coverage—whatever the "slant"—might simply reflect a balanced sampling of the actual available population of potential stories. For instance, if one observes that 90% of statements by elites on a given news outlet criticize the president, that *could* reflect biased story selection by the outlet, or it may simply reflect the fact that 90% of all statements by elites in the pertinent time frame were, in fact, critical of the president. In the latter case, this hypothetical 90% anti-president skew in media coverage would represent an *accurate* reflection—that is, *objective* reporting—of the tenor of elite rhetoric regarding the president.

By comparing overtly partisan Web sites with other sites that are *least* likely to incorporate partisan political preferences into their news selection decisions—the news wires, both non-U.S. and U.S.-based—we attempt to surmount this difficulty. We employ the news wires as the most objective available baseline measure of the possible universe of important political stories from which other news sources *could* have been selected. This should allow us to assess the extent of the partisan skew of specific political blog sites. Our relatively straightforward expectations here are summarized in the following three hypotheses:

H1—Liberal Media: Ceteris paribus, left-leaning Web sites will be more likely to feature stories harmful to Republicans or helpful to Democrats, relative to the opposite types of stories.

H2—Conservative Media: Ceteris paribus, right-leaning Web sites will be more likely to feature stories harmful to Democrats or helpful to Republicans, relative to the opposite types of stories.

H3—Nonpartisan Media 1: Ceteris paribus, nonpartisan Web sites, such as the wire services, will be equally likely to feature stories harmful to Democrats and Republicans.[7]

Notwithstanding assertions to the contrary by countless partisans on the right (Coulter, 2003; Goldberg, 2003) and left (Alterman, 2003; Franken, 2004), we assume that nonpartisan news media—either traditional or "new"—*do not* select stories because

they advantage a specific party. This, however, does not mean that they will treat all partisan messages equally. Rather, media scholars (Tuchman, 1972; Graber, 1997; Schudson, 1978; Groeling, 2001) have identified many commonly held professional norms that might affect which types of partisan news stories journalists will typically prefer to select—that is, which stories they will consider newsworthy.

Tuchman (1972), for instance, famously argued that in part to counter accusations of bias, journalists have a strong incentive to employ strategic "rituals" of objectivity, most notably presenting "both sides of the story." Groeling (2001), in turn, argues that for partisan news, norms of novelty, authority, conflict, and balance combine to put a premium on *costly* messages from a given party in which the party unexpectedly appears to be attacking its own members or praising the opposing party. Such messages are especially novel, as partisans have strong electoral incentives (Groeling & Baum, 2008; Mayhew, 1974) to reserve their attacks for the *other* party while focusing their positive rhetoric on their fellow partisans. This suggests an additional hypothesis.

H4—Nonpartisan Media 2: Ceteris paribus, the wire services will be more likely to cover partisan news stories featuring *costly* communication (i.e., party members criticizing fellow party members or praising the other party) than those featuring *cheap* communication (i.e., party members criticizing the other party or praising their own party).[8]

Data and Methods

Our research design is loosely derived from the classic "gatekeeper" studies. Most notably, White (1950) investigated the daily decisions of a newspaper wire service editor, "Mr. Gates." White examined not only the wire service stories appearing in the paper, but also focused specifically on the wire stories that Gates had decided should *not* appear in the paper.[9] The concept of news selection is at the heart of one of the most important modern theories of media effects and political communication, agenda-setting research (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which at its core has "focused on the relationship between the news media's ranking of issues (in amount and prominence of coverage) and the public ranking of the perceived importance of these same issues in various surveys" (Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 1997, p. 257). Dearing and Rogers (1996) label this dominant form of agenda-setting scholarship "public agenda-setting" research. In doing so, they distinguish it from "policy agenda setting" (which focuses on the impact of media agendas on public policy agendas) and "media agenda setting" (which examines the causes or consequences of media agenda changes). This last strain of study is most relevant to the present study.

Of course, as noted above, with new media have come new individuals and organizations that perform this same journalistic function. In this study, we trace the news choices of several of these organizations. As with White's original studies, we have chosen to focus on wire service stories for our study population. Specifically, our population consists of 1,782 AP and Reuters political news story abstracts distributed between July 24 and November 14, 2006. This represents about 10–14 abstracts per day per wire service.[10]

Nearly all traditional U.S. news outlets typically belong to or monitor one or both of these wire services. Consequently, these stories should present a reasonable snapshot of the most important political stories available to journalists and commentators on a given day. Because, in turn, the wire services traditionally adhere to the "inverted pyramid" style of story construction, the headlines and abstracts should capture the most important aspects of the stories.

For each day in our sample, we also collected stories from four other Internet news sources: the wire services' own "top news" pages, Fox News Channel's political news feed, and the front pages of the conservative blog Free Republic and liberal blog Daily Kos.[11] Each of these outlets provides an archetypal example of a distinct type of news organization: the wire services are the bedrock of professional, explicitly nonpartisan traditional media; Fox News Channel has arguably been on the vanguard of ideologically polarized cable news content; and Free Republic and Daily Kos both represent large, partisan activist communities administered by individuals who are not professional journalists.[12] Thus, our ultimate goal is to predict and understand the story selection and emphasis decisions of these several news outlets—specifically, which of the daily wire service stories each outlet featured, and why.[13]

To test why a given organization featured particular stories, we content analyzed the wire services' political stories for information relating both to our predictions and to predictions derived from the broader literature on editorial decision making and news values. For example, the literature has clearly established that the president is an especially newsworthy figure in American politics (Robinson & Appel, 1979; Tidmarch & Pitney, 1985; Graber, 1997). Thus, one should expect stories related to the president to receive broader coverage than equivalent stories discussing a member of Congress or a dog-catcher. By accounting for these common determinants of news value, we can isolate the independent effects of our hypothetical relationships. In addition to coding for factors such as the novelty and severity of the event covered, we also attempted to control for instances of particularly dramatic action, controversial topics, issue areas, and mentions and praise or criticism of various figures and institutions. Our models thus include a large array of controls for a variety of story topical and content elements, as well as for the state of the nation (economy, war, etc.) at the time of a given story (see the Appendix for definitions and coding of all control variables).

To maximize confidence in the final data, three separate coders working independently and anonymously online coded each record in the dataset.[14] Following their participation in a series of training seminars and assignments, 40 UCLA undergraduate students participated in the content analysis. The intercoder agreement for our model's explanatory variables across the three sets of this initial coding topped 94%. In the vast majority of cases (84%), where all three coders agreed on the coding, the unanimous coding was passed on to the final data set.[15] In the 14% of instances where two coders agreed in their coding but disagreed with a third coder, we used the agreed-upon coding. In the 1% of cases where all three coders disagreed or in which the computer could not find matches, an additional student arbitrated the differences to deliver a final code.[16]

For our dependent variable, we examined whether the wire service political story was published in each outlet that day. Because each wire service used exactly the same headline and text for both the political and "top news" page versions of the stories, we were able to mechanically match appearances for their own sites with perfect accuracy. For the other sites, three independent coders located the "best" match of the wire service story. To be counted as a match on Daily Kos or Free Republic's front page, or on the Fox News politics feed, the outlet had to feature the same topic in the 24-hour period after its original publication.[17]

Overview of Coverage Patterns

Before turning to our hypothesis tests, we briefly review each news outlet's aggregate story choices. In Figure 1, we summarize the distribution of several key characteristics across stories that *were* and *were not* selected as "top news" by each outlet.
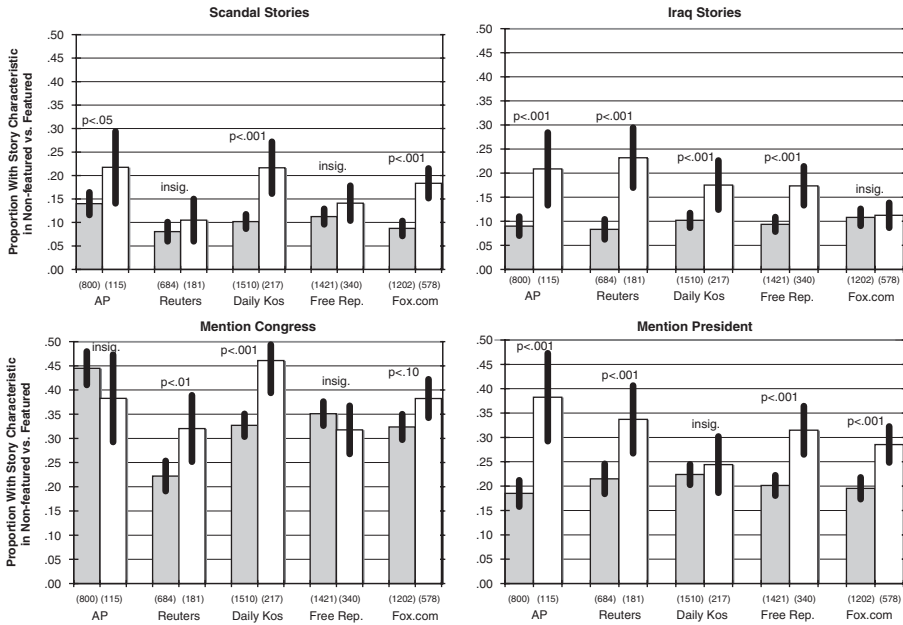
Figure 1. Relative prevalence of story characteristics across stories featured (unshaded) and not featured (shaded) on Web sites, by story characteristic and outlet (black bars are 95% confidence intervals; N's are shown in parantheses). (*Note.* Differences in the number of Daily Kos, Free Republic, and Fox cases are due to a small number of days in which the target Web site was unavailable or did not download correctly. In cases where we were unable to retrieve these items from an archive, the observations were dropped.)

For each outlet, the shaded bar shows the proportion of stories with the noted characteristic among all stories that were *not* selected as top news, while the unshaded bar shows that proportion for stories that *were* selected. If a story characteristic is significantly more common among the *selected* stories on a given outlet, relative to the *unselected* stories, this suggests that the characteristic is considered newsworthy by that outlet.

The top-left graphic in Figure 1 indicates that, all else equal, Fox, Daily Kos, and AP, but not Reuters or Free Republic, are more likely to feature stories involving scandals relative to stories *not* involving scandals ($p < .05$ or better). Similarly, the top-right graphic suggests that all outlets except Fox consider stories involving the Iraq conflict especially newsworthy ($p < .001$ in each case).

The bottom two graphics in Figure 1 show the relative prominence of stories involving Congress and the president. (It is important to bear in mind that our content analysis covers the period leading up to and following the 2006 congressional midterm elections.) For Congress (bottom-left graphic), we see that Reuters, Daily Kos, and Fox view congressional news as significantly more newsworthy than noncongressional news ($p < .10$ or better), while every outlet except Daily Kos appears to regard presidential news as significantly more newsworthy than nonpresidential news, all else equal ($p < .001$ in each case).

In Figure 2, we examine news choices over "good" and "bad" partisan news, beginning with (in the top-left graphic) the relative prevalence of stories coded as bad news for Democrats—but not Republicans (so-called "pure bad news for Democrats"). The top-right graphic then presents the equivalent summary of purely bad stories for Republicans.
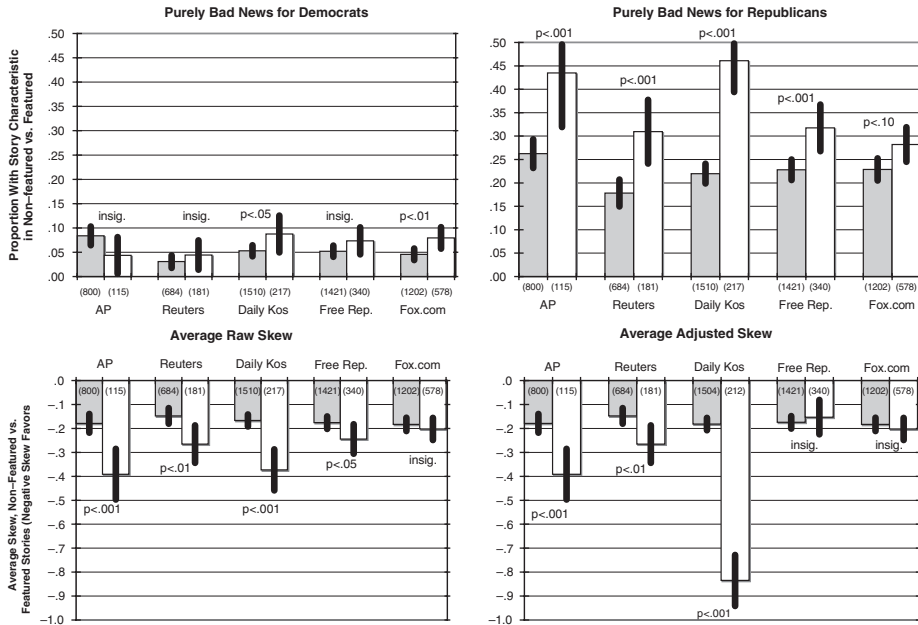
Figure 2. Story characteristics across stories featured (unshaded) and not featured (shaded) on Web sites, by story characteristic and outlet (black bars are 95% confidence intervals; N's are shown in parantheses). (*Note*. Differences in the number of Daily Kos, Free Republic, and Fox cases are due to a small number of days in which the target Web site was unavailable or did not download correctly. In cases where we were unable to retrieve these items from an archive, the observations were dropped.)

For Democrats, most outlets appear to have regarded bad news as relatively uninteresting. Only Daily Kos is significantly ($p < .05$) more likely to select than to ignore such stories (although, as shown below, such stories are often selected for purposes of rebuttal rather than endorsement). In sharp contrast, Republicans—unsurprisingly given the tenor of the 2006 election cycle—are awash in a veritable sea of bad news. Indeed, *every* news outlet apparently regarded such purely bad news stories as significantly more newsworthy than other stories ($p < .001$ for all outlets except Fox; $p < .10$ for Fox).

For each story, we created a raw skew index, which combines the raw bad news scores for each party into a scale in which stories that are purely bad for Democrats are coded as 1, stories purely bad for Republicans are coded as −1, and stories that are bad for both or neither are coded as zero. The bottom-left graphic in Figure 2 shows further evidence of a pervasive wave of bad news for Republicans, with every outlet except Fox preferring stories that skew against the Republicans over stories lacking an anti-Republican skew ($p < .05$ or better).

Unfortunately, the raw skew index has an important limitation. That is, in some cases, outlets selected these stories not to propagate them, but rather to attack them. In particular, both Daily Kos and Free Republic (unlike the wire services or the Fox RSS politics feed) produced heavily edited and skewed presentations of a wire service story, often choosing to criticize their reporting or emphasize only the most negative dimension of the story (depending on the target of the story). To capture cases such as these, we had three coders compare the original wire service summary with the summary that appeared on the outlet and code whether the outlet's version is more or less damaging to the parties. After making this

adjustment in a new variable (adjusted skew), Free Republic's apparent anti-Republican skew disappears, replaced with a slight (albeit insignificant) skew *against* anti-Republican stories, while Daily Kos appears even *more* skewed against Republicans ($p < .001$).

Of course, while single-factor analyses are suggestive, they are inherently limited by the assumption that all else is equal (as in a controlled experiment). Here, it is exceedingly clear that such party comparisons take place in a setting where all else is decidedly *not* equal. For example, as we have argued elsewhere (Baum & Groeling, in press), one should expect more scrutiny of Republican errors when they hold the reins of power; when Democrats were in the minority, they had less capacity to influence policy outcomes. Hence, for our hypothesis tests, we employ multivariate regression analysis in an attempt to account for many of the most likely alternative causal explanations for the observed patterns of coverage.

Hypothesis Tests

Our liberal (H1) and conservative (H2) media hypotheses predict that left-leaning Web sites will disproportionately feature news harmful to Republicans and/or helpful to Democrats, while right-leaning sites will disproportionately feature news harmful to Democrats and/or helpful to Republicans, respectively. Our nonpartisan media hypotheses, in turn, predict that nonpartisan Web sites—in our case, the wire services—will base their story selection on costliness (H4) rather than the partisan implications of story content (H3).

Because we consider the adjusted skew variable a more accurate measure than our raw skew indicator of the actual partisan skew in news content, our statistical investigations employ the latter dependent variable. Table 2 presents a series of logit analyses testing all four hypotheses. Models 1–3 test H1 and H2, with the adjusted measure of pro-Republican skew as the dependent variable.[18] However, as a robustness check, we replicated all analyses employing the raw skew indicator. The results (not shown)—though, as expected, slightly weaker for Daily Kos and Free Republic—largely mirror those reported herein. (We report the latter results in a supplemental appendix, available at http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/comm/groeling/warstories)

In Table 3, for ease of interpretation, we employ Clarify (King *et al.*, 2000), a statistical simulation procedure, to transform the logit coefficients into expected probabilities, as the key causal variables vary from a pro-Democratic to a pro-Republican skew. This procedure also derives standard errors surrounding the expected probabilities, thereby allowing us to determine whether the differences in the effects of (and across) the causal variables are themselves statistically significant.

Beginning with H1, the results shown in the top section of Table 3 indicate that, overall, Daily Kos is far more likely to select a story for its "top news" summary if it is skewed in a pro-Democratic direction. Moving from a pro-Republican to a pro-Democratic skew is associated with a 48-percentage-point increase in the probability that a given story will be featured on Daily Kos's top news summary (from .00 to .48, $p < .01$). In other words, Daily Kos has a near zero likelihood of selecting for its top news summary a story skewed in a pro-Republican direction. Conversely, it has nearly a 50% probability of selecting a pro-Democratic skewed story. This clearly supports H1.

Turning to H2, here we focus on the two outlets where we anticipate a preference for pro-Republican news: FoxNews.com and FreeRepublic.com. Beginning with Fox, Table 3 indicates that the network is indeed significantly more likely to select stories with pro-Republican slants for its "top news" summary. Moving from a pro-Democratic to a pro-Republican skew is associated with about an 8-percentage-point increase in the

Table 2
Logit analyses of correlates of featuring news stories on Web sites

	Adjusted skew (all)	Adjusted skew (non-elec.)	Adjusted skew (pre-elec., non-elec.)	Costly vs. cheap (non-Iraq Reuters)	Costly vs. cheap (non-Iraq, news wires combined)	Costly vs. cheap (all Reuters)	Costly vs. cheap (all, news wires combined)
FoxNews.com	1.659 (.137)**	1.480 (.175)***	1.633 (.195)***	.539 (.140)***	1.123 (.097)***	.426 (.127)***	.960 (.088)***
DailyKos.com	−1.042 (.209)**	−1.571 (.276)***	−1.740 (.325)***	−1.580 (.205)***	−.791 (.125)***	−1.482 (.172)***	−.852 (.112)***
FreeRepublic.com	.852 (.141)**	.670 (.177)***	.798 (.196)***	−.182 (.153)	.242 (.105)*	−.215 (.137)	.181 (.095)†
Reuters.com	1.117 (.170)**	.908 (.207)***	.974 (.228)***				
Daily Kos × Skew	−1.672 (.171)***	−1.768 (.243)***	−1.947 (.282)***				
Fox × Skew	.179 (.103)†	.289 (.153)†	.265 (.159)†				
Free Republic × Skew	.006 (.123)	.215 (.176)	.360 (.188)†				
Reuters × Skew	−.232 (.184)	−.344 (.244)	−.376 (.261)				
AP × Skew	−.503 (.172)**	−.472 (.238)*	−.588 (.259)*				
Wires × Costly				.948 (.718)	.112 (.592)	.856 (.723)	−.262 (.573)
Wires × Cheap				−1.451 (.782)†	−.961 (.483)*	−.345 (.472)	−.384 (.334)
Fox × Costly				−.794 (.807)	−.088 (.493)	−.765 (.802)	.086 (.465)
Fox × Cheap				−.048 (.478)	−.331 (.321)	−.364 (.446)	−.496 (.286)†
Daily Kos × Costly				.323 (.875)	−.279 (.868)	.137 (.868)	.004 (.685)
Daily Kos × Cheap				.536 (.545)	−.057 (.338)	.467 (.535)	−.100 (.324)
Free Republic × Costly				−1.002 (1.264)	−1.175 (.824)	−1.047 (1.247)	−.933 (.658)
Free Republic × Cheap				.594 (.581)	.119 (.348)	.487 (.476)	−.008 (.307)
Adjusted skew				−.252 (.120)*	−.332 (.070)***	−.293 (.107)**	−.354 (.065)***
July	3.103 (.250)***	2.790 (.305)***	2.970 (.323)***	2.784 (.349)***	2.896 (.213)***	2.497 (.316)***	2.795 (.200)***
August	3.840 (.391)***	3.612 (.446)***	3.817 (.474)***	3.441 (.470)***	3.490 (.308)***	3.248 (.442)***	3.429 (.293)***
September	2.212 (.288)***	1.954 (.333)***	2.080 (.351)***	2.337 (.361)***	2.115 (.238)***	2.132 (.331)***	1.968 (.222)***
October	−.637 (.194)***	−.681 (.259)**	−.726 (.265)**	−.050 (.343)	−.352 (.208)†	−.359 (.279)	−.527 (.183)**
Post-election	.234 (.167)	−.068 (.229)		.359 (.306)	.339 (.189)†	.172 (.248)	.219 (.165)
Election story	−.193 (.081)*			.182 (.146)	−.150 (.087)†	.082 (.132)	−.189 (.080)*
Political figures	.307 (.036)***	.316 (.045)***	.342 (.047)***	.394 (.063)***	.333 (.040)***	.362 (.055)***	.314 (.037)***

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War/military	.026 (.089)	.088 (.095)	.079 (.099)	.037 (.151)	.120 (.110)	-.052 (.119)	.030 (.087)
Terrorism	.332 (.162)*	.339 (.174)†	.352 (.180)†	.595 (.260)*	.576 (.182)**	.384 (.218)†	.350 (.158)*
Tragedy	-.220 (.247)	-.125 (.256)	-.084 (.266)	-.148 (.329)	-.245 (.254)	-.158 (.317)	-.240 (.244)
Economy/jobs	-.368 (.115)**	-.377 (.123)**	-.384 (.125)***	-.532 (.151)***	-.340 (.118)**	-.553 (.150)***	-.362 (.115)**
Scandal	.513 (.100)***	.445 (.128)***	.436 (.133)***	.648 (.178)***	.564 (.103)***	.548 (.167)***	.489 (.100)***
Environment	-.753 (.325)*	-.627 (.322)†	-.516 (.328)	-1.209 (.500)*	-.659 (.322)*	-1.306 (.493)**	-.760 (.319)
Pop stars/celebrities	-.448 (.191)*	-.713 (.352)*	-.685 (.349)*	-.563 (.304)†	-.390 (.195)*	-.554 (.293)†	-.433 (.191)*
Trend	-.376 (.059)***	-.387 (.072)***	-.441 (.076)***	-.641 (.097)***	-.434 (.065)***	-.565 (.088)***	-.371 (.059)***
Urgency	.346 (.062)***	.331 (.071)***	.305 (.074)***	.292 (.100)**	.318 (.072)***	.307 (.084)***	.330 (.062)***
U.S. fatalities—Afghan	-.105 (.058)†	-.097 (.078)	-.090 (.079)	.008 (.096)	-.067 (.061)	-.028 (.085)	-.096 (.056)†
U.S. fatalities—Iraq	-.024 (.014)†	-.049 (.019)**	-.035 (.020)†	-.067 (.024)**	-.030 (.016)†	-.060 (.022)**	-.029 (.014)*
Iraq civilian deaths	.001 (.001)	.001 (.001)	.000 (.001)	-.001 (.001)	.000 (.001)	.001 (.001)	.001 (.001)
Iraq NYT coverage	-.009 (.034)	-.004 (.042)	-.009 (.043)	-.021 (.060)	-.003 (.037)	-.015 (.054)	-.010 (.034)
Afghan NYT coverage	-.046 (.067)	.007 (.081)	.005 (.083)	-.037 (.109)	-.122 (.073)†	.004 (.098)	-.061 (.066)
Gas prices	-.000 (.004)	-.004 (.005)	-.004 (.005)	.005 (.007)	-.002 (.005)	.008 (.006)	.000 (.004)
Consumer sentiment	.411 (.060)***	.385 (.069)***	.403 (.072)***	.377 (.082)***	.350 (.054)***	.402 (.074)***	.371 (.050)***
Associated Press story	.211 (.081)**	.393 (.101)***	.371 (.107)***		.057 (.080)		-.025 (.072)
Social issues	.705 (.273)**	.587 (.339)†	.575 (.372)	1.092 (.370)**	.927 (.284)***	.995 (.361)**	.728 (.272)**
WMD	.461 (.315)	.543 (.323)†	.474 (.336)	.455 (.371)	.470 (.332)	.556 (.352)	.429 (.307)
North Korea	.448 (.215)*	.403 (.234)†	.624 (.255)*	.693 (.272)*	.579 (.225)*	.499 (.253)*	.467 (.212)*
Iran	.159 (.325)	.188 (.330)	.107 (.365)	.305 (.395)	.232 (.354)	.107 (.374)	.145 (.320)
Iraq	.385 (.117)***	.403 (.139)**	.333 (.151)*			.729 (.161)***	.377 (.116)***
China	-.353 (.417)	-.341 (.420)	-.278 (.434)	-.280 (.467)	-.253 (.419)	-.337 (.459)	-.351 (.415)
The polls	.266 (.167)	-.467 (.445)	-1.204 (.682)†	.779 (.317)*	.405 (.175)*	.594 (.314)†	.233 (.169)
Dramatic	.301 (.134)*	.227 (.152)	.246 (.161)	.468 (.211)*	.393 (.151)**	.371 (.182)*	.303 (.131)*
Constant	-40.16 (6.24)***	-36.65 (7.21)***	-38.28 (7.46)***	-37.27 (8.81)***	-33.81 (5.74)***	-40.15 (7.89)***	-35.88 (5.30)***
Pseudo R^2	.16	.17	.18	.18	.15	.16	.13
N	7,022	4,627	4,253	3,020	6,254	3,407	7,024

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Note. All models exclude between one and three extreme outlier observations. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.
†$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 3
Probability of featuring story on Web site

	Anti-Democratic	Anti-Republican	Difference
All stories included			
FoxNews.com	0.370	0.292	−0.078[†]
DailyKos.com	0.001	0.482	0.481[**]
FreeRepublic.com	0.186	0.180	−0.006
Reuters.com	0.186	0.266	0.080
AssociatedPress.com	0.055	0.135	0.080[**]
Election-related stories excluded			
FoxNews.com	0.388	0.263	−0.125[*]
DailyKos.com	0.001	0.434	0.433[**]
FreeRepublic.com	0.255	0.126	−0.129
Reuters.com	0.163	0.279	0.116
AssociatedPress.com	0.067	0.150	0.083[†]
Post-election and election-related stories excluded			
FoxNews.com	0.382	0.266	−0.116[†]
DailyKos.com	0.000	0.448	0.448[**]
FreeRepublic.com	0.298	0.096	−0.202[*]
Reuters.com	0.148	0.266	0.118
AssociatedPress.com	0.052	0.145	0.093[*]

[†]$p < .10$; [*]$p < .05$; [**]$p < .01$.

probability that a given story will be featured on Fox's top news summary ($p < .10$). This effect, though obviously less dramatic than that for Daily Kos, is nonetheless sizeable, thereby clearly supporting H2.

Interestingly, in this model, no such pattern emerges for Free Republic. The coefficient for Free Republic is correctly signed but highly insignificant. In order to determine whether our assumptions about Free Republic's story preferences were fundamentally invalid, we replicated Model 1, this time excluding stories that directly pertained to the 2006 midterm election. Our reasoning is that as a pro-Republican Web site, Free Republic's coverage may have reflected mounting dissatisfaction with the party's prospects as the election approached and the "conventional wisdom" regarding Republican prospects in the election grew increasingly bleak. The middle section of Table 3 appears to bear this out. The predicted effects for Fox and Daily Kos are similar to those described above, albeit somewhat stronger for Fox (12.5-vs. 7.8-percentage-point changes) and slightly weaker for Daily Kos (43 vs. 48 percentage points). The increased magnitude and significance for Fox appears consistent with our conjecture, as does the modest decline in magnitude for Daily Kos. More importantly, for Free Republic, while the coefficient remains insignificant the magnitude of the effect increases dramatically, with the coefficient representing about a 13-percentage point greater probability of featuring an article with a pro-Republican skew relative to one with a pro-Democrat skew.

To further control for the potential effects of election-related self-reflection, in Model 3 of Table 2 we further restrict the story content to also exclude post-election coverage. During the post-election period, pro-Republican Web sites featured an unusual amount of criticism and recrimination directed against the Republican party for its perceived failure

in the election. This could further distort the "normal" pattern of coverage. In the bottom section of Table 3, we present the corresponding probabilities derived from this latter analysis.

Once again, this restriction has little effect on Fox and Daily Kos. However, the effect on Free Republic is dramatic. Having excluded election-related and post-election coverage, we find that for all other stories—representing over 60% of all coded reports on Free Republic—the Web site is about 20 percentage points more likely to feature a story on its top news summary if it has a pro-Republican skew, relative to a story with a pro-Democrat skew (.30 vs. .10, $p < .05$). This latter result is consistent with H2.

Turning to H3, here we investigate whether similar patterns emerge for the news wires. H3 predicts no such relationships. In fact, this is just what we find for Reuters. Regardless of whether we include election-related reporting or post-election stories, Reuters demonstrates no statistically significant preference for stories with a pro-Republican or pro-Democratic skew. This supports H3.

However, contrary to our expectations, in these data the AP is between 8 and 9 percentage points more likely to feature among its top news summaries stories critical of the Republican Party, depending on whether election-related coverage and post-election reporting are included ($p < .01$ for all stories, $p < .10$ for non-election-related stories, and $p < .05$ for pre-election, non-election-related stories). This difference between Reuters and AP *may* be attributable to the fact that while AP is U.S.-based, Reuters is a non-American company based in the United Kingdom. Consequently, ceteris paribus, Reuters would seem less likely to be affected by the shifting political winds surrounding American elections. Though we sought to account for any likely factors that might tend to produce secular trends in favor of one or the other party, AP's apparent slant *could* nonetheless reflect the overwhelming anti-Republican tenor of the 2006 campaign. Regardless, this latter result is robust and contrary to H3.

We turn next to our final partisan media selection hypothesis (H4), which predicts that, all else equal, news wires but not partisan Web sites should select political stories for their top news summaries based on their perceived costliness (i.e., newsworthiness). To test this hypothesis, we focus on the subset of stories that included evaluations of Democrats or Republicans by members of either party. This could include members of Congress, the president, cabinet officials, or other party representatives. We collapse all rhetoric into two categories: cheap and costly. Cheap rhetoric involves praising one's own party or criticizing the other party, while costly rhetoric entails the opposite: criticizing one's own party or praising the other party.

For this analysis, we are somewhat restricted in that AP did not select any of the 13 instances of costly rhetoric for its "top news" page. Consequently, we cannot analyze the two wire services separately. We therefore present two analyses, one focused only on Reuters and the second combining the two wire services. Preliminary testing where data existed across both wire services revealed no significant differences in their respective preferences for different types of partisan evaluations across those categories. This suggests that combining the two may be less of a concern for this test than might have been the case in our tests of H1–H3.

Additional testing indicated that about 10% of the observations—those focused on Iraq—differ materially from all other reporting. Specifically, virtually no costly rhetoric is available on Iraq. In other words, nearly all Iraq-related stories during this time period involve Republicans praising fellow Republicans or criticizing Democrats, or, alternatively, Democrats praising fellow Democrats or criticizing Republicans. Overall, less than two-tenths of 1% of all observations (three in total) featured costly rhetoric, and *all three*

featured Republicans criticizing fellow Republicans. Including the Iraq observations thus significantly skews our results. Consequently, while for purposes of full disclosure we present our results both with and without the Iraq observations, the discussion that follows focuses on the 90% of stories that did not concern Iraq. Models 4 through 7 in Table 2 present the results from our comparison of costly and cheap rhetoric, excluding and including AP and the Iraq-related stories. In Table 4, we again transform the coefficients into probabilities of selecting a story for the top news summary of a given Web-site.

We derive the probabilities shown in the top half of Table 4 from Model 4, which focuses on Reuters and excludes Iraq-related observations. Here, the results support our hypothesis. For Fox, Free Republic, and Daily Kos, the costliness of rhetoric, or the lack thereof, has no significant effect on the propensity to select a given story for the top news summary. Conversely, for the news wires, costly rhetoric is more likely to appear as top news. Specifically, for Reuters, a story involving costly rhetoric is nearly 32 percentage points more likely than one including cheap talk to appear on the Reuters top news summary (.06 vs. .38, $p < .05$). When we combine the two wire services (in the second section of Table 4), the effects are predictably—given the imbalance in the AP data—somewhat

Table 4
Probability of featuring stories with costly vs. cheap talk

	Cheap	Costly	No eval.	Difference (cheap to costly)	Difference (none to costly)	Difference (none to cheap)
Iraq-related observations excluded						
Reuters only						
FoxNews.com	0.280	0.177	0.281	−0.103	−0.104	−0.001
DailyKos.com	0.082	0.075	0.045	−0.007	0.030	0.037
FreeRepublic.com	0.265	0.106	0.159	−0.159	−0.053	0.106
Reuters.com	0.063	0.381	0.186	0.318[*]	0.195	−0.123[*]
Reuters and AP combined						
FoxNews.com	0.258	0.315	0.320	0.057	−0.005	−0.062
DailyKos.com	0.065	0.064	0.065	−0.001	−0.001	0.000
FreeRepublic.com	0.187	0.073	0.163	−0.114	−0.090	0.024
Newswires	0.062	0.160	0.132	0.098[††]	0.028	−0.070[*]
All observations included						
Reuters only						
FoxNews.com	0.222	0.178	0.276	−0.044	−0.098	−0.054
DailyKos.com	0.092	0.080	0.053	−0.012	0.027	0.039
FreeRepublic.com	0.256	0.102	0.166	−0.154	−0.064	0.090
Reuters	0.157	0.378	0.198	0.221[††]	0.180	−0.041
Reuters and AP combined						
FoxNews.com	0.222	0.343	0.314	0.121	0.029	−0.092[††]
DailyKos.com	0.066	0.085	0.070	0.019	0.015	−0.004
FreeRepublic.com	0.176	0.088	0.174	−0.088	−0.086	0.002
Newswires	0.110	0.131	0.149	0.021	−0.018	−0.039[††]

[††]$p < .15$; [*]$p < .05$.

weaker. Nonetheless, for the combined wire stories, costly rhetoric remains about 10 percentage points more likely than cheap rhetoric to appear on the AP or Reuters top news summaries (.06 vs. .16). This latter result approaches, but does not quite achieve, standard levels of statistical significance ($p < .13$). The results shown in the bottom half of Table 4, which include Iraq stories, are also predictably—given the aforementioned skew in available rhetoric on Iraq—somewhat weaker and less significant. Nonetheless, Reuters's apparent preference for costly rhetoric remains substantial in magnitude and nearly significant. Consequently, we interpret these results as largely, albeit imperfectly, supportive of H4.

Conclusion

In June 2007, a legislative "grand bargain" on immigration supported by both the Republican administration and leaders of both parties in the House and Senate was unexpectedly defeated. While it is difficult to precisely determine the ultimate cause of any legislative outcome, in this case both political commentators and politicians attributed the defeat to a grassroots conservative revolt incited by one-sided commentary in conservative "niche" media, especially talk radio. Republican Senate Minority Whip Trent Lott (MS) complained prior to the bill's ultimate defeat that such coverage "defined [the bill] without us explaining that there were reasons for it and the good things that were in it" (*Fox News Sunday*, June 24, 2007). Appearing on the same program, Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein (CA) complained that coverage of the bill on talk radio "tends to be one-sided. It also tends to be dwelling in hyperbole. It's explosive. It pushes people to, I think, extreme views without a lot of information."

Feinstein added that she was willing to consider mandating a return to the so-called "Fairness Doctrine" to ensure greater balance. Other prominent Democrats agreed. For instance, Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) commented, "It's time to reinstitute the Fairness Doctrine . . . when Americans hear both sides of the story, they're in a better position to make a decision" (Bolton, 2007).

If the results of this study are any guide, Democratic attempts to rein in the "one-sided" content of conservative talk radio seem misguided, and perhaps even disingenuous. Even as Democratic leaders decry the bias and influence of conservative talk radio, Democratic activists and candidates have been quick to rally around an impressively biased and increasingly influential community online, including such Web sites as DailyKos.com, MoveOn.org, and HuffingtonPost.com. Our findings suggest that if Durbin is correct in his belief that hearing both sides of the story helps Americans make better decisions, the increased reliance of many politically attentive Americans on partisan sites such as Daily Kos and Free Republic could potentially pose a significant challenge to American democracy.

Regardless of their normative implications, our findings offer a striking validation for those who complain about one-sided coverage of politics in the so-called blogosphere. Daily Kos on the left and Free Republic and Fox News on the right demonstrate clear and strong preferences for news stories that benefit the party most closely associated with their own ideological orientations. While some evidence of such partisan selection emerged for AP, overall the news wires demonstrated far weaker tendencies to select news based on its implications for one or the other political party. This was especially the case for the British-based Reuters news wire.

Interestingly, elements of our findings offer some support for the claims of partisans on both the left and right concerning ideological bias in the media. On the one hand, our

results arguably present more direct evidence concerning the right-skewed political orientation of Fox News (at least online) than other studies of media bias (e.g., Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006) that rely on proxies of ideological orientation, such as references to interest groups with ideological reputations or similarity of a news outlet's rhetoric to that of different members of Congress. Indeed, our findings appear to validate the arguments of left-leaning partisans that Fox News (again, at least online) tends to favor Republican and Conservative interests.

On the other hand, as noted, we also find some evidence that the self-consciously non-partisan Associated Press prefers stories critical of Republicans, which may constitute evidence supporting the oft-cited conservative claim of liberal bias in the mainstream news media. Of course, it could also reflect the exceptionally anti-Republican mood in the nation in the run-up to the 2006 midterm election, a period in which the news was dominated by stories about domestic political scandals enveloping the Republican party and the perceived failure of the administration's policies in Iraq. Nonetheless, AP's anti-Republican skew persisted even when these alternative explanations were explicitly controlled in our models.

These differences may have important implications for political discourse in America. While the audience for partisan niche Web sites continues to be small relative to that for most mainstream media outlets (see Table 1), their typical consumers differ from the median citizen in important ways. For instance, a 2006 survey on media consumption (Pew Center, 2006) reported the percentages of self-reported "regular" users of 21 news genres and outlets who indicated that they prefer news "from sources that share [their] political point of view" to "sources that don't have a particular point of view." Out of 14 news *genres* included in the survey, regular users of Internet blogs report a higher propensity to prefer self-reinforcing news (26% of self-reported regular blog users) than regular consumers of all other types of news, save political magazines such as *The Weekly Standard* and *The New Republic*.[19] Internet blog users also outpace users of most of the seven *specific* news outlets included in the survey in their self-reported preference for self-reinforcing news, falling behind only regular viewers of *The O'Reilly Factor* on the Fox News Channel and listeners to Rush Limbaugh's radio program.

The same survey found that blog users are also more likely than typical individuals to discuss politics with others and, in doing so, to disseminate their views to the broader public. Fully half of self-reported regular blog users report that they "often talk about the news with friends and family." This figure exceeds that for regular consumers of all but two of the genres or outlets in the survey (online news magazine and national newspaper Web site readers). Overall, this suggests that while relatively small in number, blog users are disproportionately likely to be opinion leaders. In other words, blog users tend to be individuals to whom typical members of the public turn for interpretations of political issues and events. Their significance to broader patterns of public opinion, and hence American politics, thus in all likelihood exceeds their raw numbers. Indeed, news coverage in the blogosphere and the attitudes of blog consumers may increasingly influence, and as a consequence ultimately reflect, political opinion among the broader citizenry. This suggests that further systematic study is needed into the effects on mass public attitudes—direct, through personal exposure, or indirect, via discussion with those directly exposed—of partisan Web site news coverage.

Notes

1. Examples include the literatures on online deliberative democracy (e.g., Fishkin & Laslett, 2003; Price & Capella, 2002) and "e-governance" (e.g., Chadwick, 2003; Allen, 2000; Anttiroiko,

2004). One area where fundamental changes are clearly evident is political fundraising, which does appear to have been in many respects "revolutionized" by the Internet. Ever since Howard Dean shocked the Democratic field in 2003 by raising more than $3 million online in only 3 months, Internet fundraising has occupied an increasingly important role in campaigns. In the most recent election cycle, over 100,000 online donors helped Barack Obama outpace frontrunner Hillary Rodham Clinton's second-quarter fundraising by almost $10 million (Wilson, 2007).

2. None of this implies that this is the only substantive or revolutionary change produced by new media. Nor do we make any specific claims about the underlying economic incentives that might have led the organizations and individuals analyzed here to adopt their particular standards of newsworthiness. Such questions are vital, but orthogonal to the core issue of this study.

3. See, for example, Reuters's Independence & Trust Principles, which argue that the company is "dedicated to preserving its independence, integrity, and *freedom from bias* in the gathering and dissemination of news and information" (italics added; see http://about.reuters.com/aboutus/overview/independence.asp). Similarly, AP identifies its mission as "providing distinctive news services of the highest quality, reliability and *objectivity* with reports that are accurate, *balanced* and informed" (italics added; see http://www.ap.org/pages/about/about.html).

4. However, note that Althaus and Tewksbury (2002) find that consuming the same news organization's content in print versus online format can alter the impact of exposure on opinion.

5. Unlike most traditional media, such as newspapers or broadcasters, online media have comparatively small fixed costs. Thus, while organizations such as newspapers might have sought to achieve profitability by spreading those high fixed costs across as many consumers as possible, the low costs of online news outlets might make a reliable niche audience a viable alternative. See Hamilton (2004) for a discussion of how the market shapes both the producers and content of news (see especially Chapter 7, in which he discusses the potential market for news online).

6. Elsewhere (Baum & Groeling, in press) we investigate the effects on public opinion of self-selection by consumers into ideologically friendly news outlets.

7. This assumes that other characteristics about partisans might systematically vary. Such characteristics, in turn, could tend to make one party relatively more newsworthy than the other. For example, Groeling (2001) argues that control of the presidency and majority status in Congress increase a party's authority and hence newsworthiness. In our empirical analyses, we therefore carefully control for other systematic differences in newsworthiness across the parties.

8. While partisan media might be drawn to costly communication that harms the *other* party, they should avoid intraparty conflict that hurts their own party. Also, note that this hypothesis does not predict that cheap talk will be less common in the overall population of stories, as both parties prefer to praise themselves and criticize their opponents.

9. Examining a week of wire service copy, White found that Mr. Gates only included about 10% of all wire services stories in the paper, rejecting the other 90%. A follow-up study of the choices made by the same editor in 1966 found that he chose to include nearly 1 in 3 wire service stories (Snider, 1967). Subsequent studies have generally moved away from the idiosyncrasies of individual editors and have instead focused on organizational or societal factors, and also organizational decisions regarding resource allocation and news gathering (Allen, 2005).

10. We accessed wire service abstracts from their respective feeds via Breitbart.com. We collected our daily wire service stories by downloading *all* story abstracts appearing on each wire service's top political news listing. Note that we later try to predict which of these stories were selected for that day's "top news" page for that wire service. According to a telephone interview with AP, a group of editors at AP's New York headquarters decide the order of the stories, which are then sent out as "packages" to the 750 newspaper members and subscribing Web sites.

11. It is difficult to fit the Daily Kos and Free Republic sites into the traditional news model. Both sites allow substantial user-generated activity to be featured elsewhere in the site in comments, diaries, user pages, hotlists, and so forth with little or no editorial oversight. However, they both exercise more rigorous control over their main pages (see http://dkosopedia.com/wiki/DailyKos_FAQ#The_front_page). While we would have preferred to add other news outlets to our study—particularly CNN and the *New York Times*—the costs of adding additional outlets proved prohibitive.

12. Of course, this capsule description glosses over many potentially important differences between these outlets. For example, the Associated Press is American in origin and emphasis, while Reuters is British and tends to be more global in its focus. The Daily Kos community is far larger than Free Republic (see Table 1) and also tends have a less structured main page format.

13. It should be noted that there are some important differences in the implied meaning of these choices across organizations. For the wire services, the choice of whether or not to repackage a political story into their top news pages is largely a measure of its newsworthiness; the wires have ascribed some base level of newsworthiness to the story by the decision to devote resources to reporting it in the first place, and they have already published the story in at least one section of their site (the politics page). In contrast, for other organizations the wire service story serves as a baseline measure of common political information for that day, although the organizations (particularly Fox) might choose to marshal their own resources to cover that same topic rather than relying on the wire copy. In both cases, the wire service story helps illuminate a baseline or population of potential stories from which all of the news organizations could draw, if they so chose.

14. One alternative method considered for this content analysis was the use of machine coding. Many scholars have used this sort of coding to study topics related to political rhetoric (see Hart, 2000; Jarvis, 2005). While we probably could have conducted some aspects of the current project using computerized content analysis, the core explanatory variables (including those establishing the valence and direction of political evaluations by specific partisan figures) were too nuanced and specific for such tools. Another alternative would have been to rely on single-coded data collected by a much smaller number of highly trained coders (typically graduate students) and then randomly overlap the coding on a small subset of the data to ensure that the coders were making similar coding judgments. When such a system achieves high enough reliability on the sampled comparison data, the researcher has greater confidence that the coders *would have* agreed on their coding throughout the entire range of their single-coded data. Our method, which uses the output of *three independent coders for every observation*, is more labor-intensive than either of the above methods, but better allows for the distribution of coding responsibilities across a larger pool of labor.

15. Note that missing codes count as disagreements here, potentially understating actual unanimity.

16. In some cases, the flagged disputes appeared to have been the result of unfinished records. The additional coders also processed the values of all non-empty text fields, such as the field provided for pasting headlines or abstracts, because these fields could not be reliably compared by the database.

17. As a robustness test, we replicated our results using a more restrictive dependent variable in which we counted only stories that were explicitly identical to those appearing on the wire services in the same day. This lowered the number of positive occurrences considerably, and thereby weakened the statistical significance of our results. However, the results remained substantively similar. This increases our confidence that our operationalization is not fundamentally distorting the pattern of "positive" and "negative" outcomes.

18. Because in Models 1–3 we interact the adjusted skew variable with all five media outlet dummies, the base category—that is, the uninteracted adjusted skew variable—is redundant and hence necessarily drops out of the model.

19. This exception, in turn, may be an artifact of the question wording, which specifically mentions two overtly partisan political magazines. In contrast, the Internet blog response makes no mention of a specific Web site, hence avoiding a specific partisan prime in the question.

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Appendix: Variable Definitions

Top news (dependent variable): Binary variable indicating whether the wire service story in question was covered by each outlet on its "top news" page (for the wire services), front page (for Daily Kos and Free Republic), or politics feed (for Fox). In addition to exact matches of the wire service story itself, we counted coverage of the same issue on the same day. News content from Fox was collected from each day's politics RSS feed. All other news was collected using a custom daily script that downloaded an html version of the relevant Web page.

Outlet dummy variables (AP, DailyKos.com, FoxNews.com, FreeRepublic.com, and Reuters.com): For each wire service story, these dummies indicate the news organization whose news choices are being examined.

Associated Press story: Takes a value of 1 if the record concerns choices regarding an AP wire service story and 0 if the wire service story was from Reuters.

Adjusted skew: The baseline, "raw" skew indicator measures whether the original wire service story was "bad news" for one or both parties. Coders were asked "Overall,

does the story appear to be bad news for Republicans, Democrats, the president, or none of the above?" They could select multiple responses for each record. Good news for one party was coded as bad news for the other party. In the resulting index, 1 = bad news for Democrats, 0 = bad news for neither party or both parties, and −1 = bad news for Republicans and/or the president. For Daily Kos and Free Republic, which presented highly edited or modified text on their news pages, coders compared the original wire service story to the version appearing on that news outlet. (For example, a wire service story titled "GOP Makes Conditions on Wage Increase" became "GOP Holds Working Poor Hostage to Paris Hilton" on Daily Kos.) If the Web site version was more pro-Democratic (pro-Republican) than the matching wire service story, an intermediary variable was coded as 1 (−1), which was then subtracted from the original raw skew variable. The *adjusted skew* index runs from −2 (e.g., if a wire service story that was already bad for Republicans was presented in an even more negative fashion on the outlet) to 0 (e.g., if that same bad story were presented in a manner that mitigated its damage against Republicans) or 1 (−1) (e.g., if a story originally coded as having no skew or being balanced was presented in a pro-Republican [pro-Democratic] way). (The coders adjusted a total of 39 Free Republic and 142 Daily Kos skews. The three coders were instructed to code cases where the outlet "took the initial story and clearly attempted to spin it more favorably for one of the two parties [or against the other]. So if a story previously had both positive Republican and negative Republican aspects and they only include the positive ones [or say the negative ones are wrong], that would constitute spinning the story towards the Republicans.")

Cheap rhetoric: Dummy coded 1 if members of a party (members of Congress, president, cabinet officials, or other party representatives) explicitly criticize (praise) members of the other (their own) party.

Costly rhetoric: Dummy coded 1 if member of one party criticizes (praises) her or his own (other) party.

Iraq NYT coverage: Number of front-page stories mentioning Iraq in the *New York Times* on a given day.

August, September, October, pre-election November: Dummy variables for month of observation (post-election November is the excluded category).

China, Iran, Iraq, North Korea: Dummies coded 1 if that nation was mentioned in wire service story.

Economy/jobs, election story, environment, scandal, social issues, terrorism, polls, war/military, WMD: Dummies coded 1 if pertinent issues were mentioned in wire service story.

Dramatic, pop stars/celebrities, tragedy, political figures: Dummies coded 1 if the story included these newsworthy elements.

Consumer sentiment: University of Michigan consumer sentiment score, taken from http://www.federalreserve.gov/BOARDDOCS/HH/2007/february/figure7.htm.

Gas prices: Average national retail gasoline prices, all grades, all formulations (cents per gallon). Data are from the U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration.

Trend: Dummy coded 1 if the story appears to be part of a larger trend and not an isolated incident.

Urgency: Four-category scale coded as follows: −1 = proposed development; 0 = likely development, not of "life and death" severity; 1 = actual development, not of "life and death" severity; and 2 = actual development of "life and death" severity.