5

Sources of Antipathy toward the News Media

TODAY, A LARGE PORTION of the American public distrusts the news media as an institution. This has led to considerable debate about why media trust has declined nationwide since the mid-twentieth century and, relatedly, what causes individual people to distrust the media. This chapter considers several possibilities, including the hostile media phenomenon and exposure to news negativity, horserace coverage, tabloid coverage, and elite partisan media criticism. I investigate potential causes by considering the patterns found in chapter 4, results from two survey experiments, and the effects of exposure to alternative media outlets. The evidence indicates that elite partisan media criticism and tabloid coverage reduce media trust. These variables likely played large roles in the decline of media trust over recent decades.

There Are Several Possible Explanations for the Public's Antipathy toward the News Media

With opinions toward the institutional news media becoming more negative over time, a variety of observers, including journalists, psychologists, political scientists, and communication scholars, have wondered what produces antipathy toward the media. They have proposed several possibilities. One is known as the "hostile media phenomenon" or the "hostile media effect." This is the tendency of people with divergent prior opinions on an issue, when consuming the exact same news report, all to view that report as biased against their views (Vallone, Ross, and Lepper 1985; Perloff 1989; Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1993; Christen, Kannaovakun, and Gunther 2002; Chia et al. 2007). Evidence of the phenomenon has been replicated by several researchers and for several topics.

However, there are reasons to doubt that the hostile media phenomenon can explain changes in press confidence over time. First, multiple studies find that it occurs only among those with strong views on, and deep involvement in, the topic of the news report. For instance, psychologists Robert P. Vallone, Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper (1985) observed the phenomenon when showing members of pro-Arab and pro-Israeli student groups a report on a massacre of civilians in a refugee camp in

southern Lebanon. However, in studies where the viewers are not heavily involved in the issue covered, the hostile media phenomenon largely disappears (Vallone, Ross, and Lepper 1985; Perloff 1989; Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1993).

In addition, when the phenomenon does occur, a large portion of it results from respondents' preexisting beliefs about media bias (Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1993). Studies not specifically examining the hostile media phenomenon also find that prior beliefs about a source greatly influence perceptions of bias in its news reports, regardless of the content of those reports (Turner 2007; Anand and Tella 2008; Baum and Gussin 2008). Thus, while there is a small tendency for any news exposure to cause committed activists to trust the media less, the hostile media phenomenon mostly demonstrates that existing opinions about the media are firmly held and influential. It does not tell us where these existing opinions come from.

Another possibility is that negative attitudes toward the news media are caused by reactions to specific styles of news coverage. Journalist and media commentator Howard Kurtz expressed this commonly held belief when he lamented, "I think we bear 95 percent of the responsibility for the low repute in which we are held" (Shaw 1996; cited in Cappella and Jamieson 1997, 240). Similarly, former *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich (2005) claims, "What's missing from News is the news. On ABC, Peter Jennings devotes two hours of prime time to playing peek-a-boo with U.F.O. fanatics, a whorish stunt crafted to deliver ratings, not information. On NBC, Brian Williams is busy as all get-out, as every promo reminds us, 'Reporting America's Story.' That story just happens to be the relentless branding of Brian Williams as America's anchorman—a guy just too in love with Folks Like Us to waste his time looking closely at, say, anything happening in Washington." More specifically, at various times, commentators have claimed that several styles of news coverage produce media distrust. These styles fall into three categories.

First, some argue that consumption of negative and cynical political coverage creates antipathy toward the press (Sabato 1991; Jamieson 1992; Patterson 1993; Fallows 1996; Lichter and Noyes 1996; Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Sabato 2000). The press often plays the role of "critic of the established order" (Gronke and Cook 2002, 9), while reporters producing positive coverage are often derided by their peers as "shills" or "in the tank" (Cappella and Jamieson 1997, 31).[1] Furthermore, coverage of political candidates became increasingly negative

[1] Negativity may hurt the media's popularity because Americans tend to dislike disagreement and criticism in their political institutions (see, e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 2002).

over the same decades when confidence in the press declined (Patterson 1993, 20).[2]

A second and related school of thought claims that antipathy toward the media results from consuming news about the "game" of politics, such as politicians' strategies, poll results, and the campaign horserace generally, rather than policy. During these same recent decades, what Thomas Patterson (1993, 74) labels "policy schema" coverage has declined and what he calls "game schema" coverage has proliferated. Along similar lines, W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston (2007, 170) argue that "[t]he core preoccupation with power and partisan gamesmanship is largely what turns citizens off about their own government and the news messengers who seem implicated in the game."

A third possible source of media distrust is tabloid-style news. In this view, conventional news outlets' coverage of celebrities, sex scandals, and other topics once largely confined to the tabloids reduces trust in the media. This explanation is plausible because this trend in coverage has also grown over the same recent decades (Emery, Emery, and Roberts 2000, 479–85; West 2001, 104–6).[3]

The claims about the effects of all three styles of coverage are plausible. All three have increased over the same time period that confidence in the press has declined. Also, all three could help explain the widespread decline in positive media evaluations because each could plausibly affect all segments of the public. However, we should be cautious about drawing firm conclusions based on aggregate-level trends over time. It is worth investigating further by looking for individual-level causal connections between these styles of coverage and media distrust.

[2] Cappella and Jameson (1997, 139–59, 214–15) find that cynicism about politics is correlated with cynicism about the media. They also use an experiment to test the effect of cynical news coverage on an index of political cynicism. However, they did not experimentally test the effect of cynical coverage on attitudes toward the news media.

On the other hand, several recent experimental studies cast doubt on the notion that contentious, televised political debate affects attitudes toward the media. Arceneaux and Johnson (2007) fail to find a significant effect of viewing a contentious cable political talk show on general media trust, while Mutz and Reeves (2005) find that uncivil political debate has no detectable effect on evaluations of a television program's informativeness and actually increases assessments of how entertaining it is.

[3] Sensationalist coverage may be as good (or better) at informing the public (Baum 2002, 2003b; Zaller 2003; Baum and Jamison 2006), but consuming this type of news may still reduce consumers' respect for the news media. In her in-depth interviews with a small group of citizens over the course of a presidential campaign, Graber (1984) finds a tendency among her subjects to complain about the simplification and triviality of news while still choosing to consume that type of news rather than seeking more substantive media outlets. Tsfati and Cappella (2005) examine this tendency to watch news programs one reports disliking and find it to be concentrated among those high in "need for cognition."

Another possibility is that negative attitudes toward the media result from people viewing news that is biased against their predispositions. This claim is often implicitly or explicitly made in partisan books and articles attacking the institutional media, such as those mentioned in chapter 4. These critics claim that institutional news media coverage is biased in a liberal (if the commentator is conservative) or conservative (if the commentator is liberal) direction and that viewing this bias causes public distrust. While these claims are also plausible, we must again be cautious because we lack statistical evidence even of an association between exposure to biased news and antipathy toward the press, let alone evidence that such an association is causal. Still, looking for such evidence is certainly worthwhile.

These are the most common explanations for negative public attitudes toward the media. Yet, if we look beyond examinations of the media and toward scholarship on public opinion more generally, we find another possibility. Research on the formation of mass opinion is vast, but one of its most consistent findings is that elite rhetoric can influence opinions, especially among those who are politically aware and have the same political predispositions as the messenger.

To take just a few examples, the opinions of politically aware citizens tended to follow (over time) the rhetoric of political elites who shared their predispositions during World War II (Berinsky 2007, 2009), the Vietnam War (Zaller 1991; 1992, 102–3), and the first (Zaller 1994) and second (Jacobson 2007) Gulf Wars. When unsure of their opinion, many people seem to take cues from the positions of like-minded political elites (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Lupia 1994; Lupia et al. 2007). Panel surveys show that when citizens' opinions do not match the stances of the party they identify with, their opinions tend to move into conformity with their partisanship, while partisanship tends to resist change (W. Miller 1999; Lenz 2009). Experiments tend to find that people are much more receptive to political persuasion from those they perceive as knowledgeable and sharing their ideology (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). In one series of experiments, liberals and conservatives tended to support whatever welfare policy politicians from their own political party supported, even when that policy was contrary to their respective ideologies (G. Cohen 2003). Thus, in addition to the plausible sources of negative media evaluations put forward in books and articles about the news media, it is possible that these attitudes are shaped through elite opinion leadership.[4]

[4] Several studies find evidence consistent with elite opinion leadership on attitudes toward the media. Watts et al. (1999) find that perceptions of media bias in presidential campaigns are more strongly related to claims of bias by campaigners and opinion

In the remaining three sections of this chapter, I explore the sources of negative attitudes toward the news media. First, I use two survey experiments to test a variety of possible causal variables. Second, I examine one way that elite opinion leadership occurs: persuasive media criticism by alternative media outlets. In the final section, I draw conclusions based on the evidence in this chapter and the patterns presented in chapter 4.

In considering the effects of different variables, political predispositions will play a large role. In the public opinion literature, two types of predispositions tend to be most important in determining when opinion change occurs: partisanship and political awareness.[5] While the importance of partisanship is widely accepted, political awareness is often underappreciated outside of public opinion scholarship. Awareness is best measured with a series of objective political knowledge questions, such as naming which party holds the majority in Congress and identifying the vice president, Supreme Court chief justice, speaker of the House, and so on (Zaller 1985; 1992, appendix; Price and Zaller 1993), but education can often be used effectively as a proxy (e.g., Zaller 1994; Berinsky 2007, 2009). The politically aware are both more likely to be exposed to news and political discourse and more likely to respond to those messages based on their partisanship (see Zaller 1992). Upon receiving a message, the politically aware are more likely than the unaware to be persuaded when the message comes from their party, but they are less likely than the unaware to be persuaded when the message comes from the opposite party. Beyond that, the aware tend to have more consistent ideologies across issues (P. Converse 1964) and more overall interest in politics (Zaller 1992).

Consequently, when looking for elite opinion leadership, we should expect to find elite criticism's largest effects among politically aware partisans of the same party as the media critic. Also, when looking for effects

---

commentators than to the tone of news coverage of the candidates. Gunther (1992) finds that political engagement, which can expose citizens to elite messages (Zaller 1992, 1996), is strongly related to perceptions of newspaper bias. Also, perceptions of news bias tend to correlate with discussion with ideologically similar individuals, where elite messages can be spread, but not with political discussion in general (Eveland and Shah 2003).

Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) find that, during a presidential campaign, Republicans and Democrats both perceive local newspaper coverage as biased against them, regardless of the actual slant of that coverage. This could be consistent with either the hostile media phenomenon or elite opinion leadership.

[5] The seminal works making this point are by Converse (1962, 1964) and Zaller (1992). Following Zaller (1992), here I use the term *awareness* interchangeably with similar terms like *sophistication* and *engagement*. Though, in theory, these terms could denote different attributes, in the literature they are usually treated synonymously because they are so highly correlated among the mass public.

of consuming biased political coverage, we might expect politically aware partisans to be the most responsive to the direction of bias. Finally, it is also worth checking whether the effects of different styles of coverage depend on political awareness and partisanship, even though we have less clear expectations of what the relationship may be.

Partisan Rhetoric and Tabloid News Reduce Media Trust: Evidence from Two Survey Experiments

One way to test possible sources of negative attitudes toward the media is with an experiment. Experiments, where treatments are randomly manipulated by the researcher, are generally considered the best research design for drawing causal conclusions (D. Rubin 1974; Holland 1986; Green and Gerber 2002; McDermott 2002; Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002).[6] Here, I employ two survey experiments. This involves randomly assigning survey respondents different versions of survey probes and then measuring the effects on subsequent responses. An advantage of survey experiments, which has made them increasingly popular in political science and psychology, is that it is easier to conduct them with nationally representative samples, allowing one to generalize to the entire population more confidently. In contrast, it is very difficult to conduct a conventional laboratory experiment with a nationally representative sample of subjects (Piazza, Sniderman, and Tetlock 1989; Sniderman and Grob 1996).[7]

These experiments are based on defining an attitude as the sum of the considerations at the "top of the head" when responding to a survey question, as explained in chapter 4. People's opinions change when they

[6] The chief advantages of experiments are in largely avoiding reverse causation, omitted variable bias, and measurement error in the independent variables.

[7] Besides experiments (or an instrumental variables model as in the next section), there are several additional possible approaches for assessing what variables affect attitudes toward the media. One could allow survey respondents to state for themselves why they dislike the media, using closed-ended survey questions as in Dautrich and Hartley (1999) or open-ended questions as in the retrospective memory dump questions used in chapter 4 and in Tsfati (2002). The main problem with this approach is that psychologists have long documented that people are notoriously poor at introspecting about their own psychological processes. Simply put, when people report what they think has caused their opinion to change, they often get it wrong (see Nisbett and Wilson 1977). Another approach would be to examine which variables are correlated with negative media attitudes in cross-sectional observational survey data (S. Bennett, Rhine, and Flickinger 2001; Kiousis 2001; Jones 2004). Unfortunately, it is very difficult with this type of data to rule out reverse causation or spurious omitted variables. A third approach is to look at change over time. However, even when observing changes in media evaluations over the course of several years (Barker 1999), during a campaign (Dautrich and Hartley 1999) or over several decades (Patterson 1993), it is still difficult to rule out omitted variable bias.

bring different considerations to bear. This can happen either because the individual absorbs new, salient considerations or because existing, nonsalient considerations have now come to the top of the head.[8] Either way, one way to investigate why attitudes toward an object change is to look at the effect of different considerations on survey responses. These survey experiments do that. The treatments bring different considerations to the top of respondents' minds to see how they influence attitudes toward the institutional news media.[9]

The experiments were conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc., under my direction.[10] Interviews for the first experiment took place between March 15 and 22, 2007, with 1,014 respondents completing the relevant questions. Respondents were told about a recent news report and asked if they had heard about it. I am not primarily concerned with their answers to this question; rather, I use it to bring various types of news stories to the top of respondents' minds.[11] The question's preface was identical for everyone: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about some stories the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about them." The story they were subsequently told about varied randomly among six different versions (see the appendix to this chapter).

Two versions of the question were designed to test how elite messages affect media attitudes. One mentioned Democratic elite criticism, stating, "Recently, Democratic politicians have criticized the media for being too friendly with President Bush," while the other mentioned analogous Republican criticism, stating, "Recently, Republican politicians have criticized the media for being overly critical of President Bush." To test

[8] See Zaller and Feldman (1992) and Zaller (1992), as well as Tourangeau (1987), Tourangeau and Rasinski (1988), and Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski, (2000). The phrase "top of the head" comes from Taylor and Fiske (1978).

[9] How should we describe this approach? In this area, the academic jargon often confuses more than it clarifies. Specifically, the terms *framing* and *priming* are frequently used in the persuasion literature but with often-inconsistent definitions (for reviews, see Althaus and Kim 2006; Chong and Druckman 2007b). Chong and Druckman (2007b) propose clarifying these concepts by defining framing broadly, to encompass any process by which an expressed opinion changes because of changes in the relative salience of considerations related to the attitude object (105). Within this framework, they classify priming as a type of framing where the consideration made salient is a "separate issue dimension or image used to evaluate" the object (115). While other scholars may classify things differently, using this typology, this study's research approach qualifies as a type of framing, where I make salient a series of different considerations representing variables hypothesized to reduce evaluations of the news media.

[10] For more details on Knowledge Networks, see chapter 4, note 21.

[11] This design is based on one employed by Gilens (2001). It is also similar to Kuklinski and Hurley's (1994) design.

whether coverage critical of all politicians induces people to dislike the media, in another version respondents were told, "Recently, the media has reported stories that criticize both President Bush and the Democrats in Congress." To test the expectation that people are turned off by the media's focus on horserace coverage, another version told respondents, "Recently, the media has reported on President Bush's standing in opinion polls, especially when his popularity has increased and decreased." To test the effect of tabloid coverage, another version told respondents, "Recently, the media has reported on the death of Anna Nicole Smith." This example was chosen out of a desire to use a contemporary and well-known tabloid story. There had recently been a "feeding frenzy" of coverage of the death of Smith, a former *Playboy* Playmate of the Year and reality television star (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2007a; Shafer 2007).[12] The sixth and final version of the questionnaire served as the "control." Those assigned to this condition received the same question preface but were not reminded of any particular news story or style of coverage. They were simply asked, "Have you been following stories in the news media recently?" As the dependent variable, later in the question battery all respondents were asked a media feeling thermometer question identical to the one sometimes used by the ANES.

I calculate treatment effects by comparing thermometer ratings of those who received each treatment with those in the control group.[13] Figure 5-1 presents the average effect of each treatment across all respondents (for details, see table 5-1 in the appendix). Among all respondents, only two variables significantly reduce media ratings. Thinking about tabloid coverage reduces ratings by about 7 degrees, while thinking about Democratic elite criticism reduces ratings by about 5 degrees. For every other

[12] The story was covered extensively on cable news channels and network newscasts. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2007a), between her death on February 10 and her burial on March 2, 2007, Anna Nicole Smith's death was the third most covered story in the American news media as a whole, making up 8% of all coverage, behind only "a crucial House vote against the President's surge policy" (2) and the 2008 presidential race, which each took up 9% of coverage. On cable news channels, 32% of Fox News Channel's programming, 20% of MSNBC's programming, and 14% of CNN's programming focused on the Smith story, making it "far and away the biggest cable news story in that period." On major network morning news shows, it took up 20% of the first half hour of airtime on CBS, 17% on NBC, and 10% on ABC.

[13] A simple and concise way to present the results is in the form of a multiple regression. In this setup, each experimental condition is a "dummy'" explanatory variable coded 1 if the respondent received the treatment and 0 otherwise. The control condition is the excluded category. Here, the coefficient for each variable becomes simply the difference in means between the treatment and control groups, with its statistical significance equivalent to a difference-of-means test. I analyze the results with regression models presented in the chapter appendix, tables 5-1, 5-2, and 5-3. Figures 5-1 and 5-2 in the text graphically present the treatment effects from table 5-1.

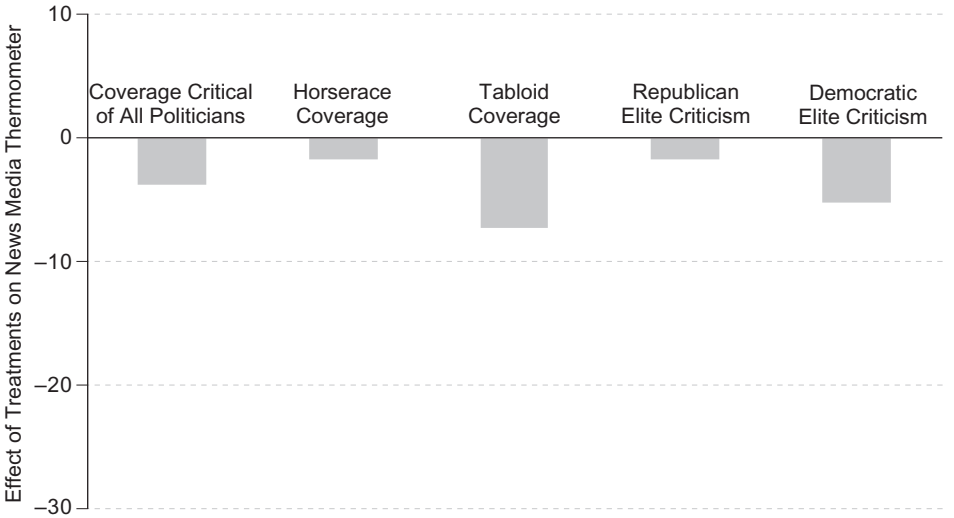

Figure 5-1. Effects on news media thermometer ratings in survey experiment. *Note:* Bars represent the difference in the average thermometer ratings between the control group and those receiving the given treatment. For more details, including significance tests, see table 5-1. *Source:* Survey experiment conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc., March 15–22, 2007.

treatment, the effects are not statistically distinguishable from zero. However, I expect some of these variables' effects to depend on predispositions. Figure 5-2 presents the treatment effects separately for all Democrats and all Republicans and also for only well-educated liberal Democrats and well-educated conservative Republicans (for details, see table 5-1).

Unsurprisingly, the effect of Democratic elite criticism is stronger among Democrats than Republicans. Among all Democrats, Democratic criticism reduces ratings by about 8 degrees, while among liberal Democrats with education through at least some college, it reduces ratings by 17 degrees. Even among Republicans, thinking about Democratic elite criticism is associated with lower media ratings, but these differences—3 degrees lower among all Republicans and 9 degrees lower among educated conservative Republicans—are not statistically distinguishable from zero. The effects of Republican elite criticism show an analogous pattern, the main difference being that they are less widespread. Republican criticism has no distinguishable effect on any group except educated conservative Republicans. Among them, however, its effect is large, reducing media evaluations by about 24 degrees. Yet in contrast to Democratic elite criticism, here the responsive group is too small to produce much of an average effect among the whole sample. If we combine the effects of both Democratic and Republican elite criticism on the entire

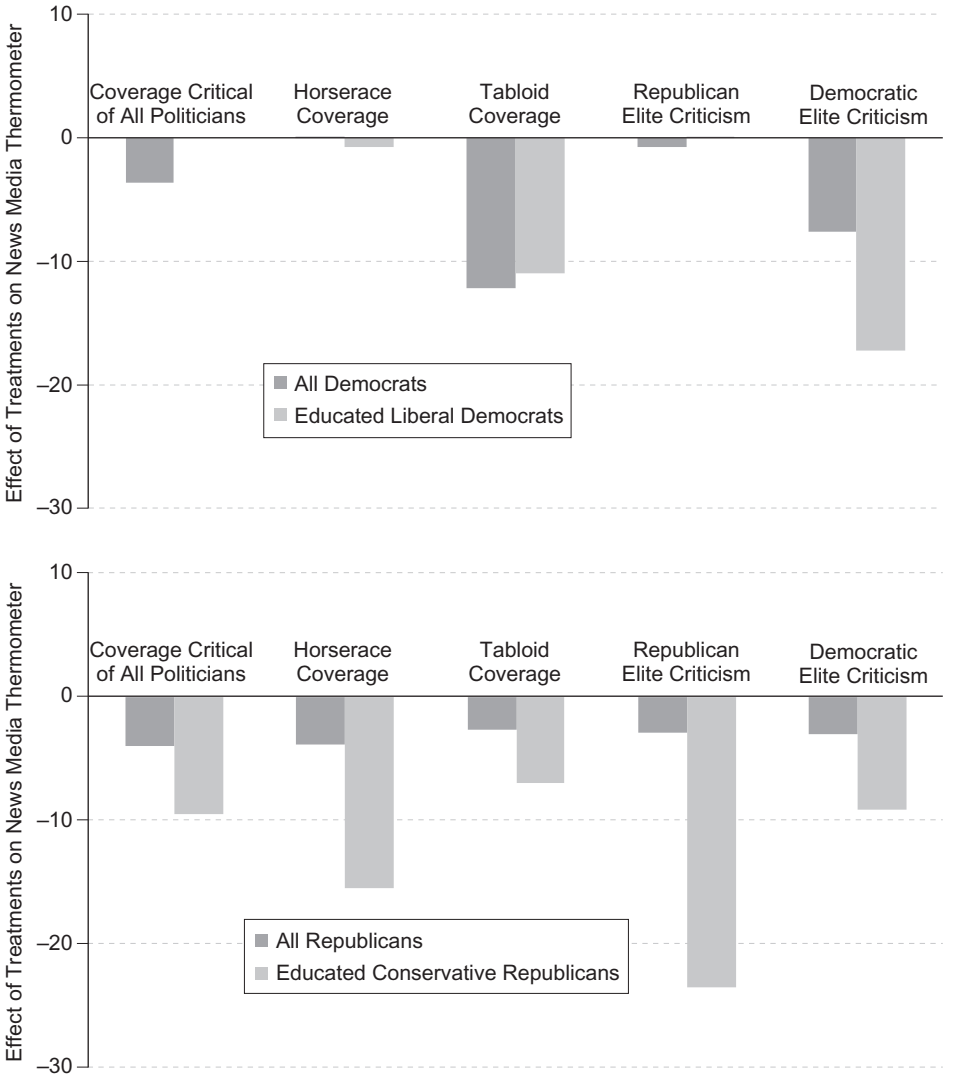

Figure 5-2. Effects on news media thermometer ratings separated by partisanship. *Source and note:* See figure 5-1.

sample's media ratings, however, overall they reduce media evaluations by about 7 degrees.[14]

[14] However, due to the imprecision of the estimate of Republican criticism in the entire sample, this combined effect is also imprecisely estimated. Its standard error is 5.1 and its *p*-value is .18.

Educated conservative Republicans' media evaluations seem particularly sensitive. They are the only group significantly affected by thinking about horserace coverage or coverage critical of all politicians, with these treatments reducing their evaluations by about 16 and 10 degrees, respectively. Among Democrats, and even among all Republicans grouped together, these treatments have no significant effect. On the other hand, the effect of thinking about tabloid coverage is significantly larger among Democrats, although there is some evidence of a substantial effect among educated conservative Republicans here as well.[15]

Overall, this experiment confirms the power of elite messages to reduce evaluations of the news media. Criticism from Democratic elites has the potential for more widespread influence. Yet Republican elite criticism is very influential among those predisposed to be most receptive to it: politically aware conservative Republicans. Of the other variables, only tabloid coverage has the effect often attributed to it: an overall reduction in media evaluations. In contrast, critical coverage and horserace coverage only reduce politically aware conservative Republicans' media evaluations, but the effects are not large or widespread enough to create much change in the population's overall evaluations.[16]

One possible source of negative news media evaluations that this first experiment does not explore is reactions to biased news. Given that partisan media critics sometimes argue that confidence has declined because of biased coverage, I conducted another survey experiment to explore this possibility.[17] To make the results comparable to the first experiment, I stayed as close as possible to the its format. This time, 1,000 respondents completed the relevant questions between March 4 and 11, 2008. The first question began with the same preface as in the first experiment: "We

[15] The difference in the effect of tabloid coverage between the parties is statistically significant at $p < .02$. Among educated conservative Republicans, the effect of tabloid coverage is about negative 7 degrees but not statistically significant at conventional levels ($p < .18$).

[16] Here, I estimate heterogeneities in the effects across predispositions by dividing the sample. In Ladd (2010a), I find similar results by pooling all respondents and estimating a model with interaction terms. However, the results here show some differences with those in Ladd (2010a), caused by a difference in how I classify liberal and conservative respondents. Here, liberals include those who place themselves at 1, 2, or 3 on the 7-point ideology scale while conservatives include those at 5, 6, and 7. However, in Ladd (2010a), liberals include only those at 1 and 2 on the scale and conservatives only those at 6 and 7. Because this led to very small sample sizes in the different conditions, such as only 50 educated liberal Democrats divided among six conditions, I decided to use a broader definition of liberal and conservative here. This coding change substantially alters only the effect of horserace coverage among educated liberal Democrats (where the effect estimate becomes smaller) and coverage critical of all politicians among educated conservative Republicans (where the effect estimate becomes larger).

[17] This study was also conducted through Knowledge Networks, Inc.

are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about some stories the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about them."

This time, the remainder of this question randomly varied among three different versions. To test the effect of thinking about coverage favoring Democrats, in one version, respondents were told that "Recently, the news media has reported stories critical of President Bush and supportive of the Democratic majority in Congress." In the second version, to make respondents think about coverage favoring Republicans, respondents were told, "Recently, the news media has reported stories supportive of President Bush and critical of the Democratic majority in Congress." The third version, serving as the control, simply said, "Recently, the news media has reported stories about President Bush and the Democratic majority in Congress."[18]

As elite criticism often contains accusations of bias, I designed the experiment to check also whether effects of bias depend on the nature of elite rhetoric. After the first question, respondents had a one-third chance of being told about Democratic media criticism, a one-third chance of being told about Republican media criticism, and a one-third chance of not receiving any follow-up question at all. The elite criticism treatments had the exact same wordings as in the first experiment. Again, I look at the effects of those treatments on media feeling thermometer ratings given later in the survey.

The experiment finds very little evidence that the bias of news directly alters media evaluations. As table 5-2 in the appendix shows in detail, neither coverage favoring Democrats nor that favoring Republicans has a significant effect among all respondents together or among all Democrats or all Republicans. Even in the presence of elite criticism, bias has no detectable direct effect among these groups.

Looking only at educated liberal Democrats and educated conservative Republicans, direct effects of coverage bias are still very limited. As table 5-3 in the appendix shows, there is no detectable effect among educated conservative Republicans, regardless of elite rhetoric. Educated liberal Democrats are affected by bias only when they also hear Democratic criticism. When they do, coverage favorable to Democrats increases their media ratings by about 10 degrees, while coverage favorable to Republicans still

[18] The key assumption in this experiment is that partisans differ in their perceptions of reality. In what political psychologists call "motivated reasoning," partisans tend to perceive reality in ways that confirm their preexisting views. As a result, I expect conservative Republicans to see coverage critical of President Bush as biased and liberal Democrats to see coverage favorable to President Bush as biased, whatever the reality.

has no detectable effect. Still, educated liberal Democrats who hear Republican criticism or no elite rhetoric are not affected by any coverage bias.

Together, these two survey experiments suggest several conclusions about the origins of news media distrust. First, elite opinion leadership can play an important role in reducing media evaluations. Second, tabloid coverage can also significantly reduce media evaluations among the public overall. Third, educated conservative Republicans are particularly responsive to negativity and horserace coverage. Yet the effect of these two types of coverage on the public's media attitudes overall is small because no other group responds to them.

In the absence of elite criticism, I found no instances of bias significantly affecting evaluations. Even in the presence of elite criticism, the only circumstance where coverage bias had its own significant effect was when educated liberal Democrats received Democratic criticism, where coverage favoring Democrats improved their evaluations. However, all failures to detect effects in these experiments should be treated with caution. Relationships can fall below the threshold of statistical significance for several reasons, including insufficient sample size or insufficient dosage of the treatment.

It is still possible that biased coverage has some effect among partisans who also hear consistent elite rhetoric. Among Democrats, favorable coverage increased their media ratings by 4 degrees if they also heard Republicans criticizing that coverage, while unfavorable coverage reduced their ratings by 5 degrees if they also heard Democratic criticism. Similarly, among Republicans, favorable coverage increased their media ratings by 3 degrees if they heard Democratic criticism, while unfavorable coverage reduced their ratings by 6.5 degrees if they heard Republican criticism. It also is possible that Democratic criticism reduces media ratings among educated conservative Republicans, where the treated group's ratings were 9 degrees below the control group's. However, all these relationships are not statistically significant, meaning that we cannot be certain whether they reflect real effects or just random variation.

It is fair to say the following about these variables. The two survey experiments had similar sample sizes. By design and intention, each type of consideration was primed in a very similar way. Thus, I am unable to clearly detect effects of variables like biased coverage when I use a similar sample size and a similar dosage of treatment to that which detects other effects. Yet it is still possible that some effects that these experiments could not detect would be detected with a stronger treatment dosage or larger sample size, especially in the case of biased coverage accompanied by consistent elite rhetoric.[19]

[19] In the case of dosage, while it is possible that variables with no detectable effect here might have some effect if the dosage was increased, an increase in dosage would also likely

Alternative Outlets Convey Elite Media Criticism: Cross-Sectional Survey Evidence

One way elite criticism of the institutional news media may reach the public is through alternative media outlets. Of course, the media criticism of politicians, political activists, opinion columnists, and others is covered in the institutional media. However, new types of outlets that have grown in prominence in the past 30 years have also been an important venue for these attacks. Chapter 4 reviewed how media criticism is a staple of discussion on political talk radio as well as on blogs and other alternative news websites. Thus, if elite criticism is an important source of negative attitudes toward the institutional media, one place we should see that influence is in the effects of consuming news from alternative media outlets.

In 2008, for the first time, the ANES asked respondents whether they "read, watched, or listened to information on the Internet about the campaign for President." This allows me to examine the relationship between political website exposure and distrust of the media. Among all respondents, there is no significant relationship between political Internet use and media trust. However, most political Internet use centers on institutional outlets' websites. It is less widely viewed sites, with partisan perspectives, that criticize the institutional media. Given this, we might expect politically aware partisans to be both more likely to use partisan websites and more accepting of the rhetoric they find there.[20] In addition, because the intensity of media criticism tends to be greater among Republican elites, effects might be strongest among politically aware Republicans.

To test this, I look at the relationship between political Internet use and media trust among five different groups: politically aware conservative Republicans, politically unaware conservative Republicans, independents, politically aware liberal Democrats, and politically unaware liberal Democrats. In doing so, I control for other attributes that may be correlated with Internet use, including education, income, age, and (among independents) ideology.[21] Internet usage is not discernibly associated with media trust among either group of Democrats nor among politically unaware conservative Republicans. Yet among politically aware

---

cause variables with detectable effects to have even greater effects. Thus, while it may be the case that, in instances where variables lack significant effects here, they do in fact have some small effect, the effects of variables that are influential here are likely to be larger at comparable dosage levels.

[20] Zaller (1992) argues persuasively that politically aware partisans are most receptive to elite messages from their side of the political spectrum when they do receive them. This is because, in Zaller's receive-accept-sample model of opinion change, they understand the political implications of the message yet "partisan resistance" does not prevent acceptance.

[21] Of course, party identification and ideology are largely held constant in the other groups as well, because the groups are selected based on these attributes.

conservative Republicans, as well as independents, those who use the Internet to learn about politics trust the media less. Among politically aware conservative Republicans, using the Internet for campaign information "a good many times" decreases one's probability of trusting the media "most of the time" or "just about always" by .21.[22] Among independents, the relationship is similar but substantially smaller. Using the Internet "a good many times" decreases one's probability of trusting the media "most of the time" or "just about always" by .10 (for details, see table 5-4 in the appendix).

A second popular alternative news medium is political talk radio. Similar to blogs and partisan news websites, talk radio features opinionated hosts who regularly criticize the institutional press. One difference is that liberal talk radio programs have been less successful than liberal Internet sites in attracting audiences comparable to their conservative counterparts. Thus, for talk radio, we have even greater reason to suspect effects to be strongest among politically aware Republicans. Using questions measuring talk radio usage in the 1996 and 2000 ANES surveys, I find a negative relationship between media trust and talk radio exposure when all respondents are grouped together. On average, listening to talk radio "every day" corresponds with a .11 lower probability of trusting the media "most of the time" or "just about always."[23] This relationship persists even when controlling for education, income, age, and ideology.

However, this overall relationship appears to be driven largely by Republicans. I again look at the relationship separately among politically aware Republicans, politically unaware Republicans, independents, politically aware Democrats, and politically unaware Democrats, in each case controlling again for education, income, age, and ideology. Among politically aware Republicans, those who listen to talk radio "every day" have a .24 lower probability of trusting the media "most of the time" or "just about always." Even among less politically aware Republicans, listening "every day" corresponds to a .19 lower probability of trusting the media "most of the time" or "just about always." Among independents and politically aware Democrats, there is no statistically significant relationship between talk radio exposure and media trust. Among politically unaware Democrats, there is even a positive relationship. In this group, listening to talk radio "every day" is associated with a .17 greater probability of trusting the media "most of the time" or "just about always" (for details, see table 5-5 in the appendix).

[22] Effects of using the Internet for political information "a good many times" are in comparison to not using the Internet for political information at all.

[23] Here and throughout the analysis of talk radio, the effects of listening "every day" are in comparison to not listening at all.

Even with control variables, there are still reasons to doubt whether these relationships between media trust and alternative media use result from persuasion. First, there could be other attributes I have not controlled for that lead people to both use alternative media sources and trust the media less. Second, I suspect (and demonstrate with evidence in chapter 6) that distrusting the media leads one to seek out more partisan media outlets. Because of this, it is difficult to know how much these associations result from alternative media persuading individuals to trust the media less and how much they result from omitted variable bias and reverse causation.

One way to tease out the persuasive effect is to find something else that increases exposure to alternative media outlets without directly influencing one's views on the media.[24] The number of miles a person drives each day may fit these criteria. The 1996 and 2000 ANES surveys ask, "And finally, about how many miles do you drive in a typical day?" Respondents provided an exact number of miles. As figure 5-3 shows, driving more often appears to lead to greater consumption of talk radio. If the additional talk radio listening exposure from driving more causes people to trust the media less, we can be more confident that talk radio has a persuasive effect whenever people listen to it.[25] In this analysis, I include additional control variables that might be correlated with driving more. In addition to education, income, age, and ideology, I control for whether individuals are employed, what type of area they live in (urban, suburban, or rural), and their type of profession (professional/managerial, clerical/sales, service, nonfarm laborer, farmer, or homemaker).

With this method, estimates of the effect of talk radio on politically unaware Democrats and Republicans become much less precise. We can no longer say with confidence that there is any persuasion among these

[24] In econometrics, this is called an instrumental variables model. Stated more formally, to identify a causal effect with this type of model, the exogenous variable(s) must satisfy two assumptions. The first is that the covariance between the instrument and the explanatory variable must not be zero. The second is that any effect of the instrument on the dependent variable must be through the explanatory variable (Hanushek and Jackson 1977, 243; Kennedy 2003, 159; Wooldridge 2003, 484). Figure 5-1 illustrates that the first assumption holds in this case. The second assumption, that the miles driven each day affects trust in the media only through talk radio exposure, is not empirically testable (Angrist, Imbens, and Rubin 1996; Wooldridge 2003).

[25] Barker (2002) also uses an instrumental variables model to estimate the persuasive effect of talk radio on media trust and employs miles driven as one of his instruments. The two differences between his analysis and mine are that, first, he uses several other variables as instruments as well, and second, he does not estimate the models separately for different groups as in table 5-3. In addition, Barker and Knight (2000), Jamieson and Cappella (2008), and Jones (2004) document an association between talk radio exposure and media distrust. Jones (2004) finds that this association is concentrated among conservatives.

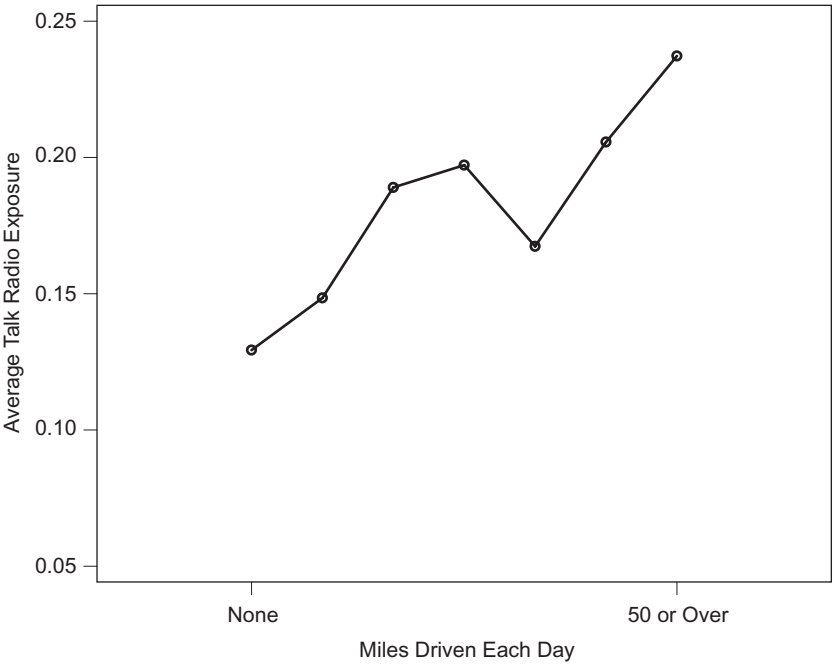

Figure 5-3. Miles driven and talk radio exposure. *Note:* Talk radio exposure is coded as in tables 5-5 and 5-6. Dots are averages for each category of miles driven. Categories are for presentation only. The actual number of miles driven is used in the analysis. *Source:* 1996, 2000 ANES.

groups. The effect estimate among independents also becomes much less precise, remaining indistinguishable from zero. Among politically aware Democrats, the effect is relatively precisely estimated yet so small it is also indistinguishable from zero. The group in which we can detect persuasion is politically aware Republicans. Among them, listening to talk radio "every day" leads people to move about one response category (out of four) lower in media trust (for details, see table 5-6 in the appendix).

Thus, we cannot rule out the possibility that the negative relationship between media trust and talk radio exposure among politically unaware Republicans and the positive relationship among unaware Democrats result from omitted variables or reverse causation. Persuasion may take place among these groups, but our estimates based on miles driven are too imprecise to be certain. However, the evidence strongly suggests that talk radio exposure persuades politically aware Republicans to distrust the media. Thus, at least for Republicans, alternative news outlets are an avenue through which elite rhetoric reduces trust in the institutional news media.

Any effects of Democratic elite media criticism appear not to flow through these alternative outlets in a large enough magnitude to be detected here.

Why Did Confidence in the Press Decline?

As I noted at the start of this chapter, many commentators provide different, sometimes conflicting, explanations for Americans' increasingly negative attitudes toward the institutional news media. Based on the evidence in this chapter and the last, we can make some progress assessing these claims. Any explanation for the public's declining confidence in the press over the past 40 years should be consistent with both the results in this chapter and the relationships among attitudes toward the press, time, partisanship, and political awareness illustrated in figures 4-4, 4-5, and 4-6.

First, consider the hostile media phenomenon. As I noted earlier, the main reason the hostile media phenomenon cannot explain change over time is that it largely results from the persistence of preexisting attitudes toward the media. It does not explain where these hostile views of the media originated. Also, to the extent that there is an actual reduction in media trust, it tends to be among the most politically engaged. Yet, we see in figure 4-6 that the politically aware have the most negative views of the media among Republicans. Among Democrats, there tends to be a modest increase in media trust among the most aware. For these reasons, it seems unlikely that the hostile media phenomenon is a major cause of the decline in media trust.

Second, while negativity and coverage focusing on the political "game" have increased since the 1960s, these changes can explain only a small part of the decline in press confidence. Negativity and horserace coverage have very modest effects on overall media evaluations, largely because their influence is concentrated among politically aware conservative Republicans. However, as figures 4-5 and 4-6 show, as Republicans' confidence in the press has declined, Democrats' confidence has significantly declined as well, just to a slightly lesser degree.

Third, the evidence also indicates that little of the decline can be explained by direct reactions to news bias. Any direct effect of biased coverage is too small to be detected in my survey experiment, with the lone exception of educated liberal Democrats also receiving Democratic elite media criticism. Moreover, if declining confidence is largely the result of the institutional media becoming increasingly biased in one direction, we would expect the decline to be concentrated on one side of the political spectrum, which is not what has occurred. Moreover, to the extent that news consumption patterns have changed over time, alternative outlets

have increased the ability of consumers to choose news sources whose biases do not offend them.

This is not to claim that the news media is free of bias. While there is no consensus in the academic literature on media bias, there is evidence that newspapers have increasingly endorsed Democrats since the mid-1960s (Ansolabehere, Lessem, and Snyder 2006), and two influential quantitative studies find coverage from institutional news organizations to be somewhat more liberal than the mass public (Groseclose and Milyo 2005; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010b).[26] In addition, several game theorists have demonstrated that it can be rational for news organizations to provide biased news (Baron 2006; Bernhardt, Krasa, and Polborn 2006; Besley and Prat 2006; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006; but see Bovitz, Druckman, and Lupia 2002).[27] However, while elite rhetoric pointing out bias can reduce media confidence, I find little evidence that directly consuming biased news has this effect.[28]

This leads us to the two most likely sources of the public's increasing antipathy toward the media: tabloid coverage and elite opinion leadership. Like several other styles of news, tabloid coverage has increased over the same period that press confidence has declined. Yet unlike other styles, my experiment indicates that tabloid coverage's effects, while larger among Democrats, are enough to produce significant declines in overall media ratings, which is what we observe in figures 4-4 and 4-5.

The evidence also consistently supports the importance of elite opinion leadership. Criticism of the press has greatly increased over the past 40 years on both sides of the political spectrum. However, criticism among conservatives started earlier and even now appears to be more intense and widespread than criticism from liberals. Thus, if media attitudes are responsive to elite partisan rhetoric, we should expect confidence in the press to decline among everyone over time but with a consistent gap between the parties, with Republicans' confidence being lower. This is the pattern we find in figures 4-4 and 4-5. Furthermore, because conservative media criticism is more intense, at any given point we should expect

[26] Consistent with contentions of liberal bias, Baum and Groeling (2010) find that wire service coverage is more similar to coverage on liberal websites than to FoxNews.com coverage. Niven (2002, chap. 3) provides a broader review of the academic literature on media bias.

[27] On the general advantages of providing and receiving biased information, see Patty (2009) and Calvert (1985), respectively.

[28] The frequent tendency of elites to criticize perceived bias likely explains why respondents frequently mention bias among the considerations that come to mind when evaluating the media. People do think about media bias. But they have received influential considerations about bias largely from elite rhetoric, not from whatever biased news they have consumed.

the party gap in media evaluations to be largest among the most politically aware, where the difference in the intensity of elite criticism is most acutely felt. This is the pattern we find in Figure 4-6. Considered together, Democratic elite criticism and Republican elite criticism can reduce media confidence across a broad spectrum of the public. In many ways, Craig Crawford (2006, 15) is correct when he claims that "[p]oliticians won the war against the media with a simple rule: first, attack the messenger."

To reiterate once more, these results do not, in and of themselves, necessarily imply that partisan media criticism and tabloid news are *problems* and other media trends are not. This chapter's aim is very specific: determining what considerations reduce public trust in the media. Just because thinking about negativity, horserace coverage, or media bias does not directly reduce people's trust in the media does not mean those phenomena are not prevalent or not problems. This chapter does not address the question of which media trends have good or bad consequences for the nation overall but focuses on the very specific question of which attributes create media distrust. Negativity, horserace coverage, media bias, and other attributes of the modern media environment may have other important effects on politics or society as a whole that are beyond the scope of this book.

Based only on this chapter, it is also not yet clear whether the distrust created by partisan criticism and tabloid news is problematic. Determining that requires looking at the consequences of media distrust and weighing any undesirable consequences against any benefits of partisan criticism and tabloid news. To that end, the next two chapters investigate the consequences of public antipathy toward the institutional news media. In doing so, they look specifically at how media distrust changes the way people acquire political information and make electoral decisions.

Appendix

Question Wordings in Survey Experiment Conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc., March 15–22, 2007

Question 1

(Respondents are randomly assigned to receive one of six different versions.)

Version A: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about some stories the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about them. Recently, the media has reported stories that criticize both President Bush and the Democrats in Congress. Have you heard these stories?"

Version B: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about some stories the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about them. Recently, the media has reported on President Bush's standing in opinion polls, especially when his popularity has increased and decreased. Have you heard these stories?"

Version C: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about a story the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about it. Recently, the media has reported on the death of Anna Nicole Smith. Have you heard this story?"

Version D: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about a story the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about it. Recently, Republican politicians have criticized the media for being overly critical of President Bush. Have you heard this story?"

Version E: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about a story the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about it. Recently, Democratic politicians have criticized the media for being too friendly with President Bush. Have you heard this story?"

Version F: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. Have you been following stories in the news media recently?"

Question 1 Answers

Yes
No

Question 2

(Respondents are shown a number box with range 0–100.)
"We'd like you to rate the news media on a scale we call a 'feeling thermometer.' It runs from 0 to 100 degrees. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable toward the news media. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable toward the news media. If you don't feel particularly favorable or unfavorable toward the news media, you would rate them at the 50 degree mark. How would you rate the news media on this scale? You can use any number between 0 and 100 to indicate how favorable or unfavorable you feel."

Question 2 Answers

0–100

Question Wordings in Survey Experiment Conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc., March 4–11, 2008

Question 1

(Respondents are randomly assigned to receive one of two different versions.)

Version A: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about some stories the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about them. Recently, the news media has reported stories critical of President Bush and supportive of the Democratic majority in Congress. Have you seen these stories?"

Version B: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about some stories the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about them. Recently, the news media has reported stories supportive of President Bush and critical of the Democratic majority in Congress. Have you seen these stories?"

Version C: "We are interested in how well the news media gets information out to the public. There are so many news stories these days that most people have trouble following them all. We want to ask about some stories the news media has reported to see if you happened to hear about them. Recently, the news media has reported

stories about President Bush and the Democratic majority in Congress. Have you seen these stories?"

Question 1 Answers

Yes
No

Question 2

(Respondents are randomly assigned to receive one of three different versions.)

Version A: "Recently, Democratic politicians have criticized the media for being too friendly with President Bush. Have you seen this story?"
Version B: "Recently, Republican politicians have criticized the media for being overly critical of President Bush. Have you seen this story?"
Version C: (Respondents do not receive question 2.)

Question 2 Answers

Yes
No

Question 3

(Respondents are shown a number box with range 0–100.)
"We'd like you to rate the news media on a scale we call a 'feeling thermometer.' It runs from 0 to 100 degrees. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable toward the news media. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable toward the news media. If you don't feel particularly favorable or unfavorable toward the news media, you would rate them at the 50 degree mark. How would you rate the news media on this scale? You can use any number between 0 and 100 to indicate how favorable or unfavorable you feel."

Question 3 Answers

0–100

Table 5-1
Treatment Effects on Media Thermometer Ratings in Survey Experiment

Treatments	*All*	*All Democrats*	*Educated liberal Democrats*	*All Republicans*	*Educated conservative Republicans*
Coverage critical of all politicians	–3.8	–3.7	1.1	–4.0	–9.6*
	(2.8)	(4.3)	(8.2)	(3.4)	(5.3)
Horserace coverage	–1.8	0.0	–0.7	–3.8	–15.5**
	(3.0)	(4.5)	(7.3)	(3.6)	(4.9)
Tabloid coverage	–7.2**	–12.3**	–11.0	–2.6	–6.9
	(2.8)	(3.9)	(7.7)	(3.9)	(5.1)
Republican elite criticism	–1.7	–0.8	0.04	–2.9	–23.7**
	(3.1)	(4.2)	(8.5)	(4.2)	(5.1)
Democratic elite criticism	–5.2*	–7.6*	–17.4**	–3.0	–9.2
	(2.9)	(4.1)	(8.6)	(4.0)	(5.7)
Intercept	50.1**	56.1**	52.7**	44.8**	50.1**
	(2.0)	(2.9)	(6.2)	(2.6)	(3.9)
R^2	0.01	0.04	0.09	0.00	0.13
Standard error of regression	22.3	21.7	21.4	21.7	18.6
n	1,002	467	129	535	187

$^{**}p < .05$, $^{*}p < .10$

Source: Survey experiment conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc., March 15–22, 2007.

Note: Entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. The explanatory variables, listed in the left-hand column, are coded 1 if the respondent received the treatment and 0 otherwise. All treatments are mutually exclusive. The control condition is the excluded category. The dependent variable is a news media feeling thermometer, which ranges from 0 to 100. Democrats and Republicans include independents who lean toward those parties. Results are substantively similar if leaners are excluded. Pure independents are not analyzed separately because there are too few of them ($n = 76$). Respondents are classified as educated if their level of education is "some college" or higher. Respondents are classified as liberal if they placed themselves at 1, 2, or 3 on the 7-point ideology scale and as conservative if they placed themselves at 5, 6, or 7. Data are weighted by the inverse of their probability of selection into the Knowledge Networks sample.

TABLE 5-2
Treatment Effects of Coverage Bias on Media Thermometer Ratings

		All			*Democrats*			*Republicans*		
Treatments	*All*	*Received no media criticism*	*Received Democratic media criticism*	*Received Republican media criticism*	*Received no media criticism*	*Received Democratic media criticism*	*Received Republican media criticism*	*Received no media criticism*	*Received Democratic media criticism*	*Received Republican media criticism*
Coverage favors	0.0	2.2	–0.9	–0.9	4.7	1.1	4.1	–1.8	–1.8	–6.5
Democrats	(2.1)	(3.6)	(2.9)	(4.1)	(4.8)	(3.2)	(5.6)	(5.8)	(4.2)	(5.4)
Coverage favors	–1.8	–1.4	–1.2	–2.1	2.0	–4.8	–3.7	–4.6	3.3	1.7
Republicans	(2.1)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.3)	(4.8)	(4.7)	(4.8)	(5.6)	(5.5)	(4.4)
Intercept	46.6**	49.4**	44.4**	45.9**	49.8**	49.8**	49.1**	48.8**	37.7**	40.4**
	(1.4)	(2.5)	(2.0)	(2.4)	(3.3)	(2.1)	(3.5)	(3.8)	(3.0)	(3.3)
R^2	0.002	0.005	0.001	0.002	0.009	0.018	0.021	0.008	0.011	0.029
Standard error of regression	21.4	21.9	21.0	21.0	21.1	19.9	20.1	22.7	20.7	20.3
n	1,000	327	341	332	170	182	175	156	159	156

$^{**}p < .05$, $^{*}p < .10$

Source: Survey experiment conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc., March 4–11, 2008.

Note: Entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. The explanatory variables, listed in the left hand column, are coded 1 if the respondent received the treatment and 0 otherwise. The control condition (those who were not told about coverage favoring Democrats or Republicans) is the excluded category. The dependent variable is a news media feeling thermometer, which ranges from 0 to 100. Democrats and Republicans include independents who lean toward those parties. Results are substantively similar if leaners are excluded. Pure independents are not analyzed separately because there are too few of them ($n = 50$). Data are weighted by the inverse of their probability of selection into the Knowledge Networks sample.

TABLE 5-3
Treatment Effects of Coverage Bias on Media Thermometer Ratings among Educated Ideological Partisans

	Educated liberal Democrats				*Educated conservative Republicans*			
Treatments	*All*	*Received no media criticism*	*Received Democratic media criticism*	*Received Republican media criticism*	*All*	*Received no media criticism*	*Received Democratic media criticism*	*Received Republican media criticism*
Coverage favors Democrats	5.6	2.3	10.4**	4.5	–0.8	4.1	1.4	–4.4
	(4.5)	(7.4)	(4.3)	(8.7)	(3.9)	(6.4)	(5.7)	(7.0)
Coverage favors Republicans	–0.6	–0.2	–1.7	1.3	2.7	6.7	4.4	-4.2
	(4.6)	(5.8)	(8.2)	(6.6)	(4.1)	(7.0)	(5.8)	(5.9)
Intercept	47.8**	50.6**	46.7**	46.2**	37.4**	43.5**	31.6**	36.8**
	(2.6)	(4.1)	(3.1)	(4.4)	(2.5)	(4.5)	(3.8)	(4.2)
R^2	0.016	0.003	0.066	0.008	0.005	0.018	0.008	0.011
Standard error of regression	21.3	21.9	20.8	21.7	21.3	21.4	20.1	20.5
n	246	78	84	84	255	81	91	83

**$p < .05$, *$p < .10$

Source: Survey experiment conducted by Knowledge Networks, Inc., March 4–11, 2008.

Note: For details, see the note to table 5-2, except for the coding of education and ideology, for which see table 5-1.

TABLE 5-4
Relationship between Political Internet Usage and News Media Trust

	All	*Politically aware liberal Democrats*	*Politically unaware liberal Democrats*	*Independents*	*Politically aware conservative Republicans*	*Politically unaware conservative Republicans*
Frequency of getting campaign information on the Internet	–0.09	0.34	–0.28	–0.25**	–0.53*	0.06
	(0.07)	(0.31)	(0.20)	(0.13)	(0.32)	(0.18)
Education	0.40**	1.74	0.96	0.54	0.07	0.13
	(0.19)	(3.50)	(0.79)	(0.35)	(3.46)	(0.71)
Income	–0.19*	–0.35	0.27	–0.28	0.27	0.03
	(0.11)	(0.47)	(0.34)	(0.19)	(0.54)	(0.29)
Age	1.80**	2.22	4.85**	2.35	–3.18	–1.05
	(0.82)	(4.87)	(2.48)	(1.48)	(4.54)	(2.15)
Age^2	–1.39*	–1.93	–5.02*	–2.14	4.91	1.00
	(0.82)	(5.13)	(2.60)	(1.53)	(4.44)	(2.13)
Party identification	0.00					
	(0.09)					
Ideology	–0.12			0.01		
	(0.13)			(0.23)		
Log-likelihood	–2065.7	–118.6	–213.4	–637.2	–131.1	–309.7
Pseudo R^2	0.004	0.008	0.023	0.008	0.041	0.001
n	1,906	133	216	599	116	254

**$p < .05$, *$p < .10$

Source: 2008 ANES Time Series Survey.

Note: Table shows ordered probit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Estimates of τ cut-point parameters are not reported. In each model, the dependent variable is respondents' trust in the media, with the following response categories: "just about always" (coded as 1), "most of the time" (.67), "only some of the time" (.33), and "just about never" (0). The main explanatory variable is how often respondents "read, watched, or listened to information on the Internet about the campaign for President," with the following response categories: not at all (0), "just one or two" times (.33), "several" times (.67), and "a good many" times (1). Respondents are classified as politically aware if they earned a graduate degree and correctly named the Republicans as the more conservative major American political party. Those who say they lean toward a party are classified as identifying with that party. Other explanatory variables are also coded to range from 0 to 1, with interior categories evenly spaced between these endpoints.

TABLE 5-5
Relationship between Talk Radio Exposure and News Media Trust

	All	*Politically aware Democrats*	*Politically unaware Democrats*	*Independents*	*Politically aware Republicans*	*Politically unaware Republicans*
Talk radio exposure	–0.27**	–0.03	0.43**	–0.05	–0.71**	–0.49*
	(0.09)	(0.17)	(0.21)	(0.32)	(0.16)	(0.29)
Education	–0.05	0.09	–0.24	0.19	0.08	0.20
	(0.09)	(0.17)	(0.22)	(0.31)	(0.20)	(0.31)
Income	–0.11	0.09	–0.01	–0.14	–0.02	–0.27
	(0.10)	(0.19)	(0.23)	(0.37)	(0.20)	(0.32)
Age	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.03	–0.03*	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Age^2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.0003*	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.0002)	(0.00)
Ideology	–1.04**	–0.27	–0.50	–0.51	–1.28**	–1.05**
	(0.12)	(0.25)	(0.31)	(0.58)	(0.30)	(0.42)
Log-likelihood	–2149.1	–683.7	–419.2	–197.3	–558.2	–227.1
Pseudo R^2	0.028	0.006	0.013	0.028	0.058	0.026
n	1,967	647	371	176	537	220

**$p < .05$, *$p < .10$

Source: 1996 and 2000 ANES Time Series Surveys.

Note: Table shows ordered probit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All models contain a year fixed effect, which is not reported. Estimates of τ cut-point parameters are also not reported. In each model, the dependent variable is respondents' trust in the media, with the following response categories: "just about always" (coded as 1), "most of the time" (.67), "only some of the time" (.33), and "just about never" (0). The main independent variable is a question asking, "There are a number of programs on radio in which people call in to voice their opinions about politics. Do you ever listen to political talk radio programs of this type?" If they said yes, then they were asked how often they listened. Response categories are "every day" (1), "most days" (.75), "once or twice a week" (.5), "only occasionally" (.25), and "doesn't listen" (0). Other explanatory variables are also coded to range from 0 to 1, with interior categories evenly spaced between these endpoints.

TABLE 5-6
Instrumental Variables Model of the Effect of Talk Radio Exposure on News Media Trust

	All	*Politically aware Democrats*	*Politically unaware Democrats*	*Independents*	*Politically aware Republicans*	*Politically unaware Republicans*
Talk radio exposure (instrumented)	–0.31**	–0.11	0.78	1.99	–0.32**	1.23
	(0.16)	(0.23)	(1.20)	(2.74)	(0.15)	(3.93)
Education: Grade 9–12	0.06*	0.08*	0.07	0.47	–0.06	–0.01
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.63)	(0.11)	(0.23)
Education: high school or equivalent	0.07**	0.12**	–0.04	0.47	–0.08	–0.15
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.21)	(0.66)	(0.11)	(0.39)
Education: some college	0.06*	0.09*	–0.04	0.52	–0.06	–0.02
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.19)	(0.66)	(0.11)	(0.20)
Education: BA or equivalent	0.08**	0.12**	–0.04	0.78	–0.06	–0.01
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.18)	(1.00)	(0.11)	(0.24)
Income: 17–33 percentile	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.04	–0.02	0.05
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.20)	(0.04)	(0.14)
Income: 34–67 percentile	–0.03	0.02	0.05	–0.27	–0.01	0.05
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.15)	(0.30)	(0.04)	(0.13)
Income: 68–95 percentile	–0.02	0.02	0.10	–0.22	–0.01	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.12)	(0.25)	(0.04)	(0.15)
Income: 96–100 percentile	–0.01	0.02	0.18	–0.29	0.00	–0.15
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.17)	(0.45)	(0.05)	(0.38)
Employed	0.01	0.02	–0.08	–0.25	0.03	–0.15
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.08)	(0.41)	(0.03)	(0.22)
Urban	0.01	0.01	–0.06	–0.41	0.00	0.17
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.53)	(0.03)	(0.35)
Suburban	–0.01	0.00	–0.05	–0.09	0.01	0.05
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.14)	(0.02)	(0.14)

Professional / managerial	0.02	0.00	–0.05	–0.16	0.02	–0.06
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.27)	(0.04)	(0.41)
Clerical / sales worker	0.00	–0.02	0.05	–0.10	0.03	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.22)	(0.04)	(0.17)
Service worker	0.01	–0.01	–0.06	–0.14	0.02	–0.01
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.21)	(0.04)	(0.28)
Nonfarm laborer	–0.03	0.07	0.02	–0.12	0.04	[a]
	(0.04)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.34)	(0.10)	
Farmer	0.00	–0.13	0.00	–0.90	0.04	–0.23
	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.16)	(1.10)	(0.08)	(0.98)
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Age^2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Liberal	0.03	0.00	–0.06	–0.45	0.00	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.14)	(0.39)	(0.11)	(0.45)
Conservative	–0.05*	–0.03	–0.05	–0.23	0.00	–0.20
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.35)	(0.03)	(0.40)
2000	0.04**	0.03	0.00	0.07	0.05*	–0.01
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.13)	(0.03)	(0.08)
Constant	0.55**	0.52**	0.72**	0.15	0.72**	0.40
	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.28)	(0.57)	(0.14)	(0.35)
Standard error of regression	0.20	0.18	0.27	0.52	0.18	0.40
n	1,634	571	289	141	466	155

**$p < .05$, *$p < .10$

Source: 1996 and 2000 ANES Time Series Surveys.

Note: Table presents coefficient estimates from an instrumental variables regression model with standard errors in parentheses. Talk radio exposure and news media trust are coded as in table 5-5. Talk radio exposure is instrumented with the number of miles the respondent reported driving in "a typical day." Other explanatory variables are also coded to range from 0 to 1, with interior categories evenly spaced between these endpoints.

[a] variable omitted due to multicollinearity