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The abundance of political media outlets raises concerns that citizens isolate themselves to likeminded news, leaving the public with infrequent shared media experiences and little exposure to disagreeable information. Network analysis of 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey data (N = 57,967) indicates these worries are exaggerated, as general interest news outlets like local newspapers and non-partisan television news are central to the public's media environment. Although there is some variation between the media diets of Republicans and Democrats (FOX News and conservative talk radio are central to Republicans' information network), neither group appears to engage in active avoidance of disagreeable information. Individuals across the political spectrum are not creating partisan "echo chambers" but instead have political media repertoires that are remarkably similar.

The proliferation of media outlets in the post-broadcast age offers citizens an array of options for news and political information. With this expansion of sources comes the possibility of audience fragmentation and concerns over the citizenry no longer having a common point of reference on important political and social issues (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Sunstein, 2007). The segmenting of

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political understanding and perspective taking along partisan or ideological fissures can create barriers to productive deliberation between discordant parties, the desire to seek compromise, and the formation of legitimate consensus building, all of which are foundational processes for a well-functioning democracy.[1]

One particular threat is that audiences will abandon general interest news outlets (e.g., broadcast and non-partisan television news, local newspapers) that expose them to a diverse range of topics and viewpoints and create shared media experiences in favor of specialized news outlets (i.e., partisan news) that reinforce existing dispositions (Sunstein, 2007). There is some evidence that citizens prefer ideologically consistent political media outlets (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2011) but do not avoid counter-attitudinal news (Garrett, 2009; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Holbert, Hmeilowski, & Weeks, 2012; Prior, 2013a). However, it remains unclear how the abundance of political information sources affects citizens' media diets *as a whole* or whether partisans still share political news experiences. That is, to what extent do individuals from opposing political parties rely on similar sources of news or isolate themselves to partisan enclaves? On one hand, it is possible that individuals' preference for news from likeminded media outlets may result in broader political media diets that look very different for members of opposing political parties. On the other hand, it is plausible that partisans show some preference for pro-attitudinal news but continue to have common media experiences by also consuming more mainstream, general interest news. The implications of the former versus the latter are profound for democracy (Garrett & Resnick, 2011; Sunstein, 2007).

Although questions of news audience fragmentation are not new, prior research typically takes a relatively narrow scope to understanding citizens' media use by examining connections between a limited set of outlets within particular media channels such as cable television news (Holbert et al., 2012; Prior, 2013a) or online news sites (Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013). We therefore do not know the extent to which partisans share a common set of information sources or how they use multiple sources from various channels in conjunction with one another. The present study fills this void by looking at the political media environment in a holistic manner. Rather than examining bivariate patterns of political news use or using forced exposure experiments with limited choice (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), we use a novel method to look at the broader media environments of partisans in the United States.

We utilize network analysis of the 2008 telephone National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) (N = 57,967) to assess citizens' complementary use of numerous outlets for political news, including mainstream and partisan television programing, newspapers, talk radio, and Web sites. We conceptualize the political media environment as a network consisting of news outlets as interrelated nodes, with connections between outlets defined by their shared audience members (Ksiazek, 2011). We examine the network relative to a core-periphery model (Borgatti & Everett, 1999) that shows the interconnectedness of all outlets in the political media environment. The more connected the outlet—that is, the more audience overlap it shares with other outlets in the network—the more likely it will reside in the core of the

network. Less densely connected outlets will reside at the periphery (i.e., outer edges) of the network. This complementary approach allows us to move beyond bivariate associations and examine the larger pattern of ties between numerous political media outlets using a large, diverse data set collected over the course of a presidential election cycle. Importantly, it provides theoretical insights into the public's political information diet as a whole, demonstrating whether partisans share common political news experiences by using the same media outlets.

General Interest and Specialized (Partisan) Political Media Outlets

Information sources in the political media environment can be classified as either "general interest" or "specialized" outlets based on their audience and content. General interest outlets target a demographically diverse audience and provide general, less partisan content intended to meet the needs of a heterogeneous audience and the public at large (McQuail, 1997; Schooler, Chaffee, Flora, & Roser, 1998; Sunstein, 2007; Tewksbury, 2005). These include outlets like broadcast network television news (e.g., NBC), non-partisan cable news outlets (e.g., CNN), local daily newspapers, and Web portals that aggregate news (e.g., MSN).

Sunstein (2007) argues that exposure to these general interest news outlets is critically important in an era where citizens' media environments can easily reflect their existing preferences. By offering more diverse content, voices, and topics, general interest outlets create a more public forum that provides individuals opportunities to encounter, often unexpectedly, information and viewpoints they might otherwise have avoided. In doing so, they create the shared media and political experiences for ideologically disparate individuals that are so important to a well-functioning, deliberative democracy. While many individuals may not be persuaded by such diverse information and viewpoints at the very least they are encountered, which encourages knowledge and understanding of the other side (Sunstein, 2007).

Specialized outlets provide information for more homogenous, niche audiences who share a particular characteristic such as lifestyle interests or political ideology (Schooler et al., 1998). The content provided by specialized outlets has a more narrow focus than general interest outlets and is intended for a unique demographic (Dimmick, 2003; Tewksbury, 2005). In the political media context, specialized outlets include partisan cable news networks (e.g., FOX News), national newspapers with ideological editorial pages (e.g., *Wall Street Journal*) and partisan Web sites (Prior, 2013a). We refer to these sources as "partisan" outlets.

Some have warned that citizens' reliance on partisan news outlets will create enclaves in which people consistently hear opinions and receive information that reinforces their existing positions (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Jamieson, & Cappella, 2008). The concern is that heavy use of partisan outlets will lead to less use of the general interest outlets that provide a common point of reference for diverse citizens and, at times, expose people to attitude-challenging information (Sunstein, 2007). As a result, there is the possibility that the public becomes increasingly fragmented

regarding the type of information to which it is exposed and polarized in its political positions (Levendusky, 2013; Stroud, 2010).

Partisan Selective Exposure and Citizens' Media Environments

The possibility of audiences abandoning general interest outlets in favor of partisan outlets is based on the concept of selective exposure, which is defined as the extent to which individuals' overall news diet reflects their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. Selective exposure is based on dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and suggests people select news based in part on a desire to avoid dissonant information that contradicts pre-existing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Dissonance stemming from political news may be avoided by either selecting ideologically consistent sources (selective approach) or avoiding ideologically inconsistent sources (selective avoidance) (Garrett, 2009).

Although both strategies may be effective in preventing dissonance, citizens engage in selective approach more often than avoidance (Garrett & Stroud, 2014). When given the choice, people prefer news from ideologically consistent media outlets (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2011), but do not actively avoid news that challenges their political attitudes (Garrett & Stroud, 2014). As Garrett (2009) argues, there are several reasons people do not avoid counter-attitudinal information. First, it is difficult to avoid all attitude-discrepant information and a more efficient way to reduce dissonance may be to counter-argue challenging information following exposure. Second, exposure to counter-attitudinal information may be useful for partisans to know the other side's position on issues or to reinforce their own opinion (Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009). Finally, people who want balanced information and a diverse set of viewpoints are unlikely to engage in avoidance (Garrett, 2009). Because citizens—even strong partisans—do not consistently avoid attitude-challenging news, it is likely that they incorporate a mix of both partisan and general interest media outlets into their news repertoires. Empirical research has found support for this contention, as use of mainstream and partisan media are often related (Garrett et al., 2013), and some partisans explicitly use counter-attitudinal sources (Holbert et al., 2012; Prior, 2013a).

Yet, prior research has not fully addressed the breadth of citizens' media environments or the extent to which partisans use a common set of news outlets. Notably, many studies of political news audience fragmentation do not fully account for use of general interest outlets—the exact sources that provide consistent exposure to diverse and, at times, disagreeable information (Mutz & Martin, 2001; Sunstein, 2007). For example, Prior (2013a) and Holbert and colleagues (2012) examine only partisan cable television use, which precludes inferences about the political media environment as a whole. Similarly, Stroud (2011) controls for broadcast network news use, but does not use ideology or partisanship to predict its use. Experimental designs also tend to not provide participants many news options from general interest outlets (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). By not fully incorporating general

interest outlets, extant work is unable to demonstrate how citizens use these sources alongside partisan outlets.

The tendency of prior research to focus on political news use within a particular media channel also limits what it can tell us about the broader media environment. For instance, Garrett and colleagues (2013) examine the relationship between use of partisan and mainstream political media outlets but limit their analyses only to online sources. Other work investigates how citizens use cable television programs but omits online news and newspapers (e.g. Holbert et al., 2012; Prior, 2013a). These studies therefore provide insights into audience composition for a single media channel rather than the media environment as a whole. As it stands, three important questions regarding citizens' media repertoires persist. First, how do individuals incorporate media from different channels into their overall political media diets? Second, to what degree do media diets consist of both general interest and partisan outlets? Finally, to what extent do partisans' media environments continue to share similarities? The network analyses used here allow us to examine these questions and provide new insights into citizens' broader political news diets.

Hypotheses

Existing literature leads us to predict that citizens mostly rely on a common set of political media outlets, regardless of their political party affiliation. We expect people use both general interest and partisan media outlets in a complementary manner and do not isolate themselves to political enclaves. Because they target a heterogeneous audience and provide broad, less-partisan content, general interest outlets should be more central to the general public's media environment (H_{1a}). Given their niche audiences and content, we also expect partisan outlets to be at the periphery for the general public (H_{1b}). Although partisans prefer sources that reinforce their existing beliefs, we do not expect use of ideological sources to replace their use of general interest outlets. Instead, we predict general interest outlets will remain central to partisans' media environments, as citizens make little attempt to avoid these sources (H_{2a}). However, given the tendency for individuals to engage in selective approach we also expect ideologically-consistent partisan outlets to be more central to partisans' media diets (H_{2b}). In sum, these hypotheses predict citizens engage in some level of selective approach but not avoidance. As a result, the media diets of Republicans and Democrats should look similar and include the same set of primary general interest outlets, with some partisan outlets becoming more or less prominent based on partisanship.

Method

This study uses data from the NAES 2008 Phone Edition. This rolling cross-sectional survey consisted of telephone interviews with 57,967 U.S. respondents

conducted daily between December 17, 2007 and November 3, 2008 (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2008). Using AAPOR (2008) guidelines (RR5) the response rate for this survey was 23%. Over half (57.2%) of the respondents were women, 82.9% were Caucasian, the mean age was 53, and 58.9% had at least an Associate's or two-year college degree.

Measures

News Use. General interest outlets were conceptualized as those targeting heterogeneous audiences and providing general content to the public at large (Sunstein, 2007; Tewksbury, 2005). We identified ten general interest outlets including news programs and/or content from broadcast network television channels (ABC, CBS, NBC), local newspapers from around the country, non-partisan cable news (CNN), a national newspaper (*USA Today*), the public broadcasting channel (PBS), and internet news aggregators (AOL, MSN, Google). Political media outlets targeting niche audiences with a common political ideology were identified as partisan outlets (Dimmick, 2003; Tewksbury, 2005). A total of nine partisan news outlets were identified, including programs and content from partisan cable news channels (FOX News, MSNBC), national newspapers whose editorial pages are often characterized as either liberal (*New York Times, Washington Post*), or conservative (*Wall Street Journal*), conservative and liberal (NPR) political talk radio, and conservative and liberal Web sites.

The NAES survey asked respondents about their use of several specific news programs or outlets across four media platforms including television news, news-papers, online news, and radio news. To create the measures for the general interest and partisan outlets, respondents' use of various programs and outlets were recoded and combined as described below (see Appendix for specific survey news items that were used to create each general interest and partisan outlet variable).

If a respondent reported using television news at least one day in the past week, they were asked to name the television network or program from which they received most of their information. Individuals who reported using a specific source most frequently were given a second follow-up question asking them to name all other networks or programs used in the previous week. Data from these two questions were combined and any outlet respondents reported using was coded as 1 and all unused programs as 0.[2] We next combined all content from the same network to form a single television brand variable for each outlet. For example, we combined use of general *ABC News, ABC World News Tonight, Nightline*, and abc.com to create the brand variable, ABC.[3] If a respondent reported use of any of the individual programs on a network or the network's Web site, the parent brand variable was coded as 1. This coding strategy reduces the error from respondents' recall. For example, perhaps a respondent reported that they watched an unspecified program on *ABC News* but in fact had watched *ABC World News Tonight*. In this instance treating the programs separately would misidentify the actual program viewed, but

combining these items captures use of the larger brand. This procedure was used to create the following network and partisan television brand variables: ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS, CNN, FOX News, and MSNBC.

We included both local (e.g., *Houston Chronicle, Detroit Free Press)* and four national newspapers in our analyses (*New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post*, and *USA Today*). If newspapers were used at least once in the previous week, respondents were asked to name the newspaper they received most of their information from (either online or in print), as well as other newspapers they used during that time frame. If any local newspaper was named as either the primary or "other" paper used, the local newspaper variable was coded as 1. If no local paper was named or if the respondent did not use a newspaper in the previous week, the local newspaper variable was coded 0. We assessed the four national newspapers individually using the same coding scheme.

Respondents who used the Web at least once for campaign information in the previous week were asked to name their most-used online site, as well as other sites used. Any reported use of a site was coded as 1 and non-use as 0. Because use of the individual partisan Web sites was very low, we identified the partisan leanings of several sites and combined them to create a single variable for both conservative and liberal Web sites.

Respondents who heard information about the campaign on political talk radio shows in the previous week were asked to name the program they listened to most, as well as other political talk radio programs listed to during that time frame.[4] Conservative and liberal radio were coded separately, and reported use of these radio programs were coded as 1 and non-use as 0.

Political Party. Political party affiliation was assessed by asking, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?" Of those polled, 2,494 respondents did not answer this question and were excluded from our partisan analyses. The final sample (N = 55,473) included 16,526 Republicans (29.8%), 20,258 Democrats (36.5%), and 18,689 Independents (or other) (33.7%).

Analysis

This study takes a networked, audience-centric approach to citizens' media diets and provides a macro-level view of political media use that highlights the position of each media outlet relative to all other outlets (Hindman, 2009). This holistic view of the political media environment is beneficial in that it integrates multiple levels of analysis by demonstrating both the audience for each political media outlet as well as the news repertoires for different audiences (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). This approach takes individual-level exposure patterns, scales them to the aggregate, and analyzes them in the context of the entire political information diet of a particular audience. This analytical technique departs from the dominant empirical approach to fragmentation that often treats each outlet in isolation—and thus in

competition with one another for a user's attention. Network analysis allows for interpretations relying on the interconnections among outlets, offering a more comprehensive and broader picture of citizens' political news environments.

The political media network here is defined as a set of media outlets (the nodes), with the shared users between each pair of outlets constituting a link. Any two nodes were connected if a respondent reported using both outlets. The measure of link strength was the number of times two outlets were connected across all respondents. Two complementary network analyses in UCINET were used (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2009). First, the network was depicted visually through iterative metric multi-dimensional scaling, where outlets are located spatially based on the strength of their connections to other outlets. Outlets are positioned so those with the strongest ties are closest together. This puts the most connected outlets in the center of the network, with those less connected in the periphery. Second, a continuous core-periphery analysis was conducted to provide empirical validation of the visual network (Borgatti & Everett, 1999). This procedure estimates a "coreness" score for each outlet and suggests a core-periphery solution that confirms whether each outlet is located in the core or periphery. The core-periphery assignments are based on the computation of concentration scores (which are calculated using formulas comparing differences between outlets with high and low coreness scores) for networks of size 1 to $n–1$, and the highest concentration score signals the recommended core size. Then, the media outlets with the highest coreness scores are selected for placement in the core until the recommended core size is met. For example, if the recommended core size is 3 because that solution had the highest concentration score, the outlets with the three highest coreness scores for that network are in the core. The procedure computes a model fit statistic to indicate how well the data fit a core-periphery structure.[5]

While the outlets are categorized as core and periphery, a coreness score is also reported to offer more detailed information about the relative location of outlets. A coreness score is a descriptive indicator of spatial location that accounts for the entire pattern of network connections. It ranges from 0 to 1 with higher coreness scores suggesting an outlet is closer to the network's core, and lower scores suggesting an outlet belongs in the periphery (Borgatti & Everett, 1999). Although coreness is not measured with error and a traditional significance test is not available, coreness scores do allow for interpretations that go beyond a simple core-periphery dichotomy by providing a more granular measure of where a node is positioned with respect to the core and periphery of a given network. They also provide descriptive information to aid in the interpretation of the visualizations.

We also conducted post-hoc assessments of whether outlets reside in the semi-periphery, which is the space midway between the core and the periphery (Moore, Teixeira, & Shiell, 2006). Drawing on the network visualizations and coreness scores, this analysis identified outlets clearly located between the core and periphery. Identifying semi-peripheral outlets provides additional theoretical insights by highlighting the outlets that remain well connected in the network and bridge the gap between core and peripheral sources.

Results

The first two hypotheses (H_{1a} and H_{1b}) predicted general interest outlets exist at the core of the general public's political media environment and specialized partisan outlets exist at the periphery. Figure 1 shows two general interest outlets in the core (local newspapers and CNN). However, FOX News also appears in the core and several other general interest (e.g., network television news) and partisan outlets (e.g. MSNBC, conservative talk radio) are in the semi-periphery. The core-periphery analysis supports these observations and the data are a good fit for the model (Table 1). These results indicate that local newspaper use, CNN, and FOX News share the most connections and overlap with other outlets, meaning that users of all other outlets also turn to these three outlets with greater frequency. The close proximity these core outlets have to one another indicates that people who use local newspapers are also likely to use CNN and FOX News and are more likely to also use the various outlets that lie in the semi-periphery.

The other hypotheses introduce party identification as a moderator. The analyses were replicated for the Republican and Democratic networks by restricting the data only to individuals who identify as a member of each party. The results support the prediction that general interest outlets remain central to partisans' media environments (H_{2a}). There is also partial support for the hypothesis that attitude-consistent outlets are more central in partisans' media diets (H_{2b}).

Both predictions find support in the Republican network, which consists of a core of general interest outlets (local newspapers and CNN) and partisan outlets (FOX News, conservative talk radio) (Figure 2). The semi-periphery includes several general interest outlets and the liberal partisan outlet, MSNBC (Table 1). Although FOX News is more centrally located for Republicans than it is the general population, use of this partisan source does not result in abandonment of general interest outlets. Like the general population, the close ties between FOX News, CNN, and local newspapers indicate Republicans use a mix of general interest and conservative partisan outlets as their primary sources of political information. It is important to note the liberal-leaning cable network, MSNBC, lies in the semi-periphery rather than the periphery, which indicates Republicans do not avoid counter-attitudinal programming altogether and occasionally seek to hear the other side. If selective avoidance were occurring, all liberal-leaning partisan outlets would be in the periphery. That is not the case here.

Contrary to expectations, liberal-leaning partisan outlets do not exist in the core for Democrats (Figure 3), as only two general interest outlets (local newspaper, CNN) constitute their core. The coreness scores highlight a semi-periphery consisting of general interest and partisan outlets, including both liberal (MSNBC, *NY Times*, NPR) and conservative (FOX News) partisan outlets. In fact, the coreness scores for Democrats show that FOX News shares nearly as many users with other media outlets as does MSNBC. Although Democrats appear less likely than Republicans to engage in selective approach, they display no signs of partisan enclaves or selective avoidance.[6]

Figure 1

Visualization of the General Public's Political Media Network (n = 55,473)
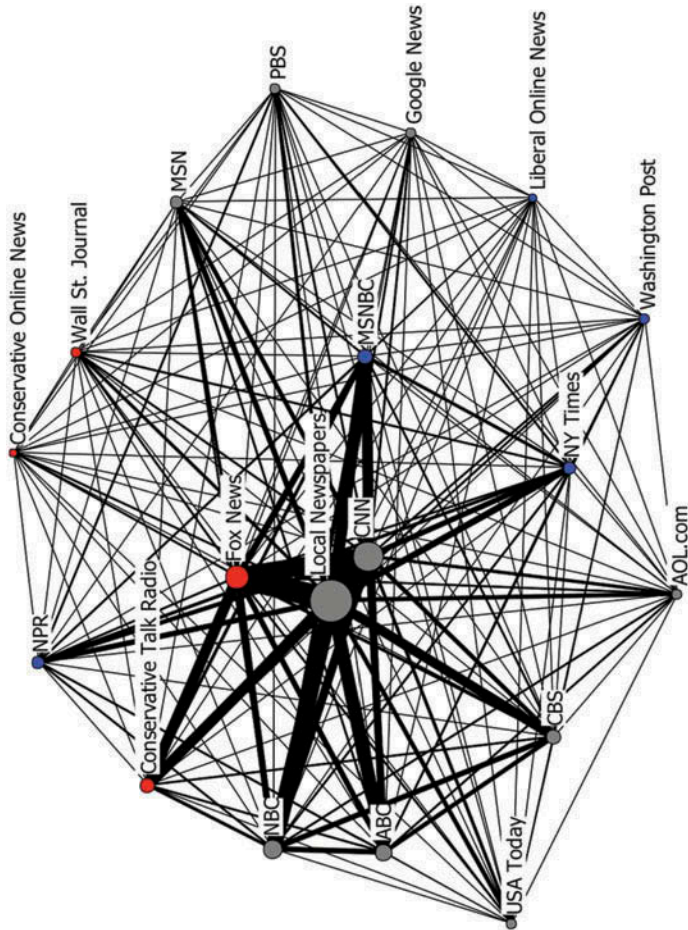
Note. Node size is an indicator of the raw number of users of a given outlet, where larger nodes have larger audiences. The thickness of the link between two outlets represents the number of shared users, where thicker lines indicate more shared audience members.

Table 1
Core, Semi-Periphery, and Periphery Assignments

General Public (N = 55,473) Model Fit = .98			Republican (N = 16,526) Model Fit = .99			Democrat (N = 20,258) Model Fit = .99		
Core	Semi-Periphery	Periphery	Core	Semi-Periphery	Periphery	Core	Semi-Periphery	Periphery
Local Newspaper (0.69)	NBC (0.22)	NPR (0.08)	Local Newspaper (0.62)	NBC (0.18)	MSN (0.07)	Local Newspaper (0.71)	NBC (0.22)	MSN (0.07)
CNN (0.47)	MSNBC (0.19)	MSN (0.08)	FOX News (0.54)	ABC News (0.16)	Wall St. Journal (0.06)	CNN (0.52)	MSNBC (0.22)	AOL.com (0.06)
FOX News (0.35)	ABC (0.17)	AOL.com (0.06)	CNN (0.37)	MSNBC (0.13)	USA Today (0.06)		FOX News (0.19)	PBS (0.06)
	Conservative Talk Radio (0.16)	USA Today (0.05)	Conservative Talk Radio (0.30)	CBS (0.10)	AOL.com (0.06)		ABC (0.18)	USA Today (0.05)
	CBS (0.12)	Wall St. Journal (0.05)					NY Times (0.14)	Conservative Talk Radio (0.05)
	NY Times (0.10)						CBS (0.13)	
							NPR (0.11)	

Note. Coreness score in parentheses. Any outlet that was not assigned to the core but had a coreness score greater than or equal to .10 was categorized as semi-peripheral. Outlets in the periphery with a coreness score less than 0.05 are not shown.

Figure 2
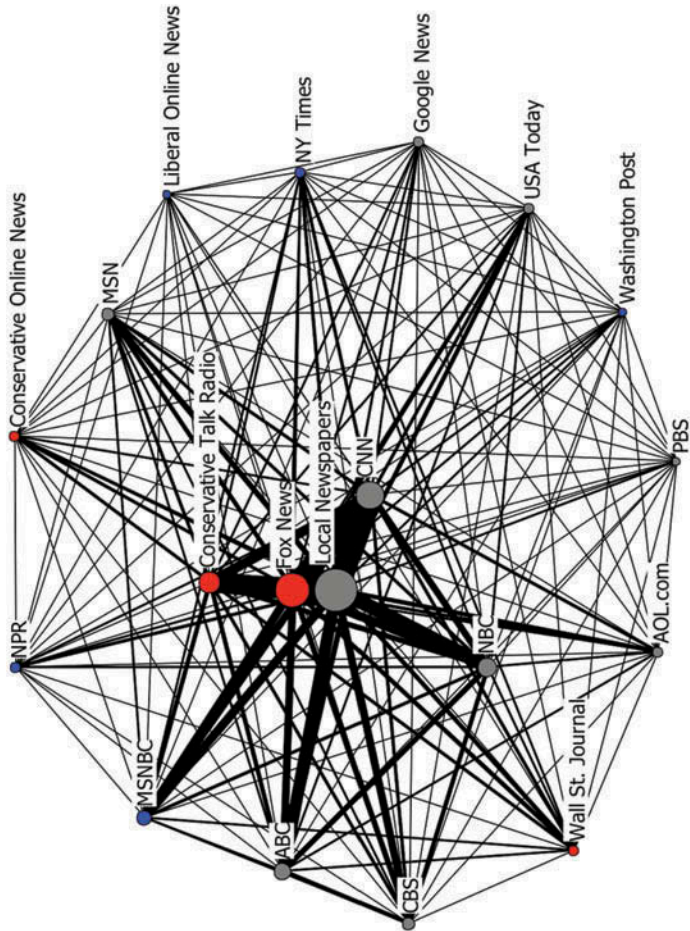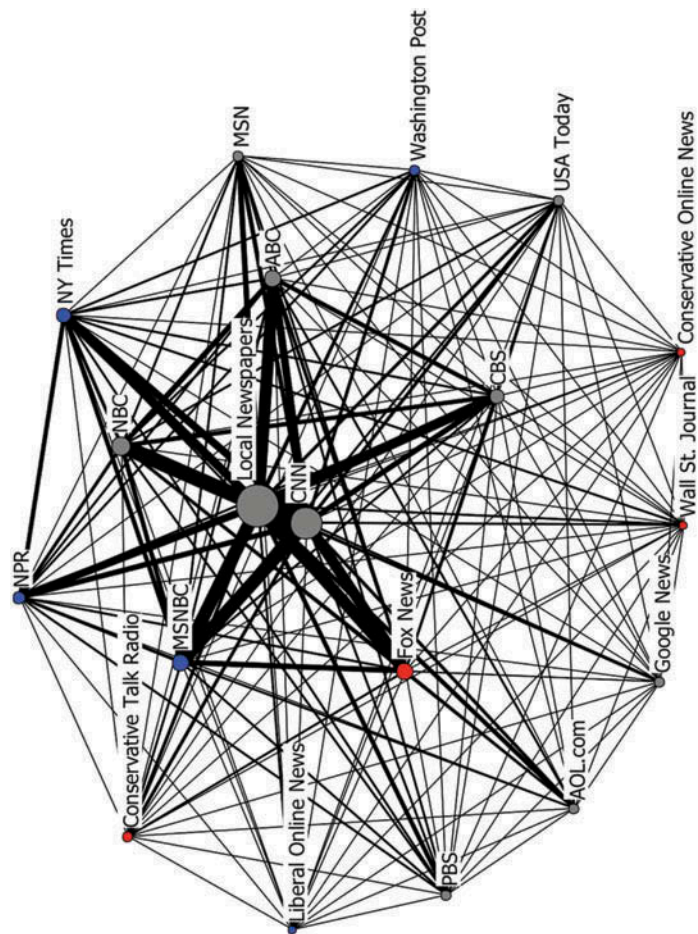Visualization of Republicans' Political Media Network (n = 16,526)

Figure 3
Visualization of Democrats' Political Media Network (n = 20,258)

Robustness Tests of Results

One potential limitation of our analyses is that they do not account for frequency of use. It is possible that citizens rely primarily on a set of attitude-consistent partisan outlets and use mainstream or counter-attitudinal outlets more sparingly. Although the NAES survey did not assess frequency of use in terms of days per week or hours per day, respondents were asked to indicate which television program, newspaper, and Web site they used *most* frequently for campaign information. To provide a check on our findings and incorporate a measure of frequency into our analyses, we retested our hypotheses using this more conservative measure of media use. When restricting our measure of media use only to those outlets respondents reported using most frequently we continue to find little evidence of selective avoidance and still see some reliance on similar sources of news for partisans. Consistent with H_{1a} and H_{1b}, local newspapers are the only outlet in the core for the general public. For Republicans, we see some minor differences: CNN moves from the core to the semi-periphery, and the semi-peripheral outlets from the original analysis move to the periphery. While newspapers are still central, and CNN is in the semi-periphery, we see FOX News and conservative talk radio playing a more important role for Republicans when restricting our analysis to only the most-used outlets. For Democrats, we see newspapers in the core, CNN in the semi-periphery, and everything else in the periphery. While the Republican network does suggest some degree of both selective approach *and* selective avoidance in this alternative analysis, we fail to see patterns of avoidance for Democrats or the general public. Moreover, across the board, general-interest outlets continue to be central to citizens' media diets, including Republicans.

We also examined the possibility that the most partisan individuals self-segregate by replicating our analysis on Republicans (N = 9,651) and Democrats (N = 13,222) who considered themselves to have a "strong" affiliation with their party. Once again, our hypotheses continue to be supported under these more rigorous analyses. We find no meaningful differences in our results from the original analyses when examining only strong partisans, as both general interest (local newspapers, CNN) and conservative partisan news outlets (FOX News, conservative talk radio) exist in the core for strong Republicans and only general interest outlets (local newspapers, CNN) are core for strong Democrats. These additional analyses suggest that even strong partisans do not create echo chambers but instead incorporate a variety of outlets into their media diets.

Our decision to include individual opinionated talk programs in the partisan cable channel variables raises the possibility that combining television programs under a parent brand restricts the opportunity for partisan preferences to emerge. These opinionated programs differ in format from traditional news broadcasts in that the latter present news in a more neutral, objective manner while the former are more opinionated and partisan and may be considered biased by the audience (Feldman, 2011). To address this possibility we examined the networks with the individual programs separated out from the "brand" variables. For example, an opinionated talk program like *The O'Reilly Factor* was treated as a distinct outlet and not combined with the FOX brand variable. The replicated analysis shows no meaningful

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Ratios

Variable	General Public (N = 57,967)	Republicans (N = 16,526)	Democrats (N = 20,258)	Independents (N = 18,689)
All outlets (M, SD)	1.96 (1.45)	2.01 (1.41)	2.01 (1.44)	1.98 (1.48)
General Interest (M, SD)	1.44 (1.12)	1.38 (1.09)	1.56 (1.12)	1.47 (1.13)
General Interest/All Outlets	.77 (.30)	.70 (.32)	.81 (.27)	.78 (.30)
Partisan (M, SD)	.52 (.77)	.63 (.78)	.45 (.75)	.52 (.79)
Partisan/All Outlets	.23 (.30)	.30 (.32)	.19 (.27)	.22 (.30)
Partisan/general interest	.37 (.58)	.46 (.61)	.31 (.54)	.36 (.59)
Conservative (M, SD)	.30 (.53)	.49 (.63)	.16 (.39)	.29 (.52)
Conservative/ All Outlets	.14 (.25)	.24 (.30)	.07 (.18)	.13 (.24)
Liberal (M, SD)	.22 (.52)	.14 (.39)	.29 (.60)	.23 (.52)
Liberal/All Outlets	.09 (.20)	.06 (.15)	.12 (.22)	.09 (.20)

Note. After combining the individual news sources into outlet variables, the dataset included a total of 19 outlets, with 10 general interest outlets and 9 partisan outlets (4 conservative and 5 liberal). Ratios are only for those with a positive number in the denominator. If denominator is 0, the ratio was not calculated. This means, for example, that the .46 ratio of partisan to general interest for Republicans is only for those who used a general interest site.

differences from our original approach. The core/periphery assignments and the network visualizations were nearly identical, with the newly added individual cable news programs primarily appearing in the periphery.

Finally, to validate the network analysis interpretations, Table 2 offers more traditional descriptive statistics to highlight the usage patterns that underpin the visualizations and coreness scores. Looking at means for exposure to general interest and partisan outlets, we see general interest sources outweigh partisan outlets for all groups. The ratios of general interest/all outlets and partisan/all outlets tell a similar story: general-interest outlets constitute a larger share of citizens' media diets than partisan outlets, across all groups. This is consistent with the network analysis results presented above and supports the location of general-interest outlets in the core, with partisan outlets in the semi-periphery and periphery.

Discussion

The expanse of media outlets has led to predictions of citizens separating into partisan enclaves that are walled off from any disagreeable information and the shared political media experiences that are essential to a healthy democracy will cease to exist. However, the results of this study strongly contest these predictions. Our network analysis of the public's broader media repertoires show citizens' media environments—even partisans'—are strikingly more similar than different. Although partisans exhibit some preference for likeminded sources, we find no evidence that they avoid disagreeable information but rather continue to rely mostly on a common set of mainstream, general interest news outlets. These more mainstream sources provide information that at times challenges both Republicans' and Democrats' positions, yet neither make an attempt to avoid them. Partisans may occasionally use niche sources that appeal to their ideology, but more often than not, people across the political spectrum still turn to major outlets for political information, suggesting they remain interested in getting a general, non-partisan take on the news.

Our assessment also shows people are at times interested in hearing a range of political opinions, including information from the other side of the spectrum, as counter-attitudinal sources were semi-peripheral for partisans (e.g., Republicans and MSNBC). This suggests there is a "middle ground" of political media outlets—those that are not quite central to people's diets yet are by no means avoided. Were partisan enclaves to exist, all counter-attitudinal sources would be isolated on the periphery for partisans. Instead, we see people at times seek non-likeminded information, which is far from selective avoidance. This does not mean partisans do not prefer political media outlets that reinforce their beliefs. They do. But there is simply no evidence for selective avoidance or partisan "echo chambers." Although there is a shift between Democrats and Republicans in the general centrality of outlets with a partisan bias, these movements are minor when compared to the greater consistency in the networks across the sub-populations.

The network approach used here advances our theoretical understanding of citizens' political media environments in several important ways. First, prior research has provided key insights into citizens' media habits at a more micro level (Garrett et al., 2013; Prior 2013a; Stroud, 2011), but these studies are only a narrow piece of the puzzle. Citizens' use of a particular political media outlet does not exist in a vacuum and is instead influenced by the other news they use (Holbert & Benoit, 2009). In order to fully understand media selectivity it is necessary to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. By examining how a large range of media outlets from different channels are used in conjunction with each other, this study highlights that partisan selectivity is minimal even on a macro level.

This study also demonstrates that partisans continue to share common media experiences, as political affiliation has little effect on the public's overall media diet. Republicans' and Democrats' media environments are similar, suggesting that individuals from both parties are often exposed to the same news and political information. Although some experimental work hints that partisans—in particular

Republicans—avoid information that disproportionately challenges their beliefs (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), we find little evidence that one party avoids disagreeable information more than the other. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that experimental designs tend to look at news selectivity using only a single issue or a limited set of choices, while our work examines the larger media diet. That is, at a micro level some differences in avoidance between Republicans and Democrats might be evident but looking at a broader political media repertoire reveals that partisans still rely on similar news sources.

   Finally, our network analyses of citizens' broad media repertoires confirms prior work suggesting citizens' preference for attitude-consistent sources does not come at the expense of disagreeable information (Garrett, 2009; Garrett & Stoud, 2014). Although citizens' media repertoires do not include explicitly cross-cutting outlets in their core, they do include general interest outlets that provide information *both* Republicans and Democrats at times find disagreeable. If we consider that these mainstream outlets sometimes offer attitude-challenging news, conclusions regarding selective avoidance become more optimistic. If disagreeable sources are instead limited only to those that provide information from one end of the political spectrum (e.g., FOX News), it is unsurprising that evidence of selective avoidance is sometimes found. However, this latter approach offers a narrow view of exposure to counter-attitudinal information. Local newspapers and broadcast television continue to be important sources of news for many citizens and these outlets offer information that challenges members of both parties. When people use these mainstream sources it becomes difficult for them to avoid dissimilar political information (Mutz & Martin, 2001; Sunstein, 2007). By incorporating these sources and treating them as potential outlets for exposure to counter-attitudinal information, we believe our data provide a more realistic view regarding selective avoidance.

   The study is not without limitations. It relies on self-reported media use, which requires respondents to accurately recall which news outlets they used and is prone to biased estimations of exposure (Prior, 2013b). However, bias in self-reported media use only threatens hypothesis testing if it varies among certain demographics of interest, which in the present study is political party affiliation. There is little reason to believe party identification influences self-reports of media use, nor is there any evidence that use of one type of media outlet is over-reported more than others.

   The data also do not fully account for frequency of media use. A possible concern is that limited exposure to disagreeable information is not equivalent to a steady stream of news from ideologically-consistent sources (Prior, 2013b). To account for this, we conducted additional analyses that examined only the tele-vision program, newspaper, radio program, and Web site used most frequently for political information. Admittedly, this measure is not a perfect proxy for frequency of use but we find that more often than not people turn to mainstream sources such as their local newspaper and non-partisan television programing as their primary source of news. It does not appear partisans turn en masse to like-minded outlets as their most frequent sources of news. This is encouraging, as any exposure to either mainstream or disagreeable information, however brief, may

be beneficial. Even limited amounts of cross-cutting information can impact public opinion and play a key role in the democratic process and most individuals who choose to use cross-cutting outlets see their attitudes become more moderate as a result (Mutz & Martin, 2001).

Finally, network analysis offers unique insights into citizens' media use but the approach carries its own limitations. Hypothesis testing in network analysis could be categorized as a mix of science and art, and visualizations of networks play a key role in interpretation (de Nooy, Mrvar, & Batagelj, 2011). Like determining an articulated factor in exploratory factor analysis or respecifying a model in structural equation modeling, the interpretation of network patterns is both objective and subjective. Network models clearly identify media outlets that constitute the network core, but making sense of the connections and location of other outlets requires informed judgments. In this sense network analysis is no different than other more exploratory statistical techniques, although the statistics in Table 2 help validate the network analysis interpretations. The benefits of a network approach—particularly the ability to see connections and patterns that other analytical techniques miss—outweigh its potential limitations.

Conclusion

Technological changes afford citizens the opportunity to craft political information environments to fit their specific needs, creating the possibility of partisan enclaves and infrequent shared news experiences. The evidence provided here indicates these threats may be exaggerated. Citizens hold some preference for likeminded content but do not actively avoid disagreeable information. More often than not, partisans and non-partisans alike use many of the same, general interest news sources. Across the political spectrum, citizens are not isolating themselves to likeminded partisan content but instead have media environments that are exceedingly more similar than different.

Notes

1. Althaus (2012) argues for the need to explicitly state the democratic theory from which any normative claims are offered (i.e., fourth-level normative assessment) in empirical political communication research. Heeding this call, our argument for the importance of shared understanding, compromise, and consensus building is in accordance with a republicanist approach to democratic theory. Pluralistic and elitist democratic theories would express different preferences (Baker, 2002; Teorell, 2006).
2. Some television outlets were used by as few as 10 people. With a large sample size, and users aggregated to the outlet level, inferences made about outlets with very few users would be questionable (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). To limit this possibility and for the sake of parsimony, we only included outlets that reached a 200-person threshold. This cut point was selected because there was a clear division in the data; several outlets had audiences between 200–250, while the next largest block of outlets had audiences well under 100 users.

3. Web sites of the television networks were coded as part of the network brand variable because these sites offer much of the same content and videos seen on television.
4. As prior research suggests conservatives at times avoid news from NPR while liberals prefer it, NPR was treated as a liberal-oriented outlet (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).
5. The model fit score is a correlation indicating whether the data are a good fit for a core-periphery model. The procedure computes 10,000 random iterations of a network of the specified size to find an ideal core-periphery structure. It then compares the ideal structure to the observed data. A high correlation suggests the observed data are a good fit for the core-periphery network structure. Borgatti & Everett (1999) note, "maximizing the correlation is equivalent to running a t-test for the difference in means between the core-to-core ties and the periphery-to-periphery ties. A valued network has a core-periphery structure to the extent that the difference in means across blocks is large relative to the variation within blocks" (p. 384). A good fit means the core would have strong ties, the periphery would have weak ties, and the variation within either block is much less than the variation between the core and periphery.
6. We also examined Independents' media environment, which looks very similar to Republicans' and the general public's environments. Local newspapers and *CNN* are in the core, along with FOX News. Independents' network also displayed a possible semi-periphery with a mix of general and partisan outlets (including MSNBC and conservative talk radio).

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Appendix: Individual News Sources Used to Create General Interest and Partisan Outlet Variables

General Interest Outlets
- Local Newspapers: Paper or Online Copy (*Arizona Republic, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Baltimore Sun, Boston Globe, Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago Tribune, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Concord Monitor, Dallas Morning News, Denver Post, Des Moines Register, Detroit Free Press, Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, Miami Herald, New Hampshire Union Leader, New York Daily News, New York Post, Newsday, Orange County Register, Oregonian, Philadelphia Inquirer, Rocky Mountain News, San Diego Union-Tribune, San Francisco Chronicle, San Jose Mercury News, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, St. Petersburg Times, Star Tribune, Star-Ledger, Other Local Paper-Verbatim Answer*)
- CNN: (*CNN-unspecified, Headline News, Anderson Cooper 360, Lou Dobbs Tonight, Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer, cnn.com*)
- ABC: (*ABC news-unspecified, ABC World News with Charles Gibson, Nightline, abcnews.com*)
- CBS: (*CBS news-unspecified, CBS Evening News with Katie Couric, cbsnews.com*)
- NBC: (*NBC news-unspecified, NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams, Meet the Press, Today Show, nbcnews.com*)
- PBS: (*PBS news-unspecified, News Hour with Jim Lehrer*)
- USA Today: Paper or online copy
- MSN: Online news portal
- Google News: Online news portal
- AOL.com: Online news portal

Partisan Outlets: Conservative
- FOX News: (*FOX News Channel-unspecified, Fox Report with Shepard Smith, Glenn Beck, Hannity and Colmes, O'Reilly Factor, foxnews.com*)
- Wall St. Journal: (Paper or *wsj.com*)
- Conservative Online News: (*Drudge Report, Instapundit, Michelle Malkin.com, Townhall*)
- Conservative Talk Radio: (*Glenn Beck, Bill Bennett, Jim Bohannon, Neal Boortz, Jerry Doyle, Focus on the Family, Mike Gallagher, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Mark Levin, Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, Michael Savage, Laura Schlessinger*)

Partisan Outlets: Liberal
- MSNBC: (*MSNBC-unspecified, Countdown with Keith Olberman, Hardball with Chris Matthews, msnbc.com*)
- New York Times: (Paper or *nytimes.com*)
- Washington Post: (Paper or *washingtonpost.com*)
- Liberal Online News: (*Daily Kos, Huffington Post, NewRepublic.com, Talking Points Memo, Think Progress*)
- NPR: (*NPR-unspecified, All Things Considered, Morning Edition*)