The Not So Exciting Relationship Between Extremeness of Political Beliefs and News Media Sources

Alex Schackmuth

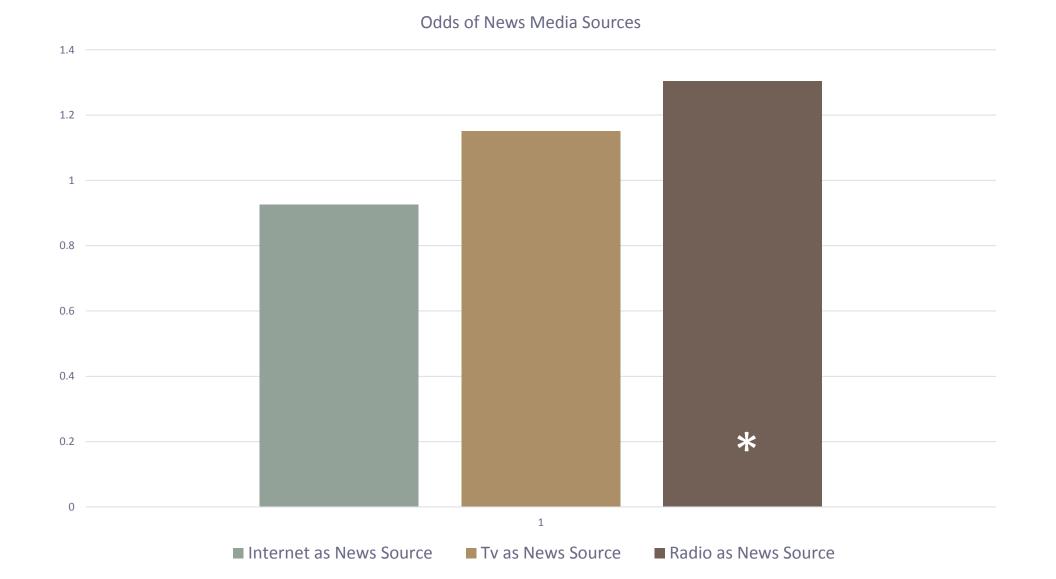
ABSTRACT

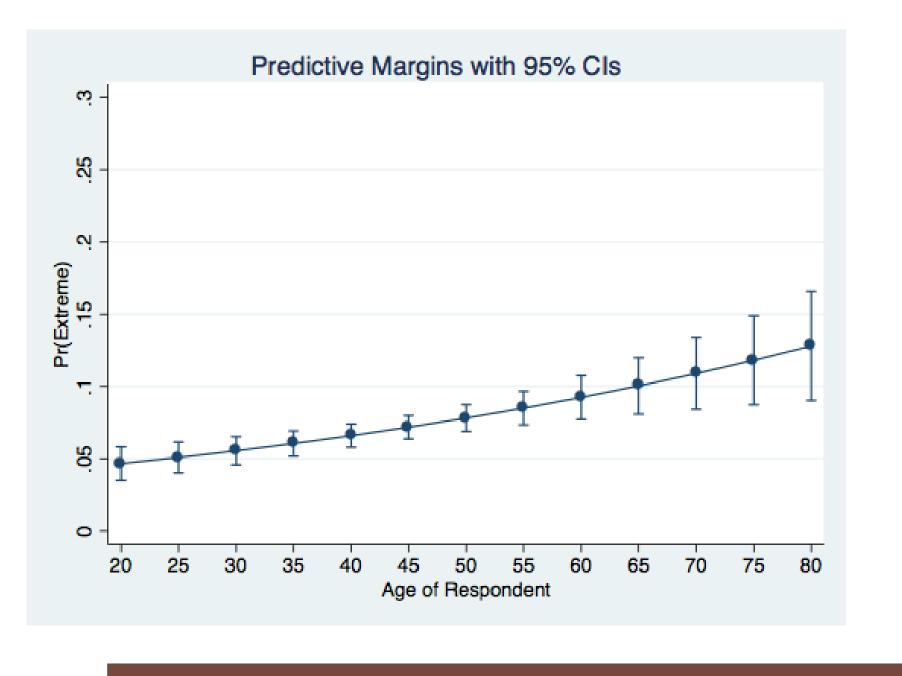
Previous research by Cass Sunstein and others has pointed to the "self-serve" nature of Internet as a possible source for extreme political beliefs. The "ideological echo chambers" that form online polarize and intensify political beliefs as users are cut off from information that contradicts their political beliefs. This project attempted to examine the correlation between news media formats, political extremeness, and political orientation. Ultimately while extremeness may be linked to online news for some, the correlation fails to appear significant due to the unexpected collinear relationship between age and political extremeness.

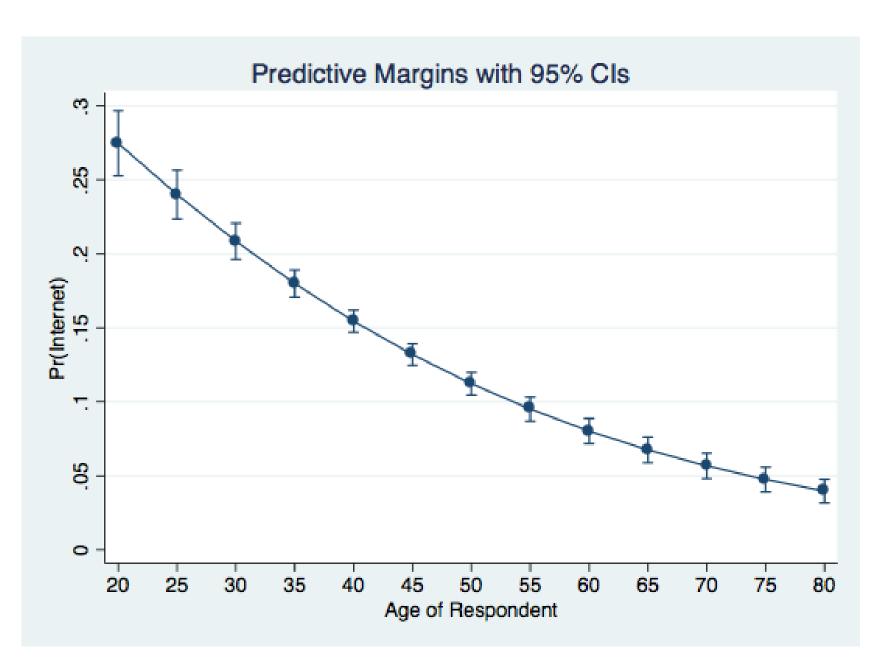
LITERATURE

- "Ideological echo chambers" on the Internet occur when users surround themselves with likeminded people and information. This gives way to extremism (Sunstein 2017, 2011, 2001)
- While Internet news is ideologically diverse compared to other formats, extreme beliefs emerge in people getting news form other people. (Gentzkow Shapiro 2011)
- "Ideological echo chambers" exist in social media due to algorithms and user choice. However user choice is the primary mechanism for information avoidance. (Bakshy et al 2015)

Relative Risk Ratios of News Media Types 25 26 27 28 29 Extremely Liberal Liberal Liberal Slightly Liberal (Base Outcome) Internet as News Source (Base Outcome) Radio as News Source







RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is there a significant relationship between political extremeness and news media types?
- Is there a significant relationship between political orientation and news media types?

FINDINGS

- Ordered model shows people with extreme beliefs are more likely to get news from radio
- Multinomial model shows a negative relationship towards TV for extreme liberals
- Multinomial model also shows a relationship between conservatives and news radio
- Age plays a significant role in extreme beliefs and using the Internet for news
 - These relationships are opposites as shown in the probability graphs above
- Race, education, and income showed significance, however they are present in these models as controls.

METHODS

- Appended 6 GSS Cross Sections (2006-2016)
- Ordered Generalized Linear Model
 - Political extremeness variable created by folding the political views variable onto itself
 - Maintain ordinal relationship without violating parallel odds assumption of ordered logistic regression (Williams 2010)
- Multinomial Logistic Regression
 - Used to test the extremeness relationship while accounting for political orientation

DISCUSSION

- While the Internet has been shown in the literature to give users the ability to avoid information they disagree with, political extremism has no significant relationship to the Internet unless a specific age group is selected. There were not enough samples for this age group to create any significant regression model.
- Ultimately the findings seem to agree with the Gentzkow Shapiro article stating that Internet news is not significantly related to political extremism.
- This may also confirm that political extremeness could be caused by a factor that develops over the life course rather than a particular media format.

CONCLUSION

Extreme political beliefs are more commonly held by older respondents than those who use the Internet for news. While there is a relationship between Internet news and extremeness in younger people, there are not enough in the sample to perform any accurate test for significance. Future research could oversample younger people with extreme beliefs and pursue this relationship. However when examining the whole sample, extremeness appears to most likely be caused by some event in the life-course. Future research could be performed to explore this hypothesis further as well.