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U.S. Extremism and Media: How the New Age of Politics Speaks to Media Usage

An Honors College Capstone Project Presented to

The Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Arts and Letters

James Madison University

by Josie Haneklau

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Political Science, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	3
Acknowledgements	4
Chapter One.....	5
Abstract.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Chapter Two.....	20
Methodology.....	20
Chapter Three.....	26
Hypothesis 1.....	26
Hypothesis 2.....	33
Hypothesis 3.....	39
Hypothesis 4.....	41
Chapter Four.....	44
Conclusion.....	44
Appendices.....	48
Appendix A.....	48
Appendix B.....	49
Appendix C.....	50
Bibliography.....	54

List of Tables

Table 3.0: Dependent Variable (DV) Frequencies.....	23
Table 3.1: Independent Variable (IV) Frequencies.....	25
Table 3.2: Party ID Response Levels.....	27
Table 3.3: Difference of Means Between Party ID.....	27
Table 3.4: Multiple Regression for Compromise.....	29
Table 3.5: Multiple Regression for Strong Leader.....	29
Table 3.6: Magnitude for Compromise.....	31
Table 3.7: Magnitude for Strong Leader.....	31
Table 3.8: Difference of Means Between Radio IVs on DV.....	34
Table 3.9: Multiple Regression for Hannity Radio on Compromise.....	35
Table 3.10: Multiple Regression for Hannity Radio on Strong Leader.....	35
Table 3.11: Multiple Regression for NPR Radio on Compromise.....	36
Table 3.12: Multiple Regression for NPR Radio on Strong Leader.....	36
Table 3.13: Magnitude for Radio on Compromise.....	37
Table 3.14: Magnitude for Radio on Strong Leader.....	37
Table 3.15: Difference of Means Between News and Commentary.....	40
Table 3.16: Traditional vs. Alternative Media Frequencies.....	42
Table 3.17: Multiple Regression for Traditional vs. Alternative Media.....	43
Table A1: Difference of Means Between Newspaper.....	48
Table A2: Difference of Means Between Online.....	48
Table A3: Difference of Means Between Television.....	48
Table A4: Difference of Means Between Radio.....	48
Table B1: Commentary vs. News Frequencies.....	49
Table B2: P-value for Commentary vs. News on Compromise.....	49
Table B3: P-value Commentary vs. News on Strong Leader.....	49
Table C1: Multiple Regression for Wall Street Journal on Compromise.....	50
Table C2: Multiple Regression for Wall Street Journal on Strong Leader.....	50
Table C3: Multiple Regression for Fox Online on Compromise.....	51
Table C4: Multiple Regression for Fox Online on Strong Leader.....	51
Table C5: Multiple Regression for Hannity Radio on Compromise.....	52
Table C6: Multiple Regression for Hannity Radio on Strong Leader.....	52
Table C7: Multiple Regression for Hannity TV on Compromise.....	53
Table C8: Multiple Regression for Hannity TV on Strong Leader.....	53

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CHAPTER I

Abstract

On January 6th, 2021, the nation watched from their television screens as a group of extremists stormed the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. An interesting emotion fell over the U.S. public – it was both shocking and not shocking at all. The attack on the Capitol was a by-product of years of internal division, catapulted by Trump’s presidency. Between racial divisions and the progression of Black Lives Matter, the advancement of COVID and its governmental policies, and Trump’s divisive nature of president at a peak, it seemed almost inevitable that an offense like this would occur.

As political conversations surrounding this event became headline news on every media source imaginable, I began wondering about extremism in general. What drives some people to extremism but not others? Is there a predictable environment that creates extreme ideals? What kinds of demographics are seen engaging in what kinds of extremism? How powerful of a force was media in bringing this group together? These were the initial questions that inspired the themes in this paper.

This paper begins with a literature review examining research on U.S. extremism and media. Next, a methodology further explains the procedural elements of this paper. Then, the four-fold hypothesis analysis begins that seeks to encompass questions about U.S. extremism and its intersection with modern media. The first hypothesis posits a general question about party identification and extremism. The second examines a more direct question about extremism and media usage. The third asks about political news vs. commentary, and the fourth explores differences in extremity between traditional and alternative media. The paper finishes with a conclusion that entails general discussion and considerations for future research.

Literature Review

A Brief Definition, History, and Inspiring Factors of U.S. Extremism

The United States is currently enduring one of the most divided times in history. The last decade, and notably the Trump presidency, has followed with an abundance of political unrest. Through it all, one emerging group that continues to gain traction is the far-right cohort of American political extremists. This “fringe group(s),” while in existence for decades, has become more mainstream in recent years, and is even publicly supported and advanced by various American political leaders (Steck & McDermott, 2020). Conditions for extremism have changed throughout U.S. history, but the modern environment lends a unique culture for it to flourish under “normal” conditions. America has turned a cynical leaf, a development that has come with the rise of such groups through deliberate partisanship, purposeful spreading of misinformation, the redefinition of the American political system, and more. As seen in the wake of Trump’s 2020 bid for a second term and the January 6th insurrection, the far-right is an amassed group, growing more brazen in their actions. Extremism has always been inspired by politics, but it is clear that modern extremism takes on a new kind of meaning with the American public being influenced in new ways, particularly through the consumption and usage of present-day media (Mann & Ornstein, 2012).

Of most importance in understanding this subject lies in defining what extremism actually is. Doing so is a challenge of course, since what makes something “extreme” is largely a subjective concept that is not always transferrable between contexts and cultures. As far as U.S. politics is concerned, some viewpoints purport that strict definitional distinctions should be set, for example making clear the difference between radicalism and extremism, and claim that the former represents more of a political doctrine and less of a violent ideology than the latter

(Botticher, 2017). Mostly though, relevant research on extremism does not necessarily *define* it, but rather, measures response agreeability and disagreeability on some sort of extremism scale (Fernbach et al., 2013) (Prooijen et al., 2015) (Toner et al., 2013). For instance, a study on extremism by Fernbach Et al. asked respondents about their agreeability with hot-button issues like a single-payer health care system. Respondents who answered “strongly” were designated as being politically extreme on this topic (2013). In this way, having an extreme political view on said ideologies is operationalized as a more objective concept within the scope of these studies. For all intents and purposes, it seems that previous literature has largely viewed U.S. extremism as some belief system that is uncompromising or in violation of democratic norms. Possible examples of a citizen following traditional democratic norms in the U.S. would entail concepts like; advocating for equality and rejecting racism, participating in civic duties like voting, engaging in compromise, and so on. In line with this, a commonly held definition of extremism is that it goes against the “status quo” (Atkins, 2011). This may translate to, “going against a democratic norm.” In general, previous research does a fairly comprehensive job of viewing American extremism beyond terms of outward and obvious displays only – like terrorist attacks for example – and is becoming well-versed on frequent and current norm violations, like through the usage of media (Chen et al., 2019). For the purposes of this paper, “political extremism” or “politically extreme ideologies” refers to the violation, or expressed agreement with the suitability of violating, a democratic norm or norms in the United States (Fernbach et al., 2013) (Prooijen et al., 2015) (Toner et al., 2013).

Research has explored countless factors on a macro or group level that may explain how and why someone conforms to extreme ideologies. For one, Americans’ false beliefs in conspiracy theories or convinced beliefs about something wholly unfounded often predict levels

of extremism, and are linked to lack of interpersonal trust and other insecurities (Ferbach et al., 2013) (Goertzel, 1994). More broadly, extremists may feel supported in their beliefs by an “illusion of understanding,” referring to their inadequate or incorrect knowledge of issues entirely (Ferbach et al., 2013). As one study showed, once participants realized they did not understand policies as well as they had thought, they tended to express more moderate views. The researchers blame this paradox of knowledge on an “unjustified confidence” held by American voters, and suggest that those who were blindly confident in their extreme beliefs exhibited a kind of close-mindedness that previous research suggests is related to extremism (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003). Further, not only are these unfounded beliefs often held, but political extremists tend to ignore other sources of information, leaning heavily on the information being sourced among their likeminded peers, what research refers to as a “crippled epistemology” (Hardin, 2002). Therefore, extremists seeking to understand social events may be likely to cherry pick information from within their streamlined pool of information, continuing on the seemingly endless cycle of extreme beliefs through the passage of false information. (Prooijen et al., 2015). This will later be discussed later in terms of an “echo chamber.”

A second broad area of research on this topic concerns understanding extremism through the micro level – through individual factors like personality. For example, one study examined individuals who were exposed to terrorism and found that they were more likely to support extreme political decision making (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009). Although this study did not involve the United States, it might lend an interesting suggestion for U.S. citizens, especially in light of recent events concerning the January insurrection. Also, those with a “dark triad personality,” that is, those who exhibit interpersonal callousness, antagonism and malevolence are more likely to hold extreme views (Gotzsche-Astrup, 2020). It is curious to think if these

kinds of personality types may be on the rise with trends of growing political cynicism, or if they are inspired from some sort of political significance in general. Finally, a “quest for personal significance” is something that has been linked to political extremist ideologies along with a correlation between higher extremity and higher belief of self-superiority (Kruglanski et al., 2014) (Toner et al., 2013). Perhaps this quest to find significance can be found individually among group members, or encourages people in general to join larger organizations.

With these factors considered, political extremism in the U.S. often outwardly ignites during times of crisis when citizens are distressed and lash out in attempts to cope with or change the political climate (Atkins, 2011). Interestingly, psychological research suggests that both right and left extremists may be inspired by extremism from similar psychological lines of reasoning, but the U.S. is more likely to home right-wing extremists because they have a much more prominent footing than left-wing extremists in the country, helping to explain why this group is heavily focused on in the literature and will continue to be in this paper (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003). The reason for this strong footing will be examined later in this chapter, but relates to the acceptance of in-group extremism in the GOP. One of the earliest well-known right-wing extremist groups is the Ku Klux Klan, whose roots go much deeper than the Civil Rights Movement alone, and are a prime example of all of the ways politics is intertwined with extremism. Tactics like perpetrating deliberate misinformation and partisanship that give rise to a general public distrust that formulates into a slew of conspiracy theories and extremist thinking are central to this group and many others. Not unlike other extremist groups, the KKK was founded by confederate generals with an influence in politics as a “social group” (Atkins, 2011). This title attracted many fans of the American public, who may have seen their involvement in a “harmless” association, as neither extreme nor political at all. Immediately, the Klan, upheld by

American political ideals, began perpetrating falsehoods about African Americans – that their ability to socially integrate would put at risk the lives of white women – as one small example (Atkins, 2011). Through a political smear campaign that still lives on today, the Klan has been able to convince a cohort of Americans that non-white, specifically Black Americans, are dangerous. Later, the Klan would be re-invigorated when Americans – including former president Wilson – would glorify films like “Birth of a Nation” depicting non-whites in aggressive lights (Atkins, 2011). Institutionalized racism continues to be blatantly present in the U.S. (and beyond) due to such extreme and false characterizations.

One general goal of political extremism as the U.S. knows it, is to violate the status quo, often by rallying around and perpetrating dangerous falsities (that followers may believe are truths) in an attempt to intellectually sway the masses to join in understanding a specific doctrine or doctrines. As previous psychological research further suggests, adhering to such intense ideology stems from multiple facets – personal feelings of closed-mindedness – and external motives like fear and group dominance, regardless of right or left affiliation (Glaser et al., 2003) (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003). Such beliefs can be so dangerous because it’s supporters are often unwavering and therefore will stop at little or nothing to advance them. If a goal of extremism is to at least some extent compel the masses to hear doctrine, then it may be more successful if backed and furthered by powerful influential political institutions – which as mentioned, is a common theme in the United States (Mann & Ornstein, 2012).

How the Modern U.S. Political Sphere Contributes to Extremism in a New Way

When one thinks of a political extremist, the first kind of image that may come to mind may be that of an unhinged individual charging political buildings while screaming profanities. While such kinds of action are still very real, as seen with the January insurrection for example, this is no longer the commonplace scene of U. S. politically extreme ideologies in action. In a compelling book entitled “It’s Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism” written by Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, a comprehensive report is given of all of the ways U.S. politics, specifically the GOP, has set itself up for failure in the last few decades. The authors define something they call a “new politics” that began emerging in the late 70s, and seems to be in full force today. In this kind of politics, party affiliation is prioritized as more crucial than national interest (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). For an example, at the end of the 70s, the National Conservative Political Action Committee began handing out defaming and derogatory fliers of its political opponents, some of the first of their kind (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). Then, leaders like Newt Gingrich assumed office, with a primary goal of reshaping the public’s attitude toward congress and destroying systems of comradery for partisan gain. Political “tools” like derogatory fliers became perfect ammunition. Gingrich engaged in activities like instructing candidates to use specific language in speeches to the public such as “pathetic, traitors, radical and sick” to describe the Democratic party – language never before acceptably used on a regular basis in public discourse (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). More recently, figures like Mitch McConnell are quoted on record saying things such as the “Republican brand” being more important than the national interest – words that would have never left the lips of previous political figureheads (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). The authors talk about the current day normalcy for politicians to use Fox News as a platform – with

full disclosure to relay provably false information to their viewers and lead smear campaigns against the Democratic party. The authors cite that viewers who watch Fox News are significantly more likely to believe the conspiracy theory that Obama was not born in the United States, for example (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). Two quotes stand out from the authors in this section – one being “No lie is too extreme to be published, aired, and repeated, with little or no repercussion for its perpetrator” and “The impact of all this is to reinforce tribal divisions, while enhancing a climate where facts are no longer driving debate and deliberation, nor are they shared by the larger public” (Mann & Ornstein, 2012, 62 67). Finally, the authors cite the growing shift to the right that the GOP continues to engineer in Congress, contrasted with the increasing levels of distrust Americans have towards government (Mann & Ornstein, 2012).

Mann and Ornstein’s “new politics” is changing the way political information originates, and perhaps equally as scary, how it is reaching the public sphere. As they discuss, the current political climate is being poisoned by elites, soaked up by Americans and then regurgitated to the nation, and is challenging historical democratic norms as the nation has known them. It is not shocking to find that other current political research is finding similarly concerning trends in U.S. politics. One convincing study talks about “leapfrog representation.” The preferences of American voters, most of the time not being extreme, are being ignored in favor of the more extreme ideologies of their representatives in Congress (Bafumi & Herron, 2010). The study finds that when one extremist member of congress is replaced, their successor is usually extreme as well, despite the actual American voters not representing such viewpoints, hence the term “leapfrog.” This is interesting because it shows a clear link between extremism and actual political structure, and may help account for the inspiration behind growing levels of extremism among the masses.

Finally, the correlation between electoral competition and policy extremism levels lends another insight into U.S. politics. One study finds that legislators from swing seats are less likely to respond to the ideological center than seats in safe states. Essentially, the findings imply that when a legislator is perhaps concerned about holding their seat, they are more worried about their own partisans – not necessarily what the public is calling for (Gulati, 2004). This further supports ideas of “leapfrog representation” that suggests American politics do not always reflect what actual public opinion calls for, and may be therefore fueling, at least in part, a more extreme America. This concept is in direct support of the work of Mann and Ornstein, and aligns perfectly with their “new politics” discussion of party over nation.

Today, the United States exists in the chaotic aftermath of the Trump presidency. Mann and Ornstein’s book was fittingly published just before Trump’s election to office, because certainly, Trump was the perfect embodiment of their new politics theory. Trump is infamous for using derogatory and overall painfully divisive language that deteriorated democratic norms during his campaign and beyond, and he publicly lied more than any other presidential candidate in U.S. history (Chen et al., 2019). Trump also used the political tactic of instilling fear about minority groups, calling immigrants “rapists” for example (Scott, 2019). All of his spreading of misinformation, blatant and dangerous lying and usage of intense divisive language, “exploited” divisions in the electorate that seemed to attract a large following consistently of, largely working class white people, enough that he was victorious in 2016 (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2018). All of these tactics, some of which are proven to breed extreme ideologies, made way for a perfect storm for a new age of extremists by creating intense negative partisanship and ideological polarization across the board (Abramowitz and McCoy, 2018).

In previous decades, political leaders were surely affiliated with conspiracy or extremist groups, but it was certainly not being publicized, and perhaps completely unknown to the public in most instances. For example, members of the far-right John Birch Society were actually shunned from the GOP when they came to fruition in the party (Trickley, 2021). At the time, it was embarrassing for the GOP when prestigious national leaders seen to affiliate with groups projecting conspiracy theories and extremist viewpoints. When contrasted with the modern far-right extremist group Qanon, a group born and bred under the Trump administration, it is a bit discouraging to see the party's change of stance on this issue (Aregentino & Amarasingam, 2020). Qanon largely exists in online forums, and is believed to be run by the anonymous "Q" who provides outlandish predictions about politics. The group wishes to destroy the world as it is now, and believes that there is a ring of political leaders seeking to demolish American freedom, with Trump leading an underground revolution that will be brought to light during "The Storm" (Zuckerman, 2019). As one article suggests, any piece of contradicting evidence can be twisted into Qanon support under the guise that authentic information is being withheld from the public (Zuckerman, 2019). Some of those who stormed the Capitol in January supported QAnon and bore verbiage to the insurrection like "we won't concede a stolen election," a complete falsehood often furthered by QAnon, Trump, and other far right-wing extremists (Pape & Ruby, 2021). Because Trump has outwardly shown support for some Qanon ideology, and because over twenty congressional candidates have been public about their Qanon support, members of the group do not feel marginalized, but accepted (Steck and McDermott, 2020) (Zuckerman, 2019). In fact, social isolation no longer predicts extremist ideology, and Qanon followers report having a decent community of friends (Cox, 2021). Qanon is being labeled as the first to have taken the "participatory" modern internet by storm, hence its rapid spread and support (Zuckerman, 2019).

It is curious if the “new politics” that Mann and Ornstein warned about could help explain this situation – if now – through the redefinition of American politics and a broader use of social media and smear campaigns, create a new sense of community not before seen in the United States is created. In fact, *only* with right-wing extremism did exposure to ideological homogeneity online, result in more extreme views (Warner, 2010). For many, it is still mind boggling how Trump was able to spew such hatred on such a public scale and retain so many unwavering supporters. One answer lies in the underbelly of Qanon’s success – the use of media.

How “New Politics” Thrives in Media

In the mid-90s, the way politics was being conducted through media began to drastically change. New types of media began to gain popularity in the form of broadcast political talk, like through talk radio and the internet. Political scientists began taking note of how these “alternative” medias seemed different than “traditional” ones, like through newspaper and television. Literature around this time makes clear the difference between new media and traditional media – the goal of new media is to entertain. Garnering this attention is often achieved by shock value – in the form of making “inflammatory” remarks about political figures (Davis, 1997).

This literature also warns about talk hosts – who perpetuate these entertainment tactics and develop close connections to their audience through new veins like the internet (Davis, 1997). The literature posited that traditional media operated under a standard of ethics, while new media does not, and hinted towards concerns of growing extremist ideals surrounding consumption of this media (Davis, 1997). Some research even looked directly into this issue, and found that talk radio in its growing popularity, was associated with negative aspects like cynicism about government and more extreme attitudes (Hollander, 1996).

The new age of technology has proven to be an intense force for politics. Politicians can have their messages broadcasted to the world in seconds, and can interact with Americans with a single social media post. Similarly, news channels and other political forums can advance their party's positions rapidly, reaching millions with ease. As demonstrated with Qanon for example – Americans are engaging back. The world of media has provided Americans with a unique platform to digest information and to form communities by sharing their own political beliefs. At media's best, it can be a helpful platform for discourse, and at worst, it can ignite extremist groups together in unison.

Since the 1990s, emerging around the same time as the “new politics” approach began to take hold, far right extremist groups have found their home in online forums and websites dedicated specifically to the promotion of their ideals in society (Conway et al., 2019). As an example of what transpires on these pages, one in particular called “Gab” provided a public forum for Robert Bowers, the man who murdered over ten people in 2018 at a synagogue in Pittsburgh. On this page, Bowers made almost 1,000 posts before his attack, with the final one posted minutes before his killing spree entitled “I’m going in” (Conway et al., 2019). It does not appear in the literature that this level of formulated online extremism within communities exists in liberal demographics.

One important concept is that of “deliberative democracy” which is described as the ability to have meaningful conversations despite differences, and is considered an integral aspect of democracy as Americans know it (Carpini, 2004) (Chen et al., 2019). On the precipice of the internet age, it was speculated that with its ability to reach across and connect people together in a rapid way, it might provide a unique opportunity for increasing deliberation and advancing deliberative democracy overall (Carpini, 2004). While the internet certainly achieves that goal to

some extent, it has produced various unfavorable consequences for deliberation through a screen. With Trump's presidency in particular having been predicted to increase ideological polarization and unfavorable partisanship, it is no surprise that much of the political "discourse" taking place online does not reflect the concept of deliberative democracy, but instead, an environment of hostility that can breed extremism (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2018).

It is important to consider that with only two political parties dominating U.S. politics, antagonism on and offline should be expected to occur. In the early 1990s, 21% of Republicans and 17% of Democrats had "highly unfavorable" views of the opposing party, but by 2016 (the first year of Trump's presidency), those numbers had grown to 58% and 55% (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2018). One study actually supposes that the two-party system itself is largely responsible for negative campaigning, by showing that once New Zealand switched from a "past the post" system (reminiscent of two party government) to a mixed member proportional system, unfavorable campaigning significantly decreased across the board (Ridout & Walter, 2013). However, it is true that Republicans and Democrats are actually engaging in discourse on social media apps like Twitter, but seemingly only in the center level (Bright, 2018). This finding demonstrates that U.S. citizens on the extreme ideological ends are generally not engaging across lines of belief, and overall have a lower level of online interaction (Bright, 2018). Additionally, political extremists at either end are likely to form "echo chambers" online where the same information is bounced back and forth with no real outside educating information (Bright, 2017) (Prooijen et al., 2015). Further, one study showed that when politically like-minded individuals, Republican or Democratic, deliberate online, their views tend to become more extreme and diversity opinion decreases (Schkade, 2010). This seems like another example of the online echo

chamber, where opinions are disseminated and endlessly relayed back and forth within the walls of one community.

Examining public discourse on online news sites has found a similar pattern of the breakdown of democratic norms that were present in Trump's comments during the campaign (Chen et al., 2019). In this research, "incivility" and "impoliteness" were examined in news comments, with an uncivil comment being denoted by the usage of xenophobic comments, racial slurs, and so on, behaviors that within the scope of this paper can be viewed as extreme. The study interestingly found that comments tended to exhibit more traits of deliberative democracy later in campaigns, but this trend was not found in comments posted on Fox News online, where uncivil discourse was not uncommon at any point (Chen et al., 2019). Additionally, many news organizations are moving their commenting features onto Facebook (Su et al., 2018). What's been found is that incivility and impoliteness are more likely on conservative news sites on Facebook, and that among uncivil comments, conservative news pages are seen to harbor the most extremely uncivil ones (Su et al., 2018). Republicans are also more likely to lie on Twitter than Democratic candidates, this being partly attributed to Donald Trump's presidency (Kenski et al., 2018). It is not shocking that many research concerning online discourse occurred during Trump's tenure, where his violation of discourse norms like lying and name calling may have carried over to his American supporters, some of whom seemed to exhibit the same trends (Chen et al., 2019).

Facebook has proven to show a few interesting social trends with commenters. As mentioned earlier, many news sites have moved their comments onto Facebook, despite the fact that Facebook users do not assume their audience to be any more intelligent or reasonable or so on, than on news sites (Kim et al., 2018). Facebook users also do not perceive any sort of

difference in quality or the civil nature of discourse on Facebook compared to news sites (Kim et al., 2018). Interestingly, some findings report that indeed, the quality of Facebook political comments is higher than that of news sources, but this research was not conducted among American news sources (Hille & Bakker, 2014). Regardless, this purports that because of the anonymity factor – those on Facebook are posting with their username, and therefore post higher quality political comments less frequently than on news platforms (Hille & Bakker, 2014). Conversely, a similar study in the United States found that deliberative discourse seems to be higher on news websites (The Washington Post) than on Facebook, the total opposite findings (Rowe, 2014). Perhaps this suggests that Americans are less concerned about the factor of anonymity when engaging in potentially uncivil online discourse, because it seems to be quite commonplace.

One thing is certain – political discourse in the United States is not always uplifting, and the U.S. far-right has seemingly found its place in modern media in a profound way. Even as recently as this past year, a survey from PRRI Research found that Republicans who trust Fox News and far-right news outlets are likely to think Trump's recent bid for election was stolen from him (PRRI Staff, 2021). The question of what exact medias those with extreme ideologies may be using, and whether or not these may predict extreme ideologies, will be examined further in this paper

CHAPTER II

Methodology

Measuring Extremism

Extremism is a force in U.S. politics that seems to have been reinforced in the media. My first set of dependent variables are the components seeking to measure extremism. While defining extremism is difficult because of its subjective nature, one important differentiation is between extreme ideologies and extreme partisanship. For example, someone may intensely support anti-democratic racist ideals, but this doesn't necessarily mean they are also strongly Republican, the two notions of extremism are not one in the same. In this chapter, the focus will remain on anti-democratic extremism, and party affiliation will be further explored later. Note that when quantifying extremism, this paper will remain focused on *anti-democratic* responses. Further, as mentioned earlier, deliberative democracy entails purposeful dialogue that attempts to make sense of differences – and may be especially necessary for controversial topics. It is considered integral to what makes a democracy whole. Therefore, when someone strongly agrees with the following statement:

“What people call compromise in politics is really just selling out on one's principles”

it is assumed that they have little to no apparent exception or give to their anti-democratic stance on the issues. An answer like this corresponds to the “new politics” idea of limited deliberative democracy and overall hard and fast stances on hot-button issues that often find a home in partisan media sources.

In an attempt to predict modern-day extremism through a similar lens, this paper employs data from the American National Election Studies (ANES). The ANES, founded in 1948, surveys Americans to examine public opinion and voting behavior. In 2020, a time-series study was released from the ANES that consisted of over 8,000 pre-election interviews and over 7,000 post-election interviews. Questions ask respondents to report demographic information, answer questions regarding voting patterns, and most importantly to this research, report agreeability on a vast array of questions – including but not limited to – questions about government funding and Trump’s handling of COVID-19 (ANES 2020). This time-series study also included extensive questions about the media and its consumption. Largely for this reason, the ANES 2020 study proved crucial to this paper. Data like current issue response agreeability, political party identification, age, type and amount of media consumption, and more, were all included in one place and can be used repeatedly in this paper. Other organizations like the General Social Survey did not have as fruitful, current and comprehensive information relating to my research question.

Considering that previous conversation talks about the “party over nation” approach of new politics that was largely spearheaded by powerful elites and promotes elitism and superiority in general, questions that address those themes are of interest to this paper, as responses may suggest a correlation between these beliefs among the masses and their extreme beliefs in general. The following dependent variables, chosen for this research and listed in question format from the time-series study below, asked respondents their level of agreeability, ranging from one (disagree strongly) to five (agree strongly):

Dependent Variable 1: Compromise: (v202409): “What people call compromise in politics is really just selling out on one’s principles.”

Dependent Variable 2: Strong Leader: (v202413): “Having a strong leader in government is good for the U.S., even if they bend the rules to get things done.”

These variables seem to speak directly to deliberative democracy and its recent deterioration as it stands now. Speaking to DV #1, the literature revealed that among government elites this anti-compromise position is relatively strong, and as evidenced in media and beyond, a similar mentality is growing amongst the American public (Mann & Ornstein, 2016). Thus, answers to this question may help explain if Americans have some generally engrained extremist ideology in general. Finally, the inspiration behind choosing DV #2, concerning a strong leader bending the rules, is similar to that of #1. In general, U.S. leaders fit the norm of appearing “political” to the public – that is – engaging in deliberative democracy, playing by the “rules” and appearing wholesome. Therefore, as a blanket statement it would be against U.S. democratic norms for a leader to “bend the rules” to accomplish things, at least, in the eyes of voters. Agreeing strongly with this statement may also suggest some sort of engrained extremist ideology. Also, previous research finds, *especially* in the last few years during and after Trump’s presidency, polarizing and extreme view differentiation has been on the rise in this country, and much of this erosion can be seen online (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2018). Because of the thoroughly polarizing previous presidency, this question is even more relevant and may elicit responses of agreeability or disagreeability that are very telling of such polarization.

Table 3.0 below shows information about these dependent variables, including frequencies and percentages of extreme responses to these questions from the entirety of the

dataset. While these numbers don't lend to deeper analysis, they are a good beginning to this research as they lay the foundation for baseline statements, like, how many respondents from the ANES data answered in what way to the DVs in question. The (N) denotes the number of respondents:

Table 3.0

Response	Compromise (N)	Strong leader (N)
Strongly Disagree	15.4% (1134)	24.7% (1814)
Disagree	22.8% (1680)	24.4% (1792)
Neither agree nor disagree	31.6% (2325)	19.6% (1440)
Agree	(23.4%) (1718)	23% (1689)
Strongly Agree	6.8% (499)	8.5% (623)

Media Usage and Extremism

Research has shown that modern media creates a fertile environment for extreme attitudes to gain traction and support. But exactly what mediums may encourage these attitudes the most, like content or platform, has not been extensively considered in the post-Trump era. Understanding exactly what kinds of media may foster the most extreme attitudes would be of great importance to a larger understanding of extremism's interaction with the media. Due to the aforementioned subjective nature of extremism and the wide variety of political media that one may consume, I have chosen a quantitative analysis for this topic. In this way, the interaction between media and extremism may be more objective within the bounds of this paper, or at least, appear more concise and easier to interpret analytically.

The ANES is an excellent source for understanding the public's use of media. Questions about respondent's radio, television, internet and newspaper consumption were all posed, including exactly which programs are being consumed. The list of possibilities included right-wing and left-wing channels as well as some more independent sources. As the literature suggests, the American two-party system has seemingly led to a unique kind of polarization and a "you against me" mentality. For these reasons, American media is often seen as divisive on its face. Because of this, independent variables were specifically chosen that encompass some of the most popular, and also most clearly party affiliated, sources of media. All of these platforms have a very similarly reported viewership, for example, the number of people who regularly read the Wall Street Journal is similar to those who regularly read the New York Times. This can help draw a clear differentiation between party and extremism in media, if any. As seen in the literature, there is an important distinction between traditional medias like television and newspapers, and alternative media like radio and internet, so both were included in this research (Davis, 1997).

The ANES listed sources like the Tucker Carlson television program, the Dave Ramsey radio show, and so on. The variables below include a complete outlook when applied together, and can hopefully adequately speak to the consumption of American media. For all of the media questions, the ANES asked: "Which of the following (radio, TV, newspaper or internet sources) do you consume regularly? Please check any that you listen to at least once a month." Respondents can answer with yes or no, or can refuse to answer at all. I recoded responses so that any participants who refused to respond were omitted from consideration. Table 3.1 shows which media variables were chosen for this paper, along with how many respondents say they

use them regularly which is denoted by (N). Additionally, percentage of Republicans, Democrats and Independents is considered among users:

Table 3.1

Media Type (N)	Republican Users (%)	Democratic Users (%)	Independent Users (%)
Wall Street Journal Newspaper (238)	43.9	45.1	11
New York Times Newspaper (378)	13	80.4	6.6
Hannity Television Show (427)	90.9	5.9	3.3
Rachel Maddow Television Show (360)	7.2	86.7	6.1
Fox Online (1072)	72.3	20.1	7.7
CNN Online (1477)	20.5	70.3	9.2
Hannity Radio Show (345)	93	4.1	2.9
NPR Fresh Air Radio Show (559)	15.4	80.1	4.5

CHAPTER III

Hypotheses

These hypotheses seek to address key questions from previous research. They are posed in order to learn more about the effects of media on partisanship and extremism. They are concise, and addressed statistically in similar ways:

Hypothesis 1: “Republicans will hold more anti-democratic ideals than Independents and Democrats”

This first hypothesis is important in laying a ground work for the rest of the paper. Subsequent hypotheses pose ideas about extremity among bipartisan news channels, and so first determining if one party in general is more anti-democratically extreme than another, acts as a control and ground work for further discussion. Additionally, party identification has been an important and significant consideration in previous research, and so it should be thoroughly addressed here. The first step in testing this hypothesis is a bivariate analysis. Table 3.2 shows the mean response for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans from this data set. By just analyzing the means, the table suggests that Republicans typically hold more extreme ideas on these views than independents and Democrats. Table 3.3 employs a difference of means test between Democratic and Republican responses at a significance value of 0.05 to further analyze if the results between Republicans and Democrats are statistically significant.

Table 3.2

Extremity among party ID	Compromise Mean (N)	Strong Leader Mean (N)
Democrats	2.56 (3426)	2.28 (3430)
Republicans	3.12 (3048)	3.08 (3043)
Independents	2.91 (861)	2.70 (863)

Table 3.3

Difference of means (p-value) COMPROMISE	Difference of means (p-value) STRONG LEADER
0.56 (P < 0.0001)	0.80 (P < 0.0001)

For both dependent variables, the results are significant. For a result to be statistically significant at a value of 0.05, this means that with 95% certainty these results are real and not due to chance, and that on these issues, Republicans are significantly more extreme in their views than Democrats. Aforementioned research has uncovered similar findings when it comes to party differences. Although these findings are promising in verifying the hypothesis, a multiple regression is necessary to validate the effects of party identification on anti-democratic sentiment. This test allows me to control for other demographic variables that might have an influence on the relationship in question. For this regression, I controlled for several demographic variables. Running this test can allow for certainty that party ID – not these other demographic variables – is causing the extremity in response. A multiple regression was

conducted for each dependent variable. The adjusted r squared variable denotes how much variation of the dependent variables is explained by the independent media variables. Results are shown in tables 3.4 and 3.5 below.

Like party ID, a series of demographic variables were listed on the ANES data set for respondents to answer. Among them, some of the most relevant to this thesis were: race, sex, education, and age. I recoded these variables on SPSS, as many of them contained a multitude of responses. For example, as a respondent gives their age, this number could vary drastically, and therefore could yield around eighty different responses for one variable. Below shows how each demographic variable was recoded for this analysis, along with their variable number from the ANES data set:

Party Identification: (v201231x) 0 = Independent 1 = Strong Republican, Not very strong Republican, Independent-Republican -1 = Strong Democrat, Not very strong Democrat, Independent-Democrat

Race: (v201549x) 1 = white 0 = non-white

Sex: (v201600) 1 = male 0 = female

Education: (v201511x) 1 = less than high school 2 = high school credential 3 = some post-high school, no bachelor's degree 4 = Bachelor's degree 5 = Graduate degree

Age: (v201507x) 1 = 18-39 2 = 40-64 3 = 65-80

Table 3.4

Extremity –Compromise	Beta	P-Value
Constant	4.08	
Party ID	.30	<0.001
Race	-.36	<0.001
Sex	-.10	<0.001
Education	-.24	<0.001
Age	-.05	.003

N = 6925

Adjusted r squared = .134

Table 3.5

Extremity – Strong Leader	Beta	P-Value
Constant	3.70	
Party ID	.42	<0.001
Race	-.29	<0.001
Sex	-.10	<0.001
Education	-.18	<0.001
Age	-.07	<0.001

N = 6925

Adjusted r squared = 0.125

The multiple regression tables reveal interesting findings. For one, demographic variables across the board hold statistical significance in all of these cases. These findings suggest that other demographic variables, beyond party identification, are important in considering the higher extremity level of Republicans. Additionally, almost all of these effects are well past the 0.05 threshold of significance, meaning that they are all seriously important variables to consider. The next step is a test of magnitude. Determining the marginal effects within a regression like this reveals just how weak or strong the impact of a change in one variable has on the outcome variable, while the others are held constant. For the tables below, the marginal effect was calculated for the two farthest ends of the spectrum for each independent variable. For example, Republican to Democrat, white to non-white, youngest group to oldest group, and so on. In analyzing each variable, the others were held constant. For instance, when evaluating the effects of race, all of the other variables remained the same (Republican, male, less than high school education, and youngest age group). This was repeated for each variable. Tables 3.6 and 3.7 below examine marginal effects of the most extreme magnitude of each variable. Determining the marginal effects of each variable post-regression will aid in understanding how impactful their presence is on the dependent variable.

Table 3.6

Variable (compromise)	Range	Size of Effect
Party ID	Democrat – Republican	0.59
Race	White – Non-white	-0.36
Sex	Male – Female	-0.10
Education	Less than HS - Graduate	-0.97
Age	Youngest – Oldest	-0.10

Table 3.7

Variable (strong leader)	Range	Size of Effect
Party ID	Democrat – Republican	0.85
Race	White – Non-white	-0.29
Sex	Male – Female	-0.10
Education	Less than HS - Graduate	-0.71
Age	Youngest – Oldest	-0.14

The marginal effects tables reveal interesting results. For party ID, the marginal effects for both dependent variables are fairly large considering they're on a five-point scale. For instance, party ID for strong leader is 0.85. This number reveals that, holding all other variables constant, Republicans are predicted to be 0.85 higher on response extremity than their democratic counterparts. This shows that there's almost an entire one point scale difference between the two parties on this issue. A few other variables are worth mentioning for having a higher magnitude. Out of all of the variables, education had the greatest magnitude, even more so

than party ID. Like party ID, those with the least education were almost an entire point more extreme on each issue than those with the highest education.

For the issue of compromise on the race variable, non-white respondents were close to half a point more extreme in their responses compared to their non-white counterparts.

Interestingly though, this magnitude was smaller for the issue of strong leader – however non-whites also reported more extreme responses. For both dependent variables, sex and age did not have a large magnitude, meaning that the impact of this significance is not as drastic as the other variables. This hypothesis is confirmed, that indeed on these issues, Republicans hold more extreme views than Independents and Democrats.

Hypothesis 2: “Consumption of conservative media will lead to more anti-democratic ideals than consumption of liberal media”

In the literature review, discussion around political extremism in media focused heavily on party ID. Especially in light of Republican extremist groups and their use of media forums like those supporting Qanon ideals, and in light of Republican media usage and perpetuation in general, it would make sense to hypothesize that these types of media may elicit more extreme responses (Pape & Ruby, 2021) (Conway et al., 2019). This hypothesis builds on previous questions, and proposes that consuming conservative media will in-turn, lead to more anti-democratic ideals than consuming liberal media (Su et al., 2018). This hypothesis is really the heart and soul of the analysis in this paper. To begin, I examined right and left leaning radio shows (Hannity and NPR Fresh Air), newspapers (Wall Street Journal and New York Times), online news outlets (Fox Online and CNN Online) and TV channels (Hannity and Maddow). Out of the limited supply of partisan-comparable networks to choose from, these aligned most closely in terms of strongest and most relevant partisan viewership. NPR Fresh Air was chosen over other NPR channels like Marketplace, because according to the NPR website, Fresh Air is most comparable to an opinion-based news outlet like Hannity, whereas Marketplace is a more informative program about the U.S. economic system (NPR 2022).

From a simple difference of means test between each set of right and left leaning sources, in every single instance for each dependent variable, the right-wing source saw higher levels of extremism than the left-wing source (see Appendix A). There isn't a single instance where a left-wing news source saw higher response extremity levels than a right-wing one. It was also often the case that results were statistically significant. For additional consideration, some may argue the validity of a media like the Wall Street Journal as a “conservative” newspaper. Although the

Wall Street Journal may be more weakly associated with conservatism than other newspapers, it was the closest to such that was offered in the data set. Table 3.1 shows that users of the Wall Street Journal were fairly evenly Republicans and Democrats.

The most seriously extreme variation came from comparing Hannity Radio and NPR Fresh Air. Here, the difference in extreme responses for both dependent variables was drastically different, and had very significant differences. These two variables were analyzed further, as they clearly had significantly different partisan viewership. Table 3.8 illustrates these differences.

Table 3.8

Extremism – Mean	Hannity Radio (N)	NPR Fresh Air (N)	Difference of Means (p-value)
Strong Leader	3.14 (307)	1.89 (526)	1.25 (<0.0001)
Compromise	3.28 (307)	2.04 (525)	1.24 (<0.0001)

Because these findings were so drastic, the second analysis of this hypothesis focused specifically on radio programs. This was done not only for the sake of parsimony, but also because these differences unanimously existed across the board of all variables, as demonstrated in the initial analysis in this hypothesis. Additionally, because the demographic variables were so significant in the first hypothesis, they have to be controlled for in hypothesis two to verify that consuming right-wing news is the reason for extreme responses, not some other confounding variable. To do this, a multiple regression was employed for each dependent variable. The results are in tables 3.9 – 3.12 below:

Table 3.9

Compromise – Hannity Radio	Beta	P-Value
Constant	4.17	
Hannity Radio	.34	<.001
Party ID	.27	<.001
Race	-.34	<.001
Gender	-.080	.035
Education	-.27	<.001
Age	-.11	<.001

N = 3342

Adjusted r squared = .145

Table 3.10

Strong Leader – Hannity Radio	Beta	P-Value
Constant	3.40	
Hannity Radio	.24	.002
Party ID	.46	<.001
Race	-.22	<.001
Gender	-.060	.157
Education	-.13	<.001
Age	-.10	<.001

N = 3341

Adjusted r squared = .143

Table 3.11

Compromise – NPR Fresh Air Radio	Beta	P-Value
Constant	4.07	
NPR Fresh Air Radio	-.47	<.001
Party ID	.25	<.001
Race	-.30	<.001
Gender	-.06	.101
Education	-.24	<.001
Age	-.07	.005

N = 3342

Adjusted r squared = .157

Table 3.12

Strong Leader – NPR Fresh Air Radio	Beta	P-Value
Constant	3.31	
NPR Fresh Air Radio	-.38	<.001
Party ID	.44	<.001
Race	-.19	<.001
Gender	-.05	.276
Education	-.10	<.001
Age	-.07	.013

N = 3341

Adjusted r squared = .151

The multiple regressions reveal very interesting results that help to prove this hypothesis in every instance. On the compromise variables, the regression shows that all other things equal, consuming a certain media program significantly impacts the likelihood of giving an anti-democratic response. For media, all of the significance values were $<.001$ with the exception of Hannity Radio on the issue of strong leader, where the value was $.002$. All of these numbers are well above the significance threshold of 0.05 , meaning that these findings are very likely not due to chance.

Because media consumption was significant in the regression for all of the analyses, the magnitude of these comparisons should be further examined to determine how strong the effect is. This comparison is conducted in tables 3.13 and 3.14 below for both of the independent variables across both of the dependent variables.

Table 3.13

Variable (Compromise)	Range	Size of Effect
Type of media consumption	NPR Radio – Hannity Radio	.81

Table 3.14

Variable (Strong Leader)	Range	Size of Effect
Type of media consumption	NPR Radio – Hannity Radio	.63

The magnitude for both of these media variables is clearly very high. These numbers show that both magnitudes are closer to a full point than a half a point different. In other words, Republicans are scoring $.81$ higher on extremity levels for compromise, and $.63$ higher on extremity levels for strong leader. For context, the reader should recall that the dependent

variables are both on five-point scales. Therefore, the hypothesis that conservative media leads to higher extremist ideals than consumption of liberal media, has been proven.

Hypothesis 3: “Consumption of conservative commentary will lead to more anti-democratic responses than consumption of conservative news.”

This hypothesis was conducted in hopes of establishing a clearer line between exactly what content respondents are consuming on what channels. For example, in hypothesis 2, it was clearly established that those who utilized Fox Online were more extreme in their responses than those who utilized CNN Online (see Appendix A). However, while these outlets are definitely partisan in nature, what’s not clear is exactly what information respondents are consuming on the website. It’s probably the case that some users are strictly following the news, while others are consuming the opinions of a nightly news commentator. This begs a different question – *what kind of information* is causing varying extremity response levels? A similar scenario could potentially exist for all of the media variables – television, internet and newspaper, with perhaps the exception of radio considering Hannity and NPR Fresh Air are primarily commentary sources.

Unfortunately for the internet variable, the ANES data set did not offer more specific variables that might allow us to narrow this research. For instance, no surveyed question existed that asked, “do you utilize Fox online for opinion-based commentary or as a news source?” In fact, this kind of question did not exist for any of the variables except television. In this instance, Tucker Carlson and Bret Baier both have a program on Fox, and the data set included questions about respondent’s consumption of each source. Technically, according to the time of day that they air, Carlson is a “commentator” while Baier is a “news reporter” (Stelter, 2009). In reality, the line between what is news and what is commentary has been blurred on Fox news in recent years. Regardless, this was the most straightforward pairing of variables to address this question.

Initially, I coded a variable that combined the viewership of both Carlson and Baier. In SPSS, the recode looked like: 0=watch neither, 1=watch Baier, 2=watch Carlson, 3=watch both. In doing this, I was able to determine what users consumed only Carlson, only Baier, or both channels, for each dependent variable. There was virtually no difference or effect with separating who watched what channels in this way (see Appendix B). Below is a table showing the difference of means in extremity response among those who simply consume Carlson and Baier for each dependent variable. Table 3.15 below examines each variable independently:

Table 3.15

Extremism (Mean)	Baier TV (N)	Carlson TV (N)	Difference of Means (p-value)
Compromise	3.20 (285)	3.24 (403)	0.04 (0.6853)
Strong Leader	3.08 (285)	3.21 (403)	0.13 (0.1960)

As seen in the above table, virtually no difference existed between the two means, and the results were far from statistically significant for both variables. The p-values were nowhere close to 0.05. Because of this, the hypothesis that right-wing commentary leads to more extreme responses than right-wing news, can be rejected. It could be possible that different implications exist for different types of media, but at least for television, this hypothesis does not hold water. Perhaps this suggests that the line between commentary and news on Fox is so blurred that viewers aren't noticing a difference, and are therefore reporting similar response extremity for both kinds of programs.

Hypothesis 4: “Consumption of alternative media (Talk Radio, Internet) will lead to more anti-democratic ideals than consumption of traditional media (Newspapers, TV).”

This hypothesis came about from a distinction drawn in previous research. A huge amount of work on this topic in the last decade centers around alternative media, while older research focuses more on traditional news sources. Further, as seen in the literature review, previous research supports the idea that alternative media seem to lead to greater extremity than traditional media (Davis, 1997) (Hollander, 1996). After running some basic comparisons across these medias by comparing differences of means, it was clear that some interesting significant differences did exist between alternative and traditional media (see Appendix A) To further examine this hypothesis, I focused on newspaper and television as “traditional” media, and radio and internet as “alternative” media. The mean extremism scores for each medium are displayed in Table 3.16. As a way of controlling for the ideological bias of these media, I have chosen all right-wing sources.

On the question of compromise, radio listeners are the most extreme but television viewers are not far behind with internet users and newspaper readers exhibiting considerably less extremism. When it comes to strong leadership, there is little variation among all four media:

Table 3.16

Extremism (Mean)	Compromise (N)	Strong Leader (N)
WSJ Paper	2.28 (218)	2.97 (966)
Fox Online	2.52 (219)	2.94 (965)
Hannity Radio	3.28 (307)	3.14 (307)
Hannity TV	3.23 (382)	3.11 (382)

In order to determine if these results hold up under greater scrutiny, a multiple regression was run between each media type with the same demographics employed in previous analyses (party ID, race, sex, education and age). Many of these demographics proved to be significant. Complete results can be found in Appendix C. Table 3.17 shows the beta coefficients for the media outlets in question. Together they shed some light on hypothesis 4. For both dependent variables, newspapers lag behind the other three media types. In fact, reading the Wall Street Journal makes one significantly less likely to denigrate compromise. There is virtually no impact of newspaper reading when it comes to the strong leader question. On both questions, radio is clearly the form of media most associated with extremism. These findings lend support to hypothesis 4. However, television comes in second place on the compromise variable and closely trails internet usage on the strong leader variable. So, hypothesis 4 cannot be completely confirmed or denied. The data suggests mixed results when it comes to my fourth and final hypothesis. Only sometimes does utilizing alternative media lead to more extreme responses than utilizing traditional media.

Potential explanations for these findings exist. On the issue of newspaper, it could be the case that level of clear partisanship is more highly related to extremism than the actual form of media in general. In other words, maybe it's less important that the Wall Street Journal is a newspaper, and more important that it's quite moderate. This moderate outlook, with Table 3.1 again showing comparable Wall Street Journal viewership rates between Republicans and Democrats, may help explain why users are less likely to denigrate compromise. As seen in hypothesis two, it's not surprising that radio, once again, yielded the most extreme results. Yet, the television variable was more extreme than expected across the board. Similarly to the situation with newspaper, perhaps what's more critical to extreme responses is not that Hannity TV is a TV show, but that Hannity TV is a media source with clear far-right partisanship. Perhaps this is driving the extreme responses, and not the source itself.

Table 3.17

	Compromise (p-value)	Strong Leader (p-value)
WSJ Paper	-.34 (<.001)	.02 (.795)
Fox Online	.10 (.018)	.17 (<.001)
Hannity Radio	.34 (<.001)	.24 (.002)
Hannity TV	.22 (<.001)	.14 (.038)

CHAPTER IV:

Conclusion

In all, this project revealed interesting, and mostly expected, findings about U.S. extremism and media. Hypotheses 1, 2 were supported by the data, hypothesis 3 was not, and hypothesis 4 was partially supported. The findings that Republicans report more anti-democratic extremist responses than Democrats, and the fact that Conservative media leads to more extreme responses than Liberal media, were both explored in previous literature, and have been proven again here. There was no statistical indication that watching Fox commentary over Fox news encourages more extremist responses, and I also cannot definitively say that using alternative media consistently relates to higher levels of response extremity on these issues.

I suspected that similar patterns may exist between the dependent variables of this study. For example, perhaps the compromise question would consistently see higher levels of extremism, or vice versa. Ultimately, a pattern like this didn't definitively exist between the variables. There were instances when the compromise question saw higher levels of extremity, and other times when the strong leader variable did.

Generally, I was surprised that many of the demographic variables were as impactful as they proved to be in the multiple regression. For example, education and age proved to be very significant factors in most of the analyses. Another shocking factor was that often, non-white respondents reported higher levels of extremity than white respondents. This is surprising in general, but specifically interesting considering that there are typically more non-white people associated with the Democratic party, yet Democrats were less extreme in this study. I believe that the likely explanation for this is that the ANES data set used in this paper was surveyed during the contentious Trump presidency, and was released in 2020 when race relations were

extremely tumultuous in the nation. While non-white Americans have always been discriminated against, Trump's presidency beckoned explicit and overt discrimination in the nation to a degree that social movements, like the Black Lives Matter movement, garnered peak attention. It could likely be the case that many non-white respondents in this study were feeling disillusioned with concepts concerning compromise and what it means to be a strong leader, yielding a higher response extremity on these issues.

A few limitations exist in this study with most of them relating to the media data that is offered in the ANES data set. One concerns the pool of independent political media variables that the ANES data set offers. While they are numerous, especially for categories like television shows, they don't always offer the most clearly partisan sources for comparison. For example, the Wall Street Journal was the most "far-right" newspaper to choose from. Perhaps it would be the fact that a more specific, and more far-right paper would have yielded more extreme responses. Additionally, the nature of the questions about usage also prove more challenging for research. As mentioned earlier, questions fail to specifically ask what content users are consuming on these platforms, and this can pose a difficulty for variables like television and internet, where content can consist of non-political topics, like a weather report.

In line with this, another limitation concerns the usage of the internet not being addressed as adequately as it could be. Once again, the ANES data set asks questions like "how often do you use Twitter, or Reddit?" But this is not enough information to determine political activity on these sites, and so these questions could not be used in this study. This is unfortunate, considering that a large pool of previous research, especially since Trump's presidency, concerns online forums, Facebook, and so on. For future datasets, this would be a useful point for the ANES to cover, and for future research to explore.

For future research, it could also be interesting to address other dependent variables besides the two in this study. The ANES data set provided a massive amount of controversial questions that exist in U.S. public discourse today. Questions like “how strongly do you agree with abortion” “do you agree that the poor should be offered more money by the government” and so on, were posed to respondents. In the context of this paper, the focus remained on anti-democratic extremism. For many hot-button issues like these, it is not so clear-cut when determining what kind of response constitutes an “anti-democratic” notion. These questions in the ANES data set could make for an interesting paper covering extreme U.S. ideals, but perhaps not one focusing on anti-democratic sentiment.

Mostly, these findings echo those of previous research. Importantly, they help show that anti-democratic sentiment, specifically among Republicans and conservative media in this study, is alive and well. Findings in this paper can help further explain how and why Republicans found a community through far-right media, gathered together, and attacked the Capitol building on January 6th, 2021. It would be extremely interesting to repeat this study with the next time-series study issued by the ANES. Again, the responses utilized in this paper reflect those of Americans living in the Trump presidency, and at the beginning of the COVID pandemic. It could be the case that by the next time-series study, U.S. citizens feel less national division, and report less extreme responses overall.

This research is important because it lends itself to the larger paradigm of politics and media — specifically during the Trump presidency — which will likely be an area of interest in politics for decades to come. It helps further the notion that politics and media are directly connected, and are often even one in the same. Research like this can be used to further understand domestic extremism in the U.S. and potentially how to predict response extremity on

certain issues. The “solution” to deterring extreme ideas being encouraged by the media may not exist, simply because it is so engrained in what U.S. citizens know political media to look like. Media bias to some degree is inevitable, but at what point does “bias” become so severe that it fosters extremist attitudes? In the context of this study, media like Hannity Radio are guilty of this to some extent. Is it possible to have a media whose motto is to appeal to the moderate voter in the U.S. by means of committing to consistently less-than-extreme interpretations? If this type of media existed, it’s curious if a lack of “shock value” would push even the moderate viewer away, or if it would become an American staple. At its best, a media like this may deter anti-democratic extremism.

At the end of this study, I cannot definitively say that extreme responses on these issues are *caused* by utilizing a certain kind of media. What I can say is that there is a correlation, that is often significant, between right-wing media usage and extreme responses on the issues in this paper. This correlation continues to exist even when other variables are controlled for. I look forward to future research on this ever-evolving topic of U.S. extremism and its functions in media.

Appendix A.

Table A1

Extremism – Mean	WSJ Newspaper (N)	NYT Newspaper (N)	Difference of Means (p-value)
Strong Leader	2.52 (219)	1.96 (349)	0.56 (<0.0001)
Compromise	2.28 (218)	2.17 (348)	0.11 (<0.2599)

Table A2

Extremism – Mean	FOX Online (N)	CNN Online (N)	Difference of Means (p-value)
Strong Leader	2.94 (965)	2.30 (1349)	0.64 (<0.0001)
Compromise	2.97 (966)	2.51 (1348)	0.46 (<0.0001)

Table A3

Extremism – Mean	Hannity TV (N)	Maddow TV (N)	Difference of Means (p-value)
Strong Leader	3.11 (382)	2.13 (327)	0.9811 (<0.0001)
Compromise	3.23 (382)	2.33 (326)	0.90 (<0.0001)

Table A4

Extremism – Mean	Hannity Radio (N)	NPR Radio (N)	Difference of Means (p-value)
Strong Leader	3.14 (307)	1.90 (526)	1.25 (<0.0001)
Compromise	3.28 (307)	2.04 (525)	1.24 (<0.0001)

Appendix B

Table B1

Extremism – Mean	Watch Neither (N)	Watch Baier (N)	Watch Carlson (N)	Watch Both (N)
Compromise	2.77 (5216)	3.12 (185)	3.20 (303)	3.34 (1.12)
Strong Leader	2.60 (5217)	2.96 (185)	3.18 (1.25)	3.29 (100)

Table B2

Compromise	P-Value
Watch Baier vs. Watch Carlson	0.47

Table B3

Strong Leader	P-Value
Watch Baier vs. Watch Carlson	0.07

Appendix C

Table C1

Compromise – Wall Street Journal	Beta	P-Value
Constant	4.16	
WSJ Paper	-.34	<.001
Party ID	.31	<.001
Race	-.40	<.001
Sex	-.03	.500
Education	-.25	<.001
Age	-.12	<.001

N = 2185

Adjusted r squared = .15 ^

Table C2

Strong Leader – Wall Street Journal	Beta	P-Value
Constant	3.50	
WSJ Paper	.02	.795
Party ID	.51	<.001
Race	-.30	<.001
Sex	-.13	.010
Education	-.14	<.001
Age	-.06	.058

N = 2186

Adjusted r squared = .16 ^

Table C3

Compromise – Fox Online	Beta	P-Value
Constant	4.11	
Fox Online	.10	.018
Party ID	.29	<.001
Race	-.37	<.001
Sex	-.14	<.001
Education	-.24	<.001
Age	-.08	<.001

N = 4561

Adjusted r squared = .14 ^

Table C4

Strong Leader – Fox Online	Beta	P-Value
Constant	3.52	
Fox Online	.17	<.001
Party ID	.45	<.001
Race	-.27	<.001
Sex	-.10	.004
Education	-.14	<.001
Age	-.10	<.001

N = 4562

Adjusted r squared = .14 ^

Table C5

Compromise – Hannity Radio	Beta	P-Value
Constant	4.17	
Hannity Radio	.34	<.001
Party ID	.27	<.001
Race	-.34	<.001
Sex	-.08	.035
Education	-.27	<.001
Age	-.11	<.001

N = 3342

Adjusted R squared = .15 ^

Table C6

Strong Leader – Hannity Radio	Beta	P-Value
Constant	3.40	
Hannity Radio	.24	.002
Party ID	.46	<.001
Race	-.22	<.001
Sex	-.06	.157
Education	-.13	<.001
Age	-.10	<.001

N = 3341

Adjusted r squared = .14

Table C7

Compromise – Hannity TV	Beta	P-Value
Constant	4.14	
Hannity TV	.22	<.001
Party ID	.28	<.001
Race	-.36	<.001
Sex	-.09	.002
Education	-.26	<.001
Age	-.07	<.001

N = 5492

Adjusted r squared = .14 ^

Table C8

Strong Leader – Hannity TV	Beta	P-Value
Constant	3.64	
Hannity TV	.14	.038
Party ID	.47	<.001
Race	-.24	<.001
Sex	-.11	.001
Education	-.17	<.001
Age	-.09	<.001

N = 5492

Adjusted r squared = .13

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