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THE INTERNET, RACE, AND U.S. DEMOCRACY

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Transformations in the media environment affect citizens' political knowledge and participation. The internet has changed the media environment dramatically in the past 15 years, and the web has become a significant source of political information for Americans. Many scholars studying the web and its impact on politics argue that because the internet enables Americans to retrieve news that can be ideologically tailored to fit their political preferences, the web causes a more polarized public, more partisan elections, and may impede deliberation, and overall has a negative effect of representative democracy. I disagree. Using panel survey data and an experimental design, I examine whether the same underlying mechanisms that allow citizens to sort themselves into highly customized information worlds also enable members of historically disadvantaged groups to more efficiently access information that pertains specifically to them and to their groups' political goals, thereby providing important political knowledge gains and improving the representativeness of American democracy. The three main research objectives of this dissertation are: **(1)** To examine whether race and ethnicity influence selective exposure to political information online; **(2)** To research how selective exposure affects voters' knowledge of candidates' policy positions; **(3)** To test the impact of a high-choice and diverse media environment on political polarization and the quality of the vote choice.

Dedication

To all of my parents:

The biological

and the not so biological ones.

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Don't be satisfied with stories,

how things have gone with others.

Unfold your own myth.

(Rumi)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

We have seen significant changes in our information environment since the Web first became widely accessible to individuals in 1993 when the National Center for Supercomputing Application (NCSA) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign released *Mosaic*. Mosaic was the first software that enabled graphical access to content on the Internet, and in many ways, it was the first "real" Internet browser. It included a number of the features current browsers have and it is often credited with making the World Wide Web usable by a broad range of people.[1]

Mosaic was discontinued in 1997,[2] but by that time, the Internet was on it is way to becoming a common household feature. Using the Web in 1997, however, was a much different experience than what (most of us) know today when we are online using common browsers like *Internet Explorer*, *Google Chrome*, *Safari*, etc to search for information. Individuals connected to the Web using dial-up modems that were slow, and the Web did not feature the same interactivity as it does today.

In 2013, twenty years after Mosaic, Web use is becoming nearly universal in the

[1]Originally designed for Unix systems, Mosaic became available for Macintosh, Windows and other operating systems in 1994.

[2]Mosaic was replaced by *Netscape Navigator*, whose descendant *Mozilla Firefox* still exists today.

United States. Eighty-five percent of men and 84 percent of women over 18 years of age use the Internet.[3] The ubiquity of the Web, not only on home computers, but also tablets and smart phones, has changed how people engage with news and how traditional news outlets deliver their news and reach their audiences.

New venues for entertainment and information consumption have augmented and, to some extent, ousted traditional sources of information, e.g. cable and broadcast TV, radio, and print newspapers. Web editions are slowly replacing traditional print papers. Television stations are making their content available online. Facebook and other social networking sites like Twitter offer additional content that is as "low-brow" or cerebral as our online friends and contacts are.[4] Hence, traditional gatekeepers are no longer the only authorities deciding what is worth reading.

Web content can be retrieved and accessed in diverse ways, and there is more content online than anyone could ever consume in a given day. Because we can only consume a small fraction of the content that is out there, we are forced to customize our engagement with information to a great extent. Consciously or not, we are using heuristics and other shortcuts to decide how to most efficiently retrieve the content that appeals most to us. The criteria, however, that we use to determine what content speaks most to us vary greatly and are as idiosyncratic as we are diverse. It is safe to assume, however, that *political interest* is the major impetus for seeking political information in the first place.

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[3]Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Spring Tracking Survey, April 1-May 19, 2013

[4]Even though Facebook announced on 12/02/13 that it will change the algorithm that determines what users see in their news feeds to include more "high quality" news items at the expense of Internet memes and the like. Memes are ideas that "go viral" and spread quickly on the Web. They can be images (e.g. a picture of Mitt Romney and big bird with a short text, designed to be a caricature of a statement ushered in one of the 2012 presidential debates) short clips, hashtags, etc. By limiting memes, Facebook's algorithm is acting more like a traditional gatekeeper who relied, among other things, on judgments of social importance (Gans 1979; Tuchman 1973). See a press release from 12/02/2013 http://newsroom.fb.com/News/768/News-Feed-FYI-Helping-You-Find-More-News-to-Talk-About

We can limit our exposure by deciding to only, for example, read the Web-edition of *The New York Times*. Or, we might rely on news aggregators/blogs like *The Drudge Report* to signal what is going on around us. We might also do a keyword search to get news on a topic that piqued our interest during a conversation with a colleague. Or, we might simply click on articles our friends recommend on Facebook.[5] No matter what we do, it is likely that our engagement with information is shaped in part by search engine and social networking feed algorithms that rely on a series of mathematical equations to return content we are likely to use, further limiting our exposure to what is "really" out there.

Changes in the media landscape have consequences for democratic politics. The information environment affects what Americans know about politics (Prior 2007), and the distribution and quality of political knowledge has an impact on democratic accountability and representation (Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996). Minorities have historically scored lower on measures of political knowledge, with detrimental consequences for the representation of their political interests (Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996). In this dissertation, I test whether racial identity plays a role in the engagement with political information online, and whether racial identity shapes engagement with online content in a way that can mitigate the historical information gap between African-Americans and Caucasians.

In this chapter, I will describe recent changes in the American media landscape and define "new media." Next, I will present data on Americans' use of the Web and its importance as a source of political information for whites and blacks. I will also discuss why the distribution of knowledge matters in a democratic society both from

[5]Referrals from Facebook to news sites have increased almost three-fold since 2012, demonstrating the increasing significance of Facebook as a driver of Internet traffic, a function browsers have largely fulfilled in the past. When a story pops up in a user's news feed on Facebook, and when the user then clicks on the story, the user is taken to the site from which the story originated. This is a referral.

a normative and practical perspective, and emphasize the importance of knowledge as an *instrumental good*, a necessary tool for the full representation of one's political interests. Furthermore, I will review literature discussing how the new media environment affects two dimensions of citizenship: (1) political knowledge, and (2) political participation. I will address research investigating knowledge and participation differences as a consequence of the old vs the new media environment, and briefly summarize how minorities[6] faired in the old media landscape. Lastly, I will argue that the US has experienced not only radical changes in its media environment since 1970, but also large demographic changes, and suggest that the new media environment may do a good job of fulfilling the information needs of the new, more diverse, America by lending itself well to the needs of "issue publics" who are a bit different from traditional 1950s mainstream America.

1.1 New Media and The American News Diet

What is the "new media environment?" As Neuman, Bimber and Hindman (2010) state, the term "new media" has been used as a catch-all term to describe the changes in the communication environment over the past 20 years. According to the authors, "new media" is "shorthand for the diverse technical developments that are changing the nature of political communication and possibly the character of citizenship — digital video recorders, satellite communication, smart phones, digital cable television and, of course, the Internet" (p. 1). In this dissertation, I utilize the term "new media environment" to describe the expansion of entertainment and information options available to Americans since the arrival of the "new media" as Neuman et al.

[6]I use the term minorities to refer to African-Americans and Latinos. The terms Latino and Hispanic are used inter-changeably.

define it. Hence, I use the term "new media environment" to describe the *proliferation of programming options* the Web has brought to the US media environment. In this dissertation, I assume that the content provided on the Web can be accessed in a variety of ways: via computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones, and that it augments or replaces more traditional ways of retrieving information and entertainment (newspapers, magazines, television and radio) for many segments of the US population.

A majority of Americans now have access to the Web, but there are differences in access speed and mode, and some populations are less likely than others to have an Internet connection. The percentage of Internet users in the United States has increased from roughly 15 percent in 1995 to 85 percent in 2013. According to Pew's *The Internet and American Life Project*, those who are Spanish-language dominant, have an annual income of less than $30,000, or are Senior citizens are least likely to be online.

There has been a persistent Internet access gap between whites, African-Americans and Latinos, but it is steadily closing in part due to advances in technology like tablets and smart phones that broaden access modes. There are also differences in home Internet access speed. Some households only have dial-up access, while others have broadband access. Broadband Internet access allows individuals to navigate quickly from one site to another, to perform searches rapidly, to watch streaming video, and to up- and download files swiftly. Hence broadband Web access allows individuals to take full advantage of the Web's features, while dial-up access makes it harder to utilize all the Web has to offer. According to a second Pew report released in 2010 on broadband use, 65 percent of whites and 46 percent of African-Americans were broadband users in 2009 (19 point gap). A year later the digital gap had closed by 8 percentage points: Sixty-seven percent of whites and 56 percent of African Americans were broadband users in 2010. A third Pew report released in February 2011 further

shows that the broadband access gap between whites and blacks is slowly closing. Latinos however, continue to lag behind blacks and whites when it comes to broadband access. Only 45 percent of Latinos had broadband access in 2011, compared to 65 percent of whites, and 52 percent of blacks. Latinos compensate for lack of broadband by accessing the Internet on their phones, because data reveal that Latinos are more likely than African-Americans or Caucasians to use their phones to go online. In sum, minority groups continue to lag behind whites in Internet access, but the digital divide is narrowing slowly.

Online sources usually supply a mix of entertainment and information options. The Internet hosts many sites that offer entertainment as well as political and non-political information under one umbrella. For example, individuals can use *YouTube* to watch music videos for entertainment, retrieve an informational video on how to fasten a bow tie, or review campaign ads and see political speeches. Similarly, *NYTimes.com* users can browse the site to read about politics, get political commentary by selecting one of the site's blogs, or watch a video on the latest New York fashion styles, browse film critiques, and movie trailers.

The format in which online content is delivered varies greatly as well. There are videos, newspaper articles, blogs, podcasts, and streaming radio, etc. Given prior research on media effects, just *how* the content is delivered should affect processing of information and hence political knowledge. All of the online formats delivering information are in some sense a replication or extension of the old information environment, where newspapers, radio, and TV dominated. Evidence from previous media effects research shows that the format in which information is presented matters. For example, scholarship has compared the impact of traditional print newspapers as compared to televised information, and data show that reading information correlates with increased retention of the information. The effect, however, lessons and may disappear after controlling for cognitive skill (See Neuman, Just, and Crigler

1992).[7]

Hence, there is reason to expect that people with different cognitive abilities engage with the Web differently, and that information retrieval and learning from the Internet is highly idiosyncratic, with non-uniform effects on knowledge, opinion, and behavior. Further complicating our expectations of possible media effects, there is evidence that reading online does not equal reading print. While online newspapers may resemble traditional print papers most closely, research comparing information search by individuals using print and online newspapers suggests that individuals engage with the same source (in this case it was The *New York Times*) differently when reading the paper on the Web and reading it in print. Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) found that online readers are more selective than their print counterparts and were less likely to read political articles.

Surveys on Internet use, however, do not capture these differences. Most survey instruments that contain a measure of Internet use simply ask respondents to indicate how many days in the past week they have used the Internet to access political information. Surveys do not require respondents to say what was the source, or the format, of the information they accessed. Thus, because surveys fail to differentiate between the distinct ways to engage with information online, there has been no way to study the effects of online news and information retrieval depending on the formats users chose.[8]

Despite the generic wording measuring online news engagement, various sources of data suggest that the Internet has become a staple of the American news diet,

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[7]Other scholars have found effects on knowledge that do not disappear with education.

[8]The American National Elections Study, for example, asks "During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, not including sports?" This kind of wording makes it impossible to distinguish between online newscasts, newspapers, blogs, or even social networking. Source: 2008 ANES, if respondent was assigned to the "new" version of the survey.

and academic research is slowly developing theories about the effects of Web use on politics. Citing Pew data, Neuman et al. (2010) show that Americans have been relying more on the Web to retrieve news than on network TV since 2006. In 2008 Americans were more likely to say they went online to read news than to claim reading a print paper on a daily basis. Thirty-seven percent of Internet users rely on the Web to access news every day, 15 percent report they use the Web for news three to five days per week, and 12 percent say they use it one or two days. About 27 percent rarely or never use the Web for news (see Table 1).

While minorities are less likely than Caucasians to have Web access, they are almost as likely to get their news from online sources as white Americans. In fact, black Internet users surpass white respondents in saying they use the Web to get news on a *daily* basis. Table 1 shows that 41 percent of African-American respondents say they use Web for news every day, compared to 37 percent of white survey participants who say the same, and 29 percent of Hispanic respondents. Hence, black Americans are the most frequent users of online news sources. A different Pew Survey further illustrates the reliance of blacks on online news: In 2012, 71 percent of black Web users and 77 percent of white Web users, reported "ever get[ting] news online."[9]

The trend of minorities to access news online is consistent with the fact that there has been a proliferation of online-only news sites, some of which are specifically designed to serve the information needs of blacks. For example, The Washington Post Company launched *The Root* in January 2008, and NBC News created *The Grio* in 2009. These new sites present black perspectives on current affairs and highlight information often neglected in mainstream news. *The Grio* for example, featured information about the Trayvon Martin shooting eight days before mainstream outlets

[9]These are unweighted numbers. Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project. Civic Engagement survey, August 2012. www.pewInternet.org/Shared-Content/Data-Sets/2012/August-2012–Civic-Engagement.aspx. Downloaded January 16, 2013

published news about the case.[10]

There is, of course, a long-standing history of African-Americans using black newspapers published with the primary goal of empowering African-Americans, and lending a voice to neglected interests, and political causes.

> "[African Americans] wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly... From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented. Our vices and our degradation are ever arrayed against us, but our virtues are passed by unnoticed."[11]

In contrast to digital gains, readership of African-American newspapers has declined steadily over the past years. While African-American papers are struggling to reinvent themselves in the new market, digital sources like *The Grio* and *The Root* are doing comparably well.[12,13]

In addition to sites catering to African-Americans, there are numerous sites for Hispanic Americans, both in English and Spanish, providing unique views on immigration policy, information technology and the economy. *NewsTaco* for example, is an independently owned website that provides "innovative and insightful news, critique,

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[10]The Grio published its first article on the case on March 8, 2012, titled "Family wants answers in Fla. Teen's death." This was eight days before the The New York Times released the first article about the shooting on March 16, 2012. The first NY Times article on the same subject was entitled "Justice Department Investigation Is Sought in Florida Teenager's Shooting Death."

[11]Freedom Journal Inaugural newspaper editorial. In Overholser and Jamieson (2005)

[12]Source: http://stateofthemedia.org/2013/african-american-2. Retrieved online 01/14/14

[13]Because these sites are not operated by an independent African-American owned company, I am by no means expecting them to be as committed to civil rights issues as *The New York Amsterdam News*, for example. Research has shown that ownership affects content, but that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I think that minority ownership, and the actual content of the sites matter a lot, but the analyses is subsequent chapters are not designed to pick up on those differences. Hence, all sites targeting a certain population are assumed to provide information relevant to that population, even if the depth and commitment to racial issues varies.

analysis and opinion from a Latino perspective." The founders of *NewsTaco* explain the name of their site by noting, "there was no place that provided Latino news and information in a way that totally satisfied [...] — like a taco that gives you everything you need in one bite. [We] worked to provide an authentic Latino point of view on NewsTaco" (NewsTaco, 2012).

Additionally, popular outlets like *The Huffington Post* are adding niche sites targeting marginalized populations by offering *Latino Voices*, and *Black Voices*. Scholars have not yet considered the impact of these sites on the political knowledge, opinions, and participation of minority populations, even though one would expect sites that are designed to speak to an audience, to convey salient information that would be processed more carefully, perhaps leading to greater political awareness and participation.

1.2 Democratic Theory and Political Knowledge

American politics is fundamentally concerned with an investigation of the question *who governs?* Access to information plays an important role in answering this question because, in the words of Francis Bacon, "knowledge is power." In their seminal work, Delli-Carpini and Keeter (1996) argue that knowledge of politics is a resource, which, "like any resource, [...] can be distributed in more or less equitable ways."[14] The question of whether there are segments of the US population with disproportionate access to resources like knowledge is important both in practice and in normative theory.

In this dissertation I focus on Web effects on political knowledge and political

[14] p. 152

participation of African-Americans for two simple reasons: Marginalized populations have historically exhibited lower knowledge levels and have been less able to influence government as a result (Delli-Carpini and Keeter, 1996). I test whether the availability of information online can lessen discrepancies in knowledge between whites and minorities who are interested in politics, hoping that, in the long run, better knowledge will translate into more political influence and better representation by the system.

At the heart of democratic theory lies the normative ideal that a democratic society ought to represent the general will of the public. What exactly that means and who "the public" is, has changed since its first articulation. Plato and Aristotle were perfectly comfortable with the exclusion of large segments of society from the democratic process and did not see a contradiction in this exclusion. In more recent history however, scholars of both participatory and deliberative democracy have demanded a much broader and more egalitarian understanding of democracy that calls for the inclusion of all groups. This expectation is rooted in the tradition of the enlightenment and has been articulated in various ways by Mill, Dewey, Barber, Habermas, and others.

This dissertation is firmly grounded in the normative concern that we ought to strive for the widest inclusion of citizen input to maximize popular control, and to minimize systemic inequality in the representation of political interests. In practice (as will be more fully developed below), this means that knowledge ought to be distributed equally. Hence the central concern that drives my research is the question of whether the new media landscape, namely the Internet, has the potential to lessen inequalities in the distribution of knowledge between white and minority Americans.

Delli-Carpini and Keeter (1996) highlight that inequality in the distribution of knowledge is systemic and reflects historical inequalities. The authors show that men are more informed than women, whites are more knowledgeable than African-

Americans, and the wealthy know more than the less well-off. Consequently, the most informed citizens are on average older, affluent, and white males. Furthermore, Delli-Carpini and Keeter argue that differences in knowledge are significant: For example, seventy-five percent of African-Americans do less well than seventy-five percent of white Americans on the authors' knowledge measures.[15] Delli-Carpini and Keeter connect inequalities in the distribution of knowledge to historical struggles for power in the US. They argue,

> "Much of of this nation's enduring political history has been defined by four critical struggles: between the economically advantaged and the economically disadvantaged; between whites and blacks; between men and women; and (in a somewhat different way) between the generation in power and the generations that precede and follow it. In part these struggles result from differences in how each group defines both its own interest and the public interest. They also result from *the historical exclusion of the poor, blacks, women and young adults* from many aspects of the public sphere. Indeed the two sources of conflict are closely related. The political limits placed on members of these groups were often justified by assuming that they lacked the civic capacity to know what was in their own or the public interest."[16]

The authors also note that the knowledge gap between blacks and whites closed between the 50's and 70's but resurfaced by 1988 with a corresponding dip in participation.[17]

Why does the distribution of knowledge matter? Research has shown that the

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[15] p.157

[16] p.156 (Emphasis added)

[17] p.163

political preferences of African-Americans and Latinos are politically more poorly represented than whites' (Bartels 1998; Griffin and Newman 2006). In order to influence the political process, and to have an impact on representation, citizens need to know their political interests and be civically engaged in a meaningful way. This interpretation of the importance of political knowledge is an "instrumentalist" view of knowledge. Delli-Carpini and Keeter argue that having political knowledge is an instrumental good that "helps to enlighten one's self-interest and to translate it into effective political action.[18] Thus, ideally, all citizens ought to know about the policies affecting them, and how to influence the political process by becoming civically engaged. Hence there is a close connection between political expertise and citizenship. Some scholars go so far as to argue that the uniformed are de facto disenfranchised. Converse (1990) for example, argues that,

> "whatever influence constituent signals have upon representatives, and hence upon national decision making, the signals tend to be defined disproportionately by the more informed [...] The more troubling implication is that the representation system in spirit follows a "one-person, one-vote" formula rather less than the letter of the law would suggest, and those poorly informed tend to suffer at least partial disenfranchisement as a result."[19]

Political knowledge is important in other contexts as well and contributes more generally to desirable democratic principles. Delli-Carpini and Keeter show that there is a strong correlation between knowledge and civic virtues like tolerance, political participation, and the formation of political opinions. Despite the various beneficial properties of general political expertise for democracy, in this dissertation I focus

[18] p.218

[19] p.387

on the significance of "situational political knowledge" (defined in chapter 2) as an *instrumental good*.

Specifically, I examine the effects of the new media environment, assuming that the Internet offers greater choice and more opportunities to learn about politics. I test the effects on political knowledge and political attitudes of white and black (as well as Latino when available) Americans. I utilize both longitudinal survey data and an experiment to examine how whites and blacks use the new high-choice information environment to become politically informed. In chapter three, I present evidence from survey data. In chapter four I explore the effects of a diverse (non-mainstream) news environment on candidate knowledge. In chapter five I present results testing the effects of a diverse news environment on policy polarization, affective polarization, and vote choice, followed by a concluding chapter.

Table 1.1: **Frequency of Online News Consumption by Race/Ethnicity**

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Total
Every Day	37 %	41 %	29 %	49 %	37 %
3-5 Days	16 %	14 %	17 %	17 %	16 %
1-2 Days	12 %	12 %	16 %	5 %	12 %
Once Every Few Weeks	8 %	8 %	5 %	4 %	8 %
Never	19 %	18 %	26 %	17 %	19 %
Don't Know/Refused	0 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
N=	1904	221	249	144	2518

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. Biennial Media Consumption Survey, May 2012. Unweighted numbers.

Chapter 2

The Media Environment and Political Knowledge

As Lippmann famously asserted, we lack knowledge of current affairs because we lack firsthand experiences with them. "Not being omnipresent and omniscient we cannot see much of what we have to think and talk about." Because we know little (or nothing, really, as Lippmann puts forth), we are forced to rely on elites who have access to public affairs, to tell us about the world. Hence we depend on the media to make knowledge available to us. According to Lippmann, we acquire knowledge from elites via the media. Lippmann's narrow (and perhaps outdated) view of politics and knowledge contrasts sharply with more recent (and radical) conceptions of knowledge.

Most notably, feminist and race scholars would fundamentally disagree with Lippmann's notion that our daily lives are devoid of direct experience with politics. Depending on the kind of firsthand experience and corresponding knowledge we are referring to, one could argue that women's daily experiences, for example, have the potential to convey a lot about politics vis a vis an awareness of how the social sta-

tus of women shapes their world.[1] And while women might first have to translate their daily experiences into political issues, to blindly state that we generally lack firsthand experience with politics means to ignore the systematic disadvantages that populations who are not white, male, affluent, straight, and able-bodied experience daily.

In much the same way, African-Americans' day-to-day experiences are not as free from politics as the daily lives of many Caucasian Americans, and their experiences are one source of knowledge that contributes to public opinion. Simply put, "politics is who gets what, when, and how" (Lasswell 1936). Members of marginalized groups are often keenly aware[2] of the negative effect that membership in a disadvantaged group has on access to resources. Dawson (2001) highlights the importance of social location and spatial situation, in addition to access to black information networks, as determinants of black public opinion. He states, "social locations that are posited to play key roles in shaping black public opinion are socioeconomic status, gender, and level of concentrated poverty."[3] Women, minorities, the poor, and their various intersecting identities experience subtle but persistent cues about their social position, their various disadvantages, which, if recognized, convey a significant amount of information about the social and political world. For marginalized populations, then, knowledge can be expected to be acquired in complex ways. Models of public opinion are consequently more complicated than commonly assumed in American politics research.[4] In fact, to discount these differences merely contributes to the concealment

[1]See Hartsock (1998) and other feminist philosophers for an elaboration on how women's lives differ structurally from men's and how this "standpoint" is (or, to avoid white ethnocentrism, "standpoints" are) a source of knowledge providing an alternative to the privileged vantage.

[2]Awareness often exists via linked fate, or group consciousness and can be more or less salient depending on a variety of factors. Women have notoriously low levels of group consciousness while African-Americans have a heightened sense of consciousness. The differences reflect how much discrimination is felt.

[3]p.68

[4]See p.70 in Dawson (2001) for a related critique of Zaller's two-message model.

of unequal social relations.

Individuals learn about politics when they have the motivation, ability, and opportunity to do so. Motivation to learn about politics is captured by interest (general and self-interest). Hence what we know often depends on what we think would benefit us (as a person, group, or society) to know. Some individuals learn a lot about a *specific* topic given their own identity and experience. They possess what Delli Carpini and Keeter refer to as "situational knowledge," which captures "the *instrumental benefits* of knowledge usually deriving from specific information relevant to a particular situation."[5] Individuals exhibiting situational knowledge are information specialists and contrast with information generalists who are equally knowledgeable about a wide range of political topics. One example of situational knowledge is marginalized groups who know more about topics that affect them directly. This view is consistent with research on "issue publics" (e.g. Converse 1964).

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) also note the importance of experience and identity in learning about politics. They argue, "television news is, of course, not the only source of information people draw on when thinking about the nation's problems. Another is personal experience."[6] Individuals who have experienced problems were more likely to cite those problems as concerns for the nation. Iyengar and Kinder's experiments, for example, showed that news coverage of civil rights issues was more influential among African-Americans, and similarly, unemployment coverage was more prominent to those currently out of work. Consequently, awareness of one's identity and the experiences connected to that identity matter. They help individuals set standards by which to evaluate incoming information. According to Iyengar and Kinder, "people do not take into account all that they know — they cannot, even if they are

[5] p.219. Emphasis added

[6] (p.113)

motivated to do so. Instead, they consider what comes to mind, those bits and pieces of political memory that are accessible" (p.114).

Delli-Carpini and Keeter also show that blacks and women know more about certain group-relevant issues than men and whites even though both groups score lower on traditional measures of political knowledge.[7] For example, African-Americans in the state of Virginia know more about the death penalty than whites. The authors explain this finding by noting that there is a disproportionate number of African-Americans on death row in Virginia, and that knowledge of the death penalty therefore carries greater immediate significance to African-Americans who live in Virginia than whites. This finding is consistent with research identifying "issue publics." According to Boninger, Krosnick, and Berent (1995), issue public membership is driven by a person's unique material self-interests and his or her identification with a reference group (and reference individuals). Other scholars have found additional evidence that individuals are more knowledgeable on issues that concern them (Hutchings 2001, 2003; Iyengar 1990; Krosnick 1990). In contrast, Zaller (1992) argues that the tendency to be informed about group matters is not significant. Noting that women are often no more informed about court decisions on abortion, he wants to "give pause to readers who may suspect that, although citizens are often poorly informed about politics in general, they still manage to learn about matters that are especially important to them."

There are important factors besides group-membership that predict political knowl-

[7]Which also raises the question how "general" the general political knowledge measures really are. Are they based on what we'd expect Caucasians to know? If so, the general knowledge measures are endogenous to the causal model that undergirds research on the distribution political knowledge among various groups in American politics. For example, African-Americans are knowledgeable on government services and know how to access them. This kind of knowledge, however, is not thought of as civics knowledge and not part of the test. Hence, the general knowledge measure may always produce biased estimates. If we use a measure that is essentially a "white" knowledge inventory, whites will always score higher and all SES variables associated with white privilege will predict general political knowledge.

edge. Individuals not only learn when they have the motivation, but also the ability, to do so. Ability refers to cognitive factors. Political knowledge as a concept is far more complicated than how we generally measure it — as a simple count of correct answers to factual knowledge questions. Political knowledge is more than a number of facts stored in long-term memory: We organize knowledge into packages of information. These information packages are then linked to form cognitive schemas, which are hierarchically organized networks of concepts that help us interpret the political world (Lau and Erber 1985). Individuals who already have political expertise are better at this than those who are new to politics (as are experts in any field). Schemas are based on experience (reflecting both motivation and opportunity), but if you lack experience, those pre-existing knowledge structures, then it may often be difficult or even impossible to process new information. Cognitive ability varies according to educational attainment.[8] Education, however, is not equally available at the same quality across all segments in the U.S. and that affects political knowledge. Delli-Carpini and Keeter (1996) note that low political knowledge levels among non-whites point to other important systematic disadvantages encountered by non-whites: Resource-poor schools and consequently poorer education further solidify the negative relationship between being black and having political knowledge.

In addition to motivation and ability, we also need the opportunity to learn about politics. While every-day experiences are one source of political knowledge, opportunity also depends on the media environment and available information, to a large

[8]The notion that there are any differences in cognitive ability between racial and ethnic groups that precede education or early childhood socialization, etc, is a persistent yet deeply offensive question in my view. Some scholars argue that differences between groups and the role of genetics vs. environment are not resolved, or that there are group differences (e.g. Rushton and Jensen 2005). I do not wish to explore this here and will assume that innate cognitive ability is random and not systematic.

degree (Prior 2007; Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen 2006).[9] In this dissertation, I explore whether *improving the opportunity to learn about politics via new media can mitigate structural disadvantages experienced by blacks* and improve situational knowledge by members of that group. As noted earlier, there are instances where blacks surpass whites on knowledge questions, and this gain in political knowledge over other groups highlights the importance of self-interest and group membership in the acquisition of knowledge. The fact that marginalized groups have more expertise on some issues shows that there is a potential to overcome structural disadvantages via self-interested engagement with knowledge. In other words, marginalized groups might be able to compensate for structural disadvantages and a lack of general knowledge, by becoming information specialists on issues that matter specifically to their group, *especially if the information environment makes access to group-relevant information by trusted sources easy.*

I hypothesize that the Internet, a medium that is designed to be *used* to selectively expose oneself to information, might be particularly useful for issue publics, minorities, women and other marginalized groups. The interactivity of the Web might "fit the bill" by providing the opportunity to seek out information necessary for minority issue publics to be informed. This is especially true given (1) that there has been a proliferation of sites designed to attract the attention of marginalized groups, and (2) that research suggests that minorities prefer, spend more time with, and recall more information from articles targeting minority media consumers (Appiah 2003; Knobloch-Westerwick et al. 2008), and are partial to nonwhite communication overall (Dawson 2001).

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[9]Niche news like feminist blogs, political sites geared towards African-Americans might also enhance political awareness by heightening racial salience, group consciousness, or linked fate, as African-American print papers have historically done. These factors should in turn increase the ability to translate every day experiences into political experiences, but that research is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

2.1 The Information Environment, Choice, and Political Knowledge

Motivation, ability, and opportunity are all factors in shaping knowledge levels. I focus on opportunity, while also considering motivation, and ability. Opportunity is important, because mainstream media have not supplied minorities and white Americans with information equally. There is ample evidence that blacks and Latinos have historically been served poorly by broadcast TV and other mainstream news outlets (Berry 1982, Campbell 1995, Davis and Gandy 1999, Washburn 2006). Dawson (2001) shows that blacks consider news "from the grapevine"[10] to be more reliable, than information originating in "white America." It is not surprising then, that more than fifty percent of blacks say they have read a black newspaper, eighty percent say they have watched a black TV program, and 78 percent say they listened to a black news program on the radio, in the past week.[11] Miller and Krosnick (2000) also find that minorities, women and the young trust mainstream media less than their white, affluent, male counterparts. Additionally, there is evidence that mainstream media decrease feelings of group identity. Allen and Kuo (1990) found that mainstream news consumption bears a negative relationship to racial identity. Davis and Gandy (1999) point out that blacks utilize the radio far more than TV to get relevant information. Hence, while mainstream media sources might serve the information needs of white Americans, especially affluent white male Americans, they might not have equally offered the opportunity to learn about politics to other groups.

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[10] p.69

[11] Table 2.3 in Dawson (2001) p.72

It is not surprising then, that alternative news sources have played an important role in the political emancipation of minorities. Newkirk (in Overholser and Jamieson 2005) argues that alternative papers published by minorities who were denied full citizenship "raised the bar on American democracy by exposing the hypocrisy of a nation founded on principles of liberty and justice, but that somehow rationalized the enslavement of African people, the subjugation of Native Americans, and the fierce discrimination against Asians."[12]

A notable trend among scholars who study the Web's impact on politics is the expectation of increased fragmentation by issue publics and partisans, both on- and offline. Tewksbury (2003) notes that "coupled with the expanded volume of news content available at most news sites on the World Wide Web, the interactivity of the medium should lead to greater selectivity on the part of news audiences."[13] In an essay Habermas (2006) footnotes the potential of the Internet to become an alternative source of information to issue publics. His assessment of the usefulness of the Web for a liberal democracy is skeptical because use of the Web by issue publics would merely lead to social fragmentation. He states,

> "Allow me in passing a remark on the Internet that counterbalances the seeming deficits that stem from the impersonal and asymmetrical character of broadcasting by reintroducing deliberative elements in electronic communication. The Internet has certainly reactivated the grassroots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers. However, computer-mediated communication in the Web can claim unequivocal democratic merits only for a special context: It can undermine the censorship of authoritarian regimes that try to control and repress public opinion. In the context of

[12]p.82 in *The Press*

[13]p. 695

> liberal regimes, the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend instead to lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics.'[14]

What are the mechanisms that allow individuals to engage with highly customized information online? Unlike television, where viewers were passively exposed to information, the Internet requires input from its users. Individuals usually retrieve information in one of two ways: They either use a search engine (e.g. Google, or Yahoo) or they surf the Web by selectively clicking on links that take them from one site to another.

Recent research has shown that search engine algorithms contribute to a customized engagement with information. By automatically filtering news based on previous searches, location, browsing history, and other data, most search engines limit our online search results and present choices we are most likely to click on (Pariser 2011).[15] Furthermore, Hindman (2009) has shown that the link structure of Web content has a significant impact on what individuals are exposed to when they go online, and what is hidden from them.

While digital sophistication varies (Hargittai 2002), (and with that the ability to customize one's information and entertainment environment), it is obvious that today's audience is not an audience of passive receivers. Political science research has focused heavily on Klapper's 1949 selective exposure theory to explain media choice, but there are several other ideas from decision-making research in psychology and media choice studies in communications that predict media choice.[16]

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) has been one of the most influential

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[14] p.422

[15] Congress introduced a bill in May 2011 that would give consumers the ability to opt out of this automatic customization, but no legislation has been passed to date.

[16] A good overview from media studies is *Media Choice* (209) edited by Hartmann.

ideas in political science to explain selective exposure to news content. Festinger's theory has been used to predict that individuals personalize information to suit their taste, or at least to minimize conflict with existing attitudes. Thus, even if the Web presented an ideologically balanced mix of information to its users, many individuals would nevertheless engage only selectively with such information. Yet overall evidence for selective exposure has been mixed. Sears and Freedman (1965) found that individuals do not actively avoid exposure to information that challenges their viewpoint. The authors argued that individuals instead find themselves in an environment where they do not have to be exposed to challenging information. This is referred to as "de facto" selective exposure. Stroud (2008) tested this hypothesis using both cross-sectional and panel data, and found that partisanship does in fact motivate selective exposure to news. She also found, however, that individuals do not exclusively surround themselves with attitudinally congruent information. Another study similarly found that many Internet users spend time investigating messages that challenge their standpoints (Garrett 2009), and Wojcieszak (2010) showed that some partisans regard opposing viewpoints as useful to strengthen their own argument.

In an experiment specifically designed to understand what ideological mix most appeals to an online audience, Munson and Resnick (2010) distinguished between subjects who are diversity-seeking and those who are challenge-averse. They noted,"contrary to the implicit assumptions of previous research on selective exposure, neither diversity-seeking nor challenge-avoidance is a fundamental trait of human behavior that describes all people." They find that while the majority of subjects in their study were challenge-averse, there was still a sizeable number of individuals who preferred a mix of attitudinally congruent and incongruent information online

Taber and Lodge (2006) found that individuals exhibit both a confirmation and a disconfirmation bias when presented with information. Their experiment showed that individuals confirm beliefs by privileging information that is consistent with their

prior convictions and by discounting information that clashes with existing attitudes.

Drawing upon theories of selective exposure and motivated reasoning, Valentino et al. (2009) argue that emotions also guide selective exposure. Valentino et al. test how anxiety affects selective vs balanced exposure to information. The authors assume that individuals primarily seek out information because it is useful to them and find that individuals who experience anxiety seek out balanced information if they anticipate that they will have to justify their stance, while they prefer one-sided information if they don't have to defend their position. This suggests that emotions and utility can interact and subsequently drive the information search. Valentino et al's study also suggests that it would be wrong to assume that citizens will default to selective exposure in the new information environment. The authors note that there may be very common circumstances under which individuals seek out balanced information.

While cognitive dissonance theory has been used widely to explain selective engagement with information according to one's ideological preferences, Donsbach (2009), argues that Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory is "one of the biggest misunderstandings in the history of social research" (p.141). This misunderstanding, according to Donsbach, stems from the focus on consonance, even though Festinger's theory focused on dissonance. In other words, Donsbach argues that Festinger's theory has been used to predict what information individuals select to produce consonance, when it was really a theory about *existing dissonance* and the *subsequent avoidance* of material that further increases the psychological discomfort of dissonance.

Donsbach is correct in pointing out that Festinger did not make predictions based on a state of consonance. Festinger states,

> The basic hypotheses I wish to state are as follows:
>
> 1. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable,

will motivate the person to try and reduce the dissonance and active consonance.

2. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance.

As the quote above illustrates, Festinger's theory is focused on the reduction of dissonance. Moreover, the desire to reduce dissonance depends on how pronounced the dissonance is. Festinger states, "The presence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. The strength of the pressures to reduce the dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance."[17]

This distinction is especially relevant when we consider experimental research where subjects often enter the experimental conditions without any significant a priori attachment to the alternatives they are being asked to consider. In other words, there is often no need to avoid dissonance, or to seek out consonant information to alleviate dissonance, because subjects are starting out without feelings of dissonance, or feelings of any kind, really. This makes a simple application of Festinger's theory questionable. [18].

There are, of course, other theories of cognitive consistency that fit within the framework of selective exposure, though they are rarely used to provide a theoretic reason why we expect confirmatory information search. Rooted in Gestalt theory, Heider's work for example, suggests that we create cognitive balance by bringing evaluations into agreement . He suggests that we extend our evaluation of a person (or news source) to its content. In other words, if I like or trust Fox News, and if

[17]p.18; See also p.183 for a reiteration of the importance of the *magnitude*.

[18]Studies in neuroscience have identified regions in the brain that are activated by cognitive dissonance and researchers have been able to tie dissonance to attitude change (Van Veen et al. 2009)

Fox News casts the president in a negative light, I will dislike the president, etc (see Osgood 1960, and Abelson 1968 for summaries of other cognitive consistency theories, and more recently Simon and Holyoak 2002).

2.2 The Knowledge Gap

Despite mixed evidence for selective exposure, scholars remain concerned that the Web will cause individuals to sort themselves into isolated information environments where one-sided news set the agenda and lead the way. Focusing on changes in the availability of television programming, Prior (2007) shows that increased programming choice widens the knowledge gap between those who are interested in politics and those who are disengaged because more choice means citizens who are disinterested in politics can successfully avoid the news. Prior presents evidence that the broadcast television era had an overall positive effect on political knowledge levels, civic participation, and ultimately the American democracy because audiences had little control over the kind of TV programming they were exposed to. Prior argues that because there were fewer choices, the likelihood that any citizen would end up watching the news and learn something about current affairs, was greater during the broadcast era than in any communication era that followed.

According to Prior, exposure to news during the broadcast era was a result of an inefficient media environment where individuals lacked the ability to perfectly determine what they saw. More specifically, individuals who tuned in to watch entertainment programs often had no other option than to watch the news since there was simply no other program available. Prior argues that this caused everyone to learn about politics, even those with little or no interest in current affairs. Nearly universal access to broadcast TV combined with little choice in programming and high rates of by-product learning thus fostered a moderate electorate with many shared political

goals.

During the 1980s, however, cable TV became an increasingly common feature in US households, and signaled the end of low-choice media. Just fifteen years later, the arrival of the Internet in the mid-nineties marked the beginning of a media revolution that made choice not only plentiful, but virtually infinite. Since then, ever-evolving technology and increasingly fast Internet connections have continued to expand choices. Today, citizens with Web access live in a media environment with countless entertainment and information options, in various formats (online newspapers, videos, or audio), available at a cost similar to a single major print newspaper subscription. Increased choice means people can efficiently seek out the kind of programming they want. Hence, even though there is more news available than ever before, today, fewer people are regularly exposed to it.

Aided by search engine algorithms that are optimized to return results that closely match an individual's existing preferences, we now live in what Eli Pariser (2011) calls the "filter bubble," an information environment where "auto propaganda" abounds. As a consequence, the distribution of political knowledge has changed. The electorate no longer shares a similar set of political facts. Instead, Americans are divided and fragmented. Some are highly informed, others are not informed at all. Moreover, lacking the moderating effects of exposure to mainstream, balanced, and objective news reporting, those who are informed now hold biased or highly partisan views of politics, while some don't hold any opinions at all and fail to turn out to vote. This leads to polarized elections where partisan appeals dominate the political landscape (Prior 2007).

Consequently, there has been significant doubt that the arrival of the Internet in the mid-nineties could improve democratic processes in the United States. This assessment of the Internet's effect on politics stands in stark contrast to initial expectations of the Web's democratic promise. At first, scholars greeted the arrival of

the Internet with enthusiasm. The Web was expected to flatten social hierarchies by removing information gatekeepers, thereby improving access to, and distribution of, political knowledge.

The comparison of the current media environment to the broadcast news era, however, fails to account for the fact that the broadcast news era with it is "one size fits all" news programming could not provide the knowledge necessary for all Americans to participate in the political process in a meaningful way. Minorities, women, and other marginalized groups like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Americans rarely see their interests represented by the mainstream media and routinely rely on niche sources to learn about politics from a perspective that speaks to their group.

Possessing, or lacking information, matters. Research has shown that those who are better informed are also better able to influence elected officials and policy decisions (Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996). Marginalized groups may therefore stand to gain a lot from the vast information found on the Web, if their particular group-centered information needs are met, and they can translate them into more informed political attitudes and vote choices. Furthermore, there is research that suggests targeted or one-sided information consumption may increase participation. Dilliplane (2011) examined the effects of partisan media exposure on participation and political mobilization. Her research confirmed many of the findings Mutz (2006) had previously published in her book *Hearing the Other Side*, namely that exposure to like-minded communication increases mobilization while exposure to cross-cutting ideas diminishes participation.[19]

Most importantly, however, the US is changing. In 1970, when the media land-

[19]These findings are also consistent with Prior's (2007) research demonstrating that increased media choice corresponds to more partisan turnout.

scape was defined by limited choice, the American population was also a lot less diverse than it is today. Only 13 percent of the population was non-white. Census data from 2012 show that minorities (everyone, except non-Hispanic whites) now make up 37 percent of the total population, and are projected to comprise more than half of the total population in 2060.

The research on selective exposure to information found on the Web primarily examines how ideology and partisanship impact news selection online and considers the broader social effects of customized news consumption. As research on issue publics has shown, ideology and partisanship are however, not the only cues by which individuals decide what information to select online.

As I will discuss in greater detail below, humans are limited in their ability to deal with incoming information (Andersen 1983, Fiske and Taylor 1991). It takes considerable effort to process information and most of the time, individuals avoid such cost — unless they are motivated and have a good reason to put forth some effort. This limitation applies to media choice as well: In a world of media saturation, individuals have to simplify choices. They cannot possibly learn everything about all media sources available to make an educated decision about what source best meets their preferences. One way individuals simplify is by using heuristics and by relying on cues. E.g. much like partisan attachment helps voters decide, ideology is expected to guide news source selection; and much like issue voters cast their ballots, members of issue publics select news that speak to their interests. Racial or ethnic group membership, linked fate, etc are also possible cues that help guide news selection.

Hence explaining media choice in the new information environment is complicated, and while I will not be able to offer a comprehensive theory that integrates all possible media choice explanations in this dissertation, my research will explain how group identity matters in the selection of news. Looking at selective engagement with information from a perspective that goes beyond party identification and ideology

may also help us understand why evidence for selective exposure has been mixed. I also hope to recoup some of the multi-dimensionality of the public by adding race as a primary explanatory variable in the discussion of selective exposure.

2.3 Cognitive Limitations and News Source Selection

Humans are cognitive misers (Fiske 1991). When confronted with choice, individuals try to maximize choice accuracy while minimizing cognitive effort (Downs 1957). Every person brings, of course, individual characteristics and preferences to every decision and hence there are many different choice processes and outcomes. I focus on the strategies most commonly employed to simplify media choices in this chapter, and the effects of news selection in a high- vs. a low-choice environment more generally in this dissertation.

Political scientists have applied literature in psychology on decision-making to vote choice (see Lau and Redlawsk 2006). Some of the concepts that have been applied to vote choice, can also be applied to media choice. However, to focus on media choice and selective exposure to news sources, means to ignore two important decisions that precede both online content selection and vote choice: First, before individuals decide what sources to employ to access political information, they choose to either consume political information in general and online specifically, or to avoid it (Prior 2005). Second, if they are interested in politics and decide to seek out political information online, their ability to make choices about the sources they employ is constrained by how well they know technology and how much they can manipulate their online environment.

Political science and communications researchers assume that the public is able to customize their information environment enough to control what information reaches

them and what remains hidden. This assumption is, perhaps, similar to the assumptions behind the importance of political knowledge: Researchers believe that the general public and academics share the same standards and sophistication, even though this is perhaps more wishful thinking than reality.

Lupia (2006) argues that biases arise when the public is held to the same standards as political science scholars hold themselves. Hence measuring political knowledge according to what political science researchers believe to be significant questions, generates biased interpretation of research findings. In the case of political knowledge, presuming that the public and academics are the same makes the public look poorly informed. In the case of digital literacy, taking for granted that the general public and scholars have the same digital sophistication, might give the public too much credit and bias how we think about media effects stemming from the Internet.

Research on Internet selective exposure rests on the implicit premise that the public knows how to customize their news environment via keyword searches, home pages, news alerts, etc. While academics might be digitally literate (we are certainly good at searching for information because locating relevant information is part of our profession), there is no reason to assume that the general public is as sophisticated in their use of the Web. In fact, research has shown that this supposition is far from justified. Hargittai (2002, 2003, 2004, and 2008) and Hindman (2009) demonstrate that most Internet users are quite unskilled in their use of online tools. Citing a Pew Internet and American Life Project study, Hindman notes that most users are "unaware and naive." Hence, even if the public wanted to customize his or her content significantly, their ability to do so is rather constrained. [20]

[20]The public does seem to perceive bias in news sources, however. A study released by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press shows that More than half of Americans in 2004 described Fox biased, and more than 40 percent saw most other news media as having a bias ("Cable and Internet Loom Large in Fragmented Political News Universe" 2005).

Most users also employ search engines when they are online (Hindman 2009). An analysis of queries shows that search phrases are brief and universal. If the public were skilled enough to locate specific information on a particular issue from a particular source, we would expect search terms to be rather long, contain boolean AND/OR operands, possibly a source name, and a particular issue search term (e.g Obama AND Abortion Issue Stance The New York Times). This however, is far from the norm. According to Hindman, searches that take the public to news sites include: Running a query for a celebrity name, googling "weather" or searching for "USA Today." He also notes that much of the public does not distinguish between the search and address bars in a browser window, incorrectly typing, for example, web addresses into the search field, and entering search terms in the url bar.

This gives rise to the question of whether the public is able to access online content efficiently, and to make use of the diversity that exists online. In an edited volume, Hargittai shows that most subjects could not successfullly complete five online search tasks (in Howard and Jones, eds 2004). Hargittai asked subjects to locate 1) cultural events, 2) music, 3) a site that compares presidential candidates' issue stances 4) a government tax form and 5) children's art. Subject were allowed to choose the operating system (macintosh vs. PC) and to select their preferred browser. Only 41 percent of all subjects (N=66) were able to find all five items. Twenty-nine percent found four out of five items and 14 percent completed three out of five tasks. The remaining subject were able to accomplish only one or two out of five assignments. Age was associated negatively with completion. Hence older subjects are less efficient looking up information than younger persons. The number of years using the web was positively related to the dependent variable. Thus, more years spent using technology is positively associated with digital skills. Lastly, having a graduate degree was also

significant and associated with better ability to complete the task.[21]

It can be inferred then, that the general public is more passive in their engagement with online content than political science scholars might presume. Some people in the general public are of course more sophisticated users[22]. These people have invested the time to learn how to best use the Internet because for some reason the cost of learning was worth it to them.[23] Hence some are better to customize their media environment than others. Some experiences the media landscape as an environment where choices can be made, and a lot of people do not.

A significant percentage of users get their news directly from websites like *CNN*, *Yahoo News*, or *The Drudge Report* (Hindman 2009). Research shows that the public searches for known news websites not fresh content. Hence most of the sites used are traditional, well-established sites (Hindman 2009). Hargittai's research (in Napoli, ed 2012) is consistent with Hindman. She also finds that users look for familiar sites online, because sources tied to traditional media organizations seem more accessible. Users therefore "simplify" choice on the Internet by relying on familiar sources and going directly to those trusted sources. This also helps explain why the public does not feel overwhelmed by the potential onslaught of information online (Hargittai et al. 2012).

It is in the selection of news sources that voters simplify the choice of what Web content to read and what to ignore. In other words, online content selection primarily happens via source selection. The order of information-selection is thus most likely as follows: Individuals first select a source, and then allow the source to prioritize content for them. Web sources such as *msnbc.com* or *The New York Times* are

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[21]Another reason to expect that political scientists are more web literate on average than the people they study.

[22]And many probably surpass social scientists in their ability to navigate the Web

[23]Being in school is just one common reason, as computer literacy is part of the school curriculum for most students and required for virtually any advanced degree.

thereby probably still setting the agenda much like TV and print papers used to.

Racial or ethnic group membership, linked fate, etc are powerful motivators that help guide news selection. Davis and Gandy (1999) show that linked fate is associated with increased critique of "white media," and Dawson (2001) argues that African-Americans prefer news tailored to a black audience. Black News sites target African-American audiences via search engine optimization, tag lines, and site names such as "Daily Black news for African American professionals [...]" (*Black News*); "Get Black entertainment and politics news, money and beauty advice, and discuss the issues that matter most to the African American community" (*Huffington Post Black Voices*); "Latest news from a Black perspective with stories and opinions you won't read anywhere else (but should)" (*News One*); "theGrio.com is a news community devoted to providing African Americans with stories and perspectives in breaking news, politics, health, business and [...]" (*The Grio*); And finally, in sarcastic reference to the conservative *Drudge Report*, the *Black Report* describes itself as providing "The latest Black News headlines continuously updated from thousands of African American and major news sources around the Web."[24] See **Figure 2.1** for a screenshot of *NewsOne* and the topics featured on the front page. In general, these sites provide a mix of hard and soft news, which is the norm for most online-only sites (See for example the *Huffington Post* vs. the former print-only publication *The New York Times'* website where hard news continue prevail on the front page and entertainment exists, but is not prominently featured).

Racial identity is, of course, multidimensional and I am simplifying by using the

[24]I selected these sites after searching for "black news" and cross referencing these sites with Pew data to see what the most visited African-American sites are. The sites listed here are of varying popularity. That said, all are from the first page of search results, accessed June 4, 2014. The Huffington Post's site is one of the most commonly visited sites according to Pew. News One is owned by Radio One, Inc., which, together with its subsidiaries (http://www.radio-one.com/), is a media company that primarily targets African-American and urban consumers. The Company is one of the nation's largest radio broadcasting companies.

terms black and African-American as if all Americans who identify as black or African-American in a survey were the same. A deeper analysis would take into account the diversity among those who identify as black in the U.S. and would take their corresponding cultural, social and political differences into account. The Afro-Caribbean diaspora in New York City for example, might not feel targeted by news catering to African-Americans as other black Americans do. Moreover, African-Americans share by no means a unified ideology.[25] I would offer a more detailed analysis if I could, but the necessary measures simply do not exist in the CCAP data and I did not ask them in my own experiment.[26]

There are additional ways individuals decide between alternatives. According to Lau (2003), voters rely heavily on several heuristics when making a vote choice, some of which can be applied to media choice. Most individuals apply *person stereotypes* to choice. Hence age, race, and appearance shape our impressions of a candidate. Similarly, the racial group linked to a website might shape perceptions of the site and might activate schema-based inferences like linked fate that increase trust and usefulness of the information provided. Black sites might also increase perceived usefulness and trust amongst African-Americans because featuring "black news for a black audience" might have a similar effect as an *endorsement* does, another decision heuristic. Lastly, African-Americans might experience positive affect when seeing news tailored to suit their information needs. This is similar to the concept of *affect referral*.

In contrast to a vote choice, however, media choice is not an exclusive choice

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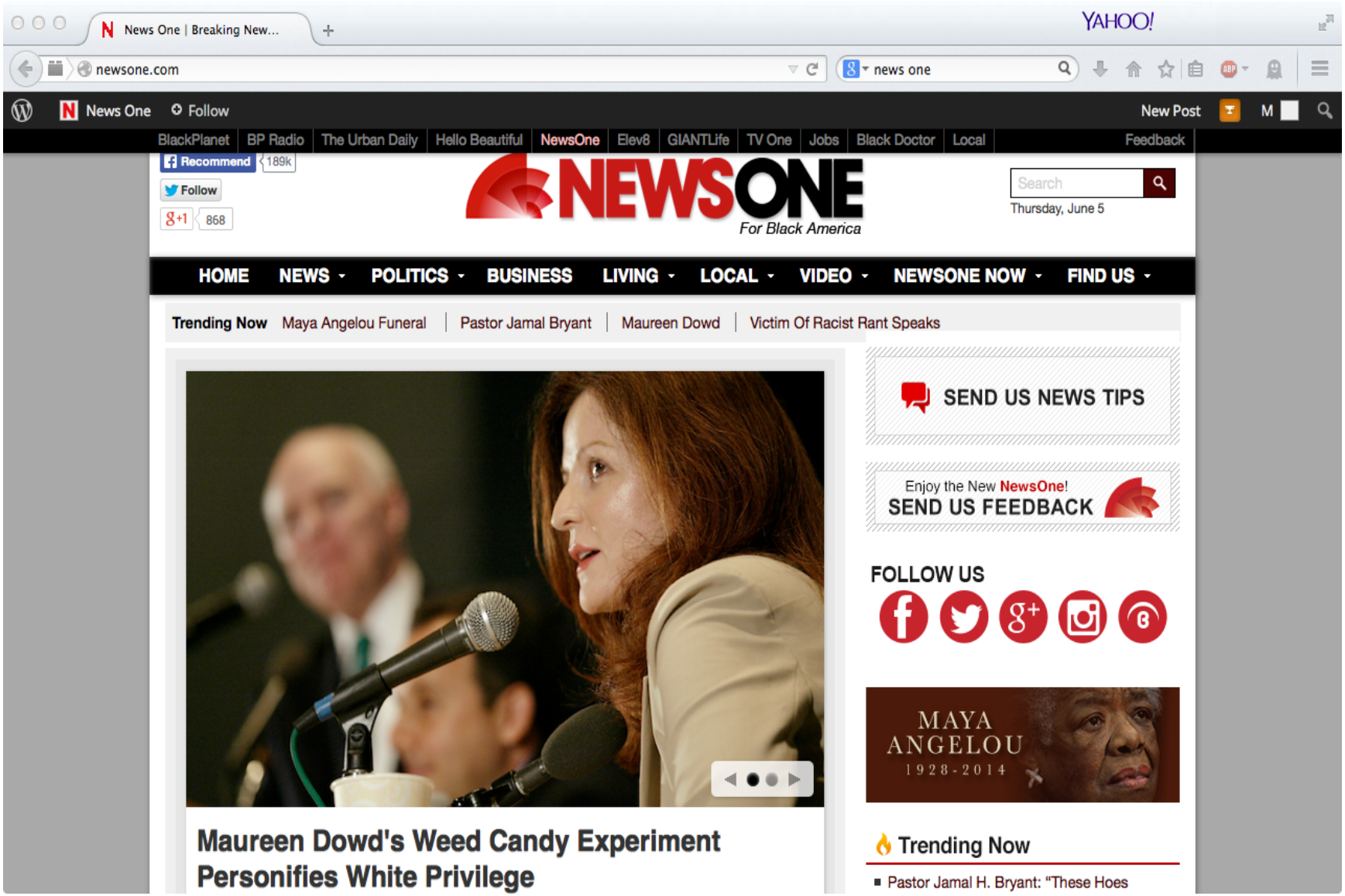
[25]Dawson (2001) notes that black political thought consists of six strands: radical egalitarianism, disillusioned liberalism, black conservatism, black feminism, black nationalism and black Marxism. See also "Dreaming Blackness" (Price 2009) for focus group interviews and an in-depth analysis of black public opinion.

[26]I therefore treat these differences as measurement error. If experimental effects are shown even with this error, we can presume that the effects would likely be greater if we were able to have more measurement precision.

and there are few risks associated with an incorrect choice (or, the consequence is relatively minor). Thus the comparison to vote choice heuristics is tenuous at best. Choosing the wrong website carries far less cost than voting for the wrong candidate. Selecting the incorrect website can be corrected almost instantly by navigating away from the site while a vote for the wrong candidate cannot be corrected and individuals have to wait four years until they get a chance to vote again.

Research in communications usually assumes that the decision to choose a news source is guided by the expectation that the content will be useful and pertinent to one's interests (see uses and gratifications literature, e.g Katz et al. 1999). Interest varies depending on a person's expectations and needs. Different cognitive styles (need for cognition, etc) can also be expected to lead to idiosyncratic engagement with information. As Tate (1994) notes, race is a powerful heuristic. Davis and Gandy (1999) argue that "our relationship with the mass media are at least in part determined by the perceived utility of the information we gather from them. Racial identity may play an especially powerful role in shaping our responses to mass media." Hence, racial identity can be expected to influence not only the processing but the selection of news.

Figure 2.1: **NewsOne Screenshot (6/5/2014)**



Chapter 3

Does Increased Opportunity Lead to Increased Political Knowledge?

As described in the previous chapter, this dissertation tests whether increased opportunity to learn about politics via greater media choice leads to increased political knowledge among African-Americans. The majority of white Americans have — in some sense — always lived in a news world more of less designed just for them. I test whether the Web (as opposed to television) can offer similar information opportunities to black Americans. I examine this question with panel data. Specifically, I test whether African-Americans and Caucasians, who use the Internet to obtain political information, learn a statistically significant amount about the Presidential candidates running in 2008. This is a test of my expectation that African-Americans who have access to the Web and who are *motivated* to gather political information, can make significant knowledge gains if they have the *opportunity* to choose their news sources, thereby mitigating the historical knowledge gap between whites and blacks.

Obama's candidacy produced increased motivation to engage in the Presidential election, as evidenced by the high turnout rate of African-Americans in 2008. Barack Obama was the first mixed-race major party candidate whose chances of winning first

the Democratic, and then the presidential ticket, were realistic. Moreover, Tesler and Sears (2010) show that the 2008 vote choice was "highly racialized" despite the efforts of both Republicans and Democrats to minimize attention to race (p.6). Obama's racial background was a persistent topic during the campaign, and both Caucasians and African-Americans were highly aware of their race. Increased awareness of race has been connected to increased group consciousness and feelings of linked fate — which describes the extent to which African-Americans believe that their own lives are affected by what happens to their group as a whole (Dawson 1994). Increased group consciousness and feelings of linked fate made the election important to African-Americans. While the exact linkage between black candidates, group consciousness, interest, and turnout are more complex than I suggest here,[1] it is important to note that black voters almost matched whites in turnout (as a proportion of their group) in 2008 and that citizens who make it to the polls are generally more informed that those who abstain (Converse 1964; Citrin, Schickler, and Sides 2003). Thus, for the purposes of this dissertation, it can be assumed that African-Americans were both aware of their race, interested and motivated to seek out political information during the campaign in preparation for election day.

Given the wealth of information, and the opportunity to learn about politics online, I expect political (as opposed to general) Web use by African-Americans to bear a significant and positive relationship to learning about the two presidential candidates' policy stances. Learning is captured by measuring how accurate African-Americans and other respondents are in placing both Obama and McCain on four policy issues (Immigration, Health Care, Iraq and Ideology). I predict that political Web use leads to more correct knowledge of both candidates because I assume that even if a person is following Obama and reads about him, he or she inevitably also

[1]See Philpot et al. 2009 for an important discussion of this topic.

learns *something* at *some point about* his opponent McCain (and vice-versa.)[2]

3.1 Variable Construction

To test whether African-Americans who used the Web for political information during the 2008 campaign learned a significant amount about the two major party candidates running for president, I measure how accurately respondents placed the two hopefuls on four policy stands over the course of the campaign. The CCAP questionnaire includes several items that probe respondents' knowledge of where the candidates stand on various policy issues at each wave. These variables are used to quantify changes in political knowledge over the course of the campaign.

While the CCAP data include a measure of general political knowledge, which is a summary scale of answers to 11 factual knowledge questions about people in politics (e.g. Correctly identifying the position held by Condoleezza Rice), this variable is not sufficient as a dependent variable for my research question. Because general political knowledge it is measured only once at the baseline and because the variable captures facts that are presumed to be stable and do not change over the course of the campaign, general political knowledge is time-invariant and can therefore not be used to assess changes in knowledge over the course of the campaign.

Where respondents thought Obama and McCain stood on four policy positions, however, was a measure taken at every wave and can therefore be used as an indication of variation in knowledge over time. In fact, one could argue that such a measure of knowledge is preferable because unlike general political knowledge, candidate knowledge has direct electoral consequences. If voters know where candidates

[2]As in print publications, online news describing one candidate usually also describe his or her opponent, because journalists seek to balance articles and provide an objective overview by comparing and contrasting candidates.

stand, the likelihood of choosing the candidate who best represents their interest should be higher.

Accurate candidate knowledge is designated as the dependent variable. To operationalize the dependent variable measuring *accurate* candidate knowledge at t_2, t_3, t_4 ,etc, the answers of the most knowledgeable segment in the sample (those with a perfect score — eleven out of eleven questions correctly answered — on the general political knowledge test taken at the baseline and discussed in the previous paragraph) were used. Where the most knowledgeable placed McCain and Obama on four policy issues during each wave, was designated as the correct placement by "experts."[3]

Using the average placement of the politically most knowledgeable respondents offers the distinct advantage that it reflects the actual information dynamics of the campaign. If I simply coded the correct answers in hindsight, it would distort what was, and what was not widely known among the public to be accurate at t_2, t_3, t_4. Using the most sophisticated panelists as experts and their time-variant responses on where the candidates stand on policy, offers a way to model correct information as it emerges and becomes known as correct over the course of the campaign. This way, the dependent variable even accounts for "flip-flopping" of candidates, or of changes from more extreme points of view (e.g. during the primary season, to more moderate stances in the general election).

Next, the absolute value of the difference between where each respondent places the candidates on policy issues and where the experts place the candidates was computed and then summed across issues. Lower numbers on this scale indicate a more correct placement of the candidate. The scale was subsequently reversed to make

[3]An earlier conceptualization of the dependent variable measuring accurate candidate knowledge, uses the most educated segment in the sample as "experts." Where the most educated place the candidates on policy issues on average is defined as "accurate." This results are essentially the same when I use the former measure.

interpretation more intuitive. Hence, an increase in the dependent variable indicates more accurate knowledge of the candidates. As **Table 3.1** shows, accuracy increases over the course of the study, but blacks have consistently and significantly lower knowledge than Caucasians and other respondents. An anova and post-hoc test shows that these differences are significant at a $p < .05$ two-tailed between blacks and whites, and one-tailed between whites and "other" respondents (all non-black, non-white respondents). All groups improve roughly at the same rate, increasing their accuracy by about one third of a correct question on average over the course of the campaign. This suggests that, on average, respondents did not learn that much about the two candidates between January and September of 2008. Moreover, the table also shows that there is room for improvement in all three groups.

Media Use: To test how use of the Web for political information affects correct candidate knowledge over the course of the campaign, four media use predictors were constructed. As Prior (2007) shows, some individuals avoid political information because they prefer entertainment. Because entertainment (vs. news preference) is a significant predictor for media choice and political knowledge levels, all regression models include two time-variant measures of Web use and two time-variant measures of TV use, each capturing different uses of the medium.[4] The first Internet predictor is a summary scale of Internet use for political information, while the second Internet predictor is a summary scale of Internet use for non-political, or general activities.

The first Internet predictor *Political Web Use*, represents averaged responses across two dichotomous items. The items used were, first, whether respondents had used the Internet for political reading in the past week, and second, whether respondents had used the Web to read the news in the past seven days. In the baseline

[4]Prior uses relative entertainment preference (REP), a measure I do not replicate with the CCAP data, however, by distinguishing between self-reported general and political use of the Web, I am able to take preference into account.

data, 62 percent of respondents claimed to have used the Internet for political reading while 38 percent said they did not use the Web for political reading in the past week. Seventy-eight percent said they had used the Web to access news and 22 percent said they had not accessed news online in the past seven days. These percentages are slightly lower, and perhaps more accurate, than comparable Pew data suggests, as individuals tend to overreport news consumption (Prior 2009).

A second predictor *General Web Use* was computed by averaging several variables measuring Web use for non-political activities, such as looking up directions online, paying bills, reading sports highlights, shopping, communicating with friends, planning vacations, finding restaurants, and searching for movies, etc. Like the political Internet use measure, this measure is calculated using items that are dichotomous and simply ask respondents to indicate whether or not they have used the Internet for those activities in the past week.

To test whether effects differ across groups, I create dummy variables for Caucasian and African-American respondents, as well as a dummy representing non-white and non-black respondents (simply called "other"). This category thus includes Latinos and all other racial/ethnic groups. I interacted the race dummy variables with the crucial media predictors.[5]

3.2 Data and Method

The data used were panel data from the 2007-2008 cooperative campaign analysis project (CCAP). The baseline wave of this study was fielded in December 2007. Sub-

[5]I initially designated "other" to be the reference group in order to compare white and black respondents, but to make comparison to the findings in the subsequent chapters easier (the experimental data), I sometimes show results from the regressions where white respondents ar the reference category. The results for blacks stay essentially the same when I change the reference category. The data are merely presented and interpreted in a different way.

sequent waves were fielded in January, March, September, October, and November of 2008. The CCAP sample is representative of the US population with the notable exception that it is an online sample. Given that Internet access rates are trending toward universality, however, and that future generations already enjoy near universal access to the Web[6], the CCAP data offer an appropriate window into the near future of American politics.[7] More importantly, however, the research question in this article concerns those who have access to the web and tests the effects of the different ways people use the Web. In other words, because the hypothesis is not about differences between those who do and those who do not have access to the Web, an online panel is the most appropriate data source.

There are two fundamental limitations to causal inference when using non-experimental data: reverse causation and unmeasured confounding variables. Both of these serious limitations can be mitigated using panel data and a fixed effects model. (See for example Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2004 ; or Cameron and Trivedi 2005.)

Panel data feature repeated observations that are clustered on the same individual. This often induces unobserved heterogeneity and gives rise to endogeneity. Consider this example: A linear regression where:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

will produce biased estimates if a variable (e.g. X_2) is correlated with X_1 but not part of the equation. In such a scenario, X_1 would be correlated with the error term and endogeneity would be present.

According to Cameron and Trivedi (2005) fixed effects models offer a way around this problem because they allow for unobserved heterogeneity by including a term δ_i

[6]Ninety-eight percent of Americans between 18 and 29 have access to the Internet according to Pew Internet and American Life data 2013.

[7]If the Internet adoption rate trajectory continues as it has, virtually all Americans will be online over the course of the next half decade making findings from the CCAP panel generalizable.

for random variables that could be correlated with the other predictors in the model. The basic individual-specific effects model then is:

$$Y_{i,t} = \delta_i + \beta X_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

The fixed effects estimator (sometimes called the within estimator) can then be used to exploit the information contained in the variation of the data over time. By taking the average over time, the within model is produced where time-invariant variables cancel out (see Cameron and Trivedi 2005). A fixed effects model allows the intercept to vary for each individual.

A serious disadvantage of the fixed effects model is that the effect of variables like race and gender cannot be estimated, unless they are interacted with a time-variant predictor. Adding an interaction, of course, only makes sense if there is a theoretical reason to compute a multiplicative term. In this dissertation I predict that race (time-invariant) interacts with media use over the course of the campaign (time-variant) to affect the dependent variable. I therefore include an interaction term.

The following fixed effects model is estimated: [8]

$$CP_{i,t+1} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PW_{i,t} + \beta_2 Black_{i,t} + \beta_3 PW_{i,t} Black_{i,t} + \beta_4 X_{i,t} + \delta_i + \delta_t + \lambda_i + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

Where CP is a measure of correct candidate placement, i indexes individual cases, t represents panel waves, PW stands for the use of the Web to access political information, X is a vector controlling on other media use, including non-political use of the Internet, as well as political and non-political TV use, δ_i are individual-level fixed

[8]Before running the model, a Hausman test was conducted. One application of the Hausman test is to decide between fixed and random effects models. Random and fixed effects models are both commonly used to estimate panel data. The Hauseman test compares the significance of the random and fixed effects estimators. Under H_0, when the estimators are not different, a random effects model is preferable because it is more efficient. When the null is rejected, a fixed effects model must be used because fixed effects estimates are consistent under H_1, while the random effects estimator is not. The results suggest that a fixed effects model is the appropriate choice for the data in this chapter.

effects accounting for time-invariant characteristics of individuals like race, education, income, gender, partisan identification, ideology, etc, δ_t are dummies accounting for temporal trends in the data. The last wave (September) is the reference category, and is therefore excluded in the fixed effects model presented in **Table 3.4**. **Table 3.4** also shows interactions of race with the time dummies to allow race to vary in earlier waves.

Fixed effects regression uses within-person variation. This means that each case acts as her own control, and all (measured and unmeasured) stable characteristics are therefore accounted for even though they are not explicitly included in the model. Hence, factors that might affect learning (e.g. political sophistication, interest, educational attainment, voting history, etc) are controlled for. To test the hypothesis that the effect of race and political Internet use on candidate knowledge is stronger for blacks than for the reference group, the interaction term $\beta_3 PW_{i,t} Black_{i,t}$ is added to the fixed effects regression.

Three waves from the 2008 CCAP panel are used: January (Time 2), March (Time 3), and September (Time 4). The power of panel data is best harnessed when multiple waves are used. Unfortunately, not all questions were asked in each wave, and some variables are therefore missing for some waves of the CCAP data. This presents a significant challenge to the optimal use of the CCAP data. Longitudinal analyses of panel data require all independent and dependent variables to be present in each wave. In order to use as many waves of the CCAP data as possible, missing time-variant variables were imputed using *last measure carried forward* in two instances. A December measure of TV use compensates for missing January TV use data and a measure from the third wave compensates for missing Internet use data in wave 4. I ran all models both on the full sample and on a smaller sample that included a nine percent random subsample (without replacement) of all Caucasian respondents to make the racial groups more equal in size. The full sample includes 34, 300

observations for Caucasians; 2,656 for African-Americans; and 3,928 for those who are non-black and non-white. Note that these observations are for all four waves and include individuals who participated in all waves used in this analysis. Whether I used the full sample or the reduced sample did not change the results obtained.

3.3 Results

Prior to fitting the data with the fixed effects model, I ran pooled OLS regressions[9] with robust standard errors to get a sense of the time-invariant variables and their relationship to the dependent variable before the fixed effects model omits them. The pooled regression is for reference only and should not be interpreted in a causal manner **Table 3.2** shows that standard demographic predictors perform as expected. Males, those with more education, those who are older, have higher levels of income, more general political knowledge, and stronger partisan attachments, all display significantly more accurate information about the two competing presidential candidates. Furthermore, consumption of political news on the Web and TV is associated with elevated knowledge levels. TV use for general, non-political purposes bears a negative relationship to knowledge. General Web use is not significant. These results are consonant with earlier research by Prior (2007) showing that a preference for non-political media is associated with less knowledge, and consequently with a gap between those who are interested in politics and those who are not.

Lastly, but importantly, racial differences exist in Model 1. A dummy variable for African-Americans is significant and negative. Hence African Americans display less accuracy of candidate knowledge when compared to the reference group, while Whites are not different from the excluded category. This finding is consistent with research

[9] A "pooled" regression simply combines all observations across all waves

by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) who demonstrate that Blacks traditionally hold lower political knowledge. Next, the interaction terms in Models 2 and 3 show that blacks who use the web however, are significantly more knowledgeable when compared to the reference group even when controlling on political TV viewing which is also significant. Whites who use the Web also exhibit higher knowledge levels. Note that blacks who do not use the TV or web for political information know significantly less. In fact lack of political Web use is associated with getting one third of one policy question wrong, while political Web use is associated with getting about one third of a policy question right (see final pooled model in table 3.2). But, do these trends hold in a fixed effects model and is a there a causal relationship between Web use and knowledge?

The fixed effects models reported in **Tables 1.3 through 1.7** are the models that can be used to infer causal relationships with the most confidence. **Table 3.3** displays two fixed effects models where accurate candidate knowledge of both McCain and Obama is regressed on the time-variant independent variables indicating various levels of media use during the campaign, as well as interactions with African-American.[10] To provide a test against alternative explanations, and to control for the effects of other media use, two TV-use variables mimicking the Internet variables were added to the model.[11]

As the first model in **Table 3.3** shows, the time dummy variables are negative and significant indicating that respondents in the racial reference group (non-black

[10]Recall that the fixed effects model omits all time-invariant variables like gender, race, party-id, etc. The constituent terms of the interaction are therefore not presented here. Also note that each subject with his or her characteristics, ideology, media habits, political knowledge, etc, acts as her own control. Thus, while standard controls do not appear in this model, the effects of these variables are in fact accounted for.

[11]There is a measure of newspaper reading in the CCAP data, but it is only asked once and therefore had to be excluded from my analysis. The first TV variable captures consumption of news programming and political talk shows. The second variable captures overall use of TV programming for entertainment and sports information, etc.

and non-white) knew less during earlier periods of the campaign. African-Americans were even less accurate in placing Obama and McCain during the January wave than the reference group. Whites were no different from the reference group and also knew less in the beginning of the campaign. This is to be expected as voter should learn more as the campaign progresses. The first model also shows that both general and political web use increase candidate accuracy over the course of the campaign. General TV use on the other hand is associated with a significantly less accurate placement of the candidates over time.

In the second model, where the first set of crucial media and race interaction terms are added, the effect of political web use disappears. After adding the race interactions, the coefficient for Political Web Use describes the effect of accessing the Web to get political news by the reference group (non-black and non-white respondents).[12] Political Web use by the reference group does not predict knowledge gains. Furthermore, the interaction between white and political Web use is not significant either, hence whites do not acquire more knowledge when compared to non-black and non-white respondents. Blacks who use the Web for political information, on the other hand, do learn a significant amount when compared to the reference group. This is consistent with the expectation of this article, namely, that African-Americans who use the Web to learn about politics were expected to be significantly more accurate in placing the candidates on their policy positions over the course of the panel study.

Model 3 in **Table 3.3** includes two additional interaction terms. To further test the robustness of my findings, I add interactions controlling for the effects of political TV viewing. As the final model illustrates, political Web use remains significant

[12]As stated earlier, I also ran these models where whites were the reference group to make the comparison between African-Americans and Caucasians more obvious. The results are consistent with the interpretations presented here, and in most instances results are significant at more conservative p values.

in predicting knowledge gains among African-Americans. The interaction term between African-American and political Web use is positive and significant, while the interaction between political TV use and black does not reach significance. General Web use remains significant, suggesting that anyone who goes online also picks up information along the way as a by-product of general Internet use. I present the same model with Caucasians as the reference group in **Table 3.4** to make the comparison to whites directly. As **Table 3.4** shows, blacks who use the Web to become politically informed acquire significantly more knowledge than white respondents. These results hold at $p < .05$. **Table 3.5** Shows the results of an expanded model where I interact political sophistication and interest with the March and January dummies. In that model, the negative effect of general TV use disappears while the effects of Web use become significant at more conservative p-values when compared to table 3.3. **Table 3.6** features the same model as table 3.5, but the reference group is Caucasians. The results are consistent and the coefficients do not change much.[13]

Lastly, I examined whether the results differed Obama and McCain. In the introduction to this chapter I argued that African-Americans were aware of their race, and motivated to seek out political information during the campaign in preparation for election day because of Obama's candidacy. Did they learn about Obama only? **Table 3.7** displays the results of a fixed effects regression showing that the Obama policy knowledge gains just miss significance (p=.104) while blacks do learn significantly about McCain. The picture that emerges from the data then is that blacks

[13]Whether the size of the coefficients is substantively meaningful is difficult to decide in a general manner. An average increase of .17, about one sixth of a correct single policy placement gained, is hard to interpret in a substantive manner without knowing if such a gain translates into other political behaviors such as talking to neighbors, family, and acquaintances about politics, or into increased interest in politics in general, etc. The fact that knowledge is gained via the Web is a start and Web use over the years might affect overall knowledge and voting behavior of blacks in a substantively non-trivial way. I return to these questions in subsequent chapters when I discuss findings from an experiment.

knew quite a bit about Obama because he was a candidate who was relevant to them and increased their knowledge of him (just missing significance) over the course of the campaign. While paying attention to Obama, blacks learned a significant amount about McCain (a candidate they might not have been as interested in, or whose information they might not have sought out given that most African-Americans voted for Obama). This begs the question whether an information environment that's efficient and engaging (as I hypothesize the Web is to African-Americans much the same way mainstream media and the Web have always been and continue to be for whites) in addition to a candidate that is interesting and engaging (as white male candidates have been to Caucasians throughout U.S. history) causes blacks to engage in politics and to learn — in this case about candidates. Taking the reverse (that for whites not much has changed with regards to candidates and the media — in terms of diversity the way I think about it) also explains why whites do not acquire a significant amount of knowledge.

3.4 Discussion

The findings from the survey data indicate that a high-choice media environment plays a crucial role in the acquisition of political knowledge for African-Americans, while TV use does not improve accuracy during the 2008 election. These findings support my prediction that the Web, in contrast to TV allows African-Americans who utilize the medium for political information, to increase their political knowledge — as indicated by the increasingly accurate placement of both candidates on their policies. Interestingly, whites do not benefit from the Web in the same way. This is consistent with the notion that Caucasian Americans have always lived in a media and political world designed to cater to them. The Web, therefore, adds only a marginal benefit to whites when it comes to finding news that is relevant to them and speaks

to them. This finding should be less true for white women, young Caucasians, and other groups, however, who have not been served as well by mainstream media as the average affluent, older, and white straight male has historically been.

The fact that Obama was a viable major party candidate and of mixed-race background is very important. His candidacy engaged African-Americans in the 2008 election cycle and made African-Americans interested in politics. This is a crucial point. Because of Obama's candidacy, It is hard to discern whether my findings are a result of and election featuring a mixed-race, major-party presidential contender, or if my findings are due to the emergence of the Web, or possibly both: the confluence of better access to information and politics that seemed more relevant to black Americans.

More generally, the findings presented model 1 in **Table 3.3** show that general TV use negatively predicts accuracy. Heavy consumption of entertainment TV decreases knowledge. This is consistent with Prior's (2007) hypothesis. General Web use, however, does not decrease knowledge. In fact, general web use positively predicts accuracy. This finding suggests that people who are heavy general web users still learn about politics even if they are not seeking news. Hence there is some by-product learning as a result of overall Internet use. This is consistent with Hindman (2009) who shows that people rarely use the Internet for political news per se. Presenting data from Hitwise, Hindman shows that 16.5 percent of traffic to news sites comes from portal front pages (e.g. Yahoo.com; aol.com. These portals are used by individuals who access their yahoo email and aol emails by navigating to these sites, or using them as their home page.). Hence, individuals who set out to check their email via a portals end up clicking on a link to a news story. This also suggests that users happen to learn at least a minimum about politics by being exposed to headlines and perhaps a few news summaries.

Only 19.5 percent of traffic to news sites came from search engines (Hindman

2009). Hence, purposeful searching for political issues like "Obama on abortion," or a similar topic constitutes a rather small percentage of traffic to news sites. Hindman also finds that most people who use the Web for political information, search for a specific news site they are already familiar with (e.g. CNN). This has implications for agenda-setting and suggests that it is not the average user who sets her agenda, but rather relies on habit and consults familiar sites to learn about current affairs. This also once again underscores the idea that the Web has little to offer over a lower-choice environment to the majority of Caucasian Americans who are interested in politics and have always used print, cable, or network news to become informed. Caucasian Americans simply refer to the online version of whatever cable, TV or print outlet they prefer, and because this is not a huge shift, whites don't increase their knowledge significantly.

African-Americans, however, have lived in a much more limited media environment where there was no TV, and perhaps one or two cable stations, and one print paper available that targeted them, where they live. Compared to what we call a "low-choice" environment for white Americans (three stations and perhaps two papers), blacks have lived in a less than low-choice environment well into the 21st century. Hence the Internet is finally providing something approaching information equity. The effects of this can be seen clearly in the panel data in **table 3.3** where Political Web use does not increase candidate knowledge in models 2 and 3 when the interaction with African-American is added. Model 1 where political Web use includes all races and ethnicities, shows that those who seek out political information online do learn a significant amount. Models 2 and 3 indicated that this finding is in large part driven by African-Americans, further supporting the idea that black Americans stand to gain the most from a diverse media environment where choice abounds.

Table 3.1: **Mean Accuracy of Candidate Placement by Time and Race**

Time	**All Respondents**	**Caucasian**	**African-American**	**Other**
January Wave	5.39	5.43	4.83	5.39
March Wave	5.85	5.91	5.15	5.83
September Wave	6.02	6.07	5.39	5.93
Pooled Mean	5.81	5.76*	5.14*	5.72
Pooled N	28548	24054	1772	2722

*Candidate Accuracy has a range of 0 to 8. * Sig. difference at* $p < .05$*, two-tailed*

Table 3.2: **Pooled Regression — Dependent Variable: Accurate Knowledge of Candidate Policy Positions**

	Pooled 1 B/SE	Pooled 2 B/SE	Final Pooled B/SE
Male	0.326***	0.323***	0.318***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Education	0.403***	0.408***	0.406***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age	0.342**	0.347**	0.358**
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Income	0.037***	0.037***	0.037***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
General Political Knowledge	0.122***	0.122***	0.122***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Ideology	0.062**	0.066**	0.066**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Party ID Strength	0.104***	0.106***	0.108***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Political Web Use	0.876***	0.675***	0.696***
	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.10)
General Web Use	0.110	0.106	0.106
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Political TV Use	0.518***	0.515***	0.458***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.07)
General TV Use	-0.186*	-0.197**	-0.198**
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
January Wave	-0.801***	-0.803***	-0.802***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
March Wave	-0.247***	-0.247***	-0.247***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Black	-0.326***	-0.323***	-0.337***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
White	0.033	0.025	0.023
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Black*Political Web		**0.417****	**0.309***
		(0.14)	(0.15)
White*Political Web		0.232+	0.238+
		(0.14)	(0.14)
Black*Political TV			0.272*
			(0.12)
White*Political TV			-0.033
			(0.11)
Constant	3.464***	3.140***	3.107***
	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.15)
R^2	0.33	0.33	0.33
N of observations=	6019	6019	6019

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$
OLS regression using a subsample of whites.
The dependent variable ranges 0-8.

Table 3.3: **Fixed Effects Model: Predicting Accuracy of Candidate Placement**

	Model 1 B/SE	Model 2 B/SE	Model 3 B/SE
January	-0.730***	-0.730***	-0.729***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
March	-0.250***	-0.250***	-0.250***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
White*January	-0.078	-0.078	-0.078
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
White*March	-0.010	-0.010	-0.010
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Black*January	-0.121	-0.121	-0.122
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Black*March	-0.164*	-0.169*	-0.165*
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
General Web Use	0.062*	0.061*	0.062*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
General TV Use	-0.045^{+}	-0.044^{+}	-0.044^{+}
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political TV Use	0.024	0.024	0.076
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.06)
Pol. Web Use	0.040*	0.029	0.029
	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Black*Pol Web Use		**0.171**$^{+}$	**0.166**$^{+}$
		(0.10)	(0.10)
White*Pol Web Use		-0.001	-0.000
		(0.07)	(0.07)
Black*Pol TV Use			0.025
			(0.10)
White*Pol TV Use			-0.062
			(0.07)
Constant	6.105***	6.107***	6.106***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
N of individual cases = 10198			

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Fixed effects regression using full sample.

Table 3.4: **Final Fixed Effects Model with Caucasians as Reference Category**

	Model 3 B/SE
January	-0.807***
	(0.02)
March	-0.259***
	(0.02)
Other*January	0.078
	(0.05)
Other*March	0.010
	(0.05)
Black*January	-0.087
	(0.06)
Black*March	-0.112+
	(0.06)
Political Web Use	0.028
	(0.02)
General Web Use	0.062*
	(0.03)
Political TV Use	0.014
	(0.02)
General TV Use	-0.044+
	(0.03)
Black* Political Web	**0.166***
	(0.08)
Other*Political Web	0.000
	(0.07)
Black* Political TV	0.087
	(0.08)
Other* Political TV	0.062
	(0.07)
Constant	6.106***
	(0.01)
R^2	0.139
N =	10198

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Fixed effects regression using full sample.

Table 3.5: **Extended Fixed Effects Model: Predicting Accuracy of Candidate Placement**

	Model 1 B/SE	Model 2 B/SE	Model 3 B/SE
January	-1.390***	-1.391***	-1.390***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
March	-0.619***	-0.619***	-0.619***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Soph*Jan	0.059***	0.059***	0.059***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Interest*Jan	0.444***	0.445***	0.445***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Soph*March	0.034***	0.034***	0.034***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Interest*March	0.251***	0.251***	0.251***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
White*Jan	-0.094+	-0.094+	-0.095+
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
White*March	-0.021	-0.021	-0.021
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Black*Jan	-0.109	-0.115	-0.113
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Black*March	-0.081	-0.082	-0.082
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
General Web Use	0.066*	0.066*	0.066*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
General TV Use	-0.040	-0.039	-0.039
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political TV Use	0.022	0.022	0.080
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.06)
Pol. Web Use	0.052**	0.032	0.032
	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Black*Pol Web Use		**0.196***	**0.194***
		(0.10)	(0.10)
White*Pol Web Use		0.007	0.007
		(0.07)	(0.07)
Black*Pol TV Use			-0.013
			(0.10)
White*Pol TV Use			-0.067
			(0.07)
Constant	6.103***	6.105***	6.104***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
N = 10198			

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Fixed effects regression using full sample.

Table 3.6: **Extended Fixed Effects Model: Predicting Accuracy of Candidate Placement with Caucasians as Reference Category**

	Model 1 B/SE	Model 2 B/SE	Model 3 B/SE
January	-1.485***	-1.485***	-1.485***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
March	-0.640***	-0.640***	-0.640***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Soph*Jan	0.059***	0.059***	0.059***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Interest*Jan	0.444***	0.445***	0.445***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Soph*March	0.034***	0.034***	0.034***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Interest*March	0.251***	0.251***	0.251***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Other*Jan	0.094+	0.094+	0.095+
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Other*March	0.021	0.021	0.021
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Black*Jan	-0.015	-0.021	-0.018
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Black*March	-0.060	-0.061	-0.061
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
General Web Use	0.066*	0.066*	0.066*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
General TV Use	-0.040	-0.039	-0.039
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political TV Use	0.022	0.022	0.013
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Pol. Web Use 0.052**	0.032	0.039+	
	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.02)
Black*Pol Web Use		**0.190***	**0.187***
		(0.07)	(0.07)
Other*Pol Web Use		-0.007	-0.007
		(0.07)	(0.07)
Black*Pol TV Use			0.053
			(0.08)
Other*Pol TV Use			0.067
			(0.07)
Constant	6.103***	6.105***	6.104***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
N = 10198			

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Fixed effects regression using full sample.

Table 3.7: **Predicting Accuracy of Candidate Placement on Obama and McCain**

	Obama B/SE	McCain B/SE
January	-0.616***	-1.221***
	(0.01)	(0.02)
March	-0.186***	-0.363***
	(0.01)	(0.02)
Other*Jan	0.094*	0.087
	(0.04)	(0.06)
Other*March	0.033	-0.011
	(0.04)	(0.06)
Black*Jan	0.078	0.003
	(0.05)	(0.07)
Black*March	0.014	-0.153*
	(0.05)	(0.07)
General Web Use	0.060*	0.054
	(0.03)	(0.04)
General TV Use	-0.055*	-0.024
	(0.02)	(0.03)
Political TV Use	0.007	0.013
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Pol. Web Use	0.013	0.027
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Black*Pol Web Use	**0.102**	**0.149**$^{+}$
	(0.06)	(0.09)
Other*Pol Web Use	0.029	-0.074
	(0.06)	(0.08)
Black*Pol TV Use	0.049	0.109
	(0.07)	(0.10)
Other*Pol TV Use	-0.018	0.084
	(0.06)	(0.08)
Constant	6.414***	6.072***
	(0.01)	(0.01)
N =	10205	10207

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Fixed effects regression using full sample.

Chapter 4

Effects of Web Use and Racial Salience on Candidate Knowledge

In the previous chapter, I presented an analysis of panel data gathered during the 2008 election. The findings from the panel data indicate that African-Americans who utilize the Web, a high-choice medium because it includes many diverse niche sites designed to appeal to African-American audiences, to learn about politics make significant knowledge gains, while those who use TV, which is a low-choice medium (or at least a "fewer choices" medium), for the same purpose, do not. Moreover, blacks increase their accuracy on candidate positions in comparison to the reference group (all other non-whites in the sample) while whites do not.

These findings are important. Moreover, because a representative sample was used, these findings are generalizable. These findings also beg the questions of what the process behind them is. Do these results hold under different conditions? There is good reason to suspect that these effects are an artifact of the 2008 election. President Obama was the first mixed-race major party candidate, and given how salient Obama's racial background was in the 2008 presidential bid (Tesler and Sears 2010), black and white Americans might have been more aware of their racial identity during

the campaign, which might in turn have affected the motivation to seek out information and subsequent processing. In the remainder of the dissertation, I test the **(A)** effects of media environment and **(B)** racial awareness on candidate knowledge, experimentally.

Experiments have become a widely used tool in political science (Druckman et al 2011) and they are especially useful to pin-point the processes behind aggregate trends. One time observational data, like survey data, usually fail to reveal causal directions. Panel studies offer an improvement because repeated observations can be used to control for reverse causation and unmeasured variable bias, if the data are modeled correctly.[1] Experiments are another, and even better, way to make causal inferences. Random assignment to different conditions ensures that the only difference between the two (or more) groups is the treatment, allowing the researcher to draw conclusions about the causal effects of the independent variable (the treatment) on the dependent variable. Experiments have been used widely to tease out cause and effect in the formation of decisions, opinions, and knowledge (See Lau and Redlawsk 1997, and Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder 1982, for good examples).

I utilize the dynamic process tracing platform to program an experiment designed to test whether blacks seek out news sources tailored to them and know more about politics (both general and group-specific) as a consequence of this type of selective exposure than blacks who have access to the same information but where the information is labeled as stemming from a mainstream source. I also explore the implications of racial salience on correct candidate knowledge in a high (diverse) and low-choice (mainstream media) environment to mimic the effects Obama's candidacy

[1]There is no clear consensus in the literature how to best model panel data. Scholars in psychology and sociology tend to use models with lagged variables, while economists use fixed- or random-effects models. Some also use hierarchical models or instrumental variables estimators (e.g. the Arellano Bond estimator — see Wawro 2002).

most likely had on voters in 2008. Hence the experiment includes two main between-subject manipulations: (1) Random assignment to either a high- or low-choice media environment (see **Table 4.1.** for an overview of the media manipulation) and (2) random assignment to either receive a racial prime or not. The high-choice condition is a condition where subjects have access to diverse media sources. I call sources that are tailored to minority populations diverse media sources.

Race is a powerful heuristic for African-Americans (see for example Dawson 1994) and serves as a motivation to learn about politics. A race prime was included to replicate the effects of Obama's candidacy in 2008. I could have included a black candidate, but I opted not to do so because I feared that subjects would have thought of that candidate as a candidate similar to Obama. Using President Obama as a heuristic would have obstructed the ability to measure learning. Despite generally high levels of racial awareness among blacks (Tate 1994) the race prime was expected to increase the salience of race for African-American subjects.[2]

Similar to the effect a black candidate might have had on respondents, racial salience was assumed to activate African-American group consciousness, a consistent predictor for political engagement, interest, and behavior among African-Americans. While group consciousness is certainly not the only significant predictor for political attitudes and engagement among African-Americans, it has consistently been shown to affect black political behavior and psychology (Tate 1994, Chong and Rogers 2005, Philpot et al. 2009).[3] To check whether the prime did in fact heighten consciousness, I included a scale measuring group consciousness in the post test.[4] African-American

[2]The prime discusses racial profiling, immigration, and alludes to non-whites as a threat to resources (see Appendix B for the stimulus used)

[3]Similarly, black Democratic candidates on the ballot have been shown to increase turnout (Washington 2005).

[4]I asked about linked fate, the degree of linked fate and general group membership. See Appendix B for the questions used

respondents who were primed on race did in fact report higher levels of group consciousness. The difference was significant using a one-tailed test (as is appropriate for a directional hypothesis).[5]

4.1 Dynamic Process Tracing Environment

To study media effects in the new diverse (high-choice) information environment, it is imperative to first understand what content people are exposed to, or more precisely, *what content individuals decide to expose themselves to.* As discussed in the Introductory chapter of this dissertation, the new media environment is saturated with information and entertainment options and requires at least some input from its users.

In order to study the effects of the new media environment on political knowledge and voter competence, I employ the *Dynamic Process Tracing Environment (DPTE)* software, designed by Lau and Redlawsk to study decision-making during political campaigns. Modeled after information boards, a standard method to examine decision-making in psychology, DPTE is "set up to dig below the surface and watch voters as they try to gather facts about candidates" (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, p. 17). Static approaches (e.g surveys and the typical static information boards) limit the extent to which we can study how the information environment, political candidates, and information search interact. The Dynamic Process Tracing Environment (DPTE), however, is designed to do just that. DPTE is a computer-based system that runs in any browser and presents lab (or online) subjects with a simulated election campaign that unfolds over time (Lau, 1995; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). DPTE can be easily adapted to examine news source selection.

[5]I expected the prime to only increase consciousness. The prime is significant at a p value of .117 two-tailed.

DPTE enables researchers to present a barrage of information to subjects, and to track what information subjects engage with and what they ignore. When subjects run DPTE on a laboratory or home computer, all screens except the window with DPTE close. DPTE runs full screen in a browser window featuring a light blue background. All instructions, questions, etc are presented in a medium sized window in the center of the screen. The visual interface is similar to many online surveys, with the exception of the dynamic portion of the experiment. The dynamic segment in DPTE is essentially a replication of a standard decision-making board, with one notable exception: The items from which subject chose are moving at a steady pace, and are only available for a certain amount of time.

To enter the experiment, participants log on to DPTE from a lab, or their home computers. In a typical election experiment, subjects first read a description of the study, acknowledge a consent form, and answer standard survey questions. Next, participants enter the campaign phase during which they are offered various pieces of information about the candidates in various formats (e.g via text, images, short video clips). The experimenter can control how much new information to introduce at a time. While some information can be programmed to be seen by all participants (a common approach is to show those items as a pop-up window), other items (so-called *information boxes*) are up to the subject to select. Similar to search engine results, information boxes usually bear a headline and a short description of the content, offering just enough information to allow subjects to decide whether to click on, and read the full text, or to ignore it. Information boxes can be customized to bear a logo, providing a cue about its source (e.g. a news organization, the candidate's website, etc). After the campaign phase of the experiment, subjects vote, are given a post-questionnaire, and are debriefed. See figure 4.1 for a screenshot of information boxes in DPTE.

Campaigns are not static information environments where all information is equally

at hand and presented in an orderly fashion. Instead, campaigns are crowded and there is usually more information available than any person could possibly process. Moreover, some information and some news sources are more readily available than others, requiring deliberate effort to find and use them. Similarly, DPTE can be programmed to offer many more pieces of information to its subjects than they can possibly read, and the number of sources can be restricted or expanded, forcing subjects to be more or less selective — much like real people have to be in the current diverse information environment. Thus DPTE is not only ideally suited for the study of campaigns, but also for the study of *selective exposure to information* during campaigns, specifically.

4.2 News Source Manipulation

In my experiment, subjects saw a number of newspaper headlines with a corresponding news source logo scrolling at a constant pace (very much like credits rolling at the end of a film). Subjects could click on any headline to open a pop-up box with the full newspaper article. Because there were several (six) newspaper articles available to subjects at a time, and because they were moving at a steady rate, subjects were not able to read all articles on screen. Subjects were therefore forced to chose to examine some articles and to ignore others. Because DPTE records not only subjects' choices, but the order, and time spent with information, DPTE allows researchers to infer how individuals make decisions. Moreover, DPTE mimics the real world in two important ways: (1) Similar to our current information environment, there is a lot more information available than individuals could possibly read, and (2) DPTE forces subjects to deal with the onslaught of information by customizing their information environment to some extent.

The news sources I present to subjects in my experiment are commonly available

information sources. Some of them were better known than others, but all exist in the real world. All individuals saw a list of the news sources available to them in their condition as they entered the experiment. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two groups: (1) A low-choice media landscape with eight mainstream news sources (I called this the mainstream news or broadcast condition) or (2) a diverse environment with sixteen sources (I called this the Internet condition) with the same eight mainstream sources, plus eight "alternative" Web news sources. See **Table 4.1** for an overview. In order to make a decision what sources to select, subjects had to rely on heuristics like the ones mentioned above. They chose familiar sources, and relied on habit, they most likely also preferred sources they liked or considered reliable. Because the information was presented in a dynamic fashion, subjects had to rely on the decision-making strategies they utilized in the "real world."

4.3 Set Up

All subjects were informed that they are taking part in a mock presidential primary campaign in the year 2016, and that the primary races are wide open. Before entering the mock campaign on their computers, subjects were given a short pre-test where I collected information on voting history and administered a practice session to familiarize subjects with the software.

As part of the practice session, subjects were shown an example news article to provide them with an idea of how long the information items encountered during the experiment would be. This "example article" constituted the fist major between-subjects manipulation in the experiment: a race prime. To model the effects Obama's candidacy had on the racial awareness of Americans during the 2008 election, half of the subjects received a treatment designed to heighten the salience of their race. The

example article was randomly either a benign story about travel to Great Britain, or an article on the reaction of the NAACP to racial profiling. The article was written to heighten racial awareness of all subjects who saw it, no matter what their race. The article covered racial profiling and illegal immigrants (thereby priming African-Americans and Latinos) and stated that profiling was done to prevent unauthorized residents from "draining state resources" (a cue to prime racial resentment in white subjects). The article is shown in Appendix B.[6]

Partisan identification has been shown to be a predominant predictor of the vote choice. To eliminate the heuristic effects of party ID, subjects were asked to participate in either a Democratic or Republican presidential primary. To control for the effects of race, gender, age, and attractiveness, all candidates in the experiment were middle-aged, average-looking, white males. Participants had 24 minutes to learn about the candidates by choosing news articles from a variety of sources. The source label, as well as the headline, and a one-line synapsis of each article were displayed on screen. Subjects could either click on the link to open and read the article, or they could choose to ignore it. Because links to multiple articles scrolled down the computer screen at a constant pace, subjects were forced to make choices. Subjects could not possibly read all articles available.

Placing a time-limit on information availability was necessary to mimic the non-laboratory environment where individuals can only devote a limited amount of their time to news gathering, and where individuals make decisions about what sources most efficiently deliver the news they care about. All news sources were presented in randomized order and each source was clearly labeled with a news logo and headline

[6]To avoid priming all subjects in the experiment on race, subjects were not asked about their race or ethnicity until the post-test. Hence, in order to heighten the salience of race for half the subjects, without knowing their race, the manipulation had to be presented in a way to prime the racial identity of African-American, Latino, and Caucasian subjects.

See **figure 4.1** for a screenshot of the treatment condition.[7] In addition to news articles, subjects could also read about the candidates policy stances by selecting information supposedly taken directly from the candidates' websites. After 12 minutes, and after being offered every available information item once, subjects were given the option to vote, thereby ending the campaign and entering the post-test questionnaire. Subjects could also stay in the campaign longer and read more about the candidates. A "vote now" button appeared a few minutes into the second round, after all articles had appeared at least once, allowing subjects to exit the campaign phase of the experiment and to progress to a questionnaire where they could vote before entering the post-test. Allowing subjects to vote early was done to make sure that subjects were deliberately reading articles and not just behaving randomly to pass time.

The second between-subjects manipulation was the random assignment of participants to one of two information environments. (1) The control condition was a low-choice information environment where subjects only had access to mainstream news sources.[8] (2) The treatment condition was a diverse setting that mimicked the Internet's broad range of information sources, and included the same sources as the control condition, as well as liberal, conservative, and minority news sites.[9] As **Table 4.1** shows, all 64 news article that were available in both conditions, were exclusively attributed to mainstream news sources in the control group. In the treatment condition, however, the same articles were attributed to either mainstream or minority news sources. Hence, the articles (and therefore the information offered) were the same across conditions, but the source label varied depending on condition. Mainstream and minority news sites featured a range of topics. In other words, stories

[7]See the Appendix for a sample news story.

[8]Mainstream sources are defined as online news magazines by the TV stations with the largest market share, ABC, CBS, NBC, as well as wire services, and major newspapers.

[9]I refer to sites targeting black or Latino audiences as "minority websites."

of minority interest were not exclusively relegated to minority news sites, and vice versa.

Subjects saw a list with all news sources available to them including a short description of each source at the beginning of the experiment. The descriptions were taken from the actual online description featured in google search returns.[10] When subjects clicked on a news logo and headline, the item opened, and they saw an article about both candidates' stances on a policy issue. In the Democratic and Republican primary, one candidate was more moderate than the other. News stories highlighted these ideological differences and always mentioned both candidates, though they alternated in focusing more on one candidate than the other (as real news articles usually do). All 128 news stories were based on real candidates' issue stances and were turned into articles by two professional journalists and three senior undergraduate students whose writing skills were on par with the trained journalists. The journalists and students wrote all mock news articles in March and April of 2012, imitating much of the tone and subject of the actual presidential primary campaigns of that year. See the Appendix for an example of a news story featured in the Republican primary and attributed to a mainstream source in the control condition, and to a minority news source in the treatment condition.[11]

In addition to news articles, subjects could also learn about candidates by reading short descriptions of where the candidates stood on several policy issues. Hence in addition to 64 news articles, each condition also featured 12 policy stances that were supposedly taken directly from the candidates' websites. The experiment ended with a mock primary election. Subjects voted for one of the two primary candidates or

[10]While a description may not seem necessary for ABC, the descriptions helped subjects assess if a source they were not already familiar with, would be of interest to them. (E.g. "Hot Air," the most widely read conservative blog, or "The Grio" an African-American site, etc.)

[11]See Appendix for examples of the news stories and topics.

abstained, and completed a lengthy post-test questionnaire. The post-experiment survey included basic demographic questions, including race/ethnicity, a digital literacy scale, group consciousness questions, as well as several questions probing whether the subjects correctly recalled where the mock candidates stood on several policy issues. It also required subjects to place candidates on a liberal-conservative scale and to judge which candidate would be better able to represent the political interests of minorities in the US. Lastly, all subjects were thanked, debriefed, and paid.

I recruited a non-student adult convenience sample via Facebook and craigslist (N=106) as well as a crowd sourced sample via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (N=333). To increase attentiveness of MTurk workers who took the study outside the laboratory at Rutgers University at the Center for the Experimental Study of Politics and Psychology, and to make up for the lack of laboratory control during an admittedly lengthy study (Interquartile time — the fastest quarter to the slowest quarter of participants — ranged from 34.3 -49.6 minutes), I included attention check questions in the crowdsourced version of my study in the questionnaire part of the experiment (see **figure 4.2**). I also embedded pop-up windows (see **figure 4.3**) during the dynamic phase of the experiment. Dpte recorded how long it took subjects to close the pop-up window. If they were paying attention (vs. in the kitchen making a sandwich) MTurk subjects were expected to close the pop-up within a certain timeframe. A post-hoc analysis suggests that Mturk workers are on par or even more attentive than the laboratory sample and do not compromise data quality (see Kleinberg et al. 2014). See **Table 4.2** for descriptive statistics. Differences between the lab and online samples were not statistically significant, with the exception of digital literacy. As one would expect the MTurk sample scored higher on digital literacy. The regressions shown in this dissertation omit a dummy variable for subjects who were part of the MTurk sample. The dummy was added to robustness checks. MTurk workers perform the same way as the laboratory sample, except in one regression where they

do better than the lab sample. They know more about the candidates and this is consistent with research showing that MTurkers exhibit a slight social desirability bias and perhaps work harder than the lab sample. There is no reason to expect that increased diligence affects the substantive findings. Rather, variation in engagement reflects the diversity of the real world. Please see appendix C for more information on recruitment text posted to the Amazon Mechanical Turk Platform, pay rate, and average completion time.

Randomization checks revealed no significant differences across conditions on standard demographic predictors. Hence the two groups were the same across conditions. Standard control variables are, however, included in all regression models to account for known differences between Caucasians and African-Americans on standard socio-economic measures. In other words, because black subjects differ systematically from white and other respondents on education, income, political knowledge, etc, in the general U.S. population, those variables need to be entered into the regression to properly estimate the effects of the treatment on the dependent variable.

4.4 Variable Construction

DPTE records what stimulus items (news articles and candidate stances) subjects click on and how much time respondents spend with each item. To measure *selective exposure* to a particular news item, the duration of time spent with each news item was used. It was possible to compute the exact time spent with the treatment articles. (Treatment articles were attributed to mainstream sources in the broadcast condition, and attributed to minority sources in the diverse media condition). A second variable captured the total duration spent with all news and was used to control for overall engagement with the information available in the experiment.

I computed two dependent variables with the candidate knowledge measures from

the post-test: First, knowledge of where the candidates stood on all policy issues, which is a count of correct answers to all seventeen candidate stance questions asked in the post-test. (This variable is similar to the dependent variable estimated with the CCAP panel data, except it ranges from 0 to 17, compared to 0 to 8 in the panel data. A perfect score is 17.) The second candidate knowledge variable captures how well subjects were able to place the candidates on group-relevant policy issues, and is an indication of group-relevant knowledge. Philpot (2009) states, "The importance of racial group-relevant considerations has been particularly noted when it comes to examining support for Black office-seekers." The items used in this second variable are a subset of all candidate questions that focus on group-relevant issues. They include: both candidates' positions on affirmative action, job creation,[12], a general question asking subjects to select the candidate who represents minority issues better, as well as a question requiring subjects to name the more liberal candidate. This variable ranges from 0 to 6, with 6 indicating perfect knowledge of group relevant policy.

4.5 Results

I begin by exploring how much time subjects spend reading the treatment articles. The regression presented in **Table 4.3** shows that blacks in the diverse group spend significantly more time with the treatment articles than African-Americans in the mainstream setting. The interaction between the diverse media condition and race is significant and positively predicts engagement with treatment articles. Treatments articles are labeled as coming from a minority news source (e.g "The Root") in the diverse condition and as coming from a mainstream source (e.g. "Reuters") in the mainstream news condition. Hence, regardless of the content or headline, African-

[12]Tate (1994) shows that job and affirmative action policies are important to African-Americans.

Americans are partial to reading news that bears a source label targeting an African-American audience.[13] This finding holds even when controlling on overall engagement with information (duration spent with articles that share the same mainstream labels across conditions.) See **Table 4.4** where a control for time spent with mainstream articles is added. None of the demographic controls entered into the equation are significant. Education, general political knowledge (named political sophistication in the models to avoid confusion with the dependent variable measuring accurate candidate knowledge) ideology (coded as liberal = low to conservative = high), nor the race dummies are significant.

Do subjects who are not African-American shy away from sources targeting African-Americans? Is the diverse condition effectively a low-choice condition for Caucasians because they are not drawn to use minority sources? **Table 4.5** shows the results from a regression where I replicate **Table 4.4** with the exception that I test the interaction of Caucasian and the diverse condition. As the regression shows, being black is associated with more consumption of the treatment articles, regardless of the condition. Being white and being in the diverse condition where the treatment articles are attributed to black sources is negative and significant. Hence Caucasian subjects stay away from content that is labeled as coming from a black sources. Being white is significant and positive, showing that subjects who are not African-American who are in the mainstream condition do spend considerable time with the treatment articles when the content is coming from traditional sources. In sum then, **Tables 4.4** and **4.5** show that Caucasians and African-Americans exhibit the same behavior: They seek out sources that are "for them." When I enter both race interactions into the same equation, being black and reading the treatment articles remains significant,

[13]I only use the sources targeting African-Americans in this analysis as the 'treatment' articles, not the partisan, nor the Latino sources.

while the effect for subjects who are not African-American disappears (see **Table 4.6**).

Figure 4.4 displays the estimated marginal means of time spent with the treatment articles while holding all controls at their mean. African-Americans (solid line) clearly prefer articles when they come from an African-American source. This finding presents a possible causal explanation for why African-Americans who use the Web learn a significant amount during the 2008 campaign: Online access guarantees easy and plenty access to group-focused news sources, which are the kind of news sources African-Americans prefer as the experiment shows. Dawson (2001) argues that African-Americans trust non-white news more. A simple t-test shows that this is in fact the case in my experiment where African-American subjects rate black sources on average significantly more trustworthy than non-black subjects (t=5.574; p=.000). Increased opportunity to access news sources that can be trusted should lead to more learning and knowledge. Hence, a diverse media environment should lead to increased candidate knowledge among African-Americans.

Predicting Accurate Candidate Knowledge

If my theory is correct, the CCAP findings (a diverse media environment leads to more accurate placement of the candidates on policy) should be replicable with this experiment. Thus, African-American subjects in the diverse media condition should have significantly more candidate knowledge than those in the mainstream condition. Given that Obama's race was salient in the 2008 election, however, I also expect that racial salience will affect information processing and accurate recall.

Table 4.7 shows the results from two regressions. The first regression predicts candidate knowledge on all policy issues, and the second regression predicts candidate knowledge on policy that should be relevant to African-Americans. In both regressions the basic demographic predictors perform as expected. Those with more

education, higher general political knowledge,[14] and those with a stronger party identification are all better able to place the candidates on both dependent variables.[15]

The three-way interaction between the dummy variable representing African-American, receiving the racial prime, and being in the diverse media condition is significant and positive indicating that African-Americans whose race is salient and who have access to black sources knew more about the candidates on all policy issues as a result.[16] The second model predicts knowledge of candidate stances on policies that are relevant to African-Americans. As the positive and significant coefficient for *diverse media* indicates, whites and other non-black subjects know more about black policy issues if they are in the diverse media condition. They also know more if they receive the race prime. If they receive both the prime and are in the diverse media condition, they know less, however, as indicated by the negative two-way interaction between the prime and the treatment. Most importantly, the three-way interaction term is significant showing that blacks who received the prime and are in the diverse media condition, know significantly more about group-relevant issues. **Figures 4.5 and 4.6** illustrate this effect for both dependent variables. Blacks (solid line) do much better in the diverse media condition when the prime is present. Subjects who are not African-American on the other hand, do worse.[17]

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[14]This is a summary scale resembling the CCAP general political knowledge battery

[15]Gender is absent due to a programming error. Less income is associated with less accuracy. This might be an artifact of the sample. The experimental sample is less affluent and more liberal than the general U.S. population.

[16]These findings are even stronger when I restrict the sample to the democratic primary

[17]A note about the experimental sample: While the CCAP data are representative of the American public, the experimental data are not. The experiment is not a survey experiment and the article makes no claim about representativeness. The experiment used in this dissertation was designed to observe information search and processing, and to investigate causal mechanisms. The analyses presented in this paper are based on a subsample of roughly 80 African-Americans and a total of 440 subjects. Since sample size affects statistical power, effects are harder to detect with fewer cases. The fact that the threeway interactions are significant despite the limited number of African-Americans, speak to the robustness of these findings. Controls were added to account for well-known differences between African-Americans and Caucasians and given the overall number of cases, the inclusion of these five predictors is necessary and the model specified remains parsimonious.

This offers further insight into the panel data findings. African-Americans who are in a diverse media condition where they have access to sites that target them, and whose race is primed, learn significantly more about candidates than their white and non-black counterparts. This corroborates the findings from the CCAP data. We can assume that all CCAP respondents were particularly aware of their race during the 2008 campaign, given that Obama's candidacy heightened racial awareness in general (Tesler and Sears 2010), and African-Americans who made use of the Web, which is a diverse media environment, were more accurate in their placement of the two candidates on policy. Hence the findings are consistent.

But, what is the causal mechanism behind these findings? Does spending time with the treatment articles in fact enhance knowledge? In other words, does selective exposure to news sources increase knowledge among African-Americans? I have implicitly put forward a model of knowledge acquisition: I posit that African-Americans spend significantly more time with sources from sites tailored to their group, and that this increases knowledge. I test this theory by adding selective exposure to treatment articles to a model predicting candidate knowledge of black policy issues. The results displayed in **Table 4.8** show that selective exposure to the treatment articles significantly predicts accuracy. This lends support for the hypothesis that the opportunity to become informed via black news sources enhances political knowledge.

4.6 Discussion

So far this study has used panel and experimental data to test the effects of access to, and selective exposure to Internet sites tailored to an African-American audience. The panel data show that African-Americans are significantly more accurate in placing McCain and Obama on their policy stands over the course of the 2008 campaign than the reference group (non-white, non-black respondents). The data also indicate

that subjects who are not African-American who use the Web are not becoming significantly more accurate over the course of the campaign. Their needs have been and are well-served by traditional sources, and hence "more news" does not change the opportunity to become informed significantly (more entertainment and the ability to escape news does, however, affect knowledge levels. See Prior 2007).

The data from the experiment support the overall findings in the panel data.The CCAP data show, and the experiment confirms, that when race is salient (as it was in the 2008 election, and for half of the subjects in the experiment), African-Americans learn more about candidate policy positions if they are online or in a diverse setting with access to diverse news sources. The experiment also confirms an important explanation for these findings: Blacks engage longer with news attributed to African-American sources than with the same news attributed to mainstream sources.

The most significant finding that comes out of the CCAP data and the experiment, is that the information available on the Web might lead to higher political knowledge levels among African-Americans under certain circumstances. This is relevant because blacks have historically trailed other groups in terms of political knowledge, and because equal knowledge levels are foundational to other forms of democratic equality. The Internet, in contrast to the mainstream media environment, offers routine access to black news and information sources, while broadcast television access does not. As such, the Internet is a potentially equalizing force for the black community and American democracy overall.

Moreover, my results suggest that it is not African-Americans who are not interested in reading about politics. Instead, it is perhaps the mainstream media that have failed to engage African-Americans because the mainstream media do not cater to or represent minority interests. This is especially true given that the information in the experiment was constant across conditions, meaning that merely providing news via a black source is enough of a cue to engage blacks. This also suggests that

far from the internet causing further fragmentation by providing niche news to niche audiences, niche news sources can provide general news to niche audiences, thereby increasing the levels of shared political knowledge across various groups.

This is not the whole story, however. The data also show that the political context matters. When there is a black candidate or when race is primed, African-Americans acquire a significant amount of knowledge. The significant threeway interactions certainly suggest that both the media and the political landscape have to cue racial salience to produce these effects.

This study allows us to understand the effects of the Web on U.S. democracy more broadly. Scholars have devoted much attention to the effects of selective exposure and news avoidance. A large body of research has examined the effects of the availability of ideological news (Dilliplane 2011, Gentzkow and Shapiro 2011, Iyengar 2009, Garrett 2009a 2009b, Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng 2009, Stroud 2008, Baum and Groeling 2008, Sunstein 2007, Tewksbury 2005), while others have considered more broadly how choice affects the distribution of political knowledge in the public (Prior 2007). Both research strands show that the Web might have dire consequences for democracy: Lack of exposure to diverse opinions creates an electorate largely ignorant of opposing views, and lack of learning about politics increases the knowledge gap between those who do and those who don't know about politics.

This dissertation offers another way to assess the Internet's effects on democratic politics by focusing on how African-Americans use the Web. This study shows that Internet use can lessen historical knowledge gaps among those who are interested in politics. In other words, while the Web does not close knowledge gaps, at least between those who care about politics and those who do not, it can mitigate historical racial knowledge differentials within the segment of Americans who are interested in politics and who use the Web to learn about politics. This is particularly true when it comes to awareness of group-relevant goals. It is in this way that the Web might hold

democratic promise and can be used to address a fundamental normative concern, that the distribution of political knowledge in the U.S. mirrors historical inequalities. Because political knowledge is central to meaningful citizenship, it is imperative that we understand how the new media environment affects political knowledge among those who have traditionally exhibited less of it. The present study shows the Web can benefit marginalized groups in a way a mainstream news environment cannot.

Figure 4.1: **DPTE Screenshot: Diverse Media Condition**

Table 4.1: **News Source Manipulation**

Number of Articles Assigned to Sources in Each Condition

	N Articles	**Mainstream Broadcast Condition**	N Articles	**Diverse Internet Condition**
TV	8	ABC	4	ABC
	8	CBS	4	CBS
	8	NBC	4	NBC
Print	8	New York Times	4	New York Times
	8	Wall Street Jrnl	4	Wall Street Jrnl
	8	Washington Post	4	Washington Post
Wire Services	8	Reuters	4	Reuters
	8	AP	4	AP
Alt. Sources	-	*none avail.*	4	Fox (*TV*)
	-		4	Hot Air (*blog*)
	-		4	MSNBC (*TV*)
	-		4	Huff. Post (*blog*)
	-		4	Univision (*TV*)
	-		4	News Taco (*blog*)
	-		4	Grio (*news site*)
	-		4	Root (*news site*)
Total =	64	8 Sources	64	16 Sources

Figure 4.2: **DPTE Screenshot: Attention Check Question**

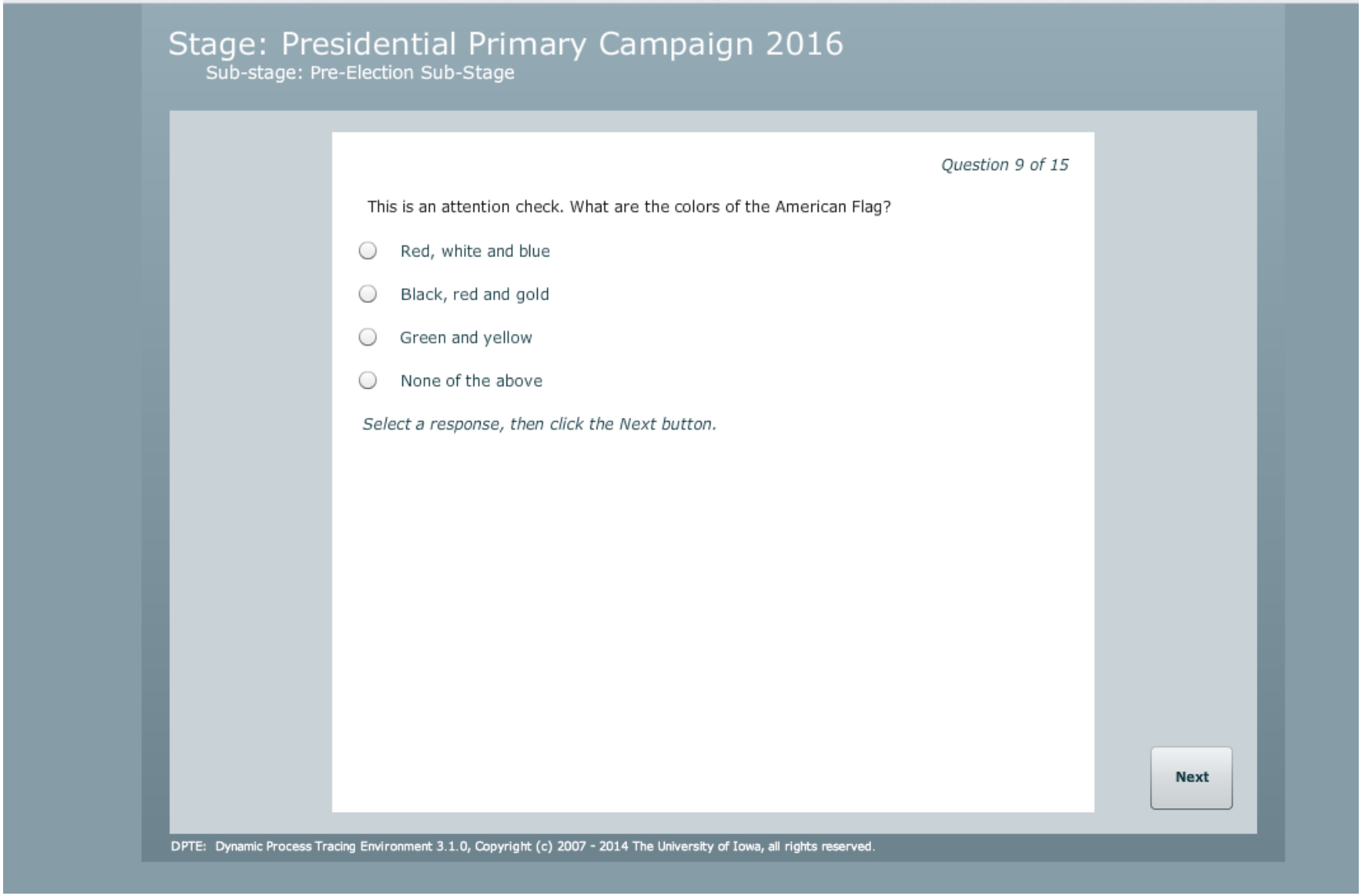


Figure 4.3: **DPTE Screenshot: Pop Up Attention Check**

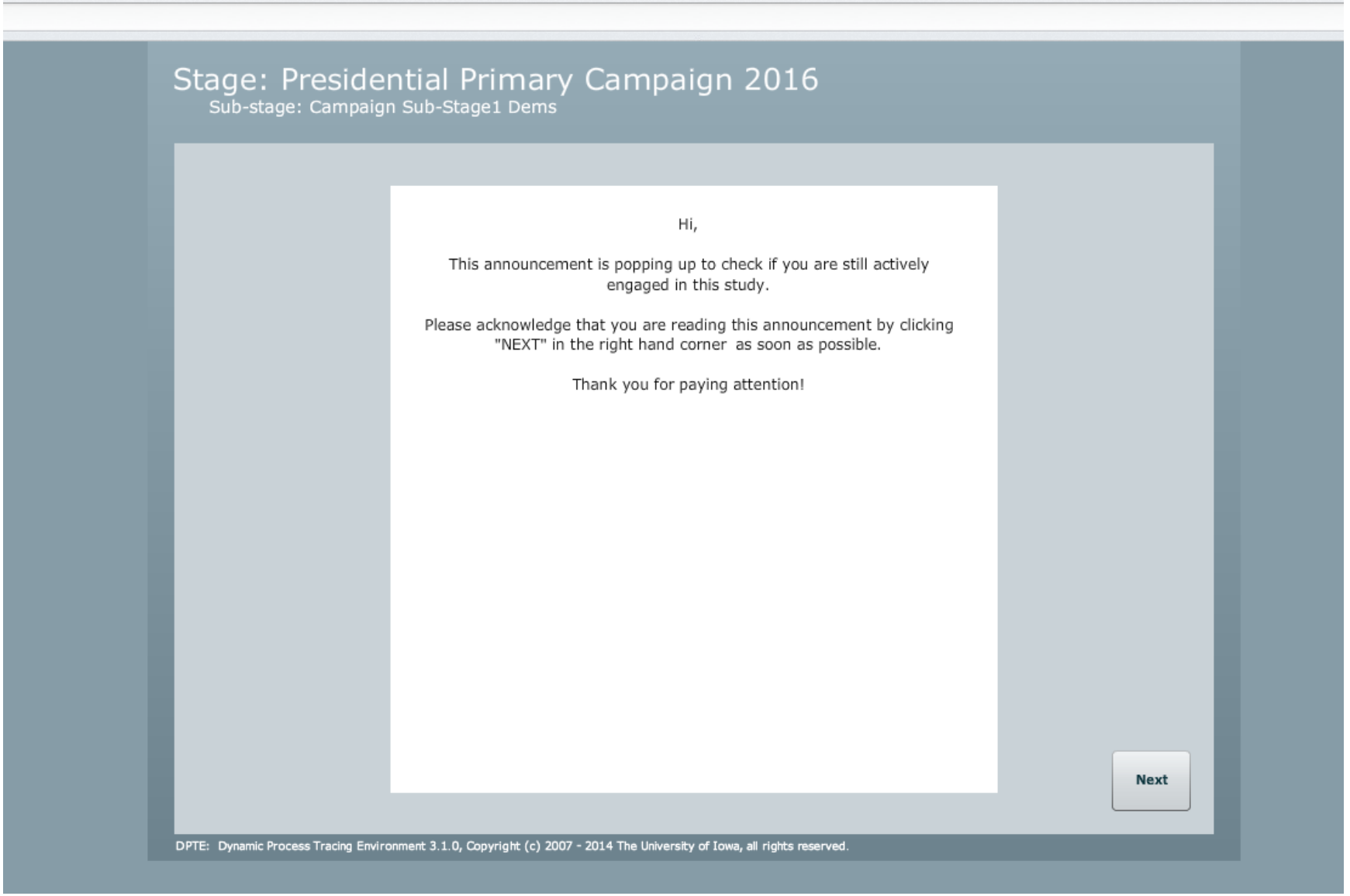


Table 4.2: **Descriptive Statistics—Experiment**

Sample Statistics

	N
White	282
Black	73
Other	82
Total	437

Accurate Candidate Knowledge by Race

	Mean	**N**
White	10.45	282
Black	9.40	73
Other	10.28	82
Total	10.23	437
Std. Dev.	Min	Max
2.92	0	17

Accurate Candidate Knowledge on Racial Issues by Race

	Mean	**N**
White	3.61	282
Black	3.53	73
Other	3.57	82
Total	3.59	437
Std. Dev.	Min	Max
1.53	0	6

Table 4.3: **Predicting Time Spent with Treatment Articles**

	B	SE
Education	-7.994	5.374
Pol. Sophistication	1.587	7.294
Ideology	3.052	5.356
White	3.096	4.131
Black	2.652	7.152
Diverse	-3.255	3.495
Black*Diverse	25.810**	8.531
Constant	24.536***	3.989
N = 439		
$R^2 adj. = .041$		
Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$		

Table 4.4: **Predicting Time Spent with Treatment Articles. Controlling on Mainstream News Use**

	B	SE
Education	-8.748	5.419
Pol. Sophistication	.529	7.358
Ideology	2.822	5.426
Mainstream Sources	.016	.013
White	3.222	4.160
Black	2.256	7.173
Diverse	-3.118	3.535
Black*Diverse	26.804**	8.588
Constant	22.511***	4.442
N = 432		
$R^2 adj. = .046$		
Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$		

Table 4.5: **Predicting Time Spent with Treatment Articles (Caucasians)**

	B	SE
Education	-8.455	5.452
Pol. Sophistication	.086	7.408
Ideology	2.117	5.456
Mainstream Sources	.017	.013
White	10.138^{+}	5.374
Black	16.644**	5.364
Diverse	10.118^{+}	5.360
White*Diverse	-13.715*	6.663
Constant	15.768***	4.865
N = 432		
$R^2adj.$ = .034		

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table 4.6: **Predicting Time Spent with Treatment Articles (Both Race Interactions)**

	B	SE
Education	-8.738 5	.425
Pol. Sophistication	.455	7.370
Ideology	2.779	5.434
Mainstream Sources	.016	.013
White	4.377	5.881
Black	3.135	7.846
Diverse	-1.365	7.234
White*Diverse	-2.285	8.223
Black*Diverse	25.050*	10.666
Constant	21.637***	5.446
N = 432		
$R^2adj.$ = .044		

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table 4.7: **Predicting Accuracy of Candidate Placement**

	All Policy Items		Black Policy Items	
	B	SE	B	SE
Education	1.206**	.461	.817***	.250
Pol. Sophistication	3.106***	.590	1.694**	.320
Income	-1.148*	.495	-.812**	.268
Strength of PID	1.441***	.365	.562**	.198
Webliteracy	3.799	655	1.641***	.355
White	-.302	.326	-.209	.177
Black	-.544	.704	.262	.382
Diverse	-.131	.414	.501*	.225
Race Prime	.551	.390	.518*	.212
Black*Diverse	-.688	.898	-.711	.487
Race Prime*Black	-1.006	1.055	-.824	.573
Race Prime*Diverse	-.657	.547	-.845**	.297
Prime*Black*Diverse	2.315^{+}	1.393	1.885*	.756
Constant	3.478***	.173	3.437***	.212
N=	434		433	
$R^2adj.$	.161		.157	

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table 4.8: **Predicting Accuracy of Candidate Placement on Black Policy Items w/ Time Spent with Treatment Articles**

	B	SE
Education	.696	.249
Political Sophistication	1.671	.316
Income	-.513	.266
Ideology	-1.335	.229
White	-.108	.177
Black	-.007	.230
High Choice	.127	.137
Time w/Treatment Articles	.004*	.002
Constant	3.478***	.173
N = 434		
$R^2adj.$ = .161		

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Figure 4.4: **Estimated Marginal Means of Time Spent with Treatment Articles**

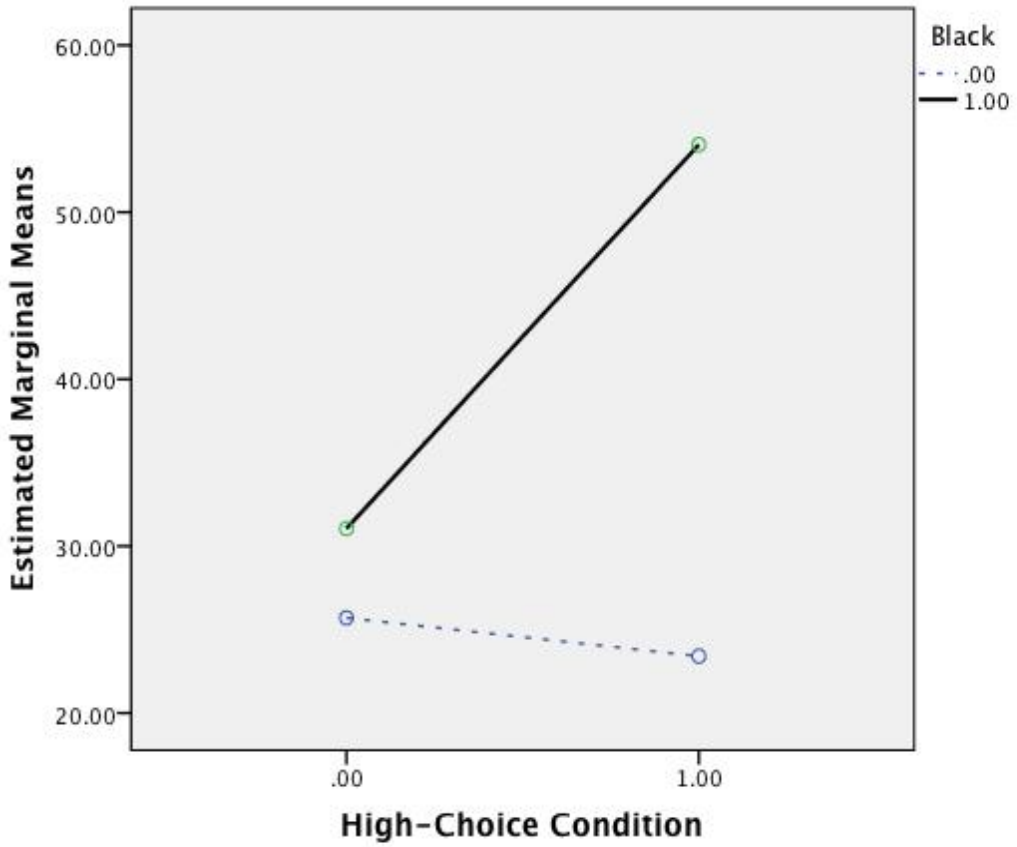


Figure 4.5: **Estimated Marginal Means of Accuracy on Black Issues**

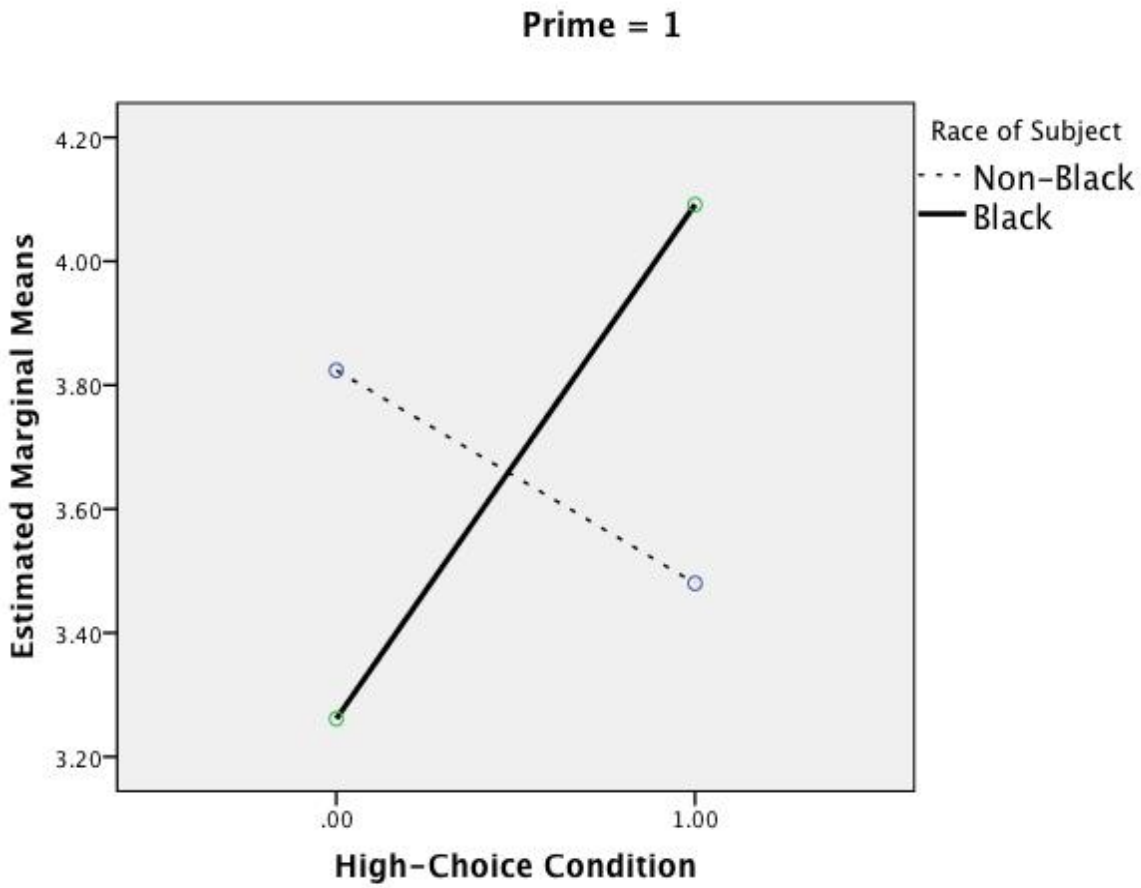
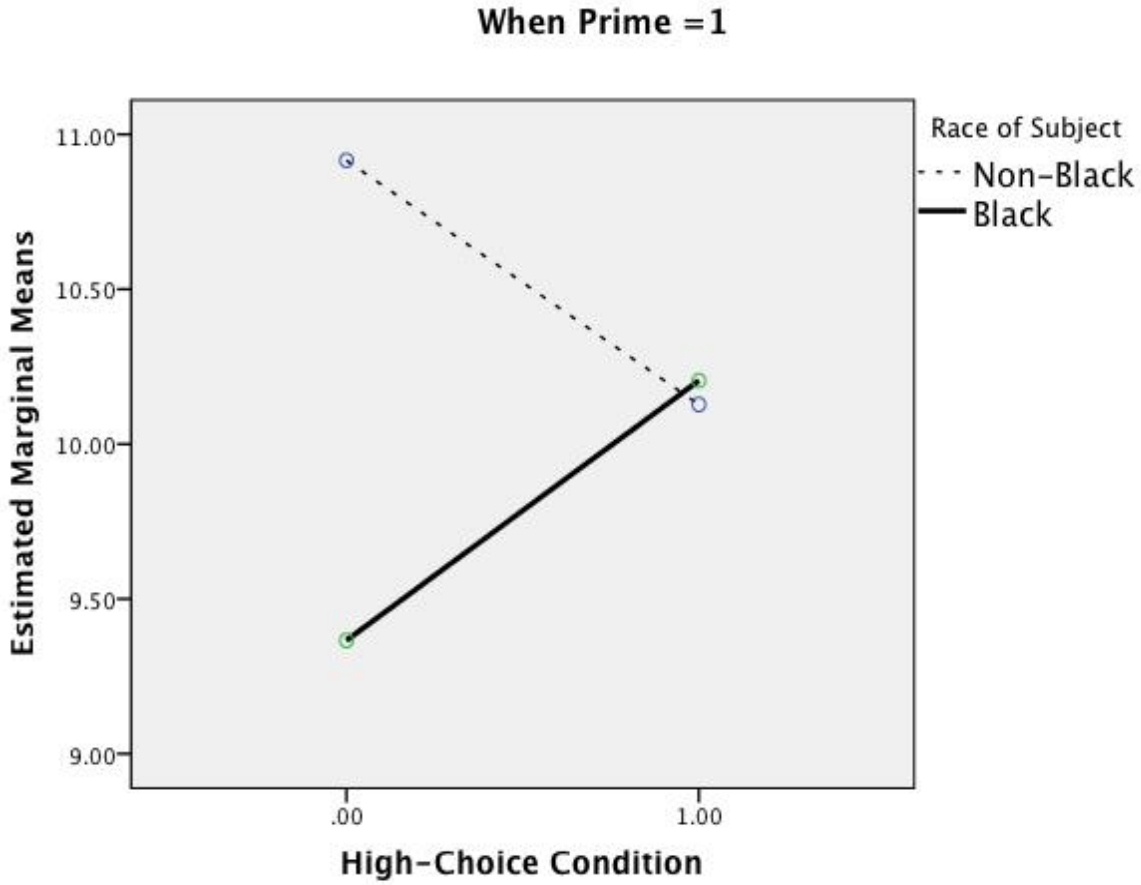


Figure 4.6: **Estimated Marginal Means of Accuracy on All Issues**



Chapter 5

How Web Use Affects Polarization and Vote Choice

In this chapter I explore additional consequences of a diverse- vs. mainstream media landscape. In chapters two and four, I find that political Web use increases knowledge, particularly among African-Americans. In this chapter, I explore if there are other — perhaps normatively less desirable — effects of political Internet use, like increased political polarization and poor vote choices. I utilize the CCAP data to test issue polarization, and I take advantage of the experimental data to examine affective polarization and correct voting.

5.1 Issue Polarization

Many political scientists are concerned about the growing polarization in American politics and communication researchers have put forward compelling arguments connecting the diverse high-choice media environment to increased attitude extremity and polarization (Sunstein 2007, Hindman 2009). According to these scholars, the new media landscape has the potential to intensify both partisan and policy polarization in the American public because the Internet features increasingly partisan news

sources and enables consumers to personalize their media environment.

Sunstein (2007) argues that because we can create a "daily me" by filtering and sorting all the news that come to us, we produce an information environment that resembles "echo chambers" (Jamieson and Capella, 2008). Polarization is assumed to be amplified because news sources on the Web can be more polarized than traditional mainstream news sources (Baum and Groeling 2008). Hindman (2009) also warns of the "missing middle," and argues that online debate has not achieved true deliberation. Deliberation is, however, at least in theory a central requirement for tolerance and democracy (See Mills 1848).

Broadcast television has historically been thought of as the most persuasive medium to transmit political information. Since the arrival of cable and Internet, scholars argue that network TV news have had an overall positive effect on political knowledge levels, civic participation, and ultimately the American democracy when compared to the modern information landscape. During the era of network TV, audiences had few choices and little control over the information they were exposed to. Hence, the likelihood that any citizen would end up watching the news, learn about current affairs, and encounter diverse information was much greater than during any communication era that followed (Prior 2007, Sunstein 2007). Thus many scholars argue that the mainstream information environment of broadcast TV fostered a moderate electorate with many shared political goals.

Kim (2009) investigates questions similar to the ones I am posing in this chapter. Using ANES data from 2000 and 2004, she finds that in 2004, web use was associated with an increase in issue-specific knowledge, but also attitude extremity, and thereby polarization. However, the author notes that the study's generalizability is limited because she focuses on attitudes towards abortion as a proxy for extremity. Kim then conducts a second study (cited in the same paper) using an innovative field experiment. Subjects' online search behavior is tracked and their opinions are

recorded. She finds that Web users expose themselves to a narrower range of issues than non-web users and concludes that web users are more selective in their news consumption. Kim also finds that this selectivity contributes to increases in attitude extremity when evaluating candidates on various policy issues. In the section that follows, I build on Kim's research and first test if a diverse media information environment leads to more polarized opinions than a mainstream environment.

5.1.1 Data and Method

I conceptualize polarization as an increase in attitude extremity. According to Fiorina and Abrams (2008), standard definitions of mass-polarization "emphasize the simultaneous presence of opposing or conflicting principles, tendencies, or points of view." The authors note that the majority of research on polarization is based on an intuitive notion of the concept "a bimodal distribution of observations [where] the two modes of the distribution lie at the extremes, not near the center." Hence an increase in polarization is represented by a distribution where the modal responses move farther away from each other toward the more extreme responses. The authors further argue that the most direct way to measure polarization of political positions is to measure political positions, which is precisely what I do in this chapter. I first capture polarization by measuring changes in political attitudes over the course of the 2008 election.

Since scholars have repeatedly suggested that the Web allows individuals to narrowcast and engage with information provided by a narrow range of ideologically congruent sources, I predict that use of the Web for political information will increase attitude extremity over time. Because TV consumption has historically been associated with more moderate opinions, I expect individuals who use the TV for political and non-political information and entertainment, to become more moderate over time.

I utilized the policy evaluation items available in the CCAP data to create an extremity variable. This variable measures level of extremism on policy issues over time. I excluded those who did not have opinions. Individuals who answered don't know or no opinion were coded missing. I did this to make sure I did not conflate having an opinion with the strength of opinion (= extremity). I first recoded all policy evaluation items. The lowest values represented the most extreme answer on the ideological left while the most extreme answer on the ideological right was coded as the highest value. I then folded the scale in half, by counting the most extreme answers on the left and right as "extreme," the moderate answers on the left and right as "moderate," and the centrist answers (when available) as "neutral."

As in chapter one, I utilize a fixed effects model.[1] Recall from chapter one that each respondent acts as her own control in a fixed effects model. Thus, unobserved variables are controlled for, as are standard time-invariant socio-economic predictors like education, political interest, political sophistication, etc. Hence, even though standard controls are not shown in the model, they are in fact accounted for. Chapter one also contains an explanation of how I constructed the time-variant media predictors.

5.1.2 Results

Respondents are more extreme in their self-placement on several policy issues during the January wave as compared to the reference wave (September). This finding might suggest that voters are more extreme in their attitudes during the early primary season. As **Table 5.1** shows, all respondents were significantly more moderate in

[1]please see chapter three for an explicit discussion of why I use fixed effects regression to model the CCAP panel data.

March (at the end of the primary season) than in September.[2]

All three models also show that General Web and TV Use is not significant. This does not change in models two and three when the race and media use interactions are added. This indicates all races/ethnicities who use the Web and TV for recreational purposes do not become more or less extreme in their attitudes.

The first model shows that Political TV Use by all three racial groups is associated with more extreme positions and hence polarization. This is contrary to my expectation that Political TV Use would moderate opinions.[3] Political Web Use, however, is also associated with an increase in extremism, and this is consistent with my expectation. Model two shows that the interactions of race and Political Web Use are not significant, while the variable Political Web Use remains significant. This suggests that whites and blacks who use the Web for political information do not become more extreme in comparison to the reference group. Those who are not African-American or Caucasian, however, do become more polarized as the positive and significant coefficient of political Web use indicates.

The final model shows that political TV use does have moderating consequences for Caucasian and African-American respondents. The variables Political TV and Web use remain positive and significant. This means that it is the excluded group for which any engagement with media for political information has a polarizing effect. Interestingly, this does not mean they know more. As chapter one illustrated, neither political TV, nor political Web use helped increase accuracy in placing Obama and McCain on their policy stances among the reference group (which is all non-white and non-black respondents), it merely caused them to give more extreme responses

[2]The data therefore seem to point to elite polarization due to campaign dynamics as a cause of polarization, but this is more speculation than fact given the evidence I have.

[3]This expectation might have been unfounded given that respondents in the CCAP data most likely have access to cable TV, thus making TV Use not necessarily a low choice environment for all respondents.

when asked to place themselves on several policy stands. See chapter one Table 1.4.[4] And while African-Americans are better able to place the candidates on their policy issues as a result of Web use, they do not become more extreme in their own policy positions as a consequence of Web use.

I replicated the variable I used to measure extremism in the CCAP data with the experimental data. The experiment, however, was not designed to test polarization in a diverse vs. mainstream-choice setting because the actual information presented to subjects was held constant across conditions. Recall from Chapter Two that the media manipulation is limited to the source attribution.[5] As a consequence of holding the news headlines and content constant across conditions, any observed differences in extremism between the treatment and control group would have been due to the label. Several tests showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the level of extremism on policy issues between the treatment and control group. Given that the experiment did not include a treatment specifically designed to manipulate extremism, subjects most likely reported the opinions they entered into the experiment with. Hence the policy items I used to construct the dependent variable are probably mostly a reflection of previously existing preferences. Affective polarization, on the other hand, might well result from the experiment (if for no other reason than

[4]This model also includes interactions of the wave dummies with black and white. I present a reduced model her in chapter four, but I ran the extended model as well and the results do not change.

[5]I opted to hold the information constant and to only vary the news source label for methodological reasons. I wanted to draw causal conclusions based on the label. I wanted to study whether the label drives news selection and not the headline or content. In other words, the experiment was first and foremost designed to study selective exposure to partisan or minority news sources, based on the news label. In order to make the design as concise as possible, I opted to keep the information the same in both conditions. At this juncture it is also important to note that I did not detect partisan selective exposure in my experiment. I tested whether partisan identification, strength of partisan identification, or ideological leanings predicted exposure to partisan news sources in the diverse condition, but the data did not provide any evidence for ideologically motivated selective exposure (both in terms of number of partisan news items opened, and the duration spent with news items).

the experiment asking subjects to make a distinction between competing candidates and to chose one candidate over another.) Additionally, since subjects' self-placement on policy issues did not change as a result of the experimental manipulations, I can assume that they are stable. This allows me to compute a measure of correct voting later on in this chapter.

5.2 Affective Polarization

There is debate about the extent of polarization at the mass level. There is research suggesting that the attitudes of the general public have not followed polarization at the elite level (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson, 1996; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2005). Others assert that citizens have sorted themselves by bringing their ideology into alignment with their partisan identification (see Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz, 2006; and Fiorina and Abrams, 2008, for recent reviews). A third perspective (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012) contends that the masses have polarized on an emotional but not a policy level. Iyengar et al. find that campaign messages cause increasing affective polarization, measured by the increased disliking of the out-party candidate.

5.2.1 Data and Method

Using the experimental data, I test to see whether I can detect affective polarization as a result of the media environment using the feeling thermometer ratings collected in the post test. Contrary to policy measures, where subjects most likely did not change much as a result of participating in the experiment and reported previously held beliefs instead, the feeling thermometer ratings provide a measure of affect that developed as a result of encountering information about the candidates in the experiment. None of the subjects knew the candidates going into the experiment because they are mock candidates. Subjects therefore had no affect attached to the candi-

dates as they entered into the experiment, and the feeling thermometer rating, like the candidate knowledge measure, is thus a reflection of subjects' participation in the experiment and any manipulations and stimuli encountered.

As already addressed in Chapter 2, I created three candidates for the experiment: The first candidate ("Smith") is a very liberal candidate modeled after President Obama, former Representative Kucinich, etc. The centrist candidate was used to represent both the moderate Democrat and the moderate Republican (D: "Wilson;" R: "Williams") was crafted using policy stances declared by Hillary Clinton and former President Bush. The most conservative candidate ("Jones") was modeled after U.S. Congressman Poe, etc.[6] Subjects who participated in the Democratic primary were asked to rank Smith and Wilson on the feeling thermometer scale ranging from 0 to 100, and participants in the Republican primary rated Williams and Jones.

Out of all participants, 324 subjects opted for the Democratic primary and rated the Democratic candidates. The mean for Smith was the highest of all candidates with an average rating of 71. The mean for his competitor Wilson was 51. The 114 subjects who participated in the Republican campaign were less decisive in their evaluations. The centrist candidate Williams received a mean score of 55 and the more conservative candidate received a 54.[7]

5.2.2 Results

Before I look at affective polarization, I test whether the candidates' mean feeling thermometer scores differ significantly across treatment groups. A significant difference suggests that the treatment affected how people feel towards the candidates even

[6]See Appendix A for the wording and positions of all policy stances taken by the candidates.

[7]Subjects in the Democratic primary seem to have been happy with their choice of candidates. They clearly preferred Smith. Republican candidates might have been dissatisfied with the options available in the experiment. A rating of 55 and 54 is neither particularly warm nor cold, and subjects did not express a definitive preference in the aggregate.

though the candidates and the information about them is the same across conditions. Participants in the mainstream condition rated Smith as 74, compared to the subjects in the treatment condition who rated him 6 points lower. The centrist Democratic candidate Wilson was rated the same in both conditions (51). The centrist Republican candidate Williams was rated slightly more warmly in the control condition (57) and cooler in the treatment condition (53). The more extreme Republican candidate was rated 54 in both conditions. In sum, the more liberal candidates evoked more distinct affect than the conservative candidates across conditions, yet only Smith produced a statistically significant finding.

Affective polarization, as Iyengar et al. conceived of it, is defined as the increased disliking of the out-party candidate. Hence I compute the absolute value of the difference between the competing candidates. A larger value represents increasing affective polarization. When I run the regression the only independent variables that are significant and positive are strength of partisan identification and white. I specify other models, but cannot detect an interaction between being black and the media condition, nor the racial prime.

I turn to Caucasians and replicate the analysis focusing on them. The results are displayed in **Table 5.2**. The results show that whites who are in the diverse condition, but did not receive the racial prime, exhibit more affective polarization.

In an additional analysis I test whether affective polarization means that voters prefer the more moderate or the more extreme candidate (more conservative or more liberal). Computing a separate measure, I subtract the feeling thermometer scores of the more extreme candidate from the more moderate candidate. A negative score therefore represents a preference for the ideologically more extreme candidate, and a positive score represents liking the more moderate candidate better. **Table 5.3**[8]

[8]When I replace frequency of online news consumption ("Web News Freq" in Table 5.3) with web

shows that being black and receiving the race prime, but being in the mainstream condition is not significant.

Being African-American and in the diverse media condition where there are news sources targeting black readers available, increases liking of the more moderate candidate by almost 30 points on the feeling thermometer scale. Note that these are subject who did not receive the race prime. Receiving the race prime, being African-American, and being in the diverse media condition, however, has the opposite effect and causes an almost 37 point preference for the more extreme candidate. The race prime therefore causes a strong preference for the more extreme candidate. Given candidate Smith's policy stances, blacks *should* prefer Smith, as he is the candidate who is most concerned about civil rights.

Table 5.4 shows the results where I regress the dependent variable on a model where I interact the crucial manipulations with a race dummy representing Caucasian Americans instead of African-Americans. In **Table 5.5** "white" represents Caucasians who are in the mainstream condition and did not receive the race prime. They feel significantly warmer (17 points) toward the more moderate candidate. Non-white subjects in the diverse media condition who did not receive the race prime are 18 points warmer toward the more moderate candidate. Whites who are in the diverse media condition, but did not receive the race prime are significantly more warm toward the more extreme candidate (the more liberal or conservative candidate). Hence a diverse media environment might benefit ideologically more extreme candidates if their constituents are white and when race is not primed. A diverse media condition is better for moderate candidates if the voters are African-American and race is not salient.

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literacy (a variable I used in a previous chapter), the size and direction of the coefficients does not change. In fact, the betas are significant at more conservative p values when I use web literacy.

As mentioned earlier, blacks who are in the Democratic primary, the diverse media condition and who received the race prime feel significantly warmer towards Smith than Wilson. Smith was designed to be the candidate whose interests best represent minorities (see Appendix A for his stance on affirmative action). The effects I am finding are also consistent with the findings presented in chapter 3. African-Americans who are in the diverse media condition and who received the race prime know more about the candidates. Better knowledge and warmer feelings towards Smith means Blacks should vote for Smith. But, do they vote for him?

5.3 Vote Choice

Table 5.5 shows that the threeway interaction is significant with a p value of .003. The direction is as hypothesized because a negative relationship predicts voting for the more extreme candidate Smith. Note that African-Americans in the diverse media condition who do not receive the race prime vote for the more moderate candidate, as do blacks who receive the race prime, but are not in the diverse media condition. Model 2 in table 5.5 illustrates that Caucasians behave the opposite. Whites in the diverse media condition who are primed on race vote for the more moderate Democrat. Whites who are either primed or in the diverse media condition vote for the more extreme candidate.[9]

The choice between a moderate and an extreme candidate is another way to think about polarization or increased partisanship. As Prior (2013) argues, it is hard to assess whether voting has become more partisan when there are no moderate choices. In my experiment, however, there is a moderate and a more extreme choice. White and black subjects choose the more moderate candidate under opposite conditions.

[9]I restrict my analysis to the Democratic primary since there are only a handful cases of African-Americans in the Republican primary, making this kind of comparison difficult.

It could, however, be the case that whites experience the diverse media condition as a de facto low-choice condition because four of the sources in the diverse media condition target minorities and not a Caucasian audience. Hence it is possible that the correct interpretation of that data is that both whites and blacks who have access to more trusted information and who receive the prime vote for the more extreme candidate. Fewer choices, or the absence of a racial cue, seems to motivate a vote for the more moderate candidate.

5.3.1 Correct Voting

How do the information environment and racial salience affect the quality of the vote? Another way to approach this question, and to objectively quantify whether the Web is normatively "good" for democracy or not, is to look at correct voting. Do the media environment and racial salience interact to affect the ability of subjects to vote in accordance of their policy preferences? Using Lau and Redlawsk's 2006 conceptualization of correct voting I compute a measure of correct voting.

I calculate the difference between subjects' self-placement on policy issues and objective ratings of where the candidates stand on policy.[10] In addition to recording their attitudes on several policy issues, subjects were also asked to indicate how important each opinion was to them. Hence I was able to weight each opinion.[11] The objective ratings stem from over 80 undergraduate students who were enrolled in a

[10]Lau and Redlawsk record subjects' self-placement on policy issues in the pretest, *before* the experimental manipulations. My experiment was not designed to test correct voting. I ask subjects to place themselves on policy issues in the posttest. Yet, as discussed earlier, because the experiment was also not designed to manipulate subjects' self-reported opinions either, and because they are not affected by the experiment, I can assume they are stable. In other words, opinions would have been the same had I asked them in the pretest.

[11]The initial question read: Q. Generally speaking, do you think that abortion should be legal in all circumstances, legal in most circumstances, only to save the life of the woman, or illegal in all circumstances? This question then followed by: And how strongly do you [Insert answer from previous question here]?

political science course in the Fall of 2012 at Rutgers University. I asked students to place the candidates on the same policies, subjects in the experiment were asked to place themselves on.[12] That way, I had a direct comparison and could simply compute the absolute value of the difference between where each subjects placed herself and where the candidate stood. The smaller the difference, the greater the utility of the candidate.

To further refine the candidate utility measure, I added a weight. Hence if a subject differed greatly from the candidate on a policy, but the subject did not assign much importance to their own opinion on the issue, the utility score was adjusted accordingly by multiplying the absolute difference by the weight (ranging 0-3, "not at all important" to "very important.") I then summed all utility scores for each of the two candidates per primary to compute two candidate utility scores per participant. A correct vote was computed so that a vote for the candidate with the greater utility (I reversed the direction of the utility score to make interpretation more intuitive) is a correct vote. Correct voting is a dichotomous variable and I used logistic regression to estimate the effects of media environment and racial salience on the dependent variable. The results are displayed in **Table 5.6**.

5.3.2 Results

There are two columns in **Table 5.6**. The first column features an analysis where I focus on African-American subjects. The second column shows the same analysis for white subjects. In both models education, strength of party identification, and

[12]I used the same questions, and merely modified the text to ask about the candidates' stances rather than the subject's stance. E.g Q. Generally speaking, do you think abortion should be legal in all circumstances, legal in most circumstances, only to save the life of the woman, or illegal in all circumstances? Was changed to: Q. Generally speaking, do you think Candidate Smith believes that abortion should be legal in all circumstances, legal in most circumstances, only to save the life of the woman, or illegal in all circumstances?

web literacy are all positively related to correct voting. In model 1 being in the high choice condition and having received the prime both affect the dependent variable positively. African-Americans are more likely to vote correctly in the diverse media condition if race is also salient.

The opposite is true for whites. They are less likely to cast a correct vote in the diverse media condition if they have also received the prime. This finding might again be due to the fact that whites read less in the diverse media condition because they might experience the diverse media condition as a de facto low-choice condition because more sources target other racial groups. If this theory were correct, however, we would expect whites in the mainstream condition (regardless of whether they did or did not receive the prime) to be more likely to cast a correct vote, but that is only partially true. Whites who receive a prime and are in the mainstream condition are in fact more likely to cast a correct vote, but whites who are in the mainstream condition and did not receive the race prime do significantly worse (see "white" in the second column). Whites who are in the diverse media condition and did not receive the race prime do significantly better at voting correctly. Hence there is an interaction between seeing sources that do not target them and having received the race prime that creates a disadvantage for whites. Reading the race prime or seeing minority sources, but not both, may make whites more anxious causing them to process information more carefully, whereas the interaction of the two causes them to disengage much like never receiving the race prime nor being in the diverse media condition does.

5.4 Chapter Recap

I summarize the findings of this chapter in **Table 5.7**. A plus sign (+) indicates a statistically significant positive coefficient, and a negative sign (-) denotes a signifi-

cant negative relationship. Caucasians who are the diverse media condition, exhibit significant affective polarization. The same group likes the more moderate candidate less, does not vote for him, and is more likely to vote correctly. Caucasians who are in the diverse media condition and who receive the prime do not exhibit increased affective polarization. That said, they do vote for the more extreme candidate, and are less correct in their vote. Whites who receive the prime, but are in the mainstream condition are likely to vote correctly. In sum then, whites who receive both the prime and are in the diverse media condition make bad choices. That said, receiving either the prime or being in the diverse media condition makes Caucasians "better voters."

Among African-Americans the story almost reverses. The experimental data suggest that African-Americans do not exhibit affective polarization at all. Blacks overall benefit from the race prime and diverse media condition. Blacks who are primed and have access to Black news like the moderate candidate (the one who is "wrong for them") less, they are less likely to vote for him and that's a correct vote. Those who are in the diverse media condition, but who do not receive the prime like the moderate candidate more and vote for the more moderate candidate. This however, means voting incorrectly. Hence the racial prime seems to activate perhaps more careful processing and combined with trusted information at hand, this translates into better political choices. This interpretation is supported by the fact that blacks who receive the prime, but do not have access to black sources do not produce significant findings. Hence receiving the prime alone, is not enough. Neither is being in the diverse media condition. For blacks, both are required, while Caucasians require only one.

Table 5.1: **CCAP Data: Predicting Polarization**

	Model 1 B/SE	Model 2 B/SE	Model 3 B/SE
January	0.016**	0.016**	0.016**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
March	-0.015**	-0.015**	-0.015**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
General Web Use	-0.007	-0.008	-0.009
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
General TV Use	-0.008	-0.008	-0.008
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Political TV Use	0.048***	0.048***	0.123**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.04)
Pol. Web Use	0.056***	0.108*	0.106*
	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Black*Pol Web Use		-0.100	-0.092
		(0.06)	(0.06)
White*Pol Web Use		-0.053	-0.051
		(0.04)	(0.04)
Black*Pol TV Use			-0.182**
			(0.07)
White*Pol TV Use			-0.075+
			(0.04)
Constant	-0.038*	0.036	0.121*
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.06)
N = 9238			

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table entries are coefficients from a fixed effects regression

Table 5.2: **Experimental Data: Predicting Affective Polarization**

Interaction with Caucasians	B	SE
Education	-.987	1.348
Pol. Sophistication	.361	.762
Income	.279	1.070
Strength of PID	1.261	.793
Web News Freq	-.723	.664
White	.696	5.314
Black	.679	3.788
Diverse	-8.739	5.310
Race Prime	2.254	5.458
Race Prime*White	-.802	6.713
White*Diverse	11.886^{+}	6.685
Race Prime*Diverse	1.010	7.323
Race Prime *White*High-Ch.	- 1.464	9.128
Constant	30.632***	5.884
N=	429	
$R^2 adj.$	.010	

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$
Table entries are from an OLS regression

Table 5.3: **Experimental Data: Predicting Liking the More Moderate Candidate**

	Interaction with African-American			
	Model 1 Democratic Primary Only		Model 2 Full Sample Both Primaries	
	B	SE	B	SE
Education	-3.623^{+}	2.166	-4.817*	2.133
Pol. Sophistication	-1.993^{+}	1.206	-.376	1.200
Income	4.410*	1.781	4.328*	1.699
Strength of PID	-5.157***	1.347	-6.216***	1.266
Web News Freq	-1.223	1.083	-.607	1.051
White	.294	4.452	4.389	4.473
Black	-9.363	9.414	-7.567	9.877
Diverse	-4.461	5.886	-2.034	5.774
Race Prime	-5.137	5.384	-3.833	5.405
Race Prime*Black	20.064	14.060	15.8934	15.039
Black*Diverse	29.883**	12.001	24.845*	12.582
Race Prime*Diverse	7.708	7.749	5.016	7.590
Race Prime *Black*High-Ch.	-36.746*	18.416	-34.778^{+}	19.558
Constant	6.886	8.618	5.241	8.760
N=	318		429	
$R^2adj.$	.078		.057	

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table entries are from an OLS regression

Table 5.4: **Experimental Data: Predicting Liking the More Moderate Candidate**

Full Sample, Both Primaries — Interaction with Caucasian

	B	SE
Education	-4.597*	2.124
Pol. Sophistication	-.428	1.201
Income	4.246	1.687
Strength of PID	-5.955***	1.250
Web News Freq	-.677	1.047
White	16.591*	8.377
Black	3.849	5.971
Diverse	18.008*	8.371
Race Prime	6.874	8.605
Race Prime*White	-12.4704	10.583
White*Diverse	- 23.135*	10.539
Race Prime*Diverse	-16.013	11.543
Race Prime *White*High-Ch.	22.712	14.390
Constant	-5.536	9.276
N=	429	
$R^2 adj.$	.057	

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table entries are from an OLS regression

Table 5.5: **Experimental Data: Predicting Vote Choice for the Moderate Candidate in the Democratic Primary**

	Model 1 Interaction w/ African-American		Model 2 Interaction w/ Caucasian American	
	B	SE		
Education	-.047^{+}	.027	-.031	.028
Pol. Sophistication	-.015	.015	-.007	.016
Income	.032	.023	.026	.023
Strength of PID	-.053**	.018	-.044**	.018
Webliteracy	-.008^{+}	.004	-.033 **	.014
White	.071	.058	.160	.104
Black	-.027	.120	.114	.074
Diverse	-.083	.076	.203	.104
Race Prime	-.080	.070	.056	.101
Race Prime*Race Dummy	.278	.174	-.143	.131
Race Dummy*Diverse	.397**	.156	-.304 *	.134
Race Prime*Diverse	.197*	.100	-.261^{+}	.144
Race Prime *Race Dum.*High-Ch.	- .700**	.238	.508**	.185
Constant	1.621***	.145	1.357***	.113
N=	308		307	
$R^2adj.$	.010		.068	

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Race Dummy indicates black in the first regression and white in the second regr.

Table 5.6: **Experimental Data: Logistic Regression Predicting Correct Voting (Weighted Sum)**

	Model 1 Interaction w/ African-American		Model 2 Interaction w/ Caucasian American	
	B	SE		
Education	.379**	141	.353*	.139
Pol. Sophistication	-.026	.075	-.022	.075
Income	-.232*	.111	-.224*	.111
Strength of PID	.416***	.081	.399***	.080
Webliteracy	.054**	.020	.054**	.020
White	-.431	.300	-1.276*	.599
Black	.175	.636	-.645	.400
Diverse	.201	.371	-1.127*	.559
Race Prime	.419	.359	-.696	.594
Race Prime*Race Dummy	-.1.511	.925	1.289^{+}	.719
Race Dummy*Diverse	-1.574^{+}	.793	1.496*	.694
Race Prime*Diverse	-.807	.492	1.312^{+}	.774
Race Prime *Race Dum.*High-Ch.	3.075**	1.249	-2.402*	.954
Constant	1.558*	.724	1.357***	.113
N=	432		432	
$NagelkerkeR^2adj.$	.148		.149	

Sig. $^{+}p < .1$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Race Dummy indicates black in the first regression and white in the second regr.

Table 5.7: **Overview Chapter 4; Significant Findings at $p < .1$**

	Aff. Pol	Like Moderate		Vote Moderate		Correct Voting	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
White			+				-
Black							
Diverse			+				-
Race Prime							
Race Prime*Race Dummy							+
Race Dummy*Diverse	+	+	-	+	-	-	+
Race Prime*Diverse				+	-		+
Race Prime *Race Dummy*High-Ch.		-		-	+	+	-
Table No. Ref.	4.2	4.3		4.5		4.6	

Race Dummy indicates either black or white.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The media environment has changed considerably over the past two decades and the American public is relying increasingly on the Internet to learn about politics. After initial enthusiasm about the Internet as the "great equalizer," that does away with traditional gatekeepers and allow everyone to access and distribute any kind of information, the bulk of academic research has recently offered a much more pessimistic view of the Web and its democratic potential, and has moved from calling the web"cybertopia," to cursing it "cyberghetto."

One of the major concerns of political observers today is the increasing polarization at the mass level, and the question of whether it is linked to an increasingly diverse and ideologically extreme media environment. Scholars worry that individuals fail to consider the "other side" and privilege information that is consistent with their already held beliefs. Consumption of like-minded news, or "partisan selective exposure" is assumed to lead to increased polarization at the mass level and to hurt American democracy.[1]

[1] Although, there are exceptions. Prior (2013) argues that we do not have sufficient evidence showing that the media, and citizens' engagement with the media, are causing polarization.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

The main contribution I make in this dissertation is that I approach the question of Web effects from the perspective of marginalized groups. I consider what value the Internet with its diverse niche sites might hold for segments of the U.S society whose group membership translates into systematic disadvantages and diminished access to resources, including (but by no means limited to) political information and political knowledge. I cite research showing that African-Americans, women, the poor, and the young trust and use mainstream media far less than their average white, male, and affluent counterparts. I thus suggest that a customizable media environment holds promise for individuals who have not been well served by the dominant mainstream media perspective.

My research approach is grounded in the normative concern that African-Americans have historically been underserved by the media and still suffer systematic disadvantages that are profoundly problematic in a society that advances a creed of equal opportunity and equal access to resources. The rise of a new media era where information options abound, in combination with data showing that African-Americans rely heavily on the Web to become informed, begs the question whether the Internet serves black voters better than the network and cable eras have in the past. If the Internet offers better information options to black voters, African-Americans could finally enjoy something approaching parity with the majority of white Americans when it comes to information options.[2] The consequences of information equality might eventually enable blacks to gain access to other political, social, and economic

[2]It is prudent to note here that not all white Americans are equally served by mainstream media. differences in class, education, gender, sexual orientation, and even political orientation affect how well individuals feel the mainstream media represent their interests. This is, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation. Hence I am talking about caucasians as if they were a monolithic group, knowing all to well, that this is not the case and is therefore a gross simplification.

resources as well.

Using both panel and experimental data, I show that the Web offers unique information opportunities to African-Americans who are motivated to engage in politics and who use the Internet. In the first chapter of this dissertation I present data collected during the 2008 election to show that racial group membership significantly affects how much individuals learn when they use the Web to become politically informed, while controlling on Web use for entertainment and other information and entertainment media use (i.e. TV).

I argue that the 2008 election was a unique election for Americans because the first major party candidacy by a mixed-race contender affected racial awareness and group consciousness, which probably — at least in part — affected black information-search behavior and subsequent processing. I test whether the survey findings are robust with the help of an experiment. I programmed a mock-election with two between-subject manipulations designed to tease out the effects of the Internet and racial awareness. First, I randomly assign subjects to a mainstream (low-choice) condition or a diverse media source (high-choice) condition. Second, I manipulate racial awareness of half of all subjects. The results from the experiment are consistent with the survey data and once again show that blacks whose race is primed and now have access to diverse sources learn significantly more about where the candidates stand, than blacks who are in a low-choice condition where they do not have access to African-American news sources.

The experiment is not only useful as a robustness check on the survey data. In addition to replicating the panel data findings, the experiment allowed me to look into the "black-box" of media exposure[3] and information processing and to generate

[3]The process tracing software used in the experiment allows me to track media exposure. Being able to measure exposure without error is a huge advantage over studies that rely on self-reported media use, as self-reported media use is unreliable and contributes to measurement in the study of

a theory about why blacks know more about candidates in a high-choice setting than a low-choice environment. The data collected during the experiment demonstrates that African-Americans prefer to spend time with black news. When information is attributed to sources that target blacks, African-Americans spend significantly more time with them than when the same information is attributed to a mainstream source that does not target them. News sites that target groups therefore activate a news selection process where the group becomes a heuristic that guides news selection, *even if the content is not directed at the group.*[4] This in turn suggests that — contrary to the fear of "cyberghettos" — the Internet has the potential to contribute to shared political knowledge. My experiment shows that regardless of content, minority sites have the potential to deliver "general news" to a niche audience. Common and shared political knowledge is precisely what scholars who are concerned with deliberative democracy and the public sphere argue is necessary to have vigorous democratic discourse.

In the final empirical chapter I test whether Internet use contributes to increased polarization and poorer vote decisions. Using panel data I find that political Web use is associated with increased attitude extremity among non-white and non-black respondents. So is political television use, however. In that sense, the Internet is not different from television. Political Internet use by Caucasian and African-American respondents is not associated with increased polarization. The experiment allows me to conclude that a high-choice environment and racial awareness do not generate affective polarization for blacks. The same is not true for white subjects. Caucasians in the high-choice condition exhibit significant affective polarization. Overall, blacks benefit from receiving both the prime and having access to black sources. They vote

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selective exposure (Prior 2013).

[4]Recall that I held the headline and content constant across conditions.

correctly in that condition while whites do not. Whites do best when they receive either the prime or are in the high-choice condition. When both occur simultaneously, whites do poorly, but they do also do poorly without the prime or the high-choice condition. In sum then, the final chapter provides more evidence that the Web alone is not a polarizing force, but rather a tool that allows minorities to access political information and to make "good" decisions *if race is salient at the same time.* Making good decisions means participating meaningfully in democracy, which is at the heart of participatory democracy.

At this point it seems prudent to point out that much of the analysis presented here points to the joint effect of racial salience and the Internet. Hence, follow up studies should look at this connection more carefully and tease out whether the race prime is the motivator for blacks as I assume in the introduction. If so, then merely having the opportunity to become informed via African-American sources on the Web, is not enough.

Race consciousness, a consistent predictor of African-American political behavior, must also be activated via a race prime or a black political figure to motivate engagement. Hence the political environment must mimic the new media environment and feature African-American political figures, much like black media features news that is designed to appeal to black audiences. In other words, African-Americans require what Caucasians have had for centuries: political figures of their own race, that appeal to them, and a media environment that provides coverage of politics from a caucasian perspective for white audiences. It is, perhaps as simple as that, and yet difficult, because as simple as it seems, it took a long time to become reality.

6.2 The Web and Democratic Theory

Our expectations of the media are conceptually related to our normative expectation of democracy. Hence in order to evaluate the effects of the new media environment on U.S. democracy, we must first articulate what kind of democracy we aspire to. We must state what kind of outcomes we would like to see, e.g. a better informed public, higher turnout rates, or larger goals such as a more equitable distribution of resources. Given the focus of this dissertation, and my concern with remaining inequalities between various racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., the"ideal media" would allow access to the kind of information needed to enact larger social changes.

A strong democracy requires both an informed and an engaged public. I argue that the Web can be used to serve the public by informing and engaging them overall, *if* they are interested in politics in the first place, and can serve marginalized groups in particular, leading perhaps, to the changes necessary to create a more equal society.[5]

Starr (2008 in Zelizer ed.) articulates the connection between media and democracy more succinctly. According to the author, there are three central conceptions of democracy. He calls the first notion a "minimalist" perspective. This idea revolves around Schumpeter's definition where politics is a struggle for votes. It is an "aggregate, adversarial and majoritarian" view of democracy, where politics is like the economic market. The minimalist conception of democracy requires little input from citizens and abstention is seen as rational. The corresponding expectations of the press are minor. The media are not expected to deliver much material for deliberation. The media function as experts and digest the information for the public. If the public want to tune out of politics and into entertainment, the minimalist does not care. There is no normative expectation of the public to be engaged, or the media to

[5]See related literature on how the Web is being used in new ways to mobilize effectively around political causes, e.g. Karpf 2012

deliver to the public.

According to the minimalist view of democracy then, there is no expectation of the media to serve marginalized populations. If their interests are driven out by concerns of profitability, then so be it. Hence minimalists would not view the underrepresentation of minority interests in the mainstream press during the network and cable era as problematic.

The Internet has fundamentally disrupted this market-driven equation of profitability. Increasing fragmentation of the media has made it profitable to serve previously unprofitable segments. The minimalist view is therefore not only normatively distasteful (because it sanctions the further marginalization of already excluded groups) but it is also less relevant because the economic structure of the news have changed in such a way that there now is an incentive to tap into marginalized groups and get them online. Large media companies now expand their offerings to include minority groups in an effort to broaden their audiences.

The second and third view advanced by Starr are deliberative and participatory democracy. Deliberative democracy requires engagement by citizens on a discursive level. And while not everyone is expected to participate in deliberation one fundamental requirement for deliberative democracy to function is that all interests must be represented in deliberation. Hence deliberative democracy requires diversity of information and common denominators as starting points for consensus-generating discussion. My dissertation research suggests that the Internet can contribute to better deliberation because minority sources do not have to cover only issues relevant to minorities to appeal to them. As the experiment shows, minority sources are preferred by minorities regardless of the content.

It remains to be seen what effect the Web will have on democratic deliberation, but for now I think Habermas's and Sunstein's expectations that the Web merely causes isolated issue publics (or daily me's) is not warranted, especially given Hindman's

research that shows most people consume fairly centrist mainstream news due to the link structure and search engine algorithms of the web. Habermas's fear that the Internet is mostly giving birth to "the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world" seems overly pessimistic. As Mutz and Dilliplane (2012) find, ideological segregation of Web information is low.[6]

Lastly, my research shows that the Internet allows individuals to participate meaningfully in electoral democracy because the Web leads individuals to be better informed. Research by Dilliplane (2011) shows that selective exposure increases participation and that cross-cutting information paralyzes individuals. Hence, even if the Internet were to cause increased extremism[7] it might — at the same time — lead to better informed and more engaged citizens.

In the introduction I stated that "At the heart of democratic theory lies the normative ideal that a democratic society ought to represent the general will of the public." What exactly that means for our expectation of the media is still unclear. That the two are related is clear, however. Moreover, that "the public" should include marginalized voices should also be unquestioned.[8]

As scholars of U.S. democracy we look at Plato and Aristotle with unease today because they were perfectly comfortable with the disenfranchisement of significant

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[6]I am not disputing, however, that the media have become more partisan with the rise of cable TV and stations like Fox and MSNBC.

[7]Extremism is a term that warrants scrutiny. The term itself has a negative normative connotation. An alternative name for the phenomenon we are observing might be "better informed" opinions, because maybe opinions are more clearly defined as people know more. Being unwavering in one's support for abortion hardly qualifies as political extremism when one compares this to white supremacist, fascist, or anarchist ideologies. Supporting choice as a principle might just be another example of more crystallized group-relevant preferences. I think "polarized" opinion would be the better term as it applies to overall moderate American ideology and the relatively centrist spectrum all mainstream ideas (like pro choice - pro life) incorporate. In other words, the kinds of policy stances we use to measure extremism are all within a generally centrist liberal-conservative spectrum and neither threaten the constitution or fundamental democratic values as "legitimately" extreme political ideologies do.

[8] At least since the civil rights and women's movement

segments of society. They did not see the contradiction in this exclusion and the democratic ideals they articulated. It should strike scholars as equally distasteful to ignore the information needs of marginalized groups and assume that all news are sufficient for all populations. If the purpose of news is to develop political sophistication and to engage the public (all of it) in the political process, then news must be diverse. Hence news must deliver a multitude of perspectives and appeal to diverse people.

6.3 Concluding Thoughts

Race has been conspicuously absent from research on the effects of the new media environment. As political scientists we have to be careful not to participate in thought processes that contribute to and maintain institutionalized oppression by thinking about the Web and researching the Internet from a perspective of privilege. If we lived in a country where all groups were politically equal, and represented by the media equally, we would all be equally well-served by the same kind of media content. But as long as systemic inequality persists, we have to deal with this fundamental contradiction of American society by thinking about how non-mainstream news might serve marginalized groups.

As long as marginalized groups and their interests are considered "niche" interests by mainstream outlets, minorities need non-mainstream outlets. In other words, unless mainstream outlets incorporate a more diverse agenda to reflect the diversity of the U.S. we need diverse news sites that compensate for this shortcoming. Taeku Lee (2002) argues that there are multiple mass publics, and consequently the assumption that there is "a single institutionalized site for critical and rational deliberation among free and equal individuals" is merely a limited and idealized notion. He concludes that "counterpublic spheres are [...] indigenous safe harbors that generate countervailing

political information and sustain oppositional political ideologies. They sow the seeds for social change that are harvested through the mobilization of social movements and the activation of public opinion." I see the Web as a force that contributes to Lee's vision, not just for African-Americans, but also for Latinos, women, gays and lesbians, the poor, the young, and other groups.

Appendix A

Candidate Stands

A.1 Liberal Candidate

Women's Health/Abortion

I am pro-choice and support the United States Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade, which protects a woman's right to reproductive health and freedom. I believe that the abortions protected by that decision should be rare and safe, but that the decision between a woman, her family and her doctor, based on her own health and circumstances.

Stem Cell Research

Using stem cells for the purposes of medical research is not the same as cloning for the purposes of producing a child. I oppose any attempt at cloning for the purpose of producing a child. But I believe if there is the possibility that therapeutic cloning, using stem cells, could find a cure that would save the lives of millions of patients who suffer every day with terrible diseases, then we should do all we can to encourage this research.

Gay Marriage/LGBT Equality

I look forward to the day when gay and lesbian families are protected through the same laws and with the same obligations, responsibilities and rights as straight Americans. Achieving these goals will require both substantive changes in our laws and personal outreach to educate and change public attitudes. Congress must act to extend equal rights, repeal discriminatory laws, and advance policies that lead to the elimination of hate-motivated violence, and the improved health and well being for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

War Oversees/Military

I will bring an immediate end to the war in Afghanistan while fighting for a drastic (33% to 50%) reduction in military spending. I furthermore pledge to close Guantanamo Bay. This is something the previous commander-in-chief promised, but failed to do.

Defense Budget

I pledge to reduce the military budget by 33%-50%. We now spend over a million dollars a minute, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year on defense. Our current military budget is larger than it has ever been. It also is larger than the defense budgets of every other country in the world combined.

Relationship with China

The Chinese government has a record of persecuting and imprisoning individuals who openly criticize the Chinese Communist Party. The U.S. State Department estimates that China's government is holding thousands of people, including pro-democracy activists and members of the Falun Gong spiritual movement, in ideological "reed-

ucation" camps. Additionally, China restricts freedom of expression in all media, including the Internet, discriminates against people with HIV/AIDS, prohibits individuals from forming independent trade unions and bargaining collectively, suppresses advocacy for Tibetan independence, forces, sometimes violent, evictions to achieve the aims of the government.

Affirmative Action

Barriers to fulfilling one's potential must be removed. Discrimination has been an insidious barrier to many. I believe that government plays a central role in guaranteeing equal opportunity to all citizens. I strongly support enforcement of the Civil Rights Act and all other federal civil rights laws. Continuing federal affirmative action programs to promote outreach to traditionally underrepresented groups is also important. Our civil rights laws are meaningless if they are not enforced.

Education

Creating and sustaining high-quality public schools that are available to all children is critical to America's social and economic well-being. Providing quality schools is our primary means to achieve equality of opportunity for all children, giving them the skills to successfully compete in a global economy. After high school, our colleges and universities, including vocational and technical schools play a vital role in preparing students for careers and retraining workers for new and emerging industries and technologies. Students must have access to these programs, including adequate financial aid.

Immigration

Our country has a long history of welcoming immigrants who have contributed to our

economy and our culture. Today, immigrants continue to play an important role in our workforce, but I believe it would be unfair to place those who illegally entered the country ahead of those who have been patiently waiting, perhaps separated from their loved ones, for a legal visa to become available. I support legislation to provide a path that requires people to go through the legal process of attaining a visa, applying for legal permanent residency, paying a penalty for their illegal entry, and then possibly becoming a citizen in the future.

Jobs

I'm also calling for a new Works Progress Administration (WPA), similar to the massive jobs program implemented by Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression to alleviate what Princeton University economist and former Federal Reserve vice chairman Alan Blinder has accurately described as a "national jobs emergency" — painfully evidenced by the fact that 25.8 million Americans are currently unemployed or underemployed. The new WPA, financed in part by retroactively rescinding the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy, will employ millions of jobless Americans in rebuilding our nation's crumbling infrastructure.

National Deficit/Economy

I also support a second stimulus package — roughly five or six times the size of the Obama Administration's relatively puny $447 billion "Son of Stimulus" — to jump-start the ailing U.S. economy; a Medicare-for-All health care plan; and a moratorium on home foreclosures (for primary residences only), not unlike that initiated by Minnesota's radical Farmer-Labor Party during the Great Depression.

Taxes

With a significant budget deficit, it is essential that we end tax breaks for the wealthiest special interests. Too many corporations avoid paying any taxes by using accounting gimmicks, loopholes and overseas operations. I support closing these tax loopholes. Working families should not be forced to bear an additional burden and future generations should not be left with a massive debt because well-connected individuals and corporations avoid paying their fair share to support our national defense, maintain our infrastructure, and ensure that our children are prepared to compete in the 21st century.

[approx. 946 words total]

A.2 Centrist Candidate

Women's Health/Abortion

I believe that the potential for life begins at conception. I am a Methodist and my church has struggled with this issue. After great concern and after searching my own mind and heart over many years, I have nevertheless concluded that individuals must be entrusted to make this profound decision themselves, and hence I do support Roe v. Wade. The alternative would be a significant intrusion of government authority that would be very difficult to sustain in our society.

Stem Cell Research

Not too long ago, we witnessed a landmark achievement when scientists discovered a way to reprogram adult skin cells to act like embryonic stem cells. This breakthrough has the potential to move us beyond the divisive debates of the past by extending the frontiers of medicine without the destruction of human life. As President, I would expand funding for this type of ethical medical research. As we explore promising

avenues of research, we must also ensure that all life is treated with the dignity it deserves. Under my watch I would also advocate for legislation that bans unethical practices such as the buying, selling, patenting, or cloning of human life.

Gay Marriage/LGBT Equality

I support civil unions. To establish full equality for gay and lesbian couples, I am in favor of civil unions with full equality of benefits, rights, and privileges. However, I am also a very strong supporter of letting the states maintain their jurisdiction over marriage.

War Oversees/Military

I am dedicated to America's security at home and abroad. I support America's mission in Afghanistan. We cannot allow the Taliban or Al Qaeda to use Afghanistan or Pakistan as a base to launch attacks against the United States. We cannot lose sight of the threats we face from terrorists and their sponsors around the world - from Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere. At home, we should maintain support to federal law enforcement and counterterrorism efforts and keep terrorists held at Guantanamo Bay outside the United States.

Defense Budget

We must maintain our defense budget. The US has to be strong in order to promote peace and stability abroad and to remain safe as a nation. Furthermore, we need to make sure that our personnel are adequately paid and that their pay is comparable to the competition from the private sector. I support pay raises for military personnel. I also support modernization of our tactical weaponry. We have an opportunity to use the great technology of the United States to make our military lighter, harder to

find, and more lethal.

Relationship with China

I think we need to cooperate with China. China is a major competitor to the United States, but China is neither our enemy nor our friend. They are vital to our interests in the region and as such, we should seek cooperation with China.

Affirmative Action/Civil Rights

I believe that the protection and promotion of fundamental human rights is important throughout the country as a whole. I believe that in order to move forward, we must recognize and learn from mistakes of the past. To this end, I have authored legislation that calls on the Archivist of the United States to establish an electronically searchable national database within the National Archives and Records Administration to house historic records of servitude, emancipation, and post-Civil War reconstruction.

Education

As co-chair of the Senate Public Charter School Caucus, I have been an outspoken advocate of charter schools. Charter schools are an opportunity for innovation and community involvement. Candidate A/B supports initiatives where universities partner with schools to bolster the Kindergarten through 12th grade educational system. Charter schools have played a major role in this redevelopment, and I continue to secure federal funds for this model of education.

Immigration

I believe in immigration. I believe that legal immigration is an important part of the

lifeblood of this country, but I also think that an unsecured border poses challenges. I believe we need to build more fence and to further secure the border using technology and personnel. Until we secure the border, we should enforce the laws in this country with respect to employers. Once the border is secured, we can deal with the problems that are in this country.

Jobs

A major part of my job creation agenda is the Small Business Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights consists of 10 policies that would immediately give companies and small businesses the certainty and economic environment they need to start hiring again. I am pleased to announce that one of these policies, which would create a patent fast lane for small businesses, has been adopted as an amendment to the America Invents Act. I will continue working to pass the remaining items included in the bill of rights to help put America back to work.

National Deficit/Economy

The simple answer to address the deficit and long-term debt is to reduce spending, reform our entitlement programs, and overhaul the tax code. I will reduce spending and keep taxes low for Americans. I am determined to reduce the deficit and I hope everyone can come to an understanding that we'll have to do more with less. I also support bi-partisan efforts to reduce spending and close tax loopholes.

Taxes

If elected president, I would make important spending, saving, and investment decisions. America's families and businesses need to be able to plan for the future. Right now, some key elements of the tax relief passed by Congress and signed into law by

President Bush - such as the increase in the child tax credit, the elimination of the death tax, and the new incentives for small business investment are set to expire in a few years. I am in favor of continuing most of the tax cutes put in place by President Bush.

[approx. 962 words total]

A.3 Republican Candidate

Women's Health/Abortion

I believe the most fundamental right is the right to life, and it is our moral obligation to defend it. Throughout my tenure in Congress, I have been proud to support numerous pieces of pro-life legislation including the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, the Life at Conception Act, and the Protect Life Act.

Stem Cell Research

I voted no on expanding research to more embryonic stem cell lines. I do understand the importance of embryonic stem cell research, however I also believe there are alternatives. It's an important moment for us in this country. This is about the value of human life. Every life has meaning. Every life deserves protection under our constitution.

Gay Marriage/LGBT Equality

I oppose domestic partnership benefits for same-sex couples and I am in favor of a constitutional amendment to protect the traditional family. In my view, homosexuality is a sin, and gay or lesbian couples should not be able to adopt children. However, I also believe that same sex couples should have legal rights so that they can leave

their estates to their partners or visit them in the hospital.

War Oversees/Military

As the rise of anti-Americanism across the globe shows no signs of abating, especially among the Islamic world, America's foreign policy has to remain strong. That said, we cannot waste precious American lives and money in countries that hate us. We must bring our troops home as soon as possible. If elected, I would return our troops by the end of the year 1217.

Defense Budget

I believe that America is the greatest country in the world and with that position comes responsibility. Since its founding, America has stood as a beacon of liberty to a watching world. We must stand up for those who have no voice. Dictators and their crony regimes must be opposed. Universal rights, such as freedom and justice, must be upheld. We must also be able to defend ourselves from anti-American actors and countries. We must continue to invest in defending this country.

Relationship with China

I am highly critical of the current administration's handling of China. The US has been too timid in the face of China's aggressive rhetoric, especially in regional matters. I also believe that the US has a moral duty to battle China's brand of godless socialism.'

Affirmative Action

Women and African-Americans deserve and equal pay and equal opportunities in this

country, but they also do not deserve special pay or special opportunities. Americans are a people that respect hard work. Everyone should be treated equally. Therefore, I do not support special advantages for Women or African-Americans.

Education

Our children are our future, and they deserve every opportunity to be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. Unfortunately, in many areas, our schools are letting them down. As I visit with teachers, administrators and parents, they ask me to fight for real education reform. I pledge to fight for innovation and reform by funneling resources, not red tape, from the federal government to our local schools. I support choice when it comes to schools.

Immigration

I believe that border security and immigration are two separate issues. Before we can fix the immigration system, we must secure our borders. Every country has the right to decide who and what crosses their borders, but the federal government has not adequately fulfilled this duty. For this reason, I introduced H.R. 152, the National Guard Border Enforcement Act, which would mandate that the Secretary of Defense deploy 10,000 National Guard troops to the US border and keep them there until operational control of the border is achieved. Furthermore, I do not support illegal immigration or amnesty for illegal immigrants already in this country.

Jobs

We need to put America back to work. We must focus on promoting economic growth and prosperity by removing more of Washington from the lives of American families and businesses. Jump-starting the economy and creating jobs requires fiscal

discipline, innovation and removal of burdensome regulations that kill jobs. We must cut spending, adopt a Balanced Budget Amendment and simplify and reduce the tax rates for all Americans.

National Deficit/Economy/Budget

The federal government has grown too big thanks to unchecked, excessive spending. I support significant spending cuts while sustaining those services that the federal government is constitutionally authorized to provide. For too long, the federal government has pretended that it could spend what it did not have without any consequences. Total federal spending, as a percentage of our economy, is at its highest level since World War II.

Taxes

I believe we need to completely overhaul the tax-system. I would like to replace the individual income tax, all payroll taxes, the self-employment tax, and the estate and gift taxes with a 23% national retail sales tax. We would no longer have the need for the IRS or a serious problem with people cheating the system and not paying their fair share. People simply would pay their taxes every time they purchased a good. I also believe we need to drastically cut the corporate income tax. At a combined government rate of 40%, the U.S. has the second highest corporate income tax rate in the world. This means that businesses are more likely to move to other countries where they will not be taxed as much as they are here. The result is we lose our jobs and become less competitive in the world market.

[approx. 901 words total]

Appendix B

Experimental Stimuli and Questions

B.1 Example Articles — Democratic Primary

Writers were asked to cover each of the four issue clusters (cultural, foreign affairs, social, and economic issue cluster) twice per mainstream news source. In the mainstream condition, both articles per cluster were attributed to a mainstream source. In the high-choice condition half of the articles were attributed to alternative sources. Writers could choose to highlight any issue in the cluster (see **table B.1**), or talk about all of them equally in an article to mimic normal variation. The articles below are examples of cultural, foreign affairs, social, and economic issue cluster coverage (in that order). This is the text only version before programming them into *DPTE*. **Figure B.1** Shows a screenshot of the mainstream condition and the information boxes available. Each information box was clearly labeled with a news source, headline, and article summary. The figure also shows the candidate stances available to subjects "directly from the candidates' own websites." **Figure B.2** shows the content of an information box: An article from the economic issues cluster on job creation.

The article was attributed to a source targeting Latinos in the high-choice condition.

B.1.1 Cultural Issues Cluster

CANDIDATES COURT ABORTION GROUPS, EACH ACCORDING TO STANCE

Candidates John Smith and Ron Wilson are both making overtures to abortion rights groups but not the same ones.

Smith, who is a strong advocate for abortion rights, has been seeking support from groups like the National Council for Women's Reproductive Rights. Appeal to such organizations could yield both access to donors and the network of NCWRR members. The politic clout that comes with strong connections to non-profits could be invaluable, especially in a tight race.

Wilson has also been making the rounds at fundraisers and benefit dinners only among the more moderate women's rights groups. Wilson, a Methodist, has complex feelings about abortion and contraception but ultimately supports them. He does however encourage adoption and foster care over terminating pregnancies.

"They're building these connections and being seen with these groups to give their respective messages some credence," says Mary Walker, a professor of Women's Studies at Coleridge University. Getting their messages diffused through emails, social media platforms and word of mouth among members of the organizations couldn't hurt either.

B.1.2 Foreign Affairs Issue Cluster

SMITH'S CUTS TO MILITARY BUDGETS WOULD NOT AFFECT TSA

The worst critique of John Smith's National Defense policy to date is that budget cuts would affect domestic security such as at airports and other transport hubs. The Smith campaign says this is not true.

While Smith's proposed cuts would severely limit the United States ability to strike at targets overseas, it would not affect those agencies and military units that guard and monitor airports, train stations and ports.

"It's time for the American government to look out for Americans," said Smith, "but my policies aren't about making us open to an attack on our soil." The Transportation Security Administration, which handles a bulk of the day-to-day security in major hubs across the country, has a budget separate from that of the Pentagon. The TSAs budget is currently $8 billion; a figure that Smith promises would not change if he were elected president.

"Here we have a man making the case that we should deal with the problem once it reaches our doorstep," said Ron Wilson, Smith's rival for the democratic nomination. Wilson has campaigned for no changes to the Pentagons budget and to keep counter-terrorism efforts at their current levels. "From a common sense standpoint I think its pretty clear to your average voter," said Tom Ellis, a defense consultant and former Air Force Colonel, "you don't have to be an expert to know that if you go from being the number one military force in the world to the third or fourth, it'll be a lot easier for the bad guys to get at you."

B.1.3 Social Issues Cluster

AT TEACHERS CONFERENCE EDUCATORS TALK TECHNIQUE AND POLITICS

There was much discussion about the democratic hopefuls at the National Association of Public School Teachers convention, held in Chicago this year.

A prolific topic throughout the convention has been Ron Wilson and his support for charter schools. “Charters mostly hire non-union teachers,” said Arethrea Jones, a public school teacher from Michigan, “we’re just talking here about the best way to deal with them and a big part of that is who you’re going to vote for.”

Teachers Unions have criticized charters for their autonomy when it comes to hiring practices and work hours but by far their biggest gripe is their preference for non-union workers. The United Federation of Teachers has publically supported the John Smith campaign for his stance on education and his pro-public school policies.

You won’t find anyone from the Smith campaign on the convention floor, however. What you will find though is conversation over coffee about possibly campaigning for Mr. Smith come the summer holidays. Several teachers told CBS they were already committed to joining his campaign as volunteers and many said they had already donated to his campaign. Those who were interviewed unanimously voiced opposition to Wilson based solely on his education policies.

B.1.4 Economic Issues Cluster

CANDIDATES DIVIDED ON JOBS AND WHEN TO INTERVENE

Both candidates made their statements this week on jobs, the deficit and taxes in a fashion that's typical of the race so far. Each candidate took a comparatively radical stance to the other. Most notably on the subject of jobs did Mr. Smith and Mr. Wilson part ways.

Smith has proposed both a massive stimulus injection of $2 trillion dollars to pay for a number of social programs as well as a new Works Progress Administration to help ease unemployment. Wilson has proposed a free market solution where small business owners will be the engines of economic growth.

"We're seeing a strong polarity here between the two candidates and their views," said Maury Thompson, a professor of political science at Hartford University, "the kind of pattern we've been seeing over the last few months is showing us two very conflicting faces of the democratic party."

Thompson suggests that Smith represents the far left wing of the party and the other, the more centrist element of the party is led by Wilson. The so-called "blue-dog" coalition of democrats and lawmakers that promote fiscal responsibility, announced their support for Wilson who called for an overhaul of the tax code and a removal of the death tax.

B.2 Race Prime

Dependent on their assignment, subjects saw one of the two following articles.

B.2.1 Race Prime Condition

New Jersey's Tough Stance on Illegal Immigration has led to Charges of Racism

A report by the NAACP finds that black and Hispanic residents are being stopped by the police at much higher rates than whites in New Jersey. Local officials claim the crackdown is necessary to reduce illegal immigration, which costs the state billions.

A recent crackdown on illegal immigration in New Jersey has forced residents and police to confront racial profiling. A report by the NAACP found that black and Hispanic residents are being stopped at much greater rates than whites.

Police Chief Ed Flynn noted that his policies to target certain neighborhoods has led to a decrease in illegal immigrants even while he acknowledged that some innocent residents might be inconvenienced. Flynn justified his actions by citing estimates that illegal immigration costs federal and local taxpayers $113 billion a year.

He noted, "federal spending on illegal aliens amounts to $29 billion. That leaves an estimated $84.2 billion for state and local citizens. Of that total, New Jersey shoulders $1.6 billion in costs, the sixth highest total in the nation behind California at more than $21 billion, New York, Texas and Florida."

The chief also noted, "there's little doubt that racial profiling makes some residents feel like second-class citizens."

B.2.2 No Prime Condition

36 Hours: Birmingham, England

In terms of respect, Birmingham is the undisputed Rodney Dangerfield of British cities. Ask a Londoner about the city, and you're likely to receive either the blankest of stares or an unkind rendition of Birmingham's memorable accent.

American travelers, too, have mostly ignored England's second-largest city, aside from the view from their London-bound flights. But with an only-in-Britain tapestry of vividly multiethnic neighborhoods, a postindustrial urbanity that's gentrifying before your eyes and a food scene that can't be ignored, Birmingham is no longer simply flyover country.

Welcome to England's heartland metropolis: big-shouldered, friendly and fun.

Birmingham was a hotbed of the Industrial Revolution, a cityscape of soot and furnaces once described as "black by day and red by night." Heavy industry has left the city center, but the canals that carried the city's coal and fortunes remain. It is said that there is more watery mileage here than in Venice.

Start your canalside explorations at the mixed-use Cube, a Lego-like structure housing shops, a hotel and apartments. From here follow the canal northwest through the heart of the new Birmingham, turning right at the big canal intersection, past innumerable old locks and tollhouses.

Feel your gentrification compass start to spin as postindustrial chic slowly gives way to just plain old postindustrial: the city's regeneration of its abandoned industrial byways is still a fascinating work in progress.

B.2.3 Post-Test Group Consciousness Questions

Q: Do you think what happens generally to black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?

Q: Will it affect you a lot, some, or not very much?

Q: People differ in whether they think about being black — what they have in common with blacks. What about you — do you think about this a lot, fairly often, once in a while, or hardly ever?

Table B.1: **Issues and Issue Clusters**

Cluster	**Cultural Issues**	**Foreign Affairs**	**Social Issues**	**Economy**
Issue	Abortion	War oversees	Affirmative action	Jobs
	Stem cell research	Defense budget	Education	Nat'l deficit
	Gay marriage	Relationship w/China	Immigration	Taxes

Figure B.1: **DPTE Screenshot: Mainstream Condition; Campaign Stage; Information Boxes**

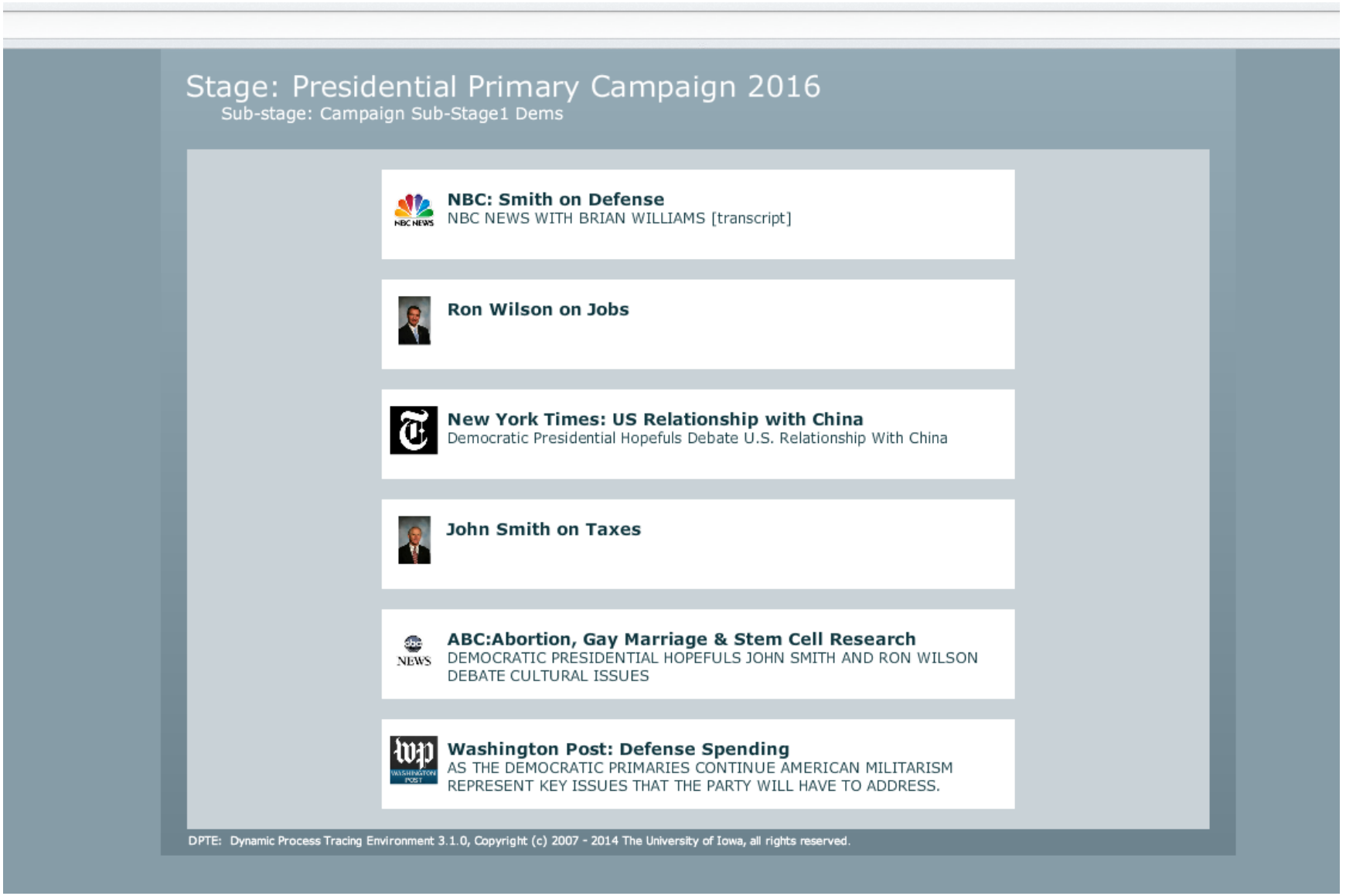
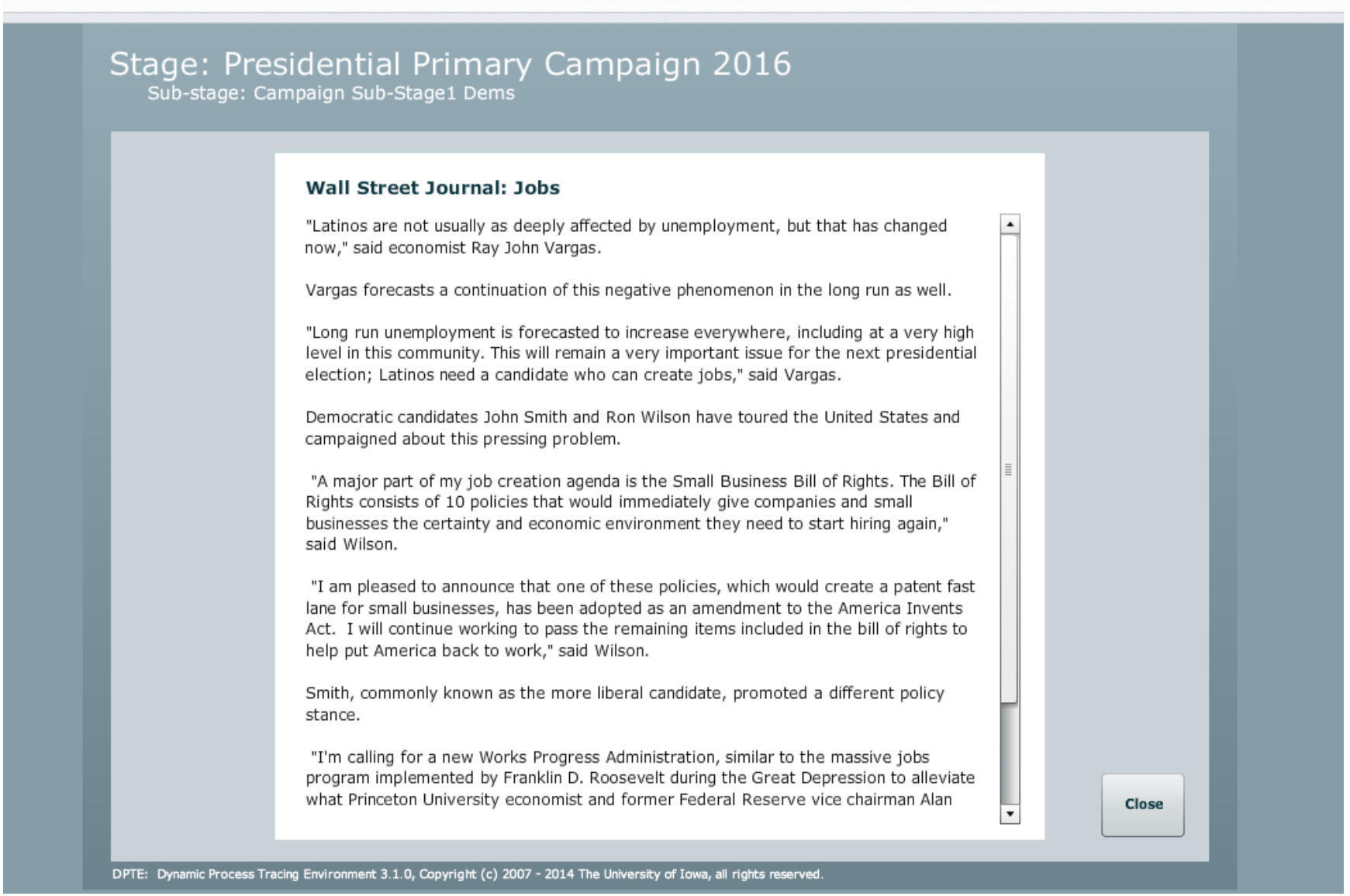


Figure B.2: **DPTE Screenshot: Mainstream Condition; Wall Street Journal Article (Latino Source in Low-Choice Cond.)**



Appendix C

Mechanical Turk

I identified myself as **Rutgers Political Psychology** on MTurk. All studies were posted in small batches for 10-25 workers to complete at a time. Median time to complete one HIT was 41 minutes. I paid $4 per batch, which comes out to about $6 per hour, a much higher rate of pay than the average compensation on MTurk. Batches took between 3-8 hours to complete depending on the time of day I posted the study (and most likely what other Hits I was competing with). Another graduate student was running a similar study at the same time as I was conducting my research. We shared the MTurk account and used qualifications to prevent workers to participate in both of our studies since they were conceptually related.

C.1 Recruitment

Description of HIT on Amazon:

You are invited to take this study if you are eligible to vote in the US. By participating you help political science researchers understand how people make voting decisions.

Keywords: Research, survey, academic, study, voting, democracy, political representation, equality

Qualification Requirement: HIT Approval Rate (percent) for all Requesters' HITs greater than or equal to 97

Number of HITs Approved greater than 1000

Location is UNITED STATES

I identified myself as **Rutgers Political Psychology** on MTurk. All studies were posted in small batches for 10-25 workers to complete at a time. Batches took between 3-8 hours to complete depending on the time of day I posted the study (and most likely what other Hits I was competing with). Another graduate student was running a similar study at the same time as I was conducting my research. We shared the MTurk account and used qualifications to prevent workers to participate in both of our studies since they were conceptually related.

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