Partisan and Social Media as Moderators of the Belief Gap

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Presented at the annual conference of the
Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research

November 19, 2011 • Chicago, IL

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ABSTRACT

Recent evidence (Hindman, 2009) suggests that, when it comes to politically contested factual claims, ideology is a more important factor than education in determining understanding, and that they may even work at cross purposes. This provides a challenging context to the long history of knowledge gap research, but also suggests a role for pathways of ideologically slanted information in strengthening beliefs. This study examines ideological media use and political discussion as mechanisms of group norm establishment and reinforcement. An additional, related investigation is made of the role of ideology in particular, as contrasted with partisanship, in the expression of belief gaps.

Using structural equation models of factors predicting beliefs on five contested but factual political issues, we find that ideology is a stronger predictor of beliefs than is education, but that partisanship is consistently stronger than either of them. Contrary to some concerns that the Internet promotes partisan clustering, use of partisan traditional media – television and radio – is by far the strongest information-related predictor of belief outcomes, while partisan social media use and partisan talk are relatively weak and inconsistent.

First tested more than four decades ago (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970), the knowledge gap hypothesis suggests that general increases in information availability about a particular topic will disproportionately benefit those who are highly educated and already knowledgeable. As issues come and go in the news agenda, we may thus be left with a population of haves and have-nots when it comes to knowledge about contested political issues.

The extensive research following up on the original knowledge gap study tends to approach knowledge from a positivistic perspective, operationalizing it in a way that assumes a correct answer that respondents either do or do not produce. However, knowledge can also be seen as the outcome of both social and cognitive processes, which may play increasingly important roles in a polarized political environment.

Synthesizing these factors in the belief gap hypothesis, Hindman (2009) suggests a stronger role for ideology than for education in predicting both the distribution of and change in beliefs about contested issues. In this study, we extend on Hindman's findings in two key ways. First, we broaden the role of ideology in the belief gap theory, conceptualizing it more as a marker of group affiliation than of a coherent belief system (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), to include party affiliation, as well; specifically, we propose that party affiliation is actually a better fit than ideology for the belief gap model. Second, we suggest that the social factors which connect ideology and party affiliation to political beliefs also drive selective exposure to the media, and in particular to partisan media. Both the knowledge gap and belief gap hypotheses are dependent on flows of information through the mass media; however, neither account for the ready availability of partisan information in today's mass and social media. While

partisan group affiliations may drive partisan media use, the reception of information from partisan sources may help to reify the belief differences originally prompted by ideology and party affiliation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Belief gaps. What was once defined by knowledge, is now by belief—at least in terms of politically contested issues. With the current political landscape's polarization, where scientific findings are a cause for partisan dispute, traditional indicators of the "knowledge gap," such as education (Tichenor, et al., 1970), are may no longer be sufficient. The knowledge gap represents the disparity in acquisition of scientific knowledge (that cigarettes cause cancer, for example) between those with different levels of education, exacerbated by increased media flow. Mass media were found to further existing differences and inequality between social classes. As an expansion of the original knowledge gap findings, Hindman's (2009) belief gap hypothesis suggests ideology is a better predictor than education of issue opinion and opinion change. Even issues with a scientific consensus are subject to this ideological influence, regardless of one's education – the belief gap found in that study exists between liberals and conservatives on the existence of climate change.

Hindman's new approach also describes media as reinforcing ideological belief differences: the partisan "echo chambers" of the fragmented media landscape help to politicize scientific issues, including those such as climate change about which there is scientific consensus. Along with ideology surpassing education as the stronger predicting variable, Hindman additionally hypothesized that the relationship between ideology and politically contested beliefs strengthens with increased media attention. Under conditions

of heavy media coverage, the gap between liberals and conservatives on belief in climate change grew larger. Notably, while Hindman finds evidence of a belief gap on the question of whether climate change exists, he finds no such evidence on the related question of whether it is caused by human activity. However, a subsequent study, examining views on climate change over a ten-year period, finds both ideological and partisan explanations for both questions (McCright & Dunlap, 2011).

Like the link between tobacco and cancer, climate change is a scientific issue with consensus, public policy repercussions and sustained media coverage. Its debate has also been co-opted by elite interests. As noted by Hindman, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press has found an expanding divide on climate change, along partisan lines (*A Deeper Partisan Divide Over Global Warming*, 2008). Republicans were less likely than Democrats to ascribe human cause to climate change, and the most educated Republicans were the *least* likely. This finding fits with the assertion by Bartels (2008) that the most well-informed ideologues are the most wrong about factual issues for which the wrong answer is the most consistent with their ideology. Hindman suggests that not only ideology, but also partisanship is related to belief, though he does not specifically test this contention. Instead, he explains the prominence of ideology in belief development as derived from ideological group affiliation: “Instead of learning about an issue, one must simply learn what one’s reference group believes about the issue.” The distinction between ideology and partisanship, and the roles that they both play in belief expression, is potentially a key one in examining belief gaps. In the model that we posit in this research, we examine them as highly related but not entirely analogous concepts.

Political identity and affiliation. Conceptually, ideology is generally taken to be a coherent belief system used by individuals to evaluate and form opinions about issues. In this formulation, ideologies are held by individuals, but in practice are few in number and shared by many people. However, early research on ideology and political sophistication suggests that it operates as conceived in few people (Campbell, et al., 1960) and that most people base issue opinions on exposure to elite discourse on those issues (Malka & Lelkes, 2010; Zaller, 1992). Despite this, most people still choose to label themselves with an ideological marker such as "liberal" or "conservative," and most research measures ideology using self-placement on the liberal-conservative scale.

This usage of ideological identification, despite the theorized concept existing so rarely, suggests that ideology is actually a marker of group affiliation, similar to political partisanship (Conover & Feldman, 1981). Indeed, in recent decades, ideology and partisanship have significantly converged. Between 1972 and 2004, the National Election Study found an increase in the Pearson's correlation between ideology and partisanship from .47 to .77 (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008). This result is part of general trend of ideological sorting between the two major parties, resulting in greater ideological consistency and more polarization among partisans.

Broadly based and nationally bound ideological and partisan group have the characteristics of what Anderson (1991) calls an "imagined community." According to Anderson, community is a social construction developed through the imaginations of those people who consider themselves as part of that group – that is, the group exists by shared acclamation of its members and is formed through their shared belief in its existence. In an imagined community, the members all imagine in the same way, and

there is a key role for newspapers and novels (what Anderson calls “print capitalism”) in the process of imagination. In updated this concept for the modern political world, we might expect a strong influence of “digital capitalism” in people’s understanding of their communities, particularly given the widespread availability of partisan media online. The always-on nature of this media may make community identification especially salient considering its role in conditioning our daily speech, behavior and attitudes (Özkirimli, 2000). Communities create norms that influence members’ attitudes, and every opportunity for exposure to partisan media can be seen as an opportunity for exposure to and reinforcement of those norms (Jones, Ferraiolo, & Byrne, 2011).

Selective exposure to political media. Scholars have long been concerned about selective exposure to media that is congruent with one’s political point of view. This has been particularly in the Internet era, as the abundance of choice online suggests the ability create a media diet that is more homogeneous and partisan that would be possible in the relatively more limited offline media world (Mutz & Martin, 2001; Sunstein, 2001). While cable television has introduced additional partisan content, the Internet significantly reduces the cost of seeking not only politically agreeable news content, but also politically agreeable discussion and social interaction (Polat, 2005).

Empirical evidence for lack of exposure to disagreeable traditional media is in short supply (Chaffee, Saphir, Graf, Sandvig, & Hahn, 2001), and this is especially true when it comes to channel selection, rather than content selection within a channel. Conceptualizing exposure as a combination of both media use and discussion makes the issue somewhat clearer, since traditional media can act as a substitute for heterogeneous political discussion (Mutz & Martin, 2001), which most individuals don’t experience in

an interpersonal setting (Mutz, 2006). The nature of the Internet as a conduit for social media also suggests this combined exposure concept, and evidence does suggest that individuals use the Internet to seek agreeable information that they couldn't otherwise access (Best, Chmielewski, & Krueger, 2005). A significant body of research also suggests the tendency for Internet sources – particulary social media, such as blogs – to offer narrow bands of partisan content (Adamic & Glance, 2005), though there is evidence that partisan social media, like traditional media, can be venues for exposure to cross-cutting views (Veenstra, Hong, & Liu, 2010).

Selective exposure is generally seen as an important concern because a lack of diversity in political information and discussion hampers the ability of disagreeing citizens to engage in rational decision-making (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004). Diverse information sources help to balance a tendency to be drawn to like-minded people, who find it easier to talk to one another, particularly about uncomfortable issues, and who are more easily persuaded by one another (Rogers, 1973). Furthermore, when like-minded people interact, they create shared norms and expectations amongst themselves, which influence each other's political beliefs and actions (Knoke, 1990).

Homogeneous discussion networks can thus serve as "safe spaces" (Polletta, 1999) that admit, encourage and reinforce partisan ideas, which will likely strengthen through the process of "enclave deliberation" (Mutz, 2006). These partisan enclaves, both directly and indirectly through partisan media, also act as outlets for political views that may be seen as unacceptable in other venues (Polletta, 1999). Traditional media can act as a stand-in for "the other side" (Mutz & Martin, 2001), but partisan media, which does not operate under the same norms of balance and objectivity, should not be expected to

play the same role. Thus, we should expect partisans who use partisan media to be especially strong carriers of the norms of their partisan groups.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the original belief gap findings (Hindman, 2009) and on the relatively stronger clarity of partisanship compared with ideology, both as a research concept and in the minds of individuals, we expect that ideology will outperform education and that partisanship will outperform both in predicting beliefs. Crucially, we bound the belief concept in this study as those opinions related to political questions with factual answers, regardless of whether one is correct. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Ideology is a stronger predictor of politically contested beliefs than is education.

H2. Partisanship is a stronger predictor of politically contested beliefs than is either education or ideology.

Additionally, because of the roles traditional media, mediated discussion and interpersonal talk play in establishing and reinforcing norms within communities, we propose the following hypotheses regarding reception of partisan information:

H3. Exposure to a) conservative traditional media, b) conservative social media, c) conservative discussion, and d) Christian traditional media strengthen the relationships of conservative ideology and Republican partisanship with politically contested beliefs.

H4. Exposure to a) liberal traditional media, b) liberal social media, and c) liberal discussion strengthen the relationships of liberal ideology and Democratic partisanship with politically contested beliefs.

METHODS

Data for this study come from a general population survey of 505 American adults, conducted September 29-30, 2011. Respondents were randomly selected by Survey Sampling International from a standing poll of survey participants. Potential respondents were contacted by e-mail with the address of an online survey. The sample was 50.4% female and 74.6% white, with a mean age of 43.97 years. The median household income was in the $20,000-$40,000 range and the median educational achievement was some college.

Partisanship and ideology. A measure of partisanship was created from two items asking respondents' political party affiliation (38.2% Democratic, 24.4% Republican, 28.3% none, 9.2% other) and the strength of that affiliation, from weak (1) to strong (3). In the partisanship scale, Republicans were assigned their strength of partisanship value, Democrats were assigned the negative of their strength of partisanship value, and all other respondents were assigned 0, creating a scale of two-party partisanship (M = -.30, SD = 1.80). Ideology was measured with two items, asking respondents to place themselves on a scale from very liberal (1) to very conservative (7) (Feldman & Johnston, 2009). These two items were averaged to create an index (r = .79, M = 4.04, SD = 1.50).

Media use. All media use concepts were measured using survey items asking respondents their usage from never (1) to frequently (4). Conservative traditional media use was measured with two items asking the frequency of watching Fox News and listening to conservative talk radio (r = .64, M = 1.99, SD = .98). Liberal traditional media use was measured with two items asking the frequency of watching MSNBC and listening to progressive talk radio (r = .60, M = 1.80, SD = .87).

Conservative social media use was measured with four items asking the frequency of reading conservative blogs, following conservative pundits via social media, following conservative commentators via social media and receiving messages from conservative e-mail lists (Cronbach's α = .90, *M* = 1.71, *SD* = .86). Liberal social media use was measured using four items asking about the same media, but with liberal targets (α = .90, *M* = 1.66, *SD* = .84). Additionally, one item asked the frequency of use of Christian radio and television programming (*M* = 1.68, *SD* = .98).

Political talk. Two items, ranging from never (1) to frequently (4) were used to measure talk with those who express conservative views (*M* = 2.33, *SD* = .97) and those who express liberal views (*M* = 2.31, *SD* = .97).

Beliefs. Five outcome beliefs were measured using one item each, asking respondents' agreement with a belief statement on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The statements were all replicated from previous public opinion surveys. Belief in anthropomorphic climate change was measured with the statement, "There is solid evidence that the Earth is warming because of human activity" (*M* = 3.39, *SD* = 1.19) (previously measured in "Fewer Americans See Solid Evidence of Global Warming: Modest Support for "Cap and Trade" Policy," 2009). Belief in the efficacy of abstinence-only sex education was measured with the statement, "Abstinence-only education is an effective way to prevent unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases" (*M* = 2.90, *SD* = 1.33) (Bleakley, Hennessy, & Fishbein, 2006). Belief that Barack Obama is a Muslim was measured with the statement, "President Obama is a Muslim" (*M* = 2.67, *SD* = 1.29) (Taylor, 2010). Belief that Obama is a natural-born citizen was measured with the statement, "President Obama was born in the United

States" ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.28$) (Morales, 2011). Belief that the Obama Administration has raised taxes on most people was measured with the statement, "The Obama Administration has increased taxes for most Americans" ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.11$) (Hendin, 2010).

RESULTS

Initial tests of H1 and H2 were undertaken using linear regression models in which the five belief outcomes were predicted by age, gender, race and income, as well as the hypothesized variables education, ideology and partisanship. To test the comparison between education and ideology, those variables were entered in a second block, after the four demographic control variables, with partisanship being entered alone in a third block. In four of the five initial models, ideology was a significantly stronger predictor of belief than was education: climate change, ß = -.38 ($p < .001$) to ß = .03 (n.s.); Obama a Muslim, ß = .23 ($p < .001$) to ß = -.09 (n.s.); Obama an American, ß = -.31 ($p < .001$) to ß = .08 (n.s.); and taxes up under Obama, ß = .22 ($p < .001$) to ß = -.10 ($p < .05$). In the model predicting belief that abstinence-only education works, the difference between ideology (ß = .10, $p < .05$) and education (ß = -.09, $p < .05$) was not significant. These results provide some support for H1.

However, in each case, the role of ideology is diminished when partisanship is added in the model's final block, while the role of education is virtually unchanged: climate change, partisanship ß = -.30 ($p < .001$) to ideology ß = -.24 ($p < .001$); abstinence-only education, ß = .16 ($p < .01$) to ß = .03 (n.s.); Obama a Muslim, ß = .24 ($p < .001$) to ß = .12 ($p < .05$); Obama an American, ß = -.28 ($p < .001$) to ß = -.18 (p <

.001); and taxes up under Obama, ß = .32 ($p < .001$) to ß = .07 (n.s.). These results provide support for H2. Full regression results can be seen in Table 1.

Hypotheses H3 and H4 were tested using structural equation models, with age, gender, race and income controlled. Education, ideology and partisanship were inserted as exogenous variables; conservative, liberal and Christian traditional media as a first level of endogenous predictor variables; conservative and liberal social media as a second level; and conservative and liberal political talk as a third. This model was used to predict each of the five outcome beliefs.

In the model predicting belief in anthropomorphic climate change, both partisanship ($\gamma = -.20$, $p < .001$) and ideology ($\gamma = -.13$, $p < .01$) are significant predictors, while education is not ($\gamma = .01$, n.s.). Additionally, each traditional media variable – conservative media (ß = -.30, $p < .001$), liberal media (ß = .27, $p < .001$), Christian media (ß = -.10, $p < .05$) – has a significant direct relationship with the outcome belief, supporting H3a, H4a and H3d. However, neither conservative nor liberal social media use is a significant predictor, and though liberal talk is (ß = .10, $p < .05$), conservative talk is not. These results support H4c, but not H3b, H3c or H4b.

In the model predicting belief that abstinence-only education works, both partisanship ($\gamma = .13$, $p < .01$) and education ($\gamma = -.09$, $p < .05$) are significant predictors, while ideology is not ($\gamma = .01$, n.s.). Additionally, conservative media (ß = .13, $p < .05$) and Christian media (ß = .22, $p < .001$) have significant direct relationships with the outcome belief, while liberal media does not, supporting H3a and H3d, but not H4a. Neither conservative nor liberal social media use is a significant predictor, and though

liberal talk is ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .001$), conservative talk is not. These results support H4c, but not H3b, H3c or H4b.

In the model predicting belief that Barack Obama is a Muslim, both partisanship ($\gamma = .17$, $p < .001$) and education ($\gamma = -.08$, $p < .05$) are significant predictors, while ideology is not ($\gamma = .08$, n.s.). Additionally, each traditional media variable – conservative media ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$), liberal media ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$), Christian media ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$) – has a significant direct relationship with the outcome belief, supporting H3a, H4a and H3d. However, neither conservative nor liberal social media use is a significant predictor, and though liberal talk is ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$), conservative talk is not. These results support H4c, but not H3b, H3c or H4b.

In the model predicting belief that Barack Obama is an American, both partisanship ($\gamma = -.23$, $p < .001$) and ideology ($\gamma = -.12$, $p < .05$) are significant predictors, while education is not ($\gamma = .06$, n.s.). Additionally, conservative media ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$) and liberal media ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) have significant direct relationships with the outcome belief, but Christian media does not, supporting H3a and H4a, but not H3d. Neither liberal social media use nor liberal talk is a significant predictor, though conservative social media use ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$) and conservative talk ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$) are. These results support H3b and H3c, but not H4b or H4c.

In the model predicting belief that most Americans' taxes have gone up during the Obama Administration, both partisanship ($\gamma = .26$, $p < .001$) and education ($\gamma = -.08$, $p < .05$) are significant predictors, while ideology is not ($\gamma = .04$, n.s.). Additionally, conservative media ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$) and liberal media ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .01$) have significant direct relationships with the outcome belief, but Christian media does not, supporting

H3a and H4a, but not H3d. Neither liberal social media use nor conservative talk is a significant predictor, though conservative social media use ($ß = .13$, $p < .05$) and liberal talk ($ß = -.15$, $p < .001$) are. These results support H3b and H4c, but not H3c or H4b. A summary of support for hypotheses can be seen in Table 2, and full structural equation models can be seen in Figures 1-5.

DISCUSSION

Our findings can be seen as contributing to the belief gap literature in three main areas. First, we find that, although ideology is generally a better predictor of beliefs than is education, partisanship consistently does a better job than either of them. This is especially noticeable in the model predicting belief that abstinence-only education works, which initially finds that ideology and education are roughly equally strong predictors, but in which partisanship outperforms both. Partisanship is not only the strongest predictor across all five models; it is also the only significant predictor of each belief.

Second, we find a major role of partisan traditional media use in the expression of beliefs. Conservative traditional media use is a significant predictor of belief – in the same direction as is Republican partisanship – in all five of our models. Perhaps playing a supplementary role, Christian traditional media use is a significant predictor of all beliefs except that Barack Obama was born in the United States, and in all cases it works in the same direction as conservative traditional media use. Liberal traditional media use is a significant predictor of all beliefs except that abstinence-only education works, and in all cases it works in the same direction as Democratic partisanship. That liberal and conservative traditional media use are significant and oppositional predictors in four of

the five models suggests an independent role for each in determining belief outcomes, rather than simply the balance of one's media diet impacting beliefs.

Finally, we find that non-traditional pathways for political information – specifically social media and interpersonal talk – appear to play only minor roles in the construction of beliefs about politically contested issues. In only the model predicting belief that Barack Obama was born in the United States do both conservative social media use and conservative talk play significant roles, and both are non-significant in three of the five models. This suggests that non-traditional pathways for conservative information may be relevant for specific issues, but not for others. On the other hand, liberal social media use does not significantly predict belief in any of our five models, while liberal talk is a significant predictor of four of the five beliefs. This suggests that talk may be a more important pathway than social media for liberal information across a range of issues.

The similarity of partisanship and ideology in our models, and the fact that partisanship statistically overpowers the impact of ideology on our belief outcomes, suggests that they are both operating as the same kind of construct, rather than one as a marker of group affiliation and one as an indicator of a coherent underlying belief system. Because it is expressly a group marker, partisanship may be a clearer way for individuals who follow cues from elites (Campbell, et al., 1960) to learn what they "should" believe in order to adhere to group norms. Additionally, partisanship may be a cleaner way of measuring political affiliation for the purpose of examining beliefs, notwithstanding the extent to which it overlaps with ideology, because ideological self-placements tend to skew away from "liberal," which is not a phenomenon seen with

“Democratic” self-identification (Abramowitz, 2010). This interpretation also tracks previous research suggesting that, when party affiliation clashes with ideology or issue position, the latter tends to change to match the former (Levendusky, 2009).

The suspicion that the Internet, in particular, would polarize the population by allowing individuals to create ideological or partisan information cocoons for themselves – “The Daily Me,” as coined by Negroponte (1995) and analyzed by Sunstein (2001) – is generally not supported by our findings, largely because of the overwhelming power of partisan sources in traditional media to predict beliefs. That is, while it may be true that the American population is becoming more politically polarized, our findings suggest a much stronger relationship between beliefs and “old” electronic media – television and radio – than “new,” social media. Because television and radio outlets retain much larger audiences than almost all individual social media sources, they may be in a better position to aggregate and disseminate partisan stances on a wide range of issues, and act as gathering places for all the members of the disparate left and right coalitions. Traditional sources have previously been shown to contribute more than social media to feelings to political involvement and feelings of efficacy (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010), both outcomes similar to the shared beliefs observed in our study. Although it is certainly possible that social media could impact beliefs in a larger way – as an example, early promotion of the Occupy Wall Street protest came largely through non-traditional, social media – there is little indication that partisan social media have anything like the reach and power still held by partisan traditional media.

What social media do have in common with partisan media, particularly as compared with interpersonal talk, is the possibility for individuals to become trusted,

quasi-elite sources. Though the blogosphere does not contain any figure with the audience or access of Rush Limbaugh or Rachel Maddow, it does contain a variety of "A-list" bloggers, such as Josh Marshall or Michelle Malkin, who straddle the line between old and new media worlds. This may help to explain why conservative social media is a much weaker predictor than conservative traditional media, but a bit stronger than conservative talk. The association of conservative identification with conformity and hierarchy (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008) suggests that mediated pathways of information flow, which both aggregate members of the conservative coalition and provide a trusted authority figure as a source, would be more useful in setting beliefs among conservatives. Conversely, liberal interpersonal talk is a consistently stronger predictor than liberal social media, which has no significant effect in any of our models. This may speak to a greater value placed on personal expression and interaction by liberals, but may also signify a greater overlap between liberal traditional and social media than their conservative counterparts. Homogeneous political discussion also presents the opportunity to share potentially controversial views in a "safe space" (Polletta, 1999), which may be something seen as more valuable or useful by liberals.

Limitations and future research. Our findings and our ability to interpret them are limited most notably by their cross-sectional nature. Much of the literature on knowledge gaps, as well as the original belief gap study, is based on examining change in knowledge and beliefs over time. Because we use one-time survey data, we are only able to establish the first part of the process – the existence of gaps and their relationships with ideology, partisanship, media use and political talk – and cannot make any conclusions about either change in or development of belief gaps.

Additionally, our analysis is guided by a series of assumptions that may or may not be correct, but which could be studied in potential follow-up studies. First, we take the partisan nature of our media sources and their content as given; we do not analyze actual content to determine either the sources' actual partisan slant or their approaches to the five issues we examine. We further assume, in our structural equation models, a prime causal position for traditional media use as an influence on social media use, which subsequently influences political talk. Though this model is developed with existing models of news use and political talk in mind (e.g., Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005), in reality the relationships between these three forms of information exchange are likely somewhat reciprocal, as are their relationships with ideological self-assessment.

Future research could address some of these limitations by increasing the amount and variety of data used in subsequent analysis. A panel survey conducted during a period of high partisan activity, such as an election season, could shed light on both the process by which partisan information flow affects existing beliefs about ongoing issues, as well as how beliefs about new issues, revealed during the campaign, are formed. Those new issues, in particular, may contain the seeds of partisan media influence, as they could first be measured in the absence of partisan group consensus, with the influence of group norms subsequently observed. New issues may also help in understanding how issues differ with regard to the influence of partisanship and partisan information flows.

Additional investigation of the content of both partisan media and individual belief systems may also be illuminating. Although most individuals do not have ideologies as traditionally defined (Campbell, et al., 1960), expressed ideology has a number of social psychological and personality correlates (Jost, et al., 2008), which may

provide a fuller picture of individuals' susceptibility to group norm pressures. A deeper examination of media exposure may also help to fill in some details of our model, as it would allow for specific issues – those covered more heavily – to be examined in terms of different levels of individual exposure. The extent to which a social media-based "Daily Me" is influenced by traditional media in such a model would be a significant factor in determining how important online partisan clustering is in the process of political polarization, and how much the phenomenon is related to changing norms in traditional media sources.

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Table 1: Regression results for H1 and H2

	Climate Change		Abstinence-Only		Obama Muslim		Obama American		Taxes Up	
Age	.04	.01	.05	.07	-.11*	-.09*	.07	.04	-.08	-.05
Gender (Female)	.06	.04	-.05	-.04	-.05	-.03	-.03	-.05	.04	.06
Race (White)	-.07	-.02	-.16***	-.18***	.02	-.01	-.09	-.04	-.07	-.12**
Income	-.08	-.06	-.08	-.10*	-.05	-.07	.01	.04	-.05	-.08
Education	.03	.02	-.09*	-.09	-.09	-.08	.08	.07	-.10*	-.09*
Ideology (Con.)	-.38***	-.24***	.10*	.03	.23***	.12*	-.31***	-.18***	.22***	.07
Partisanship (Rep.)	—	-.31***	—	.16**	—	.24***	—	-.28***	—	.32***
R^2	16.4%	23.2%	5.4%	7.3%	7.4%	11.5%	11.5%	17.1%	7.3%	14.7%

Table 2: Summary of findings

	Climate Change	Abstinence-Only	Obama Muslim	Obama American	Taxes Up
H1	Support	*No Support*	Support	Support	Support
H2	Support	Support	Support	Support	Support
H3a	Support	Support	Support	Support	Support
H3b	*No Support*	*No Support*	*No Support*	Support	Support
H3c	*No Support*	*No Support*	*No Support*	Support	*No Support*
H3d	Support	Support	Support	*No Support*	*No Support*
H4a	Support	*No Support*	Support	Support	Support
H4b	*No Support*	*No Support*	*No Support*	*No Support*	*No Support*
H4c	Support	Support	Support	*No Support*	Support

Figure 1: Belief in anthropomorphic climate change

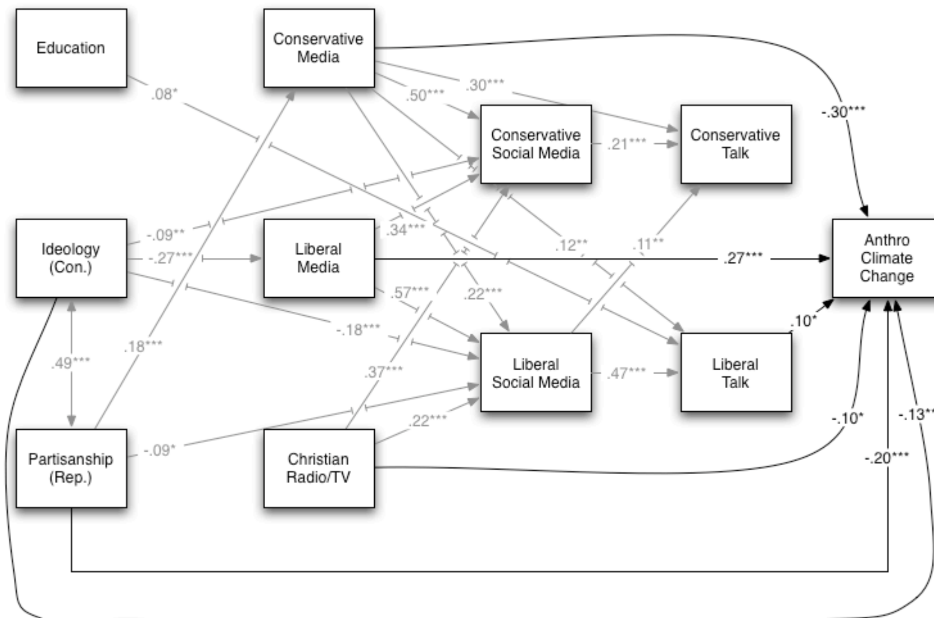

Figure 2: Belief that abstinence-only education works

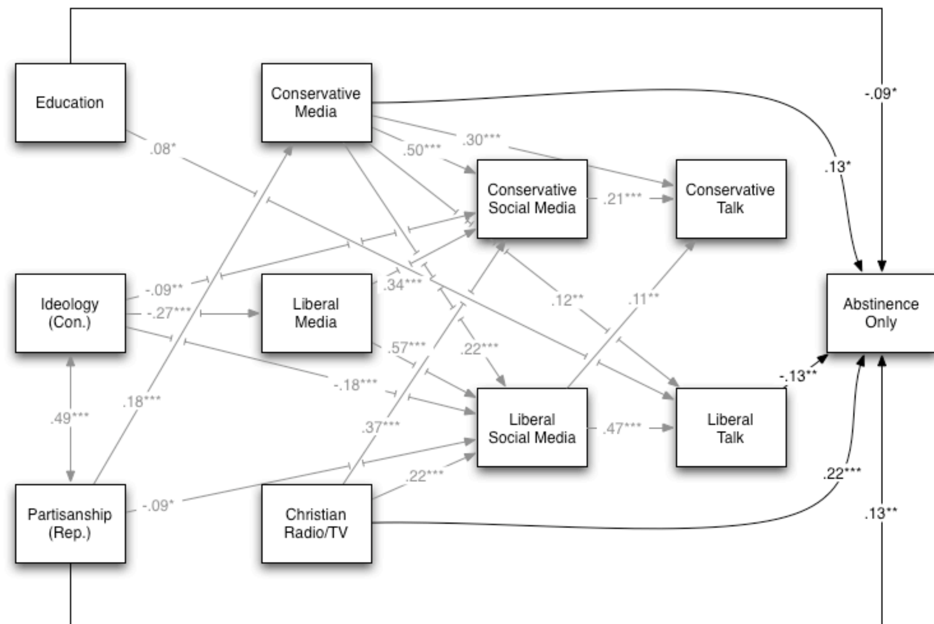

Figure 3: Belief that Barack Obama is a Muslim

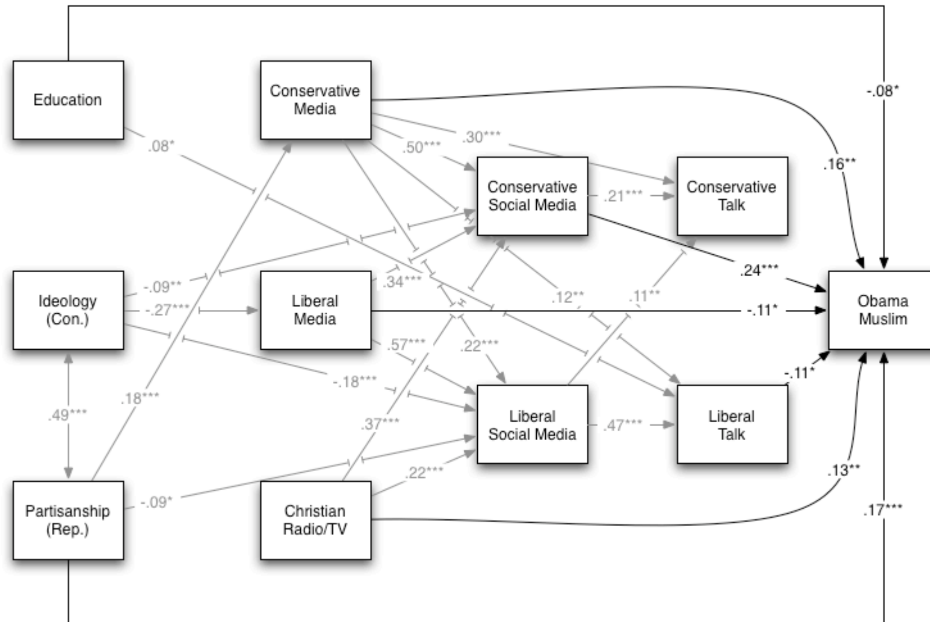

Figure 4: Belief that Barack Obama is an American

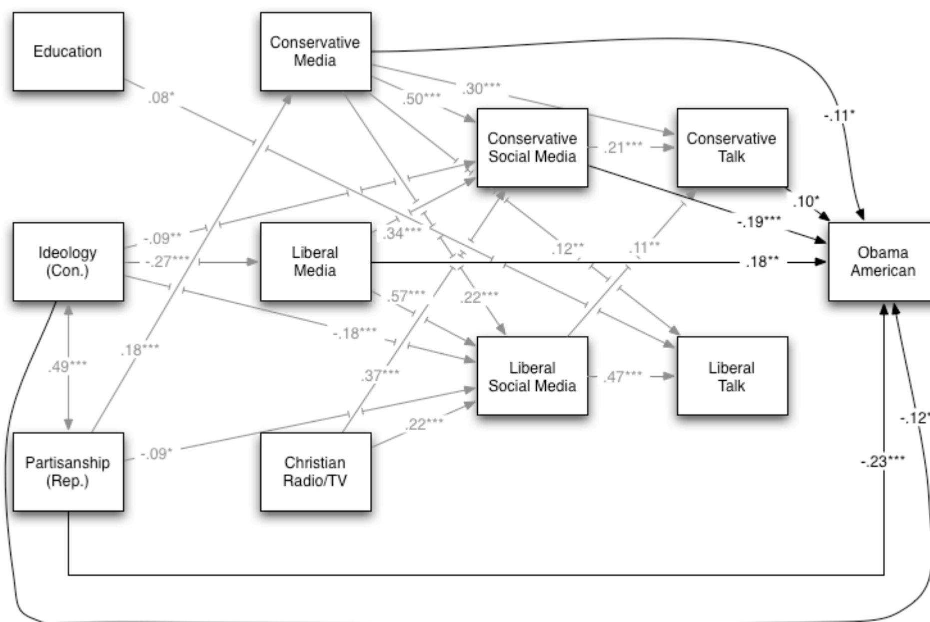

Figure 5: Belief that taxes have gone up during the Obama Administration