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# A Study of the 2016 Presidential Election: Examining the Influence of the Cable News Media on Candidate Choice

Amanda Muccio

*Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut, amuccio@trincoll.edu*

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**A STUDY OF THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE  
OF THE CABLE NEWS MEDIA ON CANDIDATE CHOICE**

A thesis presented

by

**Amanda Muccio**

to

The Political Science Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Honors in Political Science

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Hartford, CT  
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Thesis Advisor

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Department Chair

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Partisan media was part of American society much before I was alive. In recent years, though, there has been upsurge of outlets with one-sided or sympathetic roots – we see this regularly across a variety of platforms: on cable television, the Internet, social media, and talk radio. These media outlets have a distinct style of reporting: they are opinionated, and when election time rolls around, even promote a specific candidate. This thesis investigates the major cable networks’ effects – that is, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC – on the 2016 presidential campaign and election. This should not diminish the role of other sources of news – as we know, Twitter and Facebook were a core element of the most recent general election. But as Matthew Levendusky (2013, 19) writes, “...the literature on the effect of partisan cable television is much less developed, and many questions remain to be answered about their effects.” Furthermore, several sources refer to how “TV-centric” the 2016 presidential election was – with more folks getting their campaign information from cable news and “super-charged performers like Sean Hannity and Bill O’Reilly of Fox News” (Zurawik 2017). A Pew survey mentioned how the three aforementioned cable networks dominated the political conversation in 2016 (Gottfried, Barthel, and Mitchell 2017). Partisan television news was (and continues to be) an assertive force: it triggered real, visceral reactions in viewers, and likely heightened tensions and concerns in larger society. This thesis will examine the extent to which cable news consumption influences audiences, and whether or not it helped in electing the current President.

## Introduction to Chapter

This chapter serves to: one, make clear my research question; two, present my hypothesis; three, explain why this study is important; and finally, to describe the framework for the rest of this thesis.

## Statement of Research Question and Reason for Study

The purpose of this project is to evaluate the extent to which partisan cable news networks mattered in the 2016 presidential election. I specifically examine how the content provided by certain cable networks (i.e. CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC) influenced their viewers' vote choice(s). To study this phenomenon properly, I turned to data from the 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES). As such, the findings presented in chapters two and three show the correlates of partisan cable news consumption and voting for either the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, or the Republican candidate, Donald Trump. Additionally, I interviewed twelve Trinity College undergraduate students in order to understand their insights on television journalism, and the broader political environment during the most recent presidential election.

My primary research question is as follows: Does cable news content affect candidate choice? After establishing the existence of this relationship through data analyses, I sought to answer: First, does a relationship between partisan cable news consumption and vote choice exist? Second, what demographic groups are most affected by cable news content? Third, to what extent did partisan cable news influence viewers' vote choice? Fourth, how important are partisan cable news networks, since their audience is somewhat modest? Finally, how do

Trinity College students understand the connection between cable news content and candidate choice?

The idea for my thesis developed from concerns I feel rather strongly about as a citizen, and also as someone who is both personally and academically involved with U.S. political and media-related issues. Amid the 2016 general election season, I found the presence and influence of the cable news media to be particularly fascinating. In the months leading up to Decision Day, everyone appeared to comment on how the coverage of the candidates by major broadcast and cable networks (as well as major daily newspapers) was either “overwhelmingly negative” or “partisan” in tone (Sutton 2016). While the negative press that both party nominees received ended up becoming the focus of many post-election studies (and rightfully so), I was most interested in how certain cable news outlets (i.e. CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC) impacted Americans’ voting behavior. The background to these reflections is the need to resolve whether or not Americans’ voting behavior and/or political attitudes were affected by certain cable news television.

One important note: while the partisan nature of Fox News and MSNBC is cited early and often, the journalistic ideology of CNN is highly contested. Bode (2014) writes that this is because “CNN does plenty of reporting on news outside the political sphere, which largely avoids questions of slant or spin.” Because there is really no holistic CNN, it becomes increasingly difficult to say if the network is part of a certain political camp. Their breaking news content is neutral, but their opinion-based programming regularly presents a leftward bias. I want to clarify, and reiterate: I use the term “partisan” to describe the major cable news networks (including CNN) because my study of these networks is defined by their opinion-based primetime programs. CNN is defined by certain leftward-leaning shows that



were included by the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES). These CNN shows are Anderson Cooper 360 and Erin Burnett Outfront. Similarly, Fox News is defined by Hannity, The O'Reilly Factor, The Kelly File, and On the Record with Greta Van Susteren. Therefore, this thesis is not a referendum on CNN in general, but it is so for the partisan journalistic ideology of certain shows that appear on CNN.

### The Importance of this Thesis

These research questions, and subsequent analyses, are important for reasons that exceed voids in scholarly examination. This project is important because its quantitative and qualitative findings document the broader consequences of partisan cable news networks on the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Scholars call the 2016 presidential election a “shocker” (Gelman and Azari 2017). Journalists say that the “elite” media overall “missed” the election outcome (Pompeo et al. 2016). One academic notes that the 2016 election popularized the term “fake news” (Gentzkow 2017, 213). This dialogue that surrounded Trump’s victory served as a proper reason for investigation. My subsequent analyses of the cable news networks at the time of the election was carried out so that we as citizens might consider the impact of partisan news content – which disseminated thousands of stories prior to Decision Day, and which many claim is a “dominant media force in America” (Levendusky 2013, 17). These cable news networks ultimately affected the conversations that families at home had at the kitchen table – especially for those watching Fox News and CNN (although CNN is much less influential). It should be noted that these partisan cable outlets also influenced much of the U.S. population: the effect of slanted cable news content was not contained to its narrow or small audience – it had repercussions on individuals who

never even watched Fox News or CNN (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017). These partisan outlets mattered in the context of the 2016 general election, and they continue to be an important source of political information and discussion today. As such, partisan news media is a trend that merits consideration and study – if networks (which hold a certain accountability in informing the public) either helped or hurt a presidential candidate, it is only right that the electorate is aware.

### Outline of Thesis

In Chapter 2, I offer a literature review of the building blocks for the current study: political polarization, the partisan news media, and ideological selectivity. The studies I reference are often done similarly in the context of a presidential election, which help in understanding the aim of my thesis. This chapter includes my hypotheses. At the end of this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which the current study differs from previous ones.

Chapters 3 and 4 represent the empirical foundation of this thesis and provide data-driven answers to the hypotheses stated above. Using ANES panel data collected during the 2016 presidential election, I conduct a bivariate analysis which serves as the preliminary findings of this study. Chapter 4 presents the results of a multivariate analysis of 2016 ANES variables, which were run through logit models and marginal effects. The bivariate and multivariate analyses expose three important statistical findings (among many others): first, I show that asymmetric polarization exists in the cable news media (wherein Fox News is the most-watched and most influential of the major cable news networks); second, I show that the effects of partisan cable news are intensified for those who watch only one partisan network, which altogether increases an individual's likelihood of voting for either Trump or

Clinton. This insinuates that viewers of partisan cable news during the election became more extreme as a result. Third, I show that those who did not watch cable news were much more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.

Chapter 5 is a report of the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of twelve Trinity College undergraduate students. I spoke with all of them individually about the outcome of the 2016 general election, and their media habits. From there, I provide a subjective assessment of their perspectives in order to gauge their awareness of political news content and the presidential candidates.

In Chapter 6, I summarize my research and offer several conclusions about the scope of the partisan cable news media in the 2016 presidential election. I also discuss its influence on the electorate.

### Brief Summary of Thesis

In this thesis, I will first discuss the range of scholarly work that has been done on the topic of partisan cable news media, and why it has far-reaching effects on individuals' attitude and voting behavior. I will then evaluate the relationship between cable network choice and vote choice using statistical techniques. Finally, I will examine the condition of this relationship by documenting and discussing the insights of Trinity College undergraduate students – who were acutely aware of the partisan cable news media and its influence. This thesis offers quantitative and qualitative observations of the power of CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC amid the 2016 presidential election.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The overwhelming presumption in the United States is that mass ideological polarization is occurring, both among elites and the electorate (Leeper 2014, Robison 2016). Specific concerns of economic, cultural and political division have led the academic community to study possible sources of our growing animosity. In other words, what appears to be less understood by the academic community is what is motivating our dissonance. Could it be, put simply, that fundamental disagreements exist over changing social conditions and government actions? Or could polarization stem from party realignment in the electorate? While the debate seemingly identifies these factors as major contributors, one explanation was made especially popular by several presidential candidates in the 2016 primary and general election: the cable news media. Although ideas of political polarization and media have long served as a central issue in American politics, they have appeared to receive more notable empirical attention recently (Martina and Yurukoglu 2017).

Unfortunately, the verdict on the effects of partisan media coverage is rather complicated, which makes sense given the multifaceted nature of the subject. Research on the relationship between partisan media and the electorate has led to several inferences, however. Perhaps the most significant of these conjectures is the recognition of two phenomena in the United States: the rise of cable networks (and also viewership), as well as the rise of partisan polarization.

Television and the emergence of cable news have led to explosive change in the American public's news habits. For this reason, political scientists are studying the consequences of certain networks' reports on political knowledge and democratic direction. Scholars at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign noted that there are two trends

which have marked the development of cable television news in recent years: “a blurring of hard and soft news and an increase in overt partisanship.” Many cable news programs and on-screen anchors, they argue, have started to take more explicit and partisan positions, which indicates a sharp detour from the norm of objectivity that defined television for many decades (Coe et al. 2008, 201). The second trend of ‘soft news’ refers to this idea that programs are often packaging political information in an entertaining form (i.e. Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*). Coe et al.’s research encourages us to consider: one, to what extent has the rise of cable networks led political partisans to choose particular programs over others, and two, to what degree does viewers’ cable news choice impact their partisan leanings. Ultimately, Coe et al. (2008, 216) find that partisanship has a “substantial impact on both network and program selection and one’s perceptions of particular stories.”

The changing nature (and increase) of cable news also means more information is available to the U.S. electorate. For many citizens, Coe et al. (2008, 202) argue, their television has become their primary source of news. Yet, as Americans tune in to cable programs, what they find is a presentation of news in a nontraditional format – where neutrality is the exception (Coe et al. 2008; Bae 1999). More, just as a rise of cable networks has occurred, so has developed an increased (and biased) viewership (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017).

Many scholars agree with this notion that political division in America is deeper than ever before. In his book entitled *The Big Sort*, Bill Bishop affirms that more and more Americans are separating themselves politically. In 1976, Bishop finds, less than one quarter of U.S. citizens lived in counties which voted strongly in one party direction or for one specific candidate in the presidential election. Yet, by 2004, nearly half of Americans did so

(Bishop 2008, 6). Several studies have also found evidence of this intense rise of polarization. In an analysis of survey and exit poll data, Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) find that ideological polarization has dramatically increased since the 1970s. “There are now large differences in outlook between Democrats and Republicans,” say Abramowitz and Saunders (2008, 542), “... these divisions are not confined to a small minority of activists – they involve a large segment of the public and the deepest divisions are found among the most interested, informed, and active citizens.”

As part of a year-long study on polarization, the Pew Research Center conducted a large political survey of 10,000 adults between January and March of 2014. Pew found that Republicans and Democrats are further apart on the ideological spectrum than at any previous point in history (Pew Research Center, June, 2014, “Political Polarization in the American Public”). Additionally, Pew found that partisan antipathy has gone up, and that differences between the right and the left go beyond politics (polarization is often reflected in an individual’s lifestyle and choices (i.e. deciding what town to live in; schools to send children to; and opinions on ethnic and racial diversity). As such, political polarization is rightfully a recurring theme in our ongoing discussion of partisan media and its potential influence on the 2016 general election.

There are a few distinct themes which illustrate how partisan polarization among the U.S. public is increasing, and the role of cable networks in driving this trend: one, that partisans prefer certain sources; and two, that partisan sources affect citizens’ views. To this notion that partisans prefer certain sources, one generally accepted theory comes to light – that partisan selective exposure exists and contributes to polarization. On the notion that partisan sources affect citizens’ views, scholars’ findings differ. Those who argue that

partisan sources do in fact affect views have deduced the following: one, that these sources affect extremity of views (Levendusky 2013; Iyengar and Hahn 2009); two, openness to other views (Pew Research Center 2014; Bennett and Iyengar 2008); and three, and even perhaps vote choice (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017; Schroeder and Stone 2015; DellaVigna, Stefano and Kaplan 2006; Robert and Mullinix 2016).

The above findings suggest that politically active partisans are more susceptible to partisan media, thus increasing polarization. Furthermore, these conclusions beg us to consider what kind of implications this might foster in our democratic processes. While academics continue this debate, many important questions go unanswered. For instance: What if media, and specifically cable networks, are a determining factor in electoral success? If there is an association here, to what extent did cable news impact 2016 general election voters? More, to what degree do asymmetrical effects of cable programming and slanted media favor one party over another? From these analytical questions, one may consider (with specific interest in the 2016 general election): Does cable network content affect candidate choice?

By closely reviewing previous literature in the field, it is possible to draw a better picture of the popular discussion surrounding cable news and vote choice, and uncover any shortcomings. As a result of rehashing the scholarly data and findings back and forth, it is also possible to point out pitfalls in studies' methodology.

### Ideological Selectivity in the News

One of the main talking points in the contemporary debate on media influence is the idea that selective exposure to corresponding information can and will prompt political

polarization. Several recent studies indicate that Americans choose media content that matches their individual needs and interests. Still, scholars have found it empirically difficult to prove a causal mechanism. How, for instance, can scientists measure how many Americans follow partisan news, and for how long? Markus Prior (2005) of Princeton University begins to tackle issues surrounding media content preference in his study of the Internet and cable news' effects. Prior conducts a multi-phased study whereby he analyzes secondary sources to measure political knowledge (national databases such as NES and Media Consumption Surveys) as well as data to measure entertainment preference (from the Pew Research Center). He then conducts a panel which includes a survey and observation. Although LaCour and Vavreck cite the limitations to such self-reporting measures and exposure (2014, 408), Prior ultimately demonstrates evidence of two hypothesized relationships. First, he discovers that Americans who neglect cable television news are also less cognizant of politics. When the results were replicated for voter turnout, he also found that those who remained uninterested in news programming would likely abstain from voting in House elections. Overall, Prior (2005, 590) demonstrates that cable news choice increases the opportunity to select mainly entertainment content and avoid news altogether – leading to a decline in political participation.

Iyengar and Hahn (2009) conducted a randomly assigned study (using Polimetrix) to observe whether attention to news reports depended on the news source where the story originated (i.e. Fox News, NPR, CNN, or BBC). The study's participants – a representative national sample – were provided four news headlines alongside the logo of the broadcast corporation. The scholars' hypothesis was confirmed: When attaching the Fox News logo to the news headline, Republican participant interest in the story increased by twenty-five



percentage points (Iyengar and Hahn 2009, 33). In addition, when Republicans saw the CNN or NPR logo, the likelihood of watching went down about ten points. Interestingly, the effect was felt less by Democrats, who, when seeing the Fox News label, reduced selection by ten percentage points. Iyengar and Hahn therefore provide evidence of ideological selectivity – their study emphasizes Americans’ tendency to select news based on anticipated agreement and/or follow news which is close to their partisan leaning (Iyengar and Hahn 2009, 28).

Bennett and Iyengar (2008, 722) build on the study conducted in 2009 to provide stronger evidence of selective exposure amongst Americans. Moreover, they argue that by seeking out mostly like-minded content, our news choices and sources become interchangeable with our political identities. Thus, there is a strong tendency or incentive for media giants such as MSNBC or Fox News to continually get narrower, and effectively market their shows to a specific ideological audience. Accordingly, most popular news stations today simply reinforce our policy perspectives, rather than balancing or moderating them (Bennett and Iyengar 2008, 724). The rise of partisan media, the scholars note, has led to a “new era of minimal consequences,” because selective exposure erodes the influence of tone of news messages but “has little impact on the sheer volume of news” (Bennett and Iyengar 2008, 725). Put differently, Bennett and Iyengar find that the partisan media does not do much more than support or encourage our existing political attitudes. This is contrary to my hypothesis – it is my thought that partisan media is more than just a culprit behind ideological division – it may have affected our decisions in the voting booth in 2016.

## Partisan Media, Polarization and Vote Choice: Challenges for Future Work

A question of critical importance for designing future research is how exactly partisan media, polarization and vote choice should be studied. Previous studies have encountered problems related to measurement error and partisan selective exposure, and also issues of selection bias. Many of the studies and experiments on this subject involve surveys and self-reports, and there is doubt that these accurately categorize respondents. Several scholars have used self-reports of media use in order to understand exposure to network news, but this decision comes with inherent limitations. Prior (2009) argues that there is low validity to self-reports, and LaCour and Vavreck (2014) argue the same with regards to television news. In general, inaccurate self-reports appear to be the result of incorrect estimates – respondents often inflate their exposure (Prior 2009). These theories of motivated reasoning – which leads citizens to confirm what they already believe – only heightens concerns of validity for exposure to partisan media (Bartels 2002, Dalton et al. 1998). Overall, it is unlikely that respondents will faithfully report how often they follow pro-attitudinal and also counter-attitudinal programming (Prior 2009). Therefore, self-reports somewhat exaggerate selective exposure (Iyengar and Hahn 2009, 21).

In several of the studies discussed in this review there are quantifiable sources of bias. For example, while Levendusky's 2013 study of media effects was strong due to its originality, it also has significant disadvantages, given that it was conducted in a laboratory setting. It can be criticized in terms of external validity as compared to previous experimental work on the subject, and also because the study may have artificially raised subjects' sensitivity to biased content. This serves as an argument against cross-cutting messages (Levendusky 2013, 615). In addition, Levendusky's study may have suffered from selection

bias related to its composition and exchangeability (Pew Research Center, June, 2014, “Political Polarization in the American Public”). More specifically, Levendusky cannot prove that the sample matches distribution in the population. His results are based on on-campus subjects who were recruited to fill out a questionnaire in a laboratory (Levendusky 2013, 614). Future studies must be aware of source credibility and proper experimental methods when considering the role of cable networks in electoral divide (LaCour and Vavreck 2014).

### The Role of Partisan Sources in Political Perceptions

As mentioned, concern is growing about the impact of aggressive ideological rhetoric displayed on cable news. Social scientists anguish about the influence of pundits and commentators such as Sean Hannity and Keith Olbermann, for example. Some scholars fear that partisan sources do affect political views – citing that less knowledgeable Americans are at risk of being enticed by populist worldviews, or that ideologically explicit content only aims to entice people who share the anchors’ political leanings to watch political news (so as to reinforce political polarization among the electorate). Others find legitimate theoretical reasons to explain that partisan messages leave public opinion mostly unaffected. For instance, one scholar finds that partisan messages are not particularly potent because citizens ignore or oppose polarized sources altogether (Prior 2005).

### Partisan Sources and Polarization in the Mass Public: Part I

In 2009, Markus Prior carried out a multi-phased study which found that “dramatic increases in available political information” (e.g. cable news and the Internet) have created a greater opportunity to select mainly entertainment content and avoid news altogether –

leading to a decline in political participation. In fact, Prior (2005, 579) argues, Americans have developed a preferred media diet – whereby our new media age of cable television and Internet allows for a ready removal from political action. With this in mind, Prior asserts that partisan news cannot have a large impact if much of the electorate remains uninterested or involved with cable networks. Building on these findings, Fiorina and Abrams (2008) note that empirical patterns of polarization – which are thought to be a result of partisan messages and cable networks – may be caused instead by starker ideological parties and candidates alone. In a review, Fiorina and Abrams (2008, 563) conclude that Americans have already adopted intense party positions and that “the most direct evidence... shows little or no evidence of increased polarization [as a result of media forms].”

## **Partisan Sources and Polarization in the Mass Public: Part II**

### Openness

Several scholars have drawn a positive relationship between partisan sources and citizen views. For instance, both Bennett and Iyengar (2008) and the Pew Research Center’s 2014 study referred to the rise of partisan media and the ways in which these networks target a specific ideological audience. In doing so, these popular news stations’ segments continually get narrower, and citizens’ policy perspectives are less open (Bennett and Iyengar 2008, 726). Thus, our willingness to entertain alternatives to our own views is greatly reduced. Similarly, the Pew Research Center conducted a study which illuminated Americans’ severe partisan apathy. After evaluating trust levels of news sources by ideological group, the scientists found that there is a complete lack of eagerness (basically suspicion) in viewing or listening to out-party channels.

## Extremism

There is telling evidence from multiple studies which show that changes to the U.S. media environment may be exacerbating political sorting and extremity, among other things. Davis and Dunaway (2016) find that cable and Internet expansion have together increased elite polarization as well as partisan-ideological sorting. For the politically-minded, Davis and Dunaway (2016, 273) argue, the availability of more media choice has allowed for more awareness of intense partisan cues, and also has drawn more attention to the divergences of the two political parties. Sorting and negative partisan affect, the scholars explain, also serve as predictors of political polarization.

Levendusky (2013, 611) also validates the relationship between partisan media programs, selective exposure, and viewer polarization, referring to it appropriately as an “echo chamber.” In an original experiment, Levendusky displays how Americans who watch partisan programming do become more certain of their beliefs and less willing to weigh the merits of opposing views. Interestingly, while only a small portion of the population choose partisan network programs, those who do tend to become more politically active. Prominent networks (i.e. MSNBC, Fox News), Levendusky writes, play into this confirmation bias and thus contribute to an electorate that is more extreme. As one might imagine, the effects on national politics are far-reaching. While Levendusky (2013, 617-618) concedes that his study has limitations, especially regarding alternative explanations and definitive mechanisms, he deduces a significant correlation nonetheless.

## Voting Preference

Multiple studies cite a mechanism whereby media bias provides for political polarization and also electoral outcomes (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017, Dilliplane 2014, DellaVigna and Kaplan 2006, Bartels 1996). A paper published this year by two economists at Emory University and Stanford University investigates the ways in which cable news viewership may shock candidate preference. In studying the presidential elections between 2000 and 2008, they find what the Republican vote share would have been in the absence of Fox News or any other conservative network. Hypothetically, the Republican presidential candidate would have landed 3.59 points lower in 2004 and 6.34 points lower in 2008 without the influence of Fox News (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017, 2597). If this information is true, the scholars write, then John Kerry would have won the popular vote in 2004 and Barack Obama would have won the 2008 election by a landslide. The scholars estimate, then, that watching Fox News substantially shifts viewers' beliefs and attitudes rightward – allowing for a greater readiness to vote for Republican candidates.

Martin and Yurukoglu's methodology is a random experiment which focuses on channel positioning. They find that, while channels are randomly numbered in TV boxes across the country, Fox is usually a lower number, equating to more viewers. The scholars' principal finding is in line with the work done by DellaVigna and Kaplan (2006), who also find that Fox News has significant persuasive power over its viewers. Just as DellaVigna and Kaplan (2006) and Smith (2016) come upon a similar association – they observe that Fox convinced a percentage of viewers to vote conservatively in general elections between 1996 and 2000. Martin and Yurukoglu (2017, 2566) also reveal that Republican candidate choice increases by 0.3 percentage points for every 2.5 minutes of Fox News viewership each week.

Yet, the scholars did not identify that anywhere near the same influence from liberal cable networks (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017, 2577). In essence, Martin and Yurukoglu's timely study indicates how strategic channel ordering by Fox News has positively impacted the possibility of voting for Republican presidential candidates.

Martin and Yurukoglu's conclusions point specifically to the magnitude of the "Fox news effect" referenced previously by Schroeder and Stone (2015). Economists Schroeder and Stone also found impressive data presenting a similar cause and effect relationship between Fox News and Republican vote shares. Martin and Yurukoglu were able to recognize how the dominating cable network ensured conservative candidates make it to office; Schroeder and Stone (2015, 53) determine that Fox causes both Republicans and Democrats in Congress to either endorse or raise their support of conservative policies. While this news may seem startling, Schroeder and Stone (2015, 63) admit that their analysis may have actually understated the impact of Fox News because they could not account for the ways in which the show influences the content of other news organizations, or if the station's "non-informative content" still affects voting to some degree.

Dilliplane (2014), Hyun and Moon (2014) and Druckman and Parkin (2005) also encounter the question of whether or not media content or media slant has an effect on the U.S. electorate. Dilliplane's study uses a fixed effects regression analysis to examine how partisan television news exposure impacts voting decisions. Her data reveals that partisan news "modestly" boosts existing vote preferences, while decreasing the probability of conversion to the opposing party's candidate (Dilliplane 2014, 91). Hyun and Moon's research question is: What is the relationship between individual news use and the issue voting process? (2014, 692) It is for this reason that the scholars utilize data from the 2008

ANES study to better understand how and why the news media has an important function in the process of issue knowledge. They argue, therefore, that the news media increases “voters’ issue-importance perception” and aids “voters’ calculation of congruence between their own policy preferences and competing candidates’ policy stands (issue proximity) – all of which should consequently translate into voting choices (Hyun and Moon 2014, 688).” Druckman and Parkin (2005, 1030-31) develop a study which focuses on a 2000 Minnesota Senate campaign and two competing, “editorially distinct” newspapers. Their methodology includes a comprehensive content analysis of the papers with an Election Day exit poll, in order to generalize how media coverage (relative slant) impacts candidate choice (Druckman and Parkin 2005, 1047). Druckman and Parkin (2005, 1048) find that endorsements have a significant effect on voting – more, that “media actors make choices and how these choices affect voters has profound implications for the meaning of public opinion, and ultimately, democratic governance.”

In our era of “New Media” and acutely polarized parties, scholars are also concerned that partisan attachments are distorted by either the lack of information, or the lack of proper information. A related body of literature is that by Robison and Mullinix (2016), which is interested in formed political preferences as a result of communications by the news media. Robison and Mullinix (2016, 262) build on the notion that coverage of elite polarization seeks to frame divisions as fixed in the ideals of Democrats and Republicans versus legitimate, strategic issues. In order to unearth the truth in this statement, the scholars develop two survey studies to better understand how news coverage on polarization shapes public attitudes. Their conclusions arrive at substantive implications for citizen competence and public opinion on elites (Robison and Mullinix 2016, 279).



## Significance

Though I am not the first to suggest a relationship between cable news choice, political knowledge and vote choice, the literature fails to draw a correlation within the context of the 2016 general election. Moreover, it is important to at least attempt to eliminate alternative explanations for the association between cable networks and candidate choice. As Levendusky (2013, 619) notes, “future work will be needed to more carefully explore these mechanisms in more detail.” Perhaps new studies will shed more of a light on the ways in which cable news benefits one side of the aisle more, or will find a methodology which vastly reduces issues of selection bias and measurement error. Nonetheless, research is needed to try the implications of our current media-induced polarization in order to re-engage the American electorate in a national political conversation.

## Hypotheses

The fundamental question of this project is: Does cable news content affect candidate choice? I sought to answer this question, and also examine the relationship between these two variables: one, within the context of the 2016 presidential election; and two, using ANES survey data and resulting statistical analyses. After reading the work of Matthew Levendusky and other scholars, I hypothesized: first, not a large percentage of the population likely watched partisan cable news amid the 2016 presidential election (though there might be effects even for those who never watched); and second, cable news audiences (relative to those who do not watch) would likely vote for the candidate that is supported by the respective partisan network. I predicted that this would be the case because partisan cable

news often confirms both Democratic and Republican viewers' inclinations. Levendusky (2013, 118) refers to this as the media reinforcement mechanism. If my hypotheses were true, I would have to find a substantively large and statistically significant effect of partisan cable news consumption on voting behavior (i.e. Fox News watchers would vote for Trump, MSNBC and CNN watchers would vote for Clinton). In general, I am interested in identifying a pattern to the relationship between the votes that citizens cast in the 2016 general elections and partisan cable news preference.

After establishing the existence of this pattern through bivariate and multivariate analyses in Chapters 2 and 3, I sought to answer: First, does a relationship between partisan cable news consumption and vote choice exist? I hypothesized that there would surely be an association between biased cable news outlets and viewership – especially between that of Fox News-watching and voting for Donald Trump, and CNN or MSNBC-watching and voting for Hillary Clinton. Still, I knew it would be difficult to determine cause and effect in this relationship because of issues related to viewer self-selection. I will discuss issues related to causation in a later chapter. After reviewing the 2016 ANES data, I asked additional questions for which I did not have hypotheses, as they were only a consideration after the data results. I asked: What demographic groups are most affected by cable news content? How much did partisan cable news influence the our most recent presidential election? How important are partisan cable news networks, since – as found in the bivariate analysis in Chapter 3 – their audience is somewhat modest?

In Chapter 5, I provide an analysis of student interviews. I considered: How do Trinity College students understand the connection between cable news content and candidate choice? In this case, the hypothesis I was testing was: Trinity students likely avoid

cable news – due to greater media choice and/or more available political information through the Internet, news apps, etc. – but are nevertheless aware of its influence, bias, and potential to shape vote choice.

### Chapter 3: ANES Bivariate Analysis

In her recently published autobiography, Hillary Clinton (2016, 9) remarked, “In 2005, Stephen Colbert coined the term “truthiness,” inspired by how Fox News was turning politics into an evidence-free zone of seething resentments.” She continued, “And the Republican politicians whom Fox propelled to power [have] done their part, too.” Her comments underscore the findings of contemporary political scientists, who argue that partisan cable television news shapes vote choice. For the most part, literature on the political effects of cable news finds that partisan sources can increase the public’s attitudinal polarization, and even decrease affect for opposing parties and candidates (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017; Iyengar and Hahn 2009). These concerns are especially important and relevant in the context of the most recent presidential election, about which we still have many questions. The question I will be focusing on is as follows: Does cable news content affect voters’ candidate choice? In this chapter, I examine whether watching partisan cable news content from networks such as Fox News, MSNBC and CNN shaped how citizens voted in the 2016 elections. Ultimately, I find that the effect of cable news on voting appears to be a very Fox phenomenon. An important caveat to this finding: Americans who say they voted for Trump in the general election do watch (at least some) Fox News leading up to the 2016 election, whereas Clinton voters tend to avoid cable news in general.

In order to properly address the above research question, I turned to data from the 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES) Time Series. The online and in-person survey was conducted between early September, 2016, and January 2017, among 4,272 adults who are members of ANES’ eligible voter sample universe. To produce the best possible analysis, I selected certain variables to test a vote choice-election interpretation

hypothesis. In commonsense terms, I used statistics to both understand and explain the relationship between two variables – cable network choice and vote choice. In doing so, I determined the strength and the significance of the relationship. Since I am interested in the effects of viewership on vote choice, I also chose several control variables (e.g. gender, race, partisanship, etc.) in order to properly illustrate the relationship between cable network choice (independent variable) and vote choice (dependent variable).

In spite of the methodological concerns within bivariate, observational analysis, I demonstrate that there is a discrepancy in the public’s media habits during the 2016 presidential campaign. The ANES output describes a mild, but still significant, relationship between cable network choice and U.S. voters’ candidate choice. During the campaign, there was a sharp divide between Clinton and Trump voters in their regular viewing of cable news content. For Trump voters, Fox News dominated as the main campaign cable news source; for Clinton voters, there is no single cable news source as pronounced. In reality, Clinton voters watched far less cable news than did Trump voters. The findings reveal that those on the right and left have significantly different overall news diets, with Fox News being the favorite of conservatives (and also the most watched network of both Trump and Clinton voters). The observed uniformity of the data outcomes across the tables (see findings section) provides confidence in the results of the descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and correlations – even if design limitations hinder an over-arching causal argument.

### Methodological Challenges

As one might expect, this study faced inherent limitations. While I was able to identify a correlation between Fox viewership and vote choice in the 2016 general election, the primary challenge is that I am unable to determine causality. This methodological

concern does not stem from a lack of relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables in my hypothesis, but rather from the fundamental problems associated with causal inference. These problems include: spuriousness (also selection effects), reversed causality, and time ordering. A running example is the following: Individuals who watch Fox are more likely to vote for a Republican candidate, while individuals who watch MSNBC are more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate. This statement implies that a change in an individual's cable network preference or content always impacts his or her vote choice. But is it not possible that an individual may select the cable network that aligns with their attitude or party ideology, and vote accordingly? The influence of other factors is extremely important in this scenario. Therefore, I cannot say confidently that, one, certain cable network shows are causing the vote choice; or two, whether preexisting ideology is causing both the viewership and also vote choice.

Another point which hinders my ability to identify a causal link between the variables is that it is impossible to observe two different values of the independent variable (cable network content) at once. For this reason, I cannot say with certainty if the independent variable caused changes in the dependent variable, candidate choice. This is because Americans tend to self-select their media diet, and it is extremely difficult to determine if and to what extent partisan networks impact voters, or alternatively, if voters choose sources that reflect their party preferences. Furthermore, the ANES bivariate analysis will allow for multiple observed relationships between the independent and dependent variable.

In addition to the usual concerns surrounding omitted variable bias and time order, the potentially reciprocal causal relationship between choice of cable network and said outlet's effect makes estimating the effect difficult in observational data. In essence,

observational analysis maintains a limitation in that it struggles to differentiate selection from treatment effects. However, observational analysis can establish a theoretical relationship between two variables – thus ensuring the correlation between vote choice and exposure to partisan cable news is indeed strong. In addition, I can likely rule out competing explanations by pointing out they are not plausible. This causal-process observation is possible given my ability to select control variables (e.g. education, ideology, etc.) within the ANES dataset.

While bivariate observational analysis maintains its weaknesses, its strengths are demonstrated by: one, its ability to establish both positive and negative correlation; two, to detect even the most modest cable network based effects; three, demonstrate a relationship across different statistical techniques (be it by cross tabulation or correlation); and four, help tell a logical story for why the independent variable – in this case, cable network content – might cause a change in the dependent variable in the 2016 general election. In a later section, I outline the methods I am using to help reduce selection effects, while also recognizing that “no method of analyzing observational data can ever completely remove them” (Levendusky 2013, 116). I will continue forward with my observational analysis, while also accepting that experimentation is the sensible and feasible next step.

Previous studies that rely solely on observational analysis of election study data lack an abstract, instrumental context. This is why I will also strengthen my ANES findings with an in-person data component. In a later chapter, I will disclose the findings from my face-to-face, semi-structured interview surveys with Trinity College students. Qualitative interviews are excellent way to gather detailed information – they are especially useful to study social processes. In my case, the interviews with Trinity College sophomores, juniors, and seniors will elicit insight into how youth process information, and where they get their news from.

By using both approaches, I will achieve more external validity, and also combine the strengths of both techniques. The advantages of interview surveys include: potentially finding strong support for bivariate correlations (on a local scale), and also exploring the impact of the phenomena of interest (partisan cable network content on students' attitudes). For the purpose of my research, I opted for semi-structured interviews as it would allow covering various topics concerning my study. I expect that these focused conversations – with a purposive sample – will: one, broaden the scope of understanding the 2016 general election and cable news content selection; and two, serve as a more naturalistic way of finding out how youth form political identities and ideological positions. As such events are not directly 'observable,' talking to Trinity College students would be effective method for attaining such constructs.

The use of interviews in research calls into question the relationship between the narrative component and the internal validity of the information obtained. Internal validity refers to the elimination of confounding variables in a study, whereas external validity is achieved when a study's findings can generalize to the population at large. Interviews do maintain a certain level of both. They attend to internal validity because respondents can provide concrete details about the topics we discuss and talk about the conceptual framework to describe their cable news and/or vote choice. For this reason, it is easier to comment on cause and effect as it relates to my research question. Interviews with Trinity College students, however, are limited in their external validity. The perspectives or experiences of Trinity students as they relate to cable news choice and vote choice cannot necessarily be applied to a larger population. In addition, the interview method has shortcomings. In my interviews specifically (given the sensitive topics of candidate choice, party identification,



etc.), survey participants may be dishonest in their responses, or unwilling to answer some questions. Nevertheless, where an interview lacks in external validity, it makes up for in internal validity (in terms of causal effect). Certainly, these discussions also have some intrinsic worth of expressing opinions about the election, the candidates, and their cable news choices openly. The interviews with Trinity College students will hopefully bolster the reader's confidence in the relationship between the variables.

There is rich empirical literature addressing questions close to my own – much of which focus on news outlets and partisan preferences (Bartels 1993; Druckman and Parkin 2005; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010). One widely cited study is that of Matthew Levendusky (2013) which highlights the effects of ideologically distinctive media on partisan attachment and partisan ideological-sorting amongst U.S. citizens. Through the use of several methods, Levendusky studies like-minded media and its electoral effects. In Chapter 6 of his book entitled *How Partisan Media Polarize America*, Levendusky discusses his use of data from the 2008 Annenberg Election Surveys (NAES) – which ultimately leads him to draw conclusions about partisan media strength. My analysis attempts to replicate Levendusky's findings for the 2016 presidential election, using ANES data.

In order to appropriately test my research question, I had to first clarify which cable networks are partisan and potentially influence party ideologies and issue positions. Levendusky had to employ the same criteria with his NAES data. To determine the shows that comprise partisan media exposure, he conducts a content analysis of each network's discussion of the 2008 candidates. Eventually, Levendusky (2013, 114) deduces that “shows from Fox News constitute like-minded exposure for Republicans and cross-cutting exposure for Democrats; the reverse is true of shows from MSNBC... The slant of each network was

relatively clear, supporting my argument that these programs constitute partisan media exposure.” Levendusky (2013, 115) then discusses how he created a measurement of partisan media consumption. Using a dichotomy – watched any shows versus did not watch any – he was able to “homogenize the sample.” Using a “matching” algorithm, he creates a NAES dataset where he has one control group of non-partisan TV consumers and a treatment group of partisan TV consumers. Next, he “matched on a variety of baseline attitudinal and demographic factors” which might predict subjects’ partisan media source consumption (i.e. partisanship, party ID, income, general media consumption). He then assessed how many out of the treatment group reported voting for their party’s candidate in the post-election wave (Levendusky 2013, 115). After that, he conducted a corresponding fixed-effects analysis of the NAES data.

Levendusky found significant results from his matching-based analysis and fixed-effects analysis. He demonstrates that “like-minded media” had an effect on vote choice – in fact, like-minded media made subjects approximately five percent more likely to vote for their corresponding party’s candidate in the 2008 general election (Levendusky 2013, 118). While this may not seem like a large difference, his results also managed to reflect major differences “that stem from exposure to partisan media during the election campaign.” In essence, Levendusky took into account within-subject change during a campaign, and still saw the persuasion effects of media. He shows how small effects still represent a “large reinforcing effect of like-minded media,” and how the effect of media is actually quite sizable when it comes to party voting (Levendusky 2013, 120-121). With my selected ANES variables, I also present a correlation between media (cable network content) and vote choice (party voting and/or candidate choice).

Overall, I plan to take the vote choice and election interpretation hypothesis/measurement strategy by Levendusky (2013, 212) and use it as a lens. Put differently, I am interested in identifying a pattern to the relationship between the votes that citizens cast in the 2016 general elections and partisan cable news preference. Secondly, I am also necessarily interested in the degree of voter exposure to partisan cable news. As mentioned, Levendusky's work has served as a resource in finding the best way to operationalize this key independent variable. This will be the first part of my research design – a subsequent chapter will discuss multivariate analysis (of cable news viewership from 2016) and original semi-structured interview surveys with Trinity College students. I think you missed this when you revised...

To adequately answer my initial question, I plan to first start with observational, bivariate analysis. I decided to do this because the ANES data will provide the initial correlations between cable network content and vote choice. A direct correlation between these variables is imperative to the research puzzle, and to the rest of this project. With an observed relationship, I will be able to see which types of respondents watch partisan and neutral cable news, what types of shows they watch regularly, and how this connects with vote choice (among many other things). Then, I will be able to comment on certain cable networks (and their influence), and also on the sample voting population. As well, the panel data is multi-wave and rich in media exposure based questions, assisting me in getting rid of some treatment effects. Nevertheless, one might ask: Why are bivariate analysis, multivariate analysis, and interview surveys necessary? The use of multiple methods – both qualitative and quantitative – will present more credible information to the audience. These methods also seek to remove the effect of confounding variables (i.e. control variables) and also

achieve greater validity. Then, if they arrive at the same or similar answer, my results will be better trusted – the results will not depend on a particular method.

### Methods of Analysis

The American National Election Studies (also known as ANES) produced these time-series studies in two waves (pre-election and post-election), which, for each election, are composed of fresh cross-section cases of voters in the United States. The ANES Time Series have been administered by the University of Michigan since its origin in 1948 – and has been run in partnership with Stanford University since 2008. Given the topics covered and the methodology utilized in the ANES 2016 Time Series, it serves as a great information environment for understanding general election campaigns and results. ANES conducted face-to-face interviews, and administered Internet survey polls to complement the interviews. The 2016 ANES panel interviewed subjects in-person in two waves (1,181 pre-election and 1,059 post-election). They followed the same format for their Internet sample (3,090 pre-election and 2,590 post-election). The pre-election wave began two months prior to the 2016 election and were followed by post-election re-interviewing beginning November 9, 2016, after Trump's victory. They also separately selected their samples by using two modes independently (separate samples but substantially identical questionnaires). Data from this sample are therefore a high-quality, randomly selected, and representative sample of the American national population (ANES 2016; [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org)).

Operationalization of panel data and reasoning behind drawing on ANES is extremely important. I purposefully selected ANES data for bivariate analysis. This is because the ANES Time Series study possessed several key features. First, it accurately assessed partisan media consumption and exposure over the election season. This allowed me to investigate to

what extent respondents watch television news and cable network talk shows, how that changes both before and after an election, and the relationship cable networks have to vote choice (while also accounting for other factors shaping vote choice). Levendusky acknowledges that limitations of previous studies include a lack of ability to classify measures of exposure and enough panel data to extricate selection effects from exposure effects (Levendusky 2013, 113, citing Zaller 2012). Fortunately, the ANES does allow for accurate measurement of cable network exposure due to its question items, observations made by interviewers, and its multi-wave collection data model. Moreover, its design will help clear away some of the selection and treatment concerns. It is difficult to differentiate between cable network slant impacting voters' candidate preference (treatment effect) and voters selecting cable network to reinforce their existing attitude or candidate preference (selection effect). While differentiating these outcomes is challenging in observational analysis, the 2016 ANES Time Series study has a role in that it quantifies "real world" responses to election questions, it includes only the eligible voting individuals, and the data can be manipulated easily (i.e. stratification).

The large sample size of the ANES Time Series study also allows me to detect even a small correlation between cable network-based effects on candidate choice. Happily, the fact that the ANES datasets are composed of a representative, national sample guarantees at least some external validity. It would be difficult for me to rely solely on an original experiment because it would not assure sufficient external validity. Another advantage to the ANES data, therefore, is its ability to ameliorate the perceived limitations of original experimental methods and research.

In order to properly identify a relationship, I selected specific questions from the ANES Time Series study that best highlight the effects of partisan cable networks. To measure vote choice in the 2016 general election (dependent variable), I utilized the following question from the ANES study: Who did you vote for President? The options given were: “Hillary Clinton,” “Donald Trump,” “Gary Johnson,” “Jill Stein,” or “Other candidate SPECIFY,” “Other specify given as: none.” To measure cable network choice, the key explanatory (independent) variable, I selected a Computer-Assisted Self Interviewing (CASI) question that was used during both in-person and online interviews. Interestingly, the 2016 ANES panel asked a different question to evaluate cable network exposure than in their earlier election studies. In addition to asking how many programs a subject watched about national politics, and how often, they also asked about exposure to a list of specific programs. These shows range across most cable networks. Respondents were asked: “Which of the following programs do you watch regularly? Please check any that you watch at least once a month.” They were then given sixty-four options – many of these were irrelevant (e.g. *The Simpsons*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *Shark Tank*, *The Voice*). For my purposes, Fox News represented right-wing programs, and MSNBC and CNN represented left-leaning programs. The ANES study asked respondents if they watch four Fox News programs: *Hannity*, *The O’Reilly Factor*, *The Kelly File*, and *On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*. They asked respondents if they watch three programs on MSNBC: *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, *The Rachel Maddow Show*, and *All in with Chris Hayes*. They also asked respondents about two CNN programs: *Erin Burnett Outfront*, and *Anderson Cooper 360*. I also included the data of political programs from other major networks: *PBS News Hour*, *Face the Nation* (CBS), *Nightly News with Lester Holt* (NBC), and *Meet the Press* (NBC). Since observational

studies do not automatically control for selection biases, I chose specific variables to do so. In essence, I am conducting a logit analysis of vote choice, the results of which I will report in a later chapter. I selected multiple attitudinal and/or demographic factors that would typically predict whether respondents watch partisan cable network programs: gender, race, age, party ideology, liberal-conservative self-identification, education, income, and general media consumption. The inclusion of these variables in my dataset are expected to: one, homogenize the sample by only evaluating voters based on their attention to partisan networks or not; and two, to make the key analytical comparison clearer.

Formerly, I alluded to a multivariate analysis of the ANES data in a subsequent chapter. The purpose of this later multivariate analysis is to bolster the argument for causation. To provide more context, the multivariate chapter will be aimed at: one, demonstrating that the incidental correlation between vote choice and cable network choice is present for the 2016 general election. Although the forthcoming multivariate analysis will not be able to determine causality, it will provide more ground for the correlation found in the bivariate analysis.

### Bivariate Analysis Findings

Nearly one and a half years into Donald J. Trump's term as President, I intend to answer an important question about the role of partisan cable news on vote choice during the 2016 campaign and election. When considering "*Does cable news content affect candidate choice?*" my research led me to analyze Americans' voting behavior, their taste for like-minded and/or cross-cutting cable news, and the overall viewership of cable news television in the United States. After reading the work of Matthew Levendusky and other scholars, I hypothesized: one, not a large percentage of the population watches partisan cable news

(although there might be effects even for those who never watch); and two, partisan cable news watchers (relative to non-watchers) would likely support the corresponding party candidate. I predicted that this would be the case because partisan cable news often confirms both Democratic and Republican viewers' inclinations. Levendusky (2013, 118) calls this the media reinforcement mechanism. If my hypotheses were true, I would have to find a positive and statistically significant effect of partisan cable news consumption on party voting (i.e. Fox News watchers would vote for Trump, MSNBC and CNN watchers would vote for Clinton).

Table 3.1 gives the results of the cross tabulations for only one of the confounding variables (e.g. race) of those who voted for either Donald J. Trump or Hillary R. Clinton in the 2016 general election. The ANES output shows that most of the sample who voted for either candidate self-identified as white. Perhaps more importantly, one can see that more self-identified whites voted for Donald Trump than did Hillary Clinton – with Trump winning 57% of the white vote, and about 20% of the non-white vote. Hillary Clinton received a substantial share of both the white vote (43%) and the non-white vote at 80%. One daunting reality: The sheer percentage point differential between African Americans who voted for Clinton (95%) and those who voted for Trump (5%). In comparison to Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton won a much larger proportion of the minority vote (in addition to 43% of the white vote) – likely signaling that: one, the U.S. demographic trend is becoming increasingly diverse (insuring a changing electorate); and two, non-white voters/respondents took a greater liking to Clinton and her proposed policies than they did to Trump's. Table 3.2 describes the cross tabulation results of the confounding variables (e.g. gender, education level, and ideological leaning). As often discussed in post-election articles, the output



confirms that Donald Trump received a substantial portion of the female vote. While Hillary Clinton did take more 52% of the women's vote, Trump was only four percentage points behind her. In an election which saw its first female Democratic nominee and presidential candidate, this knowledge does appear shocking. Additionally, Table 3.2 presents the extent to which education influenced who would eventually vote for Clinton versus Trump. Overall, the output elucidates divisions by race, gender, and now, education level: another critical difference between Trump and Clinton voters is a college degree. Among respondents who held a Bachelor of Arts (or higher), 60% voted for Clinton, and 40% voted for Trump. Table 3.3 depicts racial or ethnic group viewership of partisan cable news programs during the 2016 presidential election. This table is the result of cross-tabulations between mutually-exclusive cable news source variables and demographic variables. With this output, I am interested in illustrating the types of people who watch Fox News, MSNBC, CNN, or no cable. These introductory tables provide deep insight into the sample voting population. For instance, Table 3.1 shows that of the self-identified white respondents in the sample, 57% voted for Donald Trump, whereas only 5% of self-identified African-Americans were Trump voters. I can identify an interesting trend in Table 3.3 as well: Fox News is overwhelmingly the most-watched network by respondents, no matter the race or ethnicity of a respondent. That being said, anywhere between 24-31% of the sample population does not watch cable news at all. 37% percent of white respondents, and 38% of non-white respondents, spent time watching cable news related to the 2016 presidential election, but none of that time included tuning in to the three partisan networks Fox News, MSNBC, or CNN.

**Table 3.1** – Percent of Demographic groups that voted for each Presidential Candidate

	White	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Hispanic	Other Race	NonWhite
Trump Voter	57%	5%	31%	30%	26%	41%	20%
Clinton Voter	43%	95%	69%	70%	74%	59%	80%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	1853	240	62	10	202	90	604

*Note:* In Table 3.1, N represents the number of respondents who both identified their race and/or ethnicity and also recorded voting for either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

**Table 3.2** – Percent of other Demographic groups that voted for each Presidential Candidate

	BA plus	Female	No Ideology
Trump Voter	40%	48%	44%
Clinton Voter	60%	52%	56%
Total	100%	100%	100%
N	1118	1292	393

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

**Table 3.3** – Percent of Demographic groups according to cable network viewing

TV Program	White	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Hispanic	Other Race	NonWhite
No TV News	25%	31%	24%	24%	27%	25%	28%
Fox News Shows Only	19%	14%	16%	18%	13%	25%	16%
MSNBC News Shows Only	3%	5%	4%	0%	5%	3%	4%
CNN News Shows Only	6%	5%	10%	0%	6%	8%	6%
FOX-MSNBC News Shows	2%	2%	4%	0%	1%	2%	2%
Fox-CNN News Shows	3%	1%	6%	6%	4%	1%	3%
MSNBC-CNN News Shows	3%	2%	3%	0%	2%	1%	2%
Fox-MSNBC-CNN News Shows	2%	1%	1%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Watch None of Above News Shows	37%	38%	34%	53%	40%	33%	38%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	2560	353	110	17	374	141	995

*Note:* To create the “Watch None of Above News Shows” variable, I used the SELECT IF function available on SPSS (i.e. input SELECT IF: sumtv=0 & tvquestion=1 & white=1). This variable represents respondents who answered the TV question (see appendix), but also did not watch shows on Fox News, MSNBC, or CNN. On the other hand, the No TV News variable represents respondents who do not watch any cable news at all.

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

Tables 3.4 and 3.5 present the descriptive characteristics for respondents’ watching patterns. Table 3.4 measures the number of television programs respondents watched about the 2016 campaign for President. While most respondents reported watching zero programs about the election, it is also true that 62% reported watching one or more programs. This describes a disparate relationship for Americans – wherein, a significant portion of the population avoids cable news, and a larger majority turns to television as an important source of news about politics, campaigns, and current events. Another important point: if respondents do report watching cable news about the campaign, they tend to watch one or a few programs. Table 3.5 also elucidates that Fox News is the most popular cable network,

18% of the sample population reporting that they watch the channel and no other cable. CNN takes second place, but at twelve percentage points lower. This finding exposes the power of Fox News, which is a heavily relied upon network.

**Table 3.4** – Number of cable news programs ANES respondents watch

Number of TV Programs	Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	1,404	38	38
1	1,086	29	67
2	564	15	82
3	310	8	90
4	191	5	95
5	89	2	98
6	55	1	99
7	18	0	100
8	6	0	100
9	6	0	100
10	1	0	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,730</b>	<b>100</b>	

*Note:* 3,730 ANES respondents recorded watching at least some cable news programs. This number does not serve as the same N as in other tables because I created mutually exclusive categories for the relevant cable news programs according to vote choice.

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

**Table 3.5** – Total ANES respondents according to cable news viewership

TV Programs	Respondents	Percent
None	1404	38%
Noncable only	956	26%
Fox (and noncable)	675	18%
MSNBC (and noncable)	129	3%
CNN (and noncable)	209	6%
F-M (and noncable)	61	2%
F-C (and noncable)	122	3%
C-M (and noncable)	98	3%
All 3 cable (and noncable)	76	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3730</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Note:* 3,730 ANES respondents recorded watching at least some cable news programs. This number does not serve as the same N as in other tables because I created mutually exclusive categories for the relevant cable news programs according to vote choice. F-M refers to Fox News and MSNBC, F-C refers to Fox News and CNN, and C-M refers to CNN and MSNBC. Noncable is a code that means the respondent reported watching Fox News, for example, and no other cable programs. This is confusing. I think you mean that they watch Fox news (for example) only, or do you mean that they watch Fox News and broadcast stations, like the ones I list above? The labels should be clarified. Again, the source of the problem is the definition of noncable.

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

The following tables provide a description of respondents' watching patterns and candidate choice during the 2016 general election. Table 3.6 identifies the correlations between specific television programs and being a Trump and Clinton voter. Table 3.7 identifies the correlations between partisan cable network consumption and being a Trump or Clinton voter. Generally, Table 3.6 makes evident the effect of cable news on vote choice, especially if a respondent is routinely exposed to *Hannity*, a Fox News program. The only statistically significant correlation on the table is between watching *Hannity* and voting for Trump. Even so, the correlation is a moderate one, at 0.34. Both tables show moderate to weak correlations with Trump voting and Fox watching – indicating a greater attention (and potential influence of) the conservative network. However, for Clinton, the only real, positive correlations (and these are quite weak) are for not watching cable news at all. This observation points to a sharp divide in the regular cable network consumption of Trump versus Clinton voters.

**Table 3.6** – Correlation between cable news programs and vote choice

TV Program	Trump Voter	Clinton Voter
Hannity	0.34	-0.31
The O'Reilly Factor	0.01	-0.01
On the Record w/ Greta Van Susteren	0.01	0.00
The Kelly File	0.00	0.00
All in with Chris Hayes	0.02	0.00
The Rachel Maddow Show	0.00	0.03
Hardball w/ Chris Matthews	0.00	0.01
Anderson Cooper 360	0.01	0.01
Erin Burnett Outfront	-0.01	0.02
Nightly News with Lester Holt	-0.01	0.02
Meet the Press	-0.08	0.08
Face the Nation	-0.04	0.04
PBS News Hour	-0.13	0.13

*Note:* Evaluation of correlations are done using this measurement – 0-.3 is weak, .3-.7 is moderate, .7+ is strong.

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

**Table 3.7** – Correlation between cable news source(s) and vote choice

TV Network(s)	Trump Voter	Clinton Voter
Some Fox	0.22	-0.20
Fox only cable	0.20	-0.19
Fox CNN	0.07	-0.06
Fox MSNBC	0.04	-0.03
Some MSNBC	0.03	-0.01
MSNBC only cable	0.01	0.01
MSNBC CNN	0.00	0.01
FoxMSNBCCNN	0.00	0.02
CNN only cable	-0.03	0.05
No TV News	-0.16	0.15

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

Table 3.8 presents a cross-tabulation of Trump voters who reported watching some degree of Fox News, MSNBC, CNN, or no cable at all. Table 3.9 presents a cross tabulation of Clinton voters who watched some degree of Fox News, MSNBC, CNN, or no cable at all. Both candidate's tables show how many voters watched none of the above cable news shows

(but do watch other cable news). Figure 3.0 is a clustered column chart that visually depicts the first three outcomes on Table 3.8 and Table 3.9 (Fox News Shows Only, MSNBC News Shows Only, CNN News Shows Only, Noncable News Shows). The two tables put an important outcome on display: Respondents who say they voted for Trump in the general election watched Fox News more than the other major cable networks, and interestingly, so did Clinton voters. Perhaps this because Trump voters watched cable news to further their own party perspective, and Clinton voters value cross-cutting content. Also, Clinton voters watch substantially less cable news than do Trump voters, inferring they regularly chose other information outlets during the 2016 election.

**Table 3.8** – Percent of Trump Voters according to cable news viewership

TV Network(s)	Respondents	Percent
Noncable News Shows	201	19%
Fox News Shows Only	297	28%
MSNBC News Shows Only	39	4%
CNN News Shows Only	50	5%
Fox-MSNBC News Shows	22	2%
Fox-CNN News Shows	49	5%
MSNBC-CNN News Shows	26	2%
Fox-MSNBC-CNN News Shows	20	2%
Watch None of Above News Shows	368	34%
Total	X	100%
N	1,072	X

*Note:* In the ANES sample, there are 1,072 respondents who recorded voting for Donald Trump. To create this table, I made mutually exclusive categories from the voting sample (eliminated all cases that were not either a Trump or Clinton voter) so that the above cable news viewership variables would sum to 100%.

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

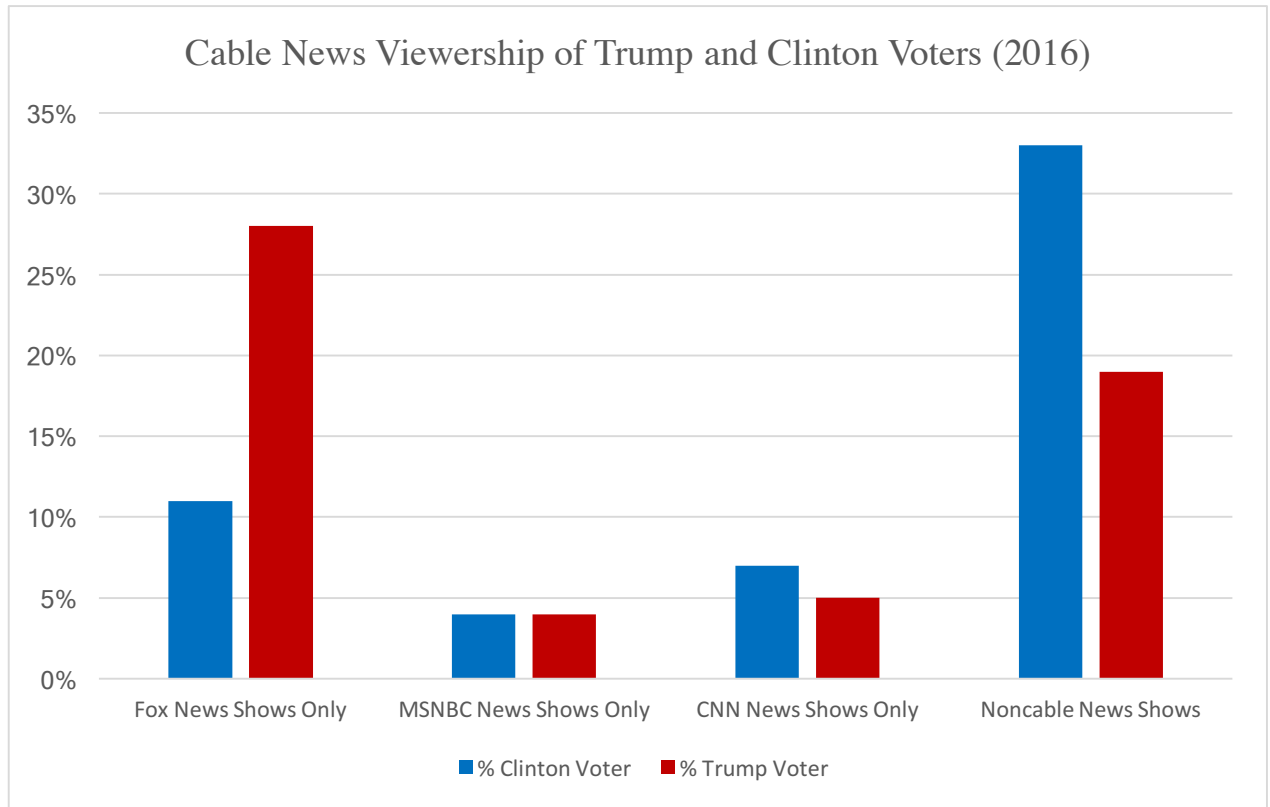
**Table 3.9** – Percent of Clinton Voters according to cable news viewership

TV Network(s)	Respondents	Percent
Noncable News Shows	379	33%
Fox News Shows Only	128	11%
MSNBC News Shows Only	42	4%
CNN News Shows Only	76	7%
Fox-MSNBC News Shows	13	1%
Fox-CNN News Shows	24	2%
MSNBC-CNN News Shows	30	3%
Fox-MSNBC-CNN News Shows	26	2%
Watch None of Above News Shows	430	37%
Total	X	100%
N	1,148	X

*Note:* In the ANES sample, there are 1,148 respondents who recorded voting for Hillary Clinton. To create this table, I made mutually exclusive categories from the voting sample (eliminated all cases that were not either a Trump or Clinton voter) so that the above cable news viewership variables would sum to 100%.

*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.

**Figure 3.0** – Clustered bar graph of Trump and Clinton voters’ cable news viewership



*Source:* 2016 American National Election Studies (Time Series), panel dataset.



This chapter began with a timely question about the contemporary partisan media environment: does cable network content affect voters' candidate choice? Using ANES panel data from the 2016 election, I demonstrated that there is a correlation, but not a causal relationship. The results of the bivariate analysis present how Fox News has a substantively important effect on vote choice. The Fox News network attracts the viewership of voters on both sides of the aisle, indicating that Americans go to the network to reinforce their politics (Trump voters) or for cross-cutting purposes (Clinton voters). That said, the general findings also demonstrate that partisan cable networks do not dramatically change candidate choice – this is because a large percentage of the sample population does not report watching cable news at all. Moreover, Clinton voters appear to mostly renounce cable news, so the real effect on vote choice is reduced. As previously discussed, I will verify this relationship using interview survey analysis and a multivariate analysis of the 2016 ANES data. When combined, these results will have far-reaching implications about U.S. democracy, political polarization, and “the legitimacy of the system more broadly” (Levendusky 2013, 133, citing Anderson et al. 2005; Mutz 2006b).

## Data Appendix A.1

This appendix provides the details for the bivariate analysis conducted in this chapter. The variables come from the 2016 ANES Time Series multi-wave dataset.

### **American National Election Studies (ANES)**

Below is the specific question wording and coding rules used for the variables in the 2016 ANES Time Series Studies.

#### 2016 Variables

##### **“PRE: SUMMARY – R self-identified race” – DEM\_RACE**

1. White, non-Hispanic 2. Black, non-Hispanic 3. Asian, native Hawaiian or other Pacif Islr, non-Hispanic 4. Native American or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic 5. Hispanic 6. Other non-Hispanic incl multiple races [WEB: Blank ‘Other’ counted as a race]

##### **“PRE FTF CASI / WEB: R Self-identified gender” – R\_GENDER**

What is your gender?

1. Male 2. Female 3. Other

##### **“PRE: Respondent age” – R\_AGE**

Type: numeric (float)

Range: [-9, 90]

##### **“PRE-POST: Summary – Party of registration” – SUM\_REGPARTY**

What political party are you registered with, if any?

1. Democratic party 2. Republican party 4. None or 'independent' 5. Other {SPECIFY}

Range: [-9, 5]

##### **“7pt scale liberal conservative self-placement” – PTYID\_RPTYID**

Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? {DO NOT PROBE}

1. Extremely liberal 2. Liberal 3. Slightly liberal 4. Moderate; middle of the road 5. Slightly conservative 6. Conservative 7. Extremely conservative 99. Haven't thought much about this {DO NOT PROBE}

##### **“PRE FTF CASI/WEB: Pre Income Summary”**

Please mark the answer that includes the income of all members of your family living here in 2015 before taxes.

1. Under \$5,0000
2. \$5,000-\$9,999
3. \$10,000-\$12,499
4. \$12,500-\$14,9990
5. \$15,000-\$17,499
6. \$17,500-\$19,999
7. \$20,000-\$22,499

8. \$22,500-\$24,999
9. \$25,000-\$27,499
10. \$27,500-\$29,999
11. \$30,000-\$34,999
12. \$35,000-\$39,999
13. \$40,000-\$44,999
14. \$45,000-\$49,999
15. \$50,000-\$54,999
16. \$55,000-\$59,999
17. \$60,000-\$64,999
18. \$65,000-\$69,999
19. \$70,000-\$74,999
20. \$75,000-\$79,999
21. \$80,000-\$89,999
22. \$90,000-\$99,999
23. \$100,000-\$109,999
24. \$110,000-\$124,999
25. \$125,000-\$149,999
26. \$150,000-\$174,999
27. \$175,000-\$249,999
28. \$250,000 or more

**“PRE: Highest level of Education” – DEM\_EDU**

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

01. Less than 1st grade
02. 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th grade
03. 5th or 6th grade
04. 7th or 8th grade
05. 9th grade
06. 10th grade
07. 11th grade
08. 12th grade no diploma
09. High school graduate - high school diploma or equivalent (for example: GED)
10. Some college but no degree
11. Associate degree in college - Occupational/vocational program
12. Associate degree in college -- Academic program
13. Bachelor's degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
14. Master's degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
15. Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
16. Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)
95. Other {SPECIFY}

**“For whom did R vote for President” – POSTVOTE\_PRESVTHO**

Who did you vote for President?

1. Hillary Clinton
2. Donald Trump
3. Gary Johnson
4. Jill Stein
5. Other candidate SPECIFY
7. Other specify given as: none
9. Other specify given as: RF

**“Preference strong for Pres cand for whom R voted” – POSTVOTE\_PRESSTR**

Would you say your preference for this candidate was strong or not strong? 1. Strong  
2. Not strong

**“Attention to TV News” – ATTVNEWS**

How much attention do you pay to news about national politics on TV? [a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or none at all / none at all, a little, a moderate amount, a lot, or a great deal]?

1. A great deal 2. A lot 3. A moderate amount 4. A little 5. None at all

**“Days in a week watch/listen/read news on any media” – PRMEDIA\_WKANYNEWS**

During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read or listen to news on TV, radio, printed newspapers, or the Internet, not including sports?

0. None 1. One day 2. Two days 3. Three days 4. Four days 5. Five days 6. Six days 7. Seven days

**“How many programs about 2016 campaign did R watch on TV REVISED” – MEDIAPO\_TVAMT**

How many programs about the campaign for President did you watch on television?

1. None 2. Just one or two 3. Several 4. A good many

“CASI: IF HEARD ABOUT PRES CAMPAIGN ON TV NEWS/TALK/PUBLIC AFFAIRS/ NEWS ANALYSIS PROG(S): Which of the following television programs do you watch regularly? Please check any that you watch at least once a month. (Mark all that apply, 0. Not selected 1. Selected)”– MEDSRC\_TVPROGS1

01. 20/20 02. All In with Chris Hayes 03. The Blacklist 04. CBS Evening News with Scott Pelley 05. Criminal Minds 06. Empire 07. Hannity 08. Jimmy Kimmel Live 09. The Kelly File 10. Modern Family 11. NCIS 12. The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore 13. Sunday Night Football 14. Scorpion 15. The Simpsons 16. Today 17. 60 Minutes 18. Anderson Cooper 360 19. CBS This Morning 20. Dancing with the Stars 21. Face the Nation 22. House of Cards 23. Hardball with Chris Matthews 24. Judge Judy 25. Meet the Press 26. Game of Thrones 27. NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt 28. On the Record with Greta Van Susteren 29. Daredevil 30. The Rachel Maddow Show 31. Shark Tank 32. The Voice 33. ABC World News with David Muir 34. Blue Bloods 35. Conan 36. Dateline NBC 37. Good Morning America 38. Hawaii Five-O 39. Madam Secretary 40. Nancy Grace 41. Erin Burnett Outfront 41. PBS News Hour 42. Scandal 43. The Big Bang Theory 44. The Late Show with Stephen Colbert 45. The O’Reilly Factor 46. The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon 47. Alpha House 48. Al Punto 49. Al Rojo Vivo 50. Aqui y Ahora 51. CNN en Espanol 52. Despierta America 52. El Gorda y La Flaca 53. Enfoque 54. Hoy 55. Lo Mejor de Caso Cerrado 56. Noticiero Enrique Gratas 57. Noticiero Telemundo 58. Noticiero Univision 59. El Senor de los Cielos 60. Que Noche! Con Angelica y Raul 61. Primer Impacto 62. Cronicas de Sabado 63. None of the above

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Hannity – FOX\_HAN**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG The O'Reilly Factor – FOX\_OFAC**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG The Kelly File – FOX\_KF**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG On the Record with Greta Van Susteren  
– FOX\_GRET**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG PBS News Hour – PBS\_NEWSH**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Face the Nation – CBS\_FTN**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt –  
NBC\_LH**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Meet the Press – NBC\_MTP**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Hardball with Chris Matthews –  
MSNBC\_CM**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG The Rachel Maddow Show –  
MSNBC\_RMS**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG All in with Chris Hayes – MSNBC\_CH**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Erin Burnett Outfront – CNN\_EB**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Anderson Cooper 360 – CNN\_ACO**

0. not selected 1. Selected

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## Chapter 4: ANES Multivariate Analysis

Americans want to know what happened in the 2016 presidential election. They want answers to a variety of questions: why the polls failed to accurately capture Donald Trump's support; how Russian officials may have intervened in the election; and to what extent they were tuning in to Fake News. I can say this safely and non-controversially: the 2016 presidential election confounded everyone – even the political strategists (Turkewitz 2016). My research question represents a tip of the iceberg – a small portion of the costly and complicated campaigns of then-party nominees Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. I wonder: Does cable news content affect candidate choice? After reviewing and reporting on the bivariate results of American National Election Studies (ANES) data, I consider: to what extent did partisan cable news influence the U.S. electorate? To what extent does bias or polarization in the cable news media exist? Were certain Americans more susceptible to cable news bias? In this chapter, I evaluate how much the Fox News phenomenon holds up in the multivariate analysis. After understanding its influence more clearly after the bivariate assessment, I ask: how much does Fox still play a role in a person's vote? And who was most affected?

Critics may maintain that the influence of cable news is insignificant, as only a small portion of the population watches it at all. I am the first to admit that this is true. In fact, the majority of the respondents in the 2016 ANES sample reported watching no cable news before, during, or after the presidential election. But, for one, that is an important finding in itself – we should be concerned that many Americans appear to avoid cable news, usually opting in favor of online sources or other outlets. Still, some people are watching cable news, and even if the correlation between vote choice and candidate choice is moderate, that has

serious implications for our democracy. If the cable news media aims to: one, affirm our preconceived political notions; or two, maintain a role (even a minimal one) in helping to elect our leaders, we deserve to understand by how much. It is equally as important to investigate the demographic viewership of partisan cable networks like Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN. Proper analysis will elucidate the types of people that are the primary consumers of cable news, as well as the general partisanship of cable news audiences (e.g. Fox News boasts the whitest viewership between MSNBC and CNN.)

As discussed previously, I am primarily interested in understanding the effect that cable news content had on vote choice in the context of the 2016 general election. The subsequent multivariate analysis seeks to both clarify and supplement the bivariate output. In order to produce a thorough multivariate analysis, I ran several equations through Stata, a statistical software package.

Using the logit function on Stata, I created equations that would draw out a relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. The independent variable is cable network choice. The dependent variable is vote choice. Cable network choice is represented by two partisan cable networks – Fox News and CNN. The resulting variables for these two networks are the same ones that appeared earlier in the bivariate analysis. I decided to exclude the logistic regression results of MSNBC from this chapter because initial testing showed that it had such limited influence on its viewers.

The independent variable used in the forthcoming models is composed of four cable network variables: Fox only cable, CNN only cable, Foxcnn, and noncable. The controlled variables are: race, gender, education level, and party identification. The race variable is split into six dichotomous variables: White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native

American, and Other Race. In fact, all of the control variables are binary. Gender is female (0/1), with zero representing men. The education level is composed of those with a Bachelor of Arts or higher (1), and those with any and all levels of education lower than that being zero. The party identification variable was originally a 7-point scale variable, with one representing strong democrat to seven being strong republican. I combined all of the Republican scaled numbers and all of the Democrat scaled numbers to create two separate party ID variables. These two variables, `Republican_pid` and `Democrat_pid`, are dichotomous. Either an individual is a Republican, or not (and vice versa for Democrats.) Those who self-identified as a moderate were excluded from the equation. The dependent variable is represented by the vote choice variable called `clintonvote`, which is also dichotomous. If an individual had a zero for `clintonvote`, it means that he or she voted for Donald Trump.

The equations input into Stata estimate the effects of viewing certain channels, and the control variables account for the effects of other factors that also affect presidential vote choice. While every model included the same dependent variable (`clintonvote`) and control variables (`white`, `black`, `asianpi`, `hispanic`, `nativeamer`, `otherrace`, `female`, `baplus`, `republican_pid`, and `democrat_pid`), the independent variable changed in each case. I had a number of models run in Stata. Each model had a different news consumption variable. Using logit equations, Stata calculated the marginal effects for the news consumption variables against vote choice.

By eliciting multiple equations, or models, I can best assess the relationship between vote choice (DV) and cable network choice (IV) – including outside factors that are likely part of the relationship (i.e. race, gender, party identification, education level). Within the



logistic equations, I used two commands: one, I added marginal effects for the news consumption variables; two, I created adjusted predictions for the control variables. Muller and MacLehose (2014, 965) call this method “marginal standardization” – wherein, the model reflects the estimate of interest (e.g. vote choice) that is “proportionally adjusted according to a weight for each level of the confounding factors(s).” In the case of this project, marginal standardization is done for several reasons: one, because this operationalization allows for the assignment of different (but standardized) specifications to control values; two, it is straightforward to observe a pattern in the control variables; and three, for both levels of binary exposure, it is similarly straightforward to assess the risk difference to certain populations (Muller and MacLehose 2014, 963). The marginal standardization controls for confounders – done by balancing the exposed and unexposed populations to the same target (cable network choice) – allowed me to observe the relative risk of certain demographics to vote choice.

Ultimately, I came up with several logit models that included nine demographic and political variables that are associated with vote choice in the United States. Marginal effects show the change in probability of voting for either Clinton or Trump when the independent variable (i.e. cable network choice) increases by one unit. In this case, the marginal effects show the likelihood that a change in cable news consumption will result in a difference in viewers’ vote choice. Overall, I am analyzing the predictive probability that voting for Clinton or Trump is caused by the viewership of a certain cable network (e.g. Foxonlycable, CNNonlycable). My interpretation of the logit results will be based on the magnitude, direction, and statistical significance of the relationship between presidential vote choice and cable network choice.

The marginal effects models included in this chapter are the product of logistic regression results and targeted population effects. By this statement I mean that I purposely selected certain control variables to standardize because they either elicited statistically significant information, or told the greatest “story” as it relates to this project. I also do not report the logit results of any MSNBC variables because the network had a trivial sized effect on the ANES sample. This finding implies that the real-world effect of MSNBC on their audience would be insignificant. That being said, my decision to exclude tables was only made after running every regression model feasible.

Similarly to the bivariate analysis, the multivariate maintains its own limitations. Some considerations (in terms of disadvantages) when it comes to this multivariate analysis have been: issues of variance, statistical significance, predictor selection, and causality. Neither the bivariate or the multivariate regression analyses imply that the relationship between cable network choice and vote choice is causal. For example, cable news content can have a persuasive effect on viewers – but at the same time, citizens can also maintain preexisting inclinations and vote that way regardless of slanted news. This is one of the fundamental challenges with regression analysis. With this in mind, I will take refuge in the claim that I am only studying an association between the cable network choice and candidate choice, and not causation.

Still, Jeon (2015, 1634) writes that in the “past tens of years, researchers have used this multiple regression analysis as a powerful tool because it allows to model statistically the relationship between dependent variable and a set of independent variables.” The logistic equations that I will be analyzing in this chapter seek to understand and also estimate the relationship between vote choice and cable network choice in the 2016 presidential election.

After running a model for every media variable, I ended up with five important conclusions. These conclusions are the product of the several marginal effects models. These models are follows: one, the marginal effects of the Fox only cable variable on the vote for Clinton (with adjusted predictor variables); two, the marginal effects of the CNN only cable variable on the vote for Clinton (with adjusted predictor variables); three, the marginal effects the Fox-CNN variable on the vote for Clinton (with adjusted predictor variables); and four, the marginal effects of the non-cable variable on the vote for Clinton (with adjusted predictor variables.) Ultimately, the logit models reveal two important points: one, they describe two cable networks that were a cause of political division during the most recent presidential election (these were Fox News and CNN); and two, they indicate a media landscape that is distinctly asymmetric – with Fox News having a much more pronounced effect on its viewership than the other major networks. This finding, as it relates to asymmetric polarization, is in line with the ANES bivariate analysis. I was primarily focused on observing the effect of Fox News, then, as the network clearly had a residual effect on the opinions and beliefs of its audience. CNN does influence its audience, but certainly less so.

### Estimating Logistic Regression Models in Stata

In order to run logistic regression models on Stata, I first had to come up with a clear research question. As discussed in my previous chapter, I am interested in the factors associated with voting for either Clinton or Trump. I eventually narrowed that question down to: Does cable network choice effect candidate choice? After establishing a basic association between the two in the bivariate analysis, I wanted to take a deeper look into Fox News – which was overwhelmingly the most-watched network of the three (beating out CNN and

MSNBC) – and also which was deemed to be the most influential. This conceptual framework helped me to decide which variables were worth advancing to the multivariate regression.

The first decision I made was to conduct logistic regressions of specific 2016 ANES variables. Both the independent (cable network choice) and dependent variable (vote choice) remained the same as in the bivariate tests. The predictor, or control variables changed slightly. In these models, they are: race, gender, education, and party identification. It made the most sense to use the logistic regression command on Stata because it models a dichotomous dependent variable. Being that my study focuses on the 2016 presidential election, I designed a dichotomous dependent variable for vote choice: either a respondent voted for Donald Trump (1), or did not (0). If the respondent did not vote for Donald Trump, this meant that they must have voted for Hillary Clinton. In this case, I eliminated those who voted for the Independent, Green Party, or write-in candidates. Moreover, the rest of my predictor variables were also binary.

Muller and MacLehose (2014, 963) write that “for dichotomous outcomes, logistic regression is the overwhelming choice for analysis of observational and experimental data.” This is mainly because regressions allow for the assessment of whether independent variables such as race, gender, education, and attitude are associated with the binary dependent variable (i.e. candidate choice), all while controlling for the overlapping outcomes with other variables. Additionally, logistic regressions are beneficial because: one, odds ratios are easily obtained from logistic models; and two, one can apply statistical methods to measure the scope of the effect from predictive probabilities of multiple control variables. As a result, I was able to evaluate the effect of cable network choice on the outcome (vote choice); the

outcome was calculated for every observed control variable and then combined as an average separately for each exposure level. The logit equations input in Stata allowed me to make inferences based on the predicted probabilities calculated from the models (Muller and MacLehose 2014, 963).

Before running the data models, I chose to change the predictor expressions based on adjusted predictions. In other words, I created conditional predicted probabilities for each independent variable (i.e. cable network choice and controls.) In this way, certain independent or control variables were fixed at either 0 or 1. They were adjusted based on the targeted population I was interested in understanding more about. This method, commonly known as standardized marginalizations, is used to understand the predicted probability of an outcome by exposure status. In my case, this method assumes an understanding of a group of participants in the ANES dataset (based on each control variable.)

Multivariate logistic regression analysis is needed for this project. It is needed because I want to identify the following: one, figuring out how cable network choice (and confounding variables) influence vote choice; two, it is important to understand how one unit change in the independent variables makes a difference in the dependent variable; and three, it is possible to estimate the change in the dependent variable according to changes in the set of independent variables (Jeon 2015, 1634). Logistic regression equations were used because the dependent variable, “clintonvote,” is binary. In sum, multivariate analysis is necessary in order to explain the effect of cable network choice on vote choice, while also controlling for other important variables.

After performing initial logistic regression tests, I faced two problems. The first problem was that many of the media variables that I analyzed as part of the bivariate analysis

were not statistically or substantively significant in predictive probability models. This was the case for all of the MSNBC variables. Given that the MSNBC variable was not illustrative of the cable-vote choice relationship, I decided to exclude the results from this chapter. I also encountered issues related to the collinearity of my predictor variables. For several of the models, I noticed that gender or party ID was not statistically significant. This is likely because the independent variables are correlated. Within the set of independent variables I selected from the ANEs study, some of the independent variables are nearly or totally predicted by the other independent variables.

### Is it Only Selective Exposure?

My purpose in this chapter, and with the multivariate analysis, is to examine the contribution of partisan cable news outlets/content to citizens' candidate choice(s) in the 2016 general election. As we have seen, though, the combination of selective exposure and reinforced biases makes it difficult to assert causation. Yet, many have documented the remarkably strong relationship between partisan slant in cable news content and the attitude and vote of their audiences in 2016 (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017). It is noticeable in this analysis as well. But whether that relationship is the product of selective exposure or not is a hard question to answer, especially in this observational study.

Theoretically, every relationship presented in the upcoming tables could be a consequence of partisan selective exposure. However, if that were true, they should disappear after controlling for characteristics that determine choice of cable news outlet. Thus, I included a set of variables in every model that would typically be significant predictors of partisan media consumption: race, gender, party identification (7-point scale), and education. Still, the models reiterate a strong relationship between partisan cable network choice and

voting for either Clinton or Trump, with the right-leaning network Fox News having the largest effect on predicted responses. The estimated effects of the rest of the mainstream cable news media are considerably smaller and, in the case of MSNBC, are not statistically significant. Since the control variables do eliminate some or most of the bias from selective exposure, then partisan cable networks both contributed to a polarized electorate as well as influenced viewers' candidate choice.

### The Effect of Fox News and CNN

In order to examine the relationship between Fox News and vote choice, and also that between CNN and vote choice, I ran several logit equations in Stata. The equations were based around a change in the independent variable, which was either Fox News only, CNN only, or FoxCNN. As one can see, these variables represented a different pool of viewers. Watching Fox News only on cable or CNN only on cable are contrasting groups within themselves – and watching both Fox and CNN indicates a willingness for the viewer to cross-cut between the two partisan networks. The logit models on which the forthcoming marginal effects tables are based are in Appendix A at the end of this chapter.

After running every possible model provided by the ANES variables, I noticed that the effect of the cable news media was felt much more strongly on white respondents.

Below are two models that show the marginal effects of watching Fox News only on white men and white women who also are Republican. I chose to model the influence of Fox News on white men and white women because, as we learned in the bivariate analysis, race had a impact on vote choice. Model 4.1 shows the outcome for individuals who do not hold a college degree, and the second model (4.2) shows the outcome for those who did earn a college diploma or higher.

**Model 4.1** – Marginal effects of Foxonlycable on non-college educated and Republican white men and white women.

Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton	Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton
<b>Model 4.1</b>			
<i>Watch Fox only cable</i>		<i>Do not watch Fox only cable</i>	
White men w/o BA + Rep	0.18**** (.022)	White men w/o BA + Rep	0.41**** (.026)
White women w/o BA + Rep	0.17**** (.022)	White women w/o BA + Rep	0.4**** (.025)

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

**Model 4.2** – Marginal effects of Foxonlycable on college-educated and Republican white men and white women.

Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton	Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton
<b>Model 4.2</b>			
<i>Watch Fox only cable</i>		<i>Do not watch Fox only cable</i>	
White men w/ BA + Rep	0.32**** (.032)	White men w/ BA + Rep	0.6**** (.026)
White women w/ BA + Rep	0.3**** (.032)	White women w/ BA + Rep	0.59**** (.026)

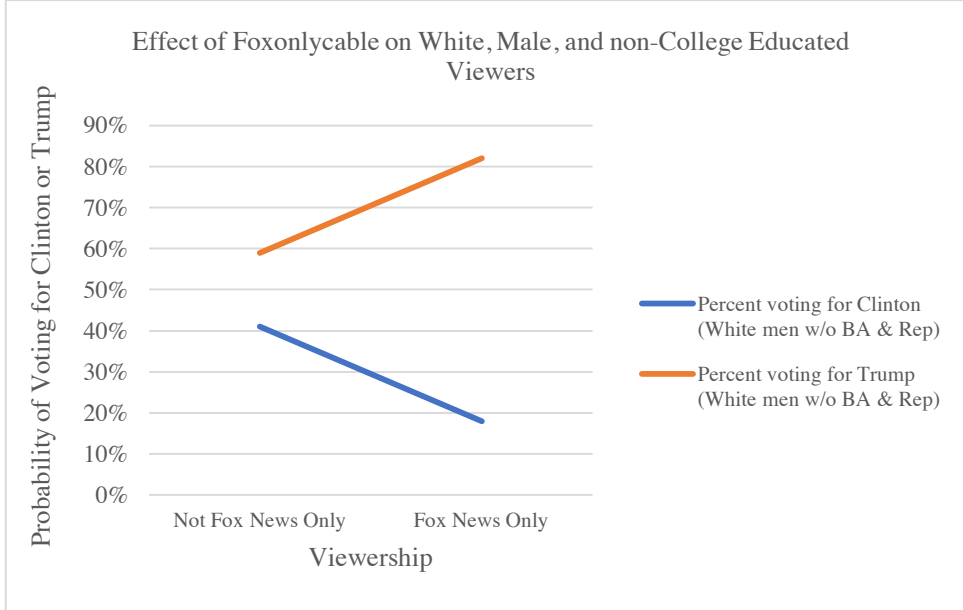
Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

Model 4.1 shows the marginal effects of the Fox only cable variable for white men and white women, without a BA, and who are also Republican. The model finds that non-college educated and conservative whites (both men and women) have a much greater likelihood of voting for Trump if they only watch Fox News. Interestingly, the effect is the same for college educated and Republican whites (Model 4.2) – if the only cable content that they watched during the 2016 presidential election was on Fox News, they were all either twenty-three to twenty-four percentage points more likely to vote for Donald Trump. This is a notable finding: it suggests that Fox News had a measurable effect on the most recent

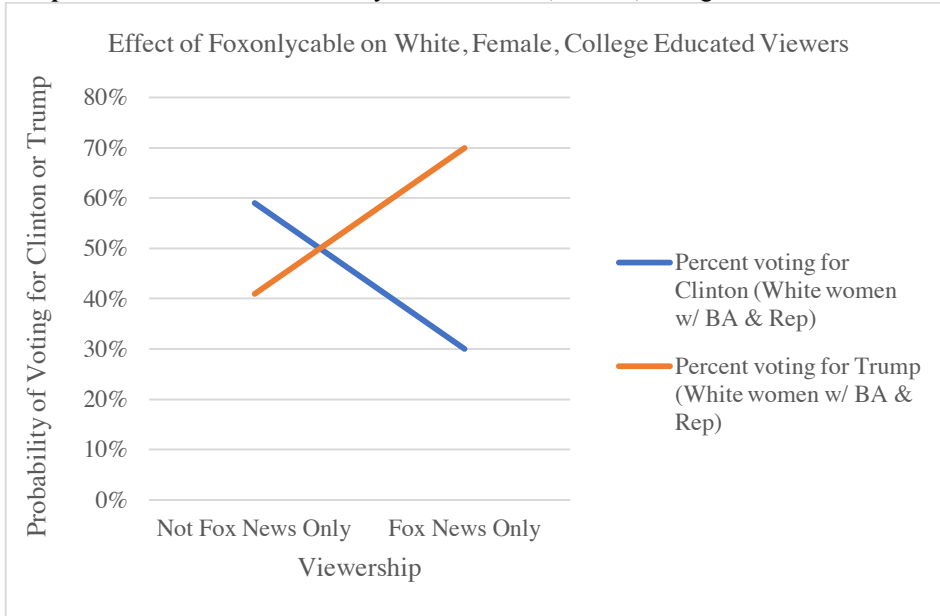


general election outcome. And these results are found all while controlling for other factors that similarly affect vote choice. It is a stinging conclusion: in the 2016 presidential election, Fox News persuaded a sizeable amount of its viewers to vote for the conservative candidate.

**Graph 4.1** – The effect of Fox only cable on white, male, and non-college educated viewers.



**Graph 4.2** – The effect of Fox only cable on white, female, college educated viewers.



Here is a conclusion that is arguably more poignant – the above models and graphs show that if an individual watches only Fox News (and is also a white man, without a college degree, and a Republican), his probability of voting for Hillary Clinton is 18%. If that same individual does not watch Fox News only, his probability of voting for Hillary Clinton goes up to 41%. Then, the likelihood that this individual will vote for Donald Trump is simply the inverse of the previous statement (because the variable for vote choice is dichotomous). Therefore, the male, white, Republican who only watches Fox News has an 82% predicted probability that he will vote for Donald Trump, and a 59% he will vote for Donald Trump if he watches anything other than just Fox News. According to the models, the effect of Fox News is felt just as heavily on white women who are Republican as well. In essence, I estimate that watching Fox News increases non-college educated and conservative white men's and white women's chances of voting for Donald Trump nearly twenty-five percentage points. Interestingly, watching Fox News only also increases college educated individuals (who are white and Republican) chances of voting for Trump be around twenty-eight points – a higher margin than with non-college educated viewers. This outcome especially signals how complex the 2016 election was, as this evidence is not consistent with the view that voters are sophisticated and filter out media bias. To add to the complicatedness, the marginal effects of the Fox only cable variable (in regard to vote choice) is found to also be true of white male and female Democrats – the data is just not shown here. It is evident: Fox News exerts power over the electorate who tune into it the most – the network affected those who tuned into it regularly, those who did not get their news from any other cable channel.

Now, for many, this makes sense on a gut level. The generally accepted theory described by social scientists and journalists alike states that the introduction of Fox News into the cable news market has been an instrumental variable in convincing its viewers to vote Republican (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2005; Holcomb 2014; Fisman and Prat 2017). It is also fitting that self-identified whites would be the most affected by Fox News, especially since (as the bivariate analysis showed) white people watch Fox News more than any other demographic group. Additionally, the influence of Fox News on white individuals to vote in Trump's favor confirms conventional wisdom about his voting bloc (Filipovic 2016; Tyson and Maniam 2016).

Still, though, we cannot take these results fully at face value. While this result appears quite telling, one must be cautious about the association between the influence of Fox News and voting for Trump. I am tentative to assign Fox News as a dominating force in Donald Trump's election to the presidency for several reasons. The first reason one cannot accept these results immediately is because of causation, which I have spoken extensively about. The mechanism by which white respondents watch Fox News is important, but hard to understand completely. Clearly, white, conservative people watched Fox News (and often watched only Fox), and then voted for Donald Trump. A correlation does exist. But this does not necessarily mean that they are persuaded to vote for the Republican candidate because they watch Fox News. Perhaps, it goes both ways.

Then again, there are reasons why this output is significant. The first reason is that watching Fox News, and getting no information from the other cable networks, does have an influence on an individual. The models establish that Fox News can increase polarization on its own, and it does so measurably (23-24 percentage points). The second reason that this

output is worthwhile is because Fox News has an effect on everyone. All those who claim to watch Fox and nothing else – men, women, college-educated, non-college educated, Republican or Democrat – will probably end up voting for the conservative candidate. Thereby, the influence of Fox News extends to those outside its own ideological party. Watching Fox News only during the 2016 general election created an unusual feedback loop: viewers (with varying political partisanship, gender, education level) consumed slanted news, either maintained or shifted their political leaning, and then developed a greater willingness to vote for Trump, and not so for Clinton. Overall, the results imply that when white people watch Fox News (and nothing else), they can be convinced to vote Republican – in spite of their party ID, gender, or education level.

Below are two models that show the marginal effects of watching CNN only on white men and white women with varying education levels (college educated or non-college educated) and party IDs (Republican or Democrat). Model 4.3 shows the outcome of watching CNN only cable for white individuals who do not hold a college degree. Model 4.4 shows the outcome for those who did earn a college diploma or higher.

**Model 4.3** – Marginal effects of CNNonlycable on non-college educated white men and white women.

Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton	Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton
<b>Model 4.3</b>			
<i>Watch CNN only cable</i>		<i>Do not watch CNN only cable</i>	
White men w/o BA + Dem	0.45**** (.052)	White men w/o BA + Dem	0.34**** (.022)
White men w/o BA + Rep	.46**** (.053)	White men w/o BA + Rep	.35**** (.024)
White women w/o BA + Dem	.44**** (.051)	White women w/o BA + Dem	.33**** (.021)
White women w/o BA + Rep	.46**** (.052)	White women w/o BA + Rep	.35**** (.023)

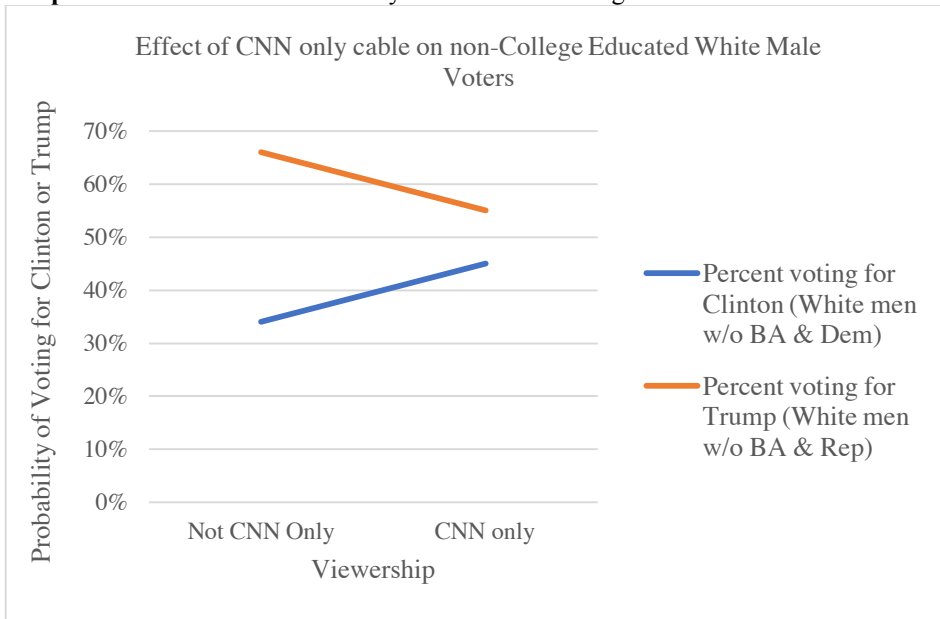
Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

**Model 4.4** – Marginal effects of CNNonlycable on college educated white men and white women.

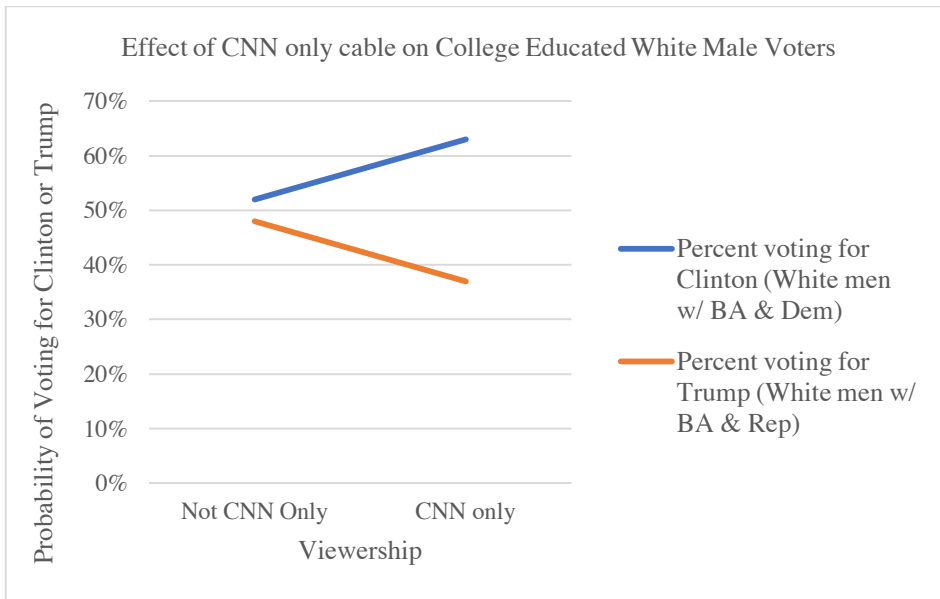
Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton	Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton
<b>Model 4.4</b>			
<i>Watch CNN only cable</i>		<i>Do not watch CNN only cable</i>	
White men w/ BA + Dem	0.63**** (.05)	White men w/ BA + Dem	.52**** (.025)
White men w/ BA + Rep	.64**** (.05)	White men w/ BA + Rep	.53**** (.026)
White women w/ BA + Dem	.63**** (.05)	White women w/ BA + Dem	.51**** (.024)
White women w/ BA + Rep	.64**** (.05)	White women w/ BA + Rep	.53**** (.025)

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

**Graph 4.3** – The effect of CNN only cable on non-College Educated White Male voters.



**Graph 4.4** – The effect of CNN only cable on College Educated White Male voters.



Given the frequency of politically divisive language used by Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN, the marginal effects of the CNN only variable are somewhat surprising. The logistic regressions for CNN only are nearly identical to the models for Fox only cable, the only

difference is that now there are visualizations for both Democrats and Republicans who claimed to watch the network and nothing else. As shown above, watching CNN only increases both non-college educated and college educated white men's and white women's chances of voting for Clinton by about eleven percentage points. The effect that CNN has on white viewers does not change by education level. Therefore, it does not matter: if a white individual (either Republican or Democrat, male or female, holding a BA or not) gravitated towards CNN during the 2016 presidential election, the probability that he or she would have voted for Hillary Clinton was heightened. To many, this finding is uncontroversial: CNN is a left-leaning network, so it is the logical response that those who watch it – especially those who watch the channel and nothing else on cable – could be expected to vote for Clinton by an extra eleven percentage points.

Yet, the effect of CNN only cable on white Republicans and Democrats is less than half of the effect of Fox News only cable. How can this discrepancy be explained? If CNN is similarly biased or polarized as Fox News (just on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum), shouldn't their effects be consistent? As shown, however, CNN is not associated with the comparable political externalities of Fox News. This could be the case for several reasons. Although CNN is certainly partial to Democratic ideals, perhaps the network was not supportive enough of Clinton leading up to the election to persuade white individuals to vote for her. It is also conceivable that CNN is simply not as liberal as Fox News is conservative, so the effect that the network has on the electorate is significantly weakened.

The bivariate analysis made another point clear: Fox News is far and away the most watched 24-hour cable news channel. This means that Fox News likely affected more people in comparison to CNN, which ANES respondents reported watching much less often. It is a

plausible conclusion, then, that those who are devotees to CNN (who watch the network and nothing else on cable) are influenced by it, but that the actual effect that CNN did have is less than with Fox – simply because CNN has less of a loyal following. Still, CNN did maintain a substantial effect on white individuals during the 2016 presidential election. It was just less powerful than that of Fox News.

Below are two models that show the marginal effects of watching both Fox and CNN on white men and white women with varying education levels (college educated or non-college educated) and party IDs (Republican or Democrat). Model 4.5 shows the outcome of watching Fox and CNN cable for white individuals who do not hold a college degree. Model 4.6 shows the outcome for those who did earn a college diploma or higher.

**Model 4.5** – Marginal effects of Foxcnn on non-college educated white men and white women.

Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton	Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton
<b>Model 4.5</b>			
<i>Watch FoxCNN</i>		<i>Do not watch FoxCNN</i>	
White men w/o BA + Dem	0.2**** (.046)	White men w/o BA + Dem	0.35**** (.023)
White men w/o BA + Rep	.21**** (.048)	White men w/o BA + Rep	.36**** (.024)
White women w/o BA + Dem	.19**** (.046)	White women w/o BA + Dem	.34**** (.022)
White women w/o BA + Rep	.2**** (.048)	White women w/o BA + Rep	.36**** (.023)

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

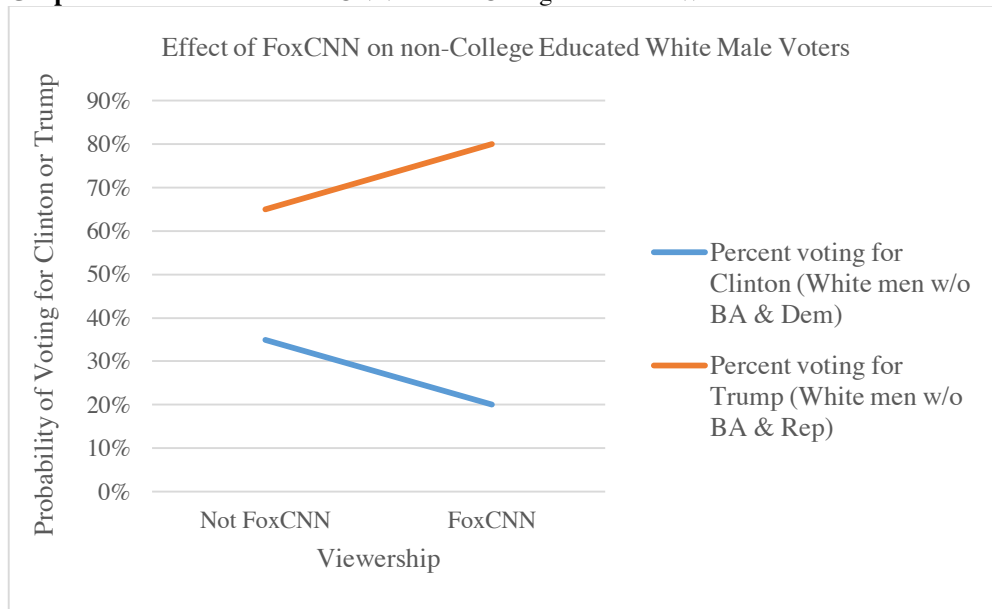


**Model 4.6 – Marginal effects of Foxcnn on college educated white men and white women**

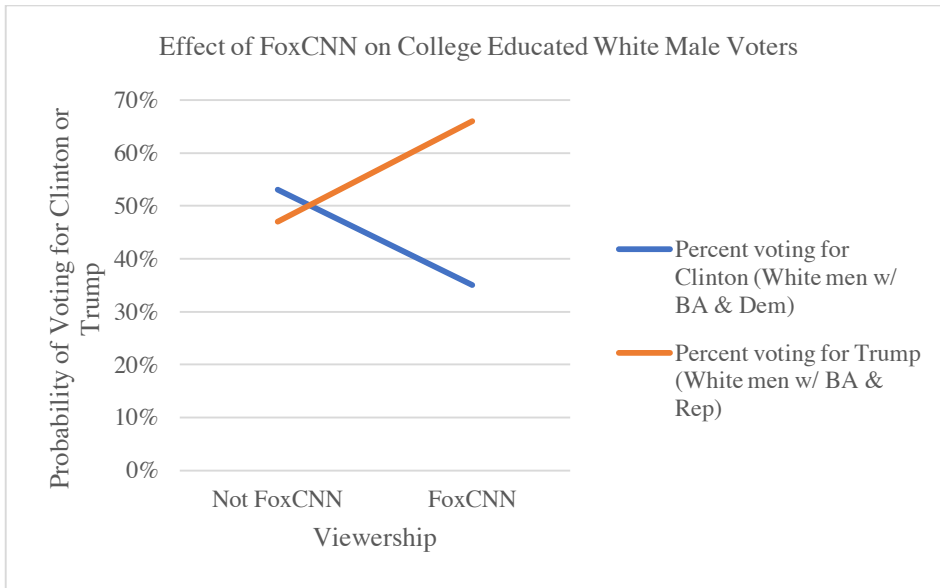
Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton	Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton
<b>Model 4.6</b>			
<i>Watch FoxCNN</i>		<i>Do not watch FoxCNN</i>	
White men w/ BA + Dem	0.35*** (.065)	White men w/ BA + Dem	.53*** (.025)
White men w/ BA + Rep	.36*** (.067)	White men w/ BA + Rep	.55*** (.026)
White women w/ BA + Dem	.34*** (.065)	White women w/ BA + Dem	.52*** (.024)
White women w/ BA + Rep	.36*** (.067)	White women w/ BA + Rep	.54*** (.025)

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

**Graph 4.5 – The effect of FoxCNN on non-College Educated White Male voters.**



**Graph 4.6** – The effect of FoxCNN on College Educate White Male voters.



The effects of Foxcnn for all groups are logical considering the outcome of watching Fox News only or CNN only. The models show that if white individuals watch Fox and CNN – which would be cross-cutting for both Democrats and Republicans – there is a reduced probability that they will vote for Clinton. Watching both Fox News and CNN has the effect of lessening white individuals’ chances of voting for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. For less educated white individuals, they are about fifteen percentage points less likely to vote for Clinton if they watch Fox and CNN. For college educated white individuals, they are about eighteen percent less likely to vote for Hillary Clinton if they watch Fox and CNN. These models and graphs show the magnitude of the two most polarized cable news networks when working in combination. The biases of the cable news media during the 2016 presidential election affected individuals who are both educated and not, who are male and female, and who are Democrat and Republican. It appears, though,

that Fox News maintains the most influence within the cable network sphere – white individuals were more likely to vote for Trump after watching both Fox and CNN.

### The Effect of Noncable

Given that the entirety of this chapter has focused on white individuals who watched partisan cable news to some degree, I felt it important to also consider those who did not watch (or even avoided watching) cable news before or during the 2016 presidential campaign. Also, the bivariate analysis showed that most ANES respondents reported watching no cable news, which is significant in it of itself. Below are two models that show the marginal effects of watching no cable news on white men and white women with varying education levels (college educated or non-college educated) and party IDs (Republican or Democrat). Model 4.7 shows the outcome of watching no cable for white individuals who do not hold a college degree. Model 4.8 shows the outcome for the noncable variable those who did earn a college diploma or higher.

**Model 4.7 – Marginal effects of Noncable on non-college educated white men and white women.**

Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton	Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton
<b>Model 4.7</b>			
<i>Do not watch cable news</i>		<i>Watch cable</i>	
White men w/o BA + Dem	0.48**** (.033)	White men w/o BA + Dem	.31**** (.022)
White men w/o BA + Rep	.50**** (.034)	White men w/o BA + Rep	.33**** (.023)
White women w/o BA + Dem	.47**** (.031)	White women w/o BA + Dem	.30**** (.021)
White women w/o BA + Rep	.48**** (.032)	White women w/o BA + Rep	.31**** (.023)

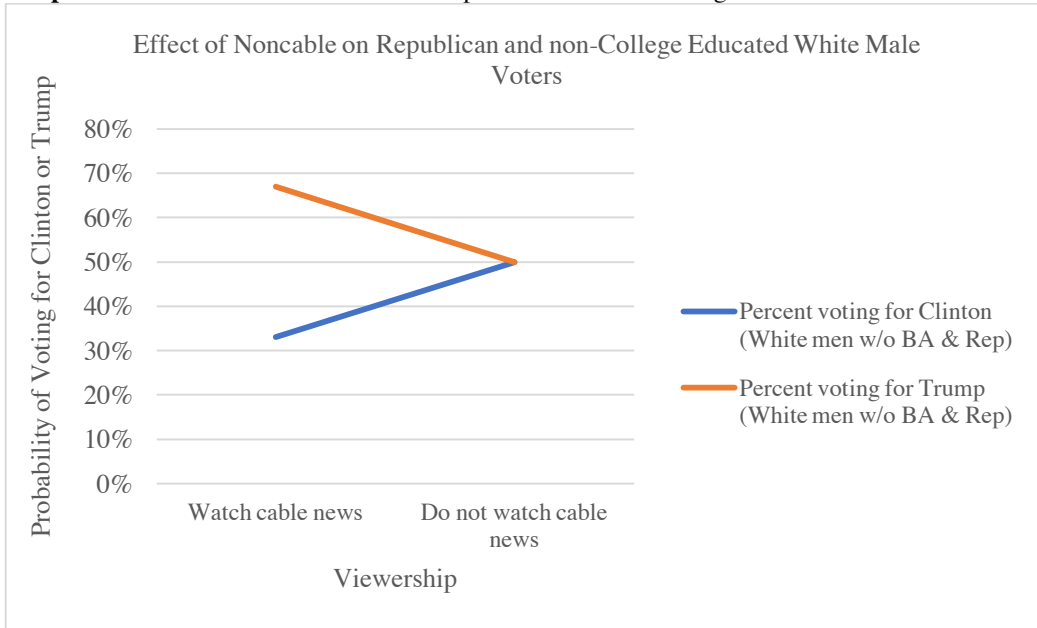
Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

**Model 4.8 – Marginal effects of Noncable on college educated white men and white women.**

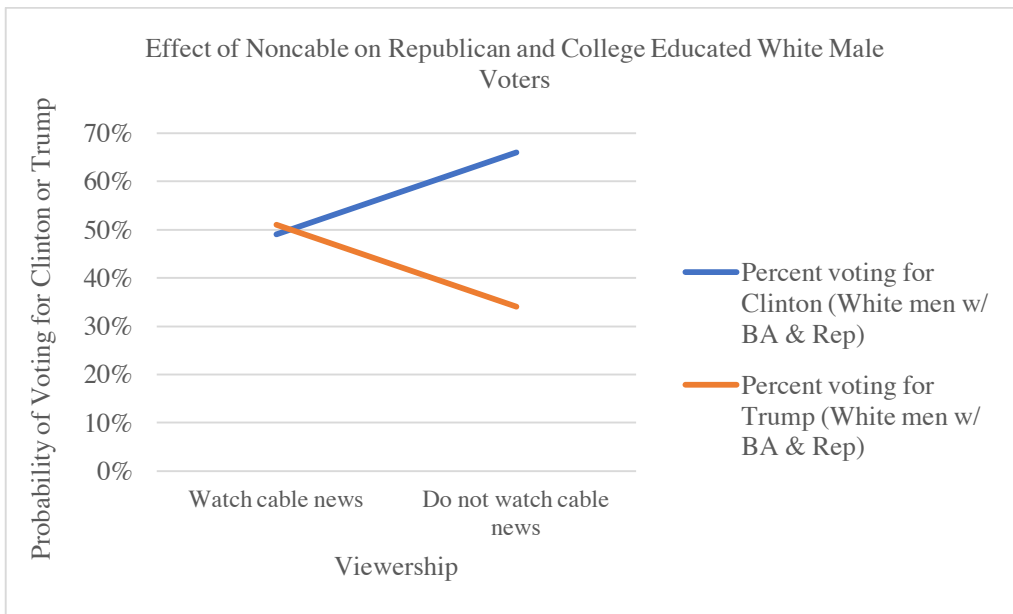
Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton	Explanatory Variable	Probability of voting for Clinton
<b>Model 4.8</b>			
<i>Do not watch cable news</i>		<i>Watch cable</i>	
White men w/ BA + Dem	.65**** (.029)	White men w/ BA + Dem	.48**** (.025)
White men w/ BA + Rep	.66**** (.029)	White men w/ BA + Rep	.49**** (.027)
White women w/ BA + Dem	.64**** (.028)	White women w/ BA + Dem	.46**** (.025)
White women w/ BA + Rep	.65**** (.028)	White women w/ BA + Rep	.48**** (.027)

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

**Graph 4.7** – The effect of Noncable on Republican and non-College Educated White Male voters.



**Graph 4.8** – The effect of Noncable on Republican and College Educated White Male voters.



As shown, watching no partisan cable news substantially increases a white individual's chances of voting for Hillary Clinton. In fact, watching no cable news increases an individual's likelihood of voting for Clinton more so than if the same individual watched

CNN only. The models show that a white individual with any combination of the predictor variables (men, women, educated, less educated, capitalize party names: democratic, republican) were all more likely to vote for Clinton by sixteen to eighteen percentage points if they did not watch cable news during the 2016 general election. This finding truly quantifies the effect of partisan cable news on vote choice. My results show that partisan cable news content takes viewers who are effectively already polarized and makes them even more so – it can push them to vote a certain way. But in this case, when cable news content was not a factor leading up to the election, white individuals had a much greater probability of voting for the Democratic candidate.

#### Multivariate Analysis Findings

The results of the logistic regression models depict the preeminence of the Fox News Channel, and, to a much less degree, the Cable News Network (CNN). Indeed, the two cable news networks played an important role in the 2016 presidential election. In this chapter, I sought to draw a distinct line of association between partisan cable networks and their viewers, specifically, the individuals who ended up being either Trump and Clinton voters. After conducting both a bivariate and multivariate analysis on this relationship, I observed what can only be described as asymmetric polarization.

Many U.S. voters were witness to the asymmetric polarization, wherein the Fox News Channel played the most important role in the 2016 presidential election. The findings are striking because of: one, the sheer magnitude of the Fox phenomenon; and two, its dominance and influence over the electorate as compared to its counterparts, MSNBC and CNN. The models show that partisan outlets, especially Fox News, persuaded white Americans to select the Republican candidate on the ballot. That being said, these effects are

concentrated primarily on viewers who are already extreme in their attitudes or political beliefs, as they claim to only watch Fox News or CNN. In a way, though, that is why these multivariate results are so telling: I estimate that Fox News caused a substantial rightward shift in viewers' vote, and this was the case for both Republicans and Democrats. This is a significant conclusion, as Democrats would not have been predisposed to voting for Donald Trump – to some extent, the content of Fox News persuaded them to do so. Fox News content (and that of CNN, for what it is worth) affected those with varying (even opposing) genders, party IDs, and education levels.

Together, these conclusions suggest that partisan cable news networks amplify partisan divisions in the public, and even drive viewers to vote a certain way. The logistic regression models leave little doubt that ideologically-based cable content – particularly that which is conservative – contributed to polarized opinions of the candidates, and a greater probability of voting for Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

## Data Appendix A.2

This appendix provides the logistic regression output for the five main findings discussed in this chapter.

As shown in the tables and models, the five main findings are as follows:

1. Watching Foxonlycable increases non-college educated white men and white women's chances of voting for Trump by 23-24 points. The effect is true for Democrats as well.
2. Watching Foxonlycable increases college educated white men and white women's chances of voting for Trump by around 28 points.
3. Watching CNNonlycable increases non-college educated AND College educated white men's and white women's chances of voting for Clinton (no difference by education level) by about 11 percentage points.
4. Watching both Fox and CNN has the effect of lessening probability of voting for Clinton by about 15 points for less educated, and 18 points for more educated respondents (male or female, democrat or republican).
5. Men, Women, Educated, Less Educated, Democratic, Republican ALL are more likely to vote for Clinton by 16-18 percentage points if they watch no cable at all.



Below is the logit model with odds ratios for the Fox only cable variable:

**Table 4.1:** Logistic regression showing the effect of Fox only cable on college-educated and non-college educated Republican white men and women's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. Foxonlycable	0.305**** (.039)	0.237	0.393
Black	35.24**** (11.75)	18.33	67.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.69*** (.895)	1.39	5.16
Native American	3.23* (2.49)	0.714	14.6
Hispanic	4.16**** (.769)	2.89	5.97
Other Race	2.16*** (.208)	1.34	3.47
Female	0.943 (0.09)	0.78	1.1
BA Plus	2.16**** (.209)	1.79	2.61
Republican Party ID	1.109 (.109)	0.914	1.34
Constant	0.633**** (.06)	0.525	0.763

R-square = 0.1536  
N = 2,184

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1.

Below are the logit models with odds ratios for the CNN only cable variable:

**Table 4.2:** Logistic regression showing the effect of CNN only cable on college-educated and non-college educated Democratic white men and women's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. CNNonlycable	1.59* (.317)	1.07	2.35
Black	33.54**** (11.05)	17.58	64.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.66** (.873)	1.399	5.06
Native American	3.03 (2.23)	0.715	12.88
Hispanic	4.37**** (.80)	3.05	6.24
Other Race	2.01** (.473)	1.27	3.19
Female	0.989 (.092)	0.82	1.2
BA Plus	2.10**** (.198)	1.74	2.53
Democrat Party ID	.995 (.092)	0.828	1.19
Constant	0.508**** (.048)	0.422	0.612
R-square = 0.1242			
N = 2,184			

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1.

**Table 4.3:** Logistic regression showing the effect of CNN only cable on college-educated and non-college educated Republican white men and women's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. CNNonlycable	1.57* (.315)	1.06	2.34
Black	33.4**** (11.0)	17.5	63.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.69** (.887)	1.42	5.14
Native American	2.95 (2.18)	0.695	12.57
Hispanic	4.36**** (.795)	3.04	6.23
Other Race	2.01** (.47)	1.266	3.18
Female	0.987 (.092)	0.82	1.2
BA Plus	2.10 (.199)	1.74	2.53
Republican Party ID	1.10 (.106)	0.917	1.33
Constant	0.489**** (.045)	0.408	0.587

R-square = 0.1246

N = 2,184

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1.

Below are the logit models with odds ratios for the Fox CNN variable:

**Table 4.4:** Logistic regression showing the effect of FoxCNN on non-college educated Democratic white men and women's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. FoxCNN	0.468** (.131)	0.271	0.81
Black	32.82**** (10.82)	17.2	62.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.79** (.919)	1.46	5.32
Native American	2.87 (2.12)	0.678	12.2
Hispanic	4.32**** (.789)	3.02	6.18
Other Race	1.98** (.465)	1.25	3.14
Female	0.975 (.091)	0.81	1.2
BA Plus	2.10**** (.198)	1.74	2.52
Democratic Party ID	1.00 (.093)	0.834	1.2
Constant	0.539**** (.050)	0.448	0.648

R-square = 0.1250

N = 2,184

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. The effect of FoxCNN on non-college educated Republican white men and women is the same.

**Table 4.5:** Logistic regression showing the effect of FoxCNN on college educated Republican white men and women's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. FoxCNN	0.469** (.131)	0.271	0.81
Black	32.72**** (10.78)	17.15	62.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.82** (.932)	1.48	5.39
Native American	2.8 (2.06)	0.659	11.91
Hispanic	4.31**** (.787)	3.01	6.17
Other Race	1.98** (.464)	1.25	3.13
Female	0.974 (.091)	0.81	1.2
BA Plus	2.09**** (.198)	1.74	2.52
Republican Party ID	1.11 (.107)	0.922	1.34
Constant	0.518**** (.047)	0.433	0.621
R-square = 0.1254			
N = 2,184			

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. The effect of FoxCNN on non-college educated Democratic white men and women is the same.

Below are the logit models with odds ratios for the Noncable variable:

**Table 4.6:** Logistic regression showing the effect of Noncable on non-college educated Democratic white men's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. Noncable	2.03**** (.22)	1.64	2.52
Black	32.3**** (10.66)	16.91	61.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.88*** (.954)	1.5	5.51
Native American	3.19 (2.36)	0.748	13.64
Hispanic	4.25**** (.781)	2.96	6.09
Other Race	2.0** (.473)	1.26	3.18
Female	0.949 (.089)	0.79	1.1
BA Plus	2.01**** (.19)	1.67	2.43
Democrat Party ID	1.0 (.094)	0.833	1.2
Constant	0.453**** (.044)	0.375	0.549

R-square = 0.1368  
N = 2,184

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. The effect of Noncable on non-college educated Democratic white men and women is the same.

**Table 4.7:** Logistic regression showing the effect of Noncable on non-college educated Republican white men's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. Noncable	2.03**** (.22)	1.64	2.51
Black	32.22**** (10.63)	16.87	61.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.92*** (.967)	1.52	5.58
Native American	3.12 (2.32)	0.73	13.37
Hispanic	4.24**** (.78)	2.96	6.08
Other Race	1.99** (.47)	1.25	3.17
Female	0.947 (.089)	0.79	1.1
BA Plus	2.01**** (.192)	1.67	2.43
Republican Party ID	1.10 (.11)	0.912	1.33
Constant	0.439 (.041)	0.36	0.53

R-square = 0.1371

N = 2,184

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. The effect of Noncable on non-college educated Republican white men and women is the same.

**Table 4.8:** Logistic regression showing the effect of Noncable on college educated Democratic white men's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. Noncable	2.03**** (.22)	1.64	2.52
Black	32.3**** (10.66)	16.9	61.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.88*** (.95)	1.5	5.51
Native American	3.19 (2.36)	0.75	13.65
Hispanic	4.25**** (.78)	2.96	6.09
Other Race	2.0** (.47)	1.26	3.18
Female	0.949 (.09)	0.78	1.1
BA Plus	2.01**** (.19)	1.67	2.43
Democrat Party ID	1.0 (.09)	0.83	1.2
Constant	0.453**** (.044)	0.37	0.55

R-square = 0.1368

N = 2,184

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. The effect of Noncable on college educated Democratic white men and women is the same.



**Table 4.9:** Logistic regression showing the effect of Noncable on college educated Republican white men's chances of voting for Clinton.

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1. Noncable	2.03**** (.22)	1.64	2.51
Black	32.22**** (10.63)	16.8	61.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.92*** (.97)	1.52	5.59
Native American	3.12 (2.32)	0.729	13.3
Hispanic	4.24**** (.78)	2.96	6.08
Other Race	1.99** (.47)	1.25	3.17
Female	0.947 (.08)	0.79	1.1
BA Plus	2.01**** (.19)	1.67	2.43
Republican Party ID	1.1 (.10)	0.91	1.33
Constant	.439**** (.041)	0.364	0.528
R-square = 0.1371			
N = 2,184			

Notes: \*\*\*\* denotes statistical significance at  $p < .0001$ ; \*\*\* at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* at  $p < .01$ ; and \* at  $p < .05$ . Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All specifications are implemented using logistic regression and adjusted predictions on STATA. All variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. The effect of Noncable on college educated Republican white men and women is the same.

## Data Appendix B.1

This appendix provides the details for the multivariate analysis conducted in this chapter. The variables come from the 2016 ANES Time Series multi-wave dataset.

### **American National Election Studies (ANES)**

Below is the specific question wording and coding rules used for the variables in the 2016 ANES Time Series Studies.

#### 2016 Variables

##### **“For whom did R vote for President”**

Who did you vote for President?

1. Hillary Clinton 2. Donald Trump 3. Gary Johnson 4. Jill Stein 5. Other candidate SPECIFY 7. Other specify given as: none 9. Other specify given as: RF

- Subcategories:
- Hillary Clinton (1) = **clinton**
- Donald Trump (2) = **trump**

##### **PRE: Summary – Party ID 7pt scale liberal-conservative**

Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about it?

1. Strong democrat 2. Not very strong democrat 3. Independent-Democrat 4. Independent 5. Independent-Republican 6. Not very strong Republican 7. Strong Republican

- Subcategories:
- Strong democrat (1), Not very strong democrat (2), Independent-Democrat (3) = **dem\_pid**
- Independent (4) = **ind\_pid**
- Independent-Republican (5), Not very strong Republican (6), Strong Republican (7) = **rep\_pid**

##### **“PRE: SUMMARY – R self-identified race”**

###### **QUESTION**

1. White, non-Hispanic 2. Black, non-Hispanic 3. Asian, native Hawaiian or other Pacif Islr, non-Hispanic 4. Native American or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic 5. Hispanic 6. Other non-Hispanic incl multiple races [WEB: Blank ‘Other’ counted as a race]

- Subcategories:
- White, non-Hispanic (1) = **white**
- Black, non-Hispanic (2) = **black**
- Asian only (3) = **asian**
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacif Islr, non-Hispanic (3) = **pacific**
- Native American or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic (4) = **nativeamer**
- Hispanic (5) = **hispanic**
- Other non-Hispanic incl multiple races (6) = **other**

##### **“PRE FTF CASI / WEB: R Self-identified gender”**

What is your gender?

1. Male 2. Female 3. Other
- Subcategory:
- Female (2) = **female**

**“PRE: Highest level of Education”**

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

01. Less than 1st grade 02. 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th grade 03. 5th or 6th grade 04. 7th or 8th grade 05. 9th grade 06. 10th grade 07. 11th grade 08. 12th grade no diploma 09. High school graduate - high school diploma or equivalent (for example: GED) 10. Some college but no degree 11. Associate degree in college - Occupational/vocational program 12. Associate degree in college -- Academic program 13. Bachelor's degree (For example: BA, AB, BS) 14. Master's degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA) 15. Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD) 16. Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD) 95. Other {SPECIFY}

- Subcategories:
- Bachelor’s degree (13), Master’s degree (14), Professional School Degree (15), Doctorate degree (16) = **baplus**

**“CASI: IF HEARD ABOUT PRES CAMPAIGN ON TV NEWS/TALK/PUBLIC AFFAIRS/ NEWS ANALYSIS PROG(S):** Which of the following television programs do you watch regularly? Please check any that you watch at least once a month. (Mark all that apply, 0. Not selected 1. Selected)” – MEDSRC\_TVPROGS1

01. 20/20 02. All In with Chris Hayes 03. The Blacklist 04. CBS Evening News with Scott Pelley 05. Criminal Minds 06. Empire 07. Hannity 08. Jimmy Kimmel Live 09. The Kelly File 10. Modern Family 11. NCIS 12. The Nigly Show with Larry Wilmore 13. Sunday Night Football 14. Scorpion 15. The Simpsons 16. Today 17. 60 Minutes 18. Anderson Cooper 360 19. CBS This Morning 20. Dancing with the Stars 21. Face the Nation 22. House of Cards 23. Hardball with Chris Matthews 24. Judge Judy 25. Meet the Press 26. Game of Thrones 27. NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt 28. On the Record with Greta Van Susteren 29. Daredevil 30. The Rachel Maddow Show 31. Shark Tank 32. The Voice 33. ABC World News with David Muir 34. Blue Bloods 35. Conan 36. Dateline NBC 37. Good Morning America 38. Hawaii Five-O 39. Madam Secretary 40. Nancy Grace 41. Erin Burnett Outfront 41. PBS News Hour 42. Scandal 43. The Big Bang Theory 44. The Late Show with Stephen Colbert 45. The O’Reilly Factor 46. The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon 47. Alpha House 48. Al Punto 49. Al Rojo Vivo 50. Aqui y Ahora 51. CNN en Espanol 52. Despierta America 52. El Gorda y La Flaca 53. Enfoque 54. Hoy 55. Lo Mejor de Caso Cerrado 56. Noticiero Enrique Gratas 57. Noticiero Telemundo 58. Noticiero Univision 59. El Senor de los Cielos 60. Que Noche! Con Angelica y Raul 61. Primer Impacto 62. Cronicas de Sabado 63. None of the above

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Hannity – FOX\_HAN**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG The O'Reilly Factor – FOX\_OFAC**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG The Kelly File – FOX\_KF**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG On the Record with Greta Van Susteren – FOX\_GRET**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt – NBC\_LH**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Meet the Press – NBC\_MTP**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Hardball with Chris Matthews – MSNBC\_CM**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG The Rachel Maddow Show – MSNBC\_RMS**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG All in with Chris Hayes – MSNBC\_CH**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Erin Burnett Outfront – CNN\_EB**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Anderson Cooper 360 – CNN\_ACO**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG PBS News Hour – PBS\_NEWSH**

0. not selected 1. Selected

**PRE FTF CASI/WEB: MENTION: TV PROG Face the Nation – CBS\_FTN**

0. not selected 1. Selected

- Subcategories:
- Hannity, The O'Reilly Factor, The Kelly File, On the Record with Greta Van Susteren = **foxonlycable**
- Hardball with Chris Matthews, The Rachel Maddow Show, All in with Chris Hayes =

**msnbconlycable**

- Erin Burnett Outfront, Anderson Cooper 360 = **cnnonlycable**
- Hannity, The O'Reilly Factor, The Kelly File, On the Record with Greta Van Susteren, Hardball with Chris Matthews, The Rachel Maddow Show, All in with Chris Hayes = **foxmsnbc**
- Hannity, The O'Reilly Factor, The Kelly File, On the Record with Greta Van Susteren, Erin Burnett Outfront, Anderson Cooper 360 = **foxcnn**
- Hardball with Chris Matthews, The Rachel Maddow Show, All in with Chris Hayes, Erin Burnett Outfront, Anderson Cooper 360 = **msnbccnn**
- Watching none of these listed shows = **noncable**

## Chapter 5: Student Reactions to Cable News Influence in the 2016 Presidential Election

In recent decades, a great deal of attention has been paid to the persuasive power of the media – specifically, its ability to influence political discourse and/or its potential to increase support for like-minded politicians or policies. This interest is driven in part by a curiosity about the interplay between the biases associated with the major cable networks and the result of the 2016 general election. An intriguing question – and one that might have normative implications – is concerned with media coverage amid the campaign and public opinion. As a way to reflect on this new topic, I altered my original research question slightly: Does cable news content affect Trinity students' candidate choice(s)?

In an effort to better understand the influence of cable news content on vote choice, I decided to speak with undergraduate students on-campus. The interviews with Trinity College students intend: one, to enrich the multivariate analysis; two, to offer an interpretation of the political insights of young adults; and three, to provide an assessment of media choice during the 2016 presidential election. If nothing else, I expect the qualitative research component to supplement the ANES analysis. My subjective evaluation of student interviews will also investigate the frequency of particular responses, and discuss interesting points made by participants.

My decision to speak with Trinity College students arose out of concerns that there was more to the story than the American National Election Studies (ANES) bivariate and multivariate analysis could provide on its own. In general, the purpose of the interview study was to learn about how youth process information, and where they get their news from. When a participant agreed to take part in the study, I conducted an in-person interview with him/her.

Admittedly, I considered the challenges of taking a qualitative approach to investigation (especially interview-based). Professors Erik Belich and Robert Pekkanen (2013, 86) review the common pitfalls associated with doing qualitative research: representativeness of sample, type and quality of information obtained, and accuracy of reporting. To diminish the above concerns, I developed a research project that sought to address them. Of the usual limitations related to sampling (i.e. limited sample size, sampling bias, self-selection bias, and observation biases), sample size was the primary cause of unease. Contrary to the quantitative ANES dataset which held a great number of respondents, my interview study would contain far fewer participants.

The sample is composed entirely of Trinity College undergraduate students. I willingly reduced that pool again by removing all freshman undergraduate students. In doing so, I eliminated 604 students from the sample. From the remaining population of (upperclassmen) students still available for interviews, I drew a small number by random selection. Ranging from sophomores to seniors, I randomly selected fifty students from the 2018 Trinity College Directory. I expected to yield at least half of those students. I similarly sought to conduct purposive sampling because white, affluent students are over represented at the college (Aisch et al. 2017). As we know, yielding a homogenous group of students will not achieve broad findings. In an effort to augment minority perspectives, I selected a separate group of students to interview based on desired characteristics. The desired characteristics were largely based on race (e.g. Hispanic, African-American, and Asian individuals). Although random selection is better because it fends off some degree of selection bias – though the study did also suffer from non-response bias – the deliberate

addition of cases was necessary for the purpose of documenting unique or diverse variations in perspectives and attitudes.

Given time constraints, it was difficult to both acquire and perform extensive interviews with the selected participants. Besides, the study was already affected by a lack of responses to my (numerous) invitations. While it would have been ideal to obtain the insights of more participants, I believe there to be relevant, valuable feedback from the twelve participants. The insight of a few Trinity College students is still helpful in learning more about the influence of cable news content.

The second group of problems with qualitative data, and my study in particular, include observational biases. Perhaps the most pressing issue pertains to the Hawthorne Effect, which refers to a change in the behavior or response of a participant when being observed (Payne and Payne 2004). The theory is important to consider, particularly with interviews. It is not lost on me that students may have been dishonest in their responses, especially since many of the questions were personal and concerned with political outlook. However, in many, if not all of the conversations that I had, participants voluntarily provided the candidate that they supported in the 2016 presidential campaign. Correspondingly, many, if not all of the participants also indicated that they went to the voting booth, and named who they had voted for. If a participant had not voted in the election, he or she immediately conceded. Although there is surely the possibility that a participant lied in a response, misremembered their cable news consumption, or misinterpreted my question(s), it is my firm belief that the interviews shed light on the normative consequences of cable news opinion programming and partisan media.



It is my hope that by sharing as much information as possible about the interview process, readers will be confident in: one, the methodology adhered to in the study; two, the reliability of the results; and three, the accuracy of my reporting. One can be certain that I am faithfully reporting results without conjointly data mining because of the sample itself as well as the procedures that I followed. Given that the sample was composed exclusively of Trinity College students, the study is not designed to echo the exact conclusions of the ANES analysis. Instead, the interview responses present an opportunity for the abstract evaluation of the media in the context of the 2016 general election. Likewise, students were merely guided by the interview questions – they were not asked to comment about specific cable networks or candidates that I selected from the ANES dataset. Their reactions directed our conversation, and their opinions and criticisms often changed the focus of the interview. Additionally, because of my presence in the interview, I was able to rephrase or clarify questions that were not initially understood. As a result, there were more appropriate answers and likely more accurate data was reached. Since I tape-recorded the interviews in-person, I was able to accurately transcribe a report later (without disruptive notetaking during). This also disallows me from reconstructing what a participant said, as every word said is on the record. The accuracy of interview data is part of the reason that it is an attractive method of data collection (Alshenqeeti 2014).

At this point, my thesis has been guided by a quantitative research design, in which the data output maintains some degree of external validity – or transferability of the sample to the actual population. It is for this reason that empirical research is of the gold standard. But there is conflicting support for the use of interviews in political science as a means of inferring data to the population universe. My choice to conduct interviews with students

intends to better understand their media choices and political preferences, and to measure their awareness of cable news influence.

I hope to make a clear distinction here – I am not implying that the interview responses of Trinity College sophomores, juniors, and seniors are in any way representative of the U.S. voting population or even the U.S. college-educated voting population. For my purposes, they serve as a basis for more thoroughly understanding the effects of cable news content on vote choice.

With the analysis of these interviews, my goal is simple: to informally assess and make observations from the candid perceptions of a limited number of Trinity College students. It is legitimate, then, even desirable to consider the findings from these interviews, providing the existence of limitations and the results are carefully applied. These responses are central and revealing in my study of cable news content and political polarization.

### Background

This interview study seeks to evaluate the perspectives of Trinity College sophomore, junior, and senior students. The interview itself is comprised of questions connected to a participant's political party identification, choice for news source(s), and vote choice. The interview consent form and corresponding questionnaire can be found in Appendices A.3 and B.2.

The research question I seek to answer is the following: Does cable news content affect Trinity students' candidate choice(s)? The hypothesis I am testing is the following: Trinity students likely avoid cable news – due to greater media choice and/or more available political information through the Internet, news apps, etc. – but are nevertheless aware of its influence, bias, and potential to shape vote choice.

To collect data, I conducted in-person interviews with twelve undergraduate students. This research method is qualitative, meaning that it is devoid of a numerical element. Just as well, I used purposive sampling to select interview participants and collect data. After considering the make-up of the Trinity College student body, I recognized the need for purposive sampling to heighten both the scale and scope of my model.

I am confident that students did not face any risks by participating in this study. I am also positive that the benefits of the broader study can justify any possible risks that students may have experienced. I do think that the benefits of these interviews can have important and far-reaching effects for the Trinity community. This study seeks to explain how Trinity students respond to cable news polarization and their consequent vote choice(s) during the 2016 presidential election. The knowledge/information that comes from this study will be significant, especially in our current political climate.

#### Critical Evaluation of the Method

Although, as Robert Marvin Gillespie (1992, 6) writes, focused interviews are a “very useful and revealing methodology,” there are often criticisms of this type of qualitative work. The concerns are legitimate and substantial: the primary objection is related to the issue of generalizability of interview findings, because in this type of research that “the samples are small and not selected at random from the population under study” (Gillespie 1992, 2). Unfortunately, this is mostly true of my interview study, as the findings are based off of twelve Trinity College students. In addition, only four of the twelve interviewees are persons of color. As mentioned previously, Trinity College students are not representative of a large-scale, national population – and this sample does not even reflect the characteristics of the student population at the college. This interview study is appropriately limited to a single

college, and within that, an even smaller group of individuals who agreed to participate. The reasons why this interview study is still worthwhile to report about are: one, it is simply an inevitable feature about qualitative studies that samples are small (this should not completely diminish one's work); and two, Trinity students' awareness or insights about cable news content and its influence are important (especially to the final conclusions of this project).

Besides the apprehension about interview surveys – as they pertain to external validity and the limited sample size – there is also a necessary consideration of the power of the interviewer. Gillespie (1992, 3) asserts that “the unconscious biases of the moderator may affect the focus and interpretation of the discussion.” These and other concerns are certainly appropriate given the context. In my experience, however, I was acutely aware of my potential to influence the participants of this study, and took steps to make less of my authority. For example, when asking my list of pre-set questions, I always inquired gently and did not push for more information than the interviewee was willing to give. I let my peers speak freely about topics and ideas – if he or she digressed from the initial query, that was just as well. I treated each interview as more of a polite conversation about the participant and the cable news that they watched during the election, as opposed to a close examination or audit of their political inclinations. I also never made participants aware of my personal and political leanings, my knowledge of cable news bias, or the findings of the bivariate or multivariate tests. I did not want my views to affect theirs. Moreover, my analysis of the interview came long after I sat down with the interviewee, and it is my opinion that the time away from the interview transcripts allowed me to interpret student insights more effectively.

Overall, I knew going in to this interview study that my involvement (despite my best efforts) may slightly influence the responses and/or the general feelings of participants. I realized that my being a female might make a difference, and that my being a fourth-year student at the college might as well. But the questionnaire kept the conversation navigable and flowing, and I altogether censored myself – I do not think I inserted my political opinions in any conversation. My awareness of my interviewer position, coupled with my: one, tendency to answer with generic responses; and two, analyze the interviews with a certain degree of separation from previous findings, helped keep this study as objective as possible. Still, I realize that this study cannot be fully objective as ‘all research is “influenced” by the inquirer’ (Gillespie 1992, 13).

Another point of concern in qualitative research is that which relates to the ethical treatment of human subjects. I similarly learned of the ways I had to be cognizant of this: in order to conduct this study, I had to take part in the CITI Program course. This course is required of anyone involved in research studies with human subjects, and/or have to follow procedures of the Trinity College Institutional Review Board (IRB). The course exposed me to various topics: including, but not limited to: informed consent, assurance of anonymity in the survey design, respect for participants, and how to ensure that the risks are reasonable to anticipated benefits. As a result, I had important technical details that are included in the consent form (see Appendix A.3). In general, I understood my commitment to (and the importance of) treating the participants of this study, my peers, at the highest level both ethically and respectfully. I do not believe that I exploited their time or sentiments in any way. While I wish I had the resources to compensate them for their time, I repeatedly told them how grateful I was for their participation.

## Sample and Participants

Prior to submitting an application to Trinity's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I organized a plan for this interview study. I randomly selected fifty students of the college – all of whom ranged from sophomores to seniors, with freshmen students excluded from any possibility of being chosen – with a goal of eventually interviewing around twenty-five students. My decision to speak with only sophomores, juniors, and seniors was done because those students should have been eligible to vote in the 2016 presidential election. For this reason, I also made the assumption that upperclassmen students may have had a heightened awareness of factors that influenced their vote. The sample for this study was drawn by random selection. Using the most updated version of the Trinity College Student Directory, I chose every fiftieth person on the list. I did this by hand – counting each student one-by-one and circling the individual I would expect to interview. I kept selecting students until I had collected the names of fifty students total. I expected, or hoped, to receive responses from about half of those students. It should be noted that the directory happened to be sorted alphabetically by the first-letter of a student's last name, as opposed to by class grade. This was conducive to the indiscriminate nature I aimed to have in this study – no one student was less likely to be included than another. In the case that a freshman student was selected, I would choose the next student on the list who was also not a freshman. Fortunately, this was rarely a problem.

For this sample, I also sought to add purposive sampling. As Gillespie (1992, 6) writes, purposive sampling involves “choosing subjects based on dimensions which contribute to understanding the population and which will provide an appropriate range of information for the purposes of the research.” What this means in the context of my own

study is that I planned to select a separate group of students (hopefully from each class year) based on desired characteristics. The desired characteristics were concerned with race and gender specifically – I aimed to speak with an equal amount of both women and men, and a proportionate group of white and non-white students (i.e. African American, Asian, and Hispanic students). As mentioned formerly, the reason I wanted to do this is because white, affluent students are over-represented at Trinity, and I needed a sample which was diverse in order to achieve more authentic results. Sadly, I was unable to meet with additional persons of color (other than those who were randomly selected through the Directory and agreed to be interviewed). I did get in contact with several students on campus who were part of persons of color alliances and organizations, but none of those students ended up wanting to be interviewed. I am contented, nevertheless, that at least a few minority students were able to take part in this study.

On February 26, 2018, the interview study earned Trinity College Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. It was on the same day that the study was approved that I sent an email introduction to the fifty students that were randomly selected through the Directory. This first note only garnered three responses. The next day, I sent a follow-up note to the other forty-seven individuals on my list. Another nine responded. All of the resulting interviews were conducted between February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 7<sup>th</sup>.

My conversations with participants ranged from anywhere between five to twenty minutes. The interview included questions about the participant's political party preference, the cable news shows he/she watches, and the additional sources which he/she gets news from. The interview guide can be seen in Appendix B.2. Again, these interviews were intended to describe Trinity students' individual knowledge and sense of cable news

influence. It is with their help that I intended to answer: Does cable news content affect Trinity students' candidate choice(s)? To what extent?

One point struck me about this sample, and should be discussed now: There is a lack of Fox News-watching and also students who voted for Donald Trump. Although I am sure that students outside of this sample did do both, I thought it important to comment on their absence from this sample. A final detail: I will later write about three students who did not disclose who they voted for in the 2016 presidential election. While I cannot say for certain the candidate they selected (only that they did vote), it is clearly possible that they could have voted for Donald Trump.

### Method of Analysis

When going through the interview process, I began to discover reoccurring themes in participant responses. This is the beauty of qualitative data analysis – it provides an opportunity to identify and also discuss abstract constructs brought up by interview participants both during and after data collection. After reviewing the characteristics of the partisan media phenomena – which had already devised common-sense constructs and theoretical orientations of political preferences – I was able to analyze students' personal experiences after the interviews were transcribed. I am careful, still, to follow qualitative tradition closely. Again, my goal is to induce themes from the interviews that properly and efficiently describe the insights of students. An additional goal is to use the interviews as a resource to enrich the prior multivariate analysis. Certainly, though, the findings will mostly stand alone because of reasons related to sample representativeness.



While there are many strategies for discovering themes in text, I plan to utilize techniques which are based on (Ryan and Bernard n.d.): one, an analysis of terms (i.e. word repetitions, key-words-in contexts); and two, a careful reading of larger blocks of text (i.e. compare and contrast, themes, student perspectives and anecdotes). In the end, I hope to better understand the trends related to partisan media influence amongst Trinity College students.

I want to begin by assessing the frequencies of key terms, phrases, and words used by students during the interviews. In order to understand what Trinity students are talking about, it is best to analyze the words they are using. I will analyze the interviews both formally and informally. I will do so informally by reflecting generally on student perceptions and responses. I will do so formally by, for example, (occasionally) counting the number of times a word or term is used. D'Andrade (1991, 287) observes that "indeed, anyone who has listened to long stretches of talk, whether generated by a friend, spouse, workmate, informant, or patient, knows how frequently people circle through the same network of ideas." After conducting twelve in-depth interviews, I noticed that students repeatedly referred to certain terms or ideas associated with the media or vote choice – indicating that students consider these terms to be salient and/or these terms and ideas are reoccurring. I will similarly evaluate the use of key words-in-context. To determine what were key words, I use the method stated above (I simply count the terms or ideas that students said most frequently.) After identifying those key words and terms, I discuss their immediate context. Finally, I form piles, or buckets if you will, of similar meaning.

### How Trinity College Students View the News During the 2016 Presidential Election

The findings of this on-campus interview study are all thanks to twelve undergraduate students at Trinity College. These twelve students received no compensation for their participation, and in some cases, our conversations went long past the designated fifteen-minute window. It is my firm belief that they shared their candid views about media coverage and the 2016 presidential candidates. It is clear to me that the outcome of the 2016 presidential election is still a weight felt by members of the Trinity College campus, and for that reason I am pleased that these students offered their reflections of the political season that is now nearly two years past.

Below are the findings from the interviews I had with twelve students at Trinity College. In the end, I was able to speak with six women and six men; eight of whom were white, two of also: which were African American, and two of which were of Asian descent. I spoke with seven seniors, two juniors, and three sophomores. Three participants in the sample are international students, and the rest are based domestically.

### How Trinity College Students Get Their News

Of the twelve students I spoke with, seven said that they watched cable news related to the 2016 presidential election. The other five said that they did not watch any at all – instead, they claimed to get information in electronic formats, be it through social media applications or online newspapers. After reviewing the transcripts, one point should be noted: not one student was actively avoiding political news during the 2016 presidential election. All of the participants admitted to reading, listening, or watching news about the campaign or

the election in some capacity – and all of them appeared to realize that their sources could have affected their perspectives.

I was surprised to hear that more than half of the sample – about 58% – said that they watched cable news during the 2016 general election. I was surprised to find this out because it is counterintuitive to what I have always known to be true. Conventional wisdom holds that TV news watching is dramatically lower for young adults (Mitchell et al. 2016). Yet, more than half of the Trinity students that I spoke with did watch cable news related to the presidential election. For those who did watch cable news, the breakdown of the shows that they watched is as follows: four students watched CNN, one student watched MSNBC, one student watched CNN and MSNBC, and one student watched CNN and Fox News.

Student reasoning for viewing these networks ranges greatly. Interestingly, most students who admit watching cable news attribute their doing so to their parents, families, or to the people they surround themselves with generally. Five out of the seven spoke to this point. Three sophomore and junior students said that their parents usually keep, in their case, CNN running in their homes daily. One junior student said she would wake up to her parents watching MSNBC, so it just made sense to watch with them. Another sophomore spoke to the same parental guidance: “Like I said my parents watched that, I also just kind of thought that they had the best news coverage of it and the opinions of the people speaking were kind of in line with what I was thinking.” A senior, male student said, “he would never open the TV” if he were alone, he only watched cable news with friends. When he’s with friends, he explained, they only watch CNN because “a lot” of his friends are “against watching Fox News.” That said, the student also noted: “But for me, it’s just like, news is news. I’m fine hearing both sides even though one source may sound a little one-sided.” The one senior,

female student who watches both CNN and MSNBC said something important about her cable news viewership (as it relates to her family). When asked how she decided to watch those networks/shows, she responded: “I think MSNBC feels familiar to me. It’s something my mom would put on, or CNN. She would put on either one of those. We’re not a Fox News family, so that feels almost threatening for me to hear it on.” Ironically, the decision for students to watch cable news [elucidates exposes?] the generational gap of cable news audiences. The students who said they watched cable news about the campaign or the election, in most cases, happened to have been led that way by their families or friends. Their willingness to effectively fall in line with the partisan cable news outlet of their parents or friends also elucidates how party ID and/or vote can be attributed to long-established family traditions.

As mentioned, five out of the twelve students I spoke to did not watch cable news. These students instead opted for online sources such as The New York Times, The Daily Mail, or the Atlantic. Of those five students, two said that they used social media applications such as Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook to get news about the presidential election. Even though my research question is concerned with the effect of cable news content, I was glad to hear about participants’ choice to use online sources. This was an element that I was not able to evaluate in my bivariate and multivariate analysis that I would have liked to. I will discuss the findings of non-cable participants at length in the forthcoming sections.

### Cable News’ Credibility Slips Among Trinity Students

Whether they watched cable news or not during the presidential election, one point is evident: Trinity students have a growing apprehension as to how much of the news surrounding the campaign can be trusted. As a whole, Trinity students do not believe the

major networks to be credible. Even the interviewees who watched cable news admitted its content was divergent from one network to another, and also from what they were seeing online or elsewhere. Interestingly, though, students did feel that the cable news media did (for the most part) accurately portray the candidates and the campaigns. They just had overwhelmingly negative interpretations of the major cable news networks themselves. It was their attitude towards the cable news media that was slipping.

Senior 4 denounced the integrity of the cable news media quite firmly: “I look at Fox News as sort of a joke. I mean, not that it’s not serious with what’s going on with Fox News, but I don’t take it... it’s not journalism to me watching it. As far as MSNBC, they have shows... I know someone with a different political opinion could not sit through Rachel Maddow. I watch Rachel Maddow knowing the bias. You know what I mean?” Sophomore 1 was angered by how influential the cable news media was: “... you have to search out other sources to try and find different truths and different things and come together and say, ‘this is congruent with this’ and ‘this doesn’t make sense’ based on what would be with my other findings.’ Several students (who also avoided cable news during the election) expressed this very same concern – they took to online sources, and effectively had to hunt for “real news” since cable was so unreliable.

Students’ undeniable distrust of the cable news media was truly made clear in a term they kept referring to: Fake News. It was alarming how often it was said. Senior 6 said it after my first question: “I’ve always been tuned into politics,” he noted, “The first thing I do whenever I get back to my room is turn on CNN. Some people consider that Fake News of course.” Sometimes it was less nonchalant. Sophomore 2 said: “I think they [networks] definitely showed a lot of bias and I think that definitely hurt some candidates. I felt like if

they were more focused on putting out the facts, and letting people decide for themselves instead of trying to sway opinion. I think a lot of people got upset that they were trying to sway their opinion, and that's where the whole 'Fake News' came from." Sophomore 3 said: "People are listening to others who confirm their biases, and I can say that... some people could say about me, since I listen to CNN, Fake News or whatever." Senior 3 said that last year, she did "a full class project about Fake News" because the issue was so prevalent. Fake News was a critical part of students' lives nearly two years ago, and clearly still is today.

Towards the end of the interview, I asked participants to discuss the role of the news media in our democracy. Most participants explained that they thought it was important, and powerful. Senior 7 said she thought it was powerful "in negative ways." Sophomore 2 said he thought "the media definitely has a huge impact on how our presidential election went." Senior 3 echoed that statement, saying, "media sources... are making these conscious decisions of who they support and who they don't want to support. And that sort of becomes affecting certain legislation." Senior 5 said that he thought that the cable news outlets maintained a big role because "whatever the media says, they will be swayed by it."

In essence, Trinity students did not feel that the cable news media, or the media at all for that matter, fulfilled its role to the public. They did not see it as a reputable source. As Senior 3 noted: "They're all coming from an angle."

#### Cable News Networks Are Only in it for Entertainment and Business

Several Trinity students described the tension between journalism and commercialism specifically as it relates to cable news content. For some, this heightened their willingness to watch the news because it was exciting. For others, cable news began to look less and less worthy of their time.

When I asked participants about the responsibility they feel cable networks have in comparison to print news, a few of them brought up the fact that people often watch cable news for reasons other than its intended purpose. They explained that the popular cable news stations are focused on their content being entertaining, as networks are interested in keeping their viewers and ratings. Senior 7 said: “Well, I feel like they should have the same responsibility, but because it’s almost like a 24/7 news cycle, they kind of fluff it up and fill it up try and get the air-time or fill the air-time that they have to fill.” Other students were not as kind to cable news stations. Sophomore 1 said he thought that the cable news media did a poor job in fulfilling its role “...because if we’re predicated on truth, you know there’s a lot of things that are just eye-popping... they just need headlines.” Sophomore 3 offered that the news media is “very important,” but also that ... there were so many different news stories that I personally feel didn’t need to be covered, that were covered just for the pure fact that it’s entertainment for the watchers and stuff like that. I’d say it’s important... but at the end of the day it’s not the most reliable and what they’re covering isn’t that important.” Sophomore 1 said “the general idea with cable news is that their number one goal isn’t to report news, but to get advertising dollars.” Senior 4 suggested a similar notion that stuck with me: “Realistically, a lot of it is just based on getting viewership, and so everything is going to be sensationalized. But I think as long as you are watching with a sort of a keen eye... but who actually does? And like I said before I almost view it as entertainment television – where it’s like ‘yeah, I’m just going to watch this anyway.’”

### “Polarization” and Voting

Perhaps the most common theme that arose out of these interviews was that of “polarization.” There were pervasive comments made by Trinity students in direct reference

to the partisan identity and bias of the media, which many deemed as a signal that the country is moving in a negative direction. It should come as no surprise that polarization is one of the most dominant terms or themes in student discussions of U.S. politics – a reporter at the Atlantic concedes that “over the past few decades, the public has become sharply divided across partisan and ideological lines” (Rauch 2016). Is it significant, then, that Trinity College students maintain an (acute) awareness of media bias? It is important for several reasons – the first being that it is an idea that is mentioned by every participant to at least some degree. Certainly, the media itself, as well as campus culture, can be to blame for this. Journalists, politicians, and nearly everyone in the public sphere harp on the divergences in national political discourse. But the scope to which students – ranging from sophomores to seniors, of differing backgrounds, and who maintain opposing party views – can speak articulately about cable news slant is striking.

For the five students who did not watch cable news related to the 2016 presidential election, they all cited “polarization” as a justification. This cannot be a simple coincidence. Those who watched cable news tended to agree. Sophomore 1 mentioned that he had a problem with the “agenda” that cable sources have – and the accompanying advertising dollars these networks receive for putting forth a certain ideological brand – and also the “stigma associated with whatever news media you follow.” When asked to reflect on the role of the media in our democracy, Junior 1 responded that she thought it is “incredibly polarized,” and “geared toward whatever audience they want.” Other participants were equally as cognizant. Junior 2 said: “I know it’s kind of biased, so they only show certain content.” Senior 1 said cable networks did a bad job in fulfilling their role during the presidential election because “they were so biased.” Senior 2 said that this election allowed



her to see how important the media is in terms of “making people have opinions,” noting, “it has really polarized people.” Junior 1 said he thinks “...it’s incredibly polarized. And... geared toward whatever audience they want.”

Some students spoke to cable news polarization as a matter-of-fact, acknowledging its influence but denying its effect on them. Sophomore 3 confessed that since he watched CNN, “it was more so towards Hillary Clinton... it definitely added on to my opinion.” For sophomore 2, partisan cable news had the reverse effect: the biased content prompted him to “stay away from politics in general.” These perspectives forced me to consider the extent to which the cable news media should even have a role in political discourse.

Of the twelve students in the sample, nine said that they voted in the 2016 presidential election. One participant said that he was unable to send his write-in vote on time, which is why he did not vote. Two participants who also did not vote could not as they were international students, and were ineligible to do so as non-U.S. citizens. Still, the majority of the sample voted (75%). Also, seven students self-identified as Democrats, and three self-identified as Republicans. One student identified as a moderate. One student identified as a left-leaning Independent. Overall, participants realized the magnitude of the cable news media, and they admitted the influence that it likely had on their vote. Of the students who did not watch cable news, two voted for Hillary Clinton, one voted for the Independent candidate, one wrote-in her father’s name, and one was ineligible to vote. Of the students who did watch cable news, three did not say who they voted for (only that they did vote), three voted for Hillary Clinton, and one was ineligible to vote.

On the topic of voting, I noticed student aversion to both of the major party candidates (Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton). When I asked participants to consider the

deciding factors in how they voted, most spoke to this point. Senior 1 was one of the few self-identified Republicans in the sample. He said that even though he is a conservative, he doesn't "agree with Donald Trump" and he really didn't agree with Hillary Clinton. He ultimately decided to vote for "the first woman president, and be able to say that." Senior 6 said: "...I wasn't not going to vote, and I couldn't vote for someone like Trump. If there was anybody else besides Hillary who had a chance of winning, I would've voted for that person." Senior 2 said she voted for the Democratic candidate because "... the values of the Republican candidate were just so outside of my comfort zone and values that I don't think it would've been something I would've felt proud of for voting for." Senior 7 said that she did not "trust Hillary Clinton with an ounce" of her being, so she could not vote for her. "But on the other hand," she asserted, "Donald Trump is such a wild card and I think I knew that before the election... I voted third-party just because I wanted to vote." If nothing else, these interviews revealed Trinity students' disdain for the candidates running in the first election they were able to vote in.

### Conclusion

The findings that resulted from my interviews with Trinity students are telling because they are so reactionary. They make clear students' deep consciousness of cable news biases; of their feelings that cable news simply serves an entertainment function; and of the disappointment they had in choosing a candidate on the ballot.

There were more points made by students that were valuable, but given time constraints it was not possible to cover them all. For instance, one student brought up the "free air-time" that Donald Trump received from the cable news media – this sophomore, female student described it as a "constant stream of him, and it was almost like you couldn't

look away.” A senior, male student said that “networks like CNN” were giving “Trump free coverage that they didn’t give Bernie, and he had a great message that I’m sure a lot of people would’ve resonated with.” Senior 4 (a white female) stated it again: “Well, if we’re talking about the election, we can’t deny that Trump getting free air-time really boosted him.” Another point I found interesting was that Fox News was necessarily a part of every conversation I had, which was unlike CNN or MSNBC (which some students did not bring up at all). Students who did not even watch a minute of Fox News content had intense critiques of it.

Again, I am extremely grateful for student participation in this interview study. The knowledge that they imparted certainly leaves a lasting impact on me, and on those who are concerned for the future of our democracy. We all were witness to a particularly controversial election season, and their comments help us to process the factors that contributed to the 2016 election outcome.

## Appendix A.3

This appendix provides the interview survey form that was read and signed by all participants in this study.

### Interview Survey Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how undergraduate students at Trinity College perceive cable news content. This interview is a part of my political science senior thesis project. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**DESCRIPTION:** The purpose of this interview survey is to learn about how youth process information, and where they get their news from. If you agree to take part in this study, I will conduct an in-person interview with you. The interview will include questions about your political party preference, the cable news shows you watch, and the sources you get your news from. With your permission, I would also like to tape-record the interview.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** The interview will take about 15 minutes to complete.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your political ideology, or cable news preferences, to be personal or sensitive. Please refer to your participants rights below.

I cannot guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this study. I hope to learn more about the students at Trinity College and their perspective(s) of the cable news media in the 2016 presidential election.

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this study, please understand your participation is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Additionally, your responses will be kept confidential. The results of this interview study may be presented or published in my final thesis paper, and/or your responses may be quoted in an on-campus thesis presentation at the conclusion of the semester. Your individual privacy will be mainlined in all published and written data resulting from the study. Your name will be anonymized in the event that any part of your interview is presented or published. In addition, any contextual names you may reference (e.g. organizations you work for, the town you work in, a family member's name, and so on) will be anonymized before being presented or published. If I tape-record the interview, I will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within a month of its taping. The interview transcript will be destroyed within two months of its tape-recorded date. Finally, any interview notes I take during the interview will be kept in a locked file; only I will have access to the records.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** The researcher conducting this study is Amanda Muccio. Please ask any questions you have immediately. If you have questions in the future, you may contact Amanda at [amanda.muccio@trincoll.edu](mailto:amanda.muccio@trincoll.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at their website <https://commons.trincoll.edu/irb/>.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT:** I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I have asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B.2

This appendix provides the email introduction and interview guide used in this study.

### Interview Guide:

February 2018

### Email Introduction:

My name is Amanda Muccio and I am writing a political science senior thesis regarding cable news content in the 2016 presidential election. As part of the project, I selected students from Trinity College to interview, and I would be most grateful if I could meet with you.

I would like to interview you in person and hope that you are available during the week of February 26<sup>th</sup> or March 5<sup>th</sup>. I have about ten questions to ask and I'll probably take 15 minutes of your time. I appreciate your consideration of my request.

I will send a follow-up email to see if you are available or you may leave me a message for me using my information below. Thank you so much and I look forward to meeting with you.

Best,

Amanda Muccio

201-787-0882

[amanda.muccio@trincoll.edu](mailto:amanda.muccio@trincoll.edu)

### In-Person Interview Introduction:

“Thank you so much for meeting with me. Just to refresh your memory, I’m writing a political science senior thesis about the cable news media in the 2016 presidential election. I am interested in learning more about where Trinity students get their news from, and how they develop political positions.”

“I would like to tape the interview just so that we can have more of a conversation without rushed notetaking. Would that be alright with you? If you feel uncomfortable or want to say something off the record, I am happy to turn it off.”

“Also, the results of this interview study may be published in my final senior thesis paper, and/or your responses may be quoted in an on-campus thesis presentation at the conclusion of the semester. Please know that your individual privacy will be mainlined in all published and written data resulting from the study. Your name and any identifying details you may reference (such as any organizations you work for, the town you work in, a family member’s name, etc.) will be anonymized before being presented or published. Additionally, I will destroy the interview tape recording after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within a month of its taping. The interview transcript will be destroyed within two months of its tape-recorded date. Finally, any interview notes I take during the interview will be kept in a locked file; only I will have access to the records.”

### Opening Questions

*My general approach here is to ease students into more sensitive questions about political views and party preference.*

1. To begin with, I’m interested to hear a bit about you. Can you tell me about where you’re from and what you’re involved with on campus?
  2. Tell me about how you gathered information about the 2016 presidential election.
- Probe: did you watch cable news related to the 2016 presidential election?

### Interview Questions: Track 1

If YES, the respondent does watch cable news, follow this track:

3. If so, what shows, and on what networks?
4. How did you decide to watch those networks/shows?
- Probe: When you're choosing a networks or news show, to what extent does it matter whether the show lines up with your views on politics?
5. How frequently did you watch cable news related to the 2016 presidential election? How often do you watch it now?
6. If you had to guess, what percentage of news did you get from cable networks? What percentage from non-cable, online news sources?
- 6a. To what extent did cable news content influence your opinions about the candidates or the campaigns?
- To what extent did other sources of news influence your opinions about the candidates and the campaign?
7. What do you see as the role of the news media in our democracy?
- Probe: In the 2016 election, how would you say that the media did in fulfilling that role?
- Probe: Do you think cable networks have more, less, or the same responsibility as print news to accurately report news?
- Probe: To what extent do you think that the cable news reports accurately represented the candidates?
8. Overall, how would you characterize you attitude towards the cable news media?
9. Did you vote in the 2016 presidential election? If so, what were the deciding factors in how you voted? How do you think the cable news you watched influenced your vote, if at all? What about other information sources?
- 9a. If you didn't vote, did you prefer one candidate to another? How do you think the cable news you watched influenced your vote, if at all? What about other information sources?
9. In general, do you have a party preference? (If yes) What is your party preference?
10. I'm really interested in how our generation sees the media and how the media influences our political views and actions. Is there anything else you think I should know about this, anything else that's come up as we've been talking?

#### Interview Questions: Track 2

If NO, the respondent does not watch cable news, follow this track:

3. If not, did you get news about the election from sources besides cable news? If so, what sources did you use?
4. Why did you select the non-cable sources?
5. To what extent did other sources of news influence your opinions about the candidates and the campaign?
6. What do you see as the role of the news media in our democracy?
- Probe: In the 2016 election, how would you say that the media did in fulfilling that role?
- Probe: Do you think cable networks have more, less, or the same responsibility as print news to accurately report news?
- Probe: To what extent do you think that the cable news reports accurately represented the candidates?
7. Overall, how would you characterize you attitude towards the cable news media?

8. Did you vote in the 2016 presidential election? If so, what were the deciding factors in how you voted? How do you think news sources influenced your vote, if at all?

8a. If you didn't vote, did you prefer one candidate to another? How do you think the news sources you watched influenced your vote, if at all? What about other information sources?

9. Do you have a party preference? (If yes) What is your party preference?

10. I'm really interested in how our generation sees the media and how the media influences our political views and actions. Is there anything else you think I should know about this, anything else that's come up as we've been talking?

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Over the course of the 2017-2018 academic year, I was focused on resolving one broad, overarching question: Does cable news content affect candidate choice? To explore this relationship, I offered five related questions that I would answer in my chapters: First, does a relationship between partisan cable news consumption and vote choice exist? Second, what demographic groups are most affected by cable news content? Third, to what extent did partisan cable news content influence our most recent presidential election? From the results of the bivariate chapter, I further evaluated: how important are partisan cable news networks, since their audience is somewhat modest? The fifth question was to be answered locally: How do Trinity College students understand the connection between cable news content and candidate choice?

At the heart of these questions is a desire to analyze the association between partisan cable networks – that is, opinion-based programming (i.e. CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC) – and our political opinions and the decisions we make in the ballot box. This is a relationship which seemed to be at the forefront of many American minds eighteen months ago, as we struggled to understand the implications of unrelenting bias and unfair cable news coverage during the 2016 presidential election and campaign. I was just as eager for an answer to the puzzle described above.

This project actually quantifies the influence, or effect, of the major cable news networks on Americans' likelihood of voting for Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. I argue that partisan cable news – the primetime commentary-based shows – have significant consequences for U.S. politics. The partisan media did have an impact on the American electorate, wherein: one, Fox News was responsible for greater probabilities of their white



audience voting for Trump; and two, despite their relatively limited audience, cable news networks contributed to polarized beliefs about the two major party candidates. I found that two of the main partisan cable news networks (i.e. CNN and Fox News) contributed to the election of the current POTUS. This being said, the ideology that pervades CNN is highly contested. Bode (2014) writes that this is because “CNN does plenty of reporting on news outside the political sphere, which largely avoids questions of slant or spin.” Point well taken: It is difficult to classify CNN in particular because there really is no holistic CNN. Their breaking news/boots-on-the-ground reporting, which is middle of the road, is different from their commentary-based shows. The opinion-based programming on CNN does present a leftward bias. I want to clarify, and reiterate: I use the term “partisan” to describe the major cable news networks (including CNN) because my study of these networks is defined by their opinion-based primetime programs. For example, CNN is defined by certain leftward-leaning shows that were included by the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES). These CNN shows are Anderson Cooper 360 and Erin Burnett Outfront. Therefore, this thesis is not a referendum on CNN in general, but it is so for the partisan journalistic ideology of certain shows that appear on CNN. On a somewhat separate note, some have commented that CNN gave Donald Trump a lot of coverage (and gave Hillary Clinton plenty of negative coverage) that helped him get elected. Even if this happened inadvertently, I am not in a position to speculate about whether backlash about CNN’s partisan views created a pro-Trump sentiment.

My interview study showed that Trinity College undergraduates are aware of the increasingly divisive, intolerant viewpoints that were displayed in cable news content during the campaign. I observed what can only be described as darkly comic: students thought cable

news content during the election to be little more than a source of entertainment – but it didn't stop them from watching. Students (who were also cable news viewers) also described cable news content to be reinforcing their political positions, which they said contributed to their own dislike of the other party and its presidential candidate. It is undeniable that partisan media mattered in the 2016 presidential election, and continue to do so for American politics. All in all, partisan cable news (for watchers and non-watchers) can be a significant determinant in vote choice.

### A Synopsis of the Findings

In Chapter 2, I answered the first two questions I raised earlier. In order to answer the over-arching research question: Does cable news content affect vote choice? I first needed to understand if and to what extent a relationship between the two variables exists. If partisan cable networks do affect, or polarize, their viewers, I had to describe that association. This is deceptively difficult to do because of viewers' partisan attachments, which distorts their preference formation, thereby exaggerating the real connection of TV programs to vote. I am careful to avoid saying I *proved* that a relationship between the two exists, because of these issues related to causality. But after the bivariate analysis of ANES data, I found that partisan cable news content (especially the right-leaning Fox News) does have a substantively and statistically significant correlation with vote choice (i.e. votes in favor of either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump). Additionally, I made critical observations about descriptive characteristics for respondents' watching patterns (e.g. race, gender, education level); and the discrepancies between the cable news viewership of Clinton and Trump voters (Clinton voters watched cable news to a much lesser degree than did Trump voters). The bivariate

measures (e.g. correlations) introduced the relationship between cable news and vote choice, and the following chapters hardened those initial findings.

After determining the preliminary influence of CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC, I wanted to quantify how much these networks affect their viewers/the electorate. I wondered if the partisan cable news media would have a far-reaching effect, given that relatively small portion of the population tunes into the shows at all. However, the multivariate analysis of the 2016 ANES data shows—consistent with the models of scholars studying slanted media on previous elections – that the effect of cable news content is striking. The logit models show that the influence of partisan cable news content is greatest for those who watch Fox News and no other channel. In other words, Fox News created the largest effect on viewers’ vote choice. While those who watch CNN and no other cable channel do have a greater probability of voting for Clinton, but Fox News has undeniably more influence than its liberal counterpart. Interestingly, MSNBC did not maintain a statistically or substantively significant effect on its viewers. Still, two points should be made in relation to these findings: one, these individuals are likely more extreme than the typical American voter, so it is only logical that the cable news they watched made their views more intense – and then they voted accordingly. Perhaps the most illustrative of conclusions about cable news influence can be made in reference to individuals who reported watching no cable news during the campaign or election. The logit regressions demonstrate that both men and women (while controlling for race, gender, etc.) were more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton by nearly eighteen percentage points if they avoided cable news. All in all, the multivariate analysis clarified how partisan media was a cause of political division during the most recent presidential election – the content (especially that of Fox News) is at least partly accountable for viewers’

votes for Donald Trump. These findings reveal an asymmetric polarization that is in line with the ANES bivariate analysis.

My fifth and final question is one I was glad I was able to ask. The answer(s) serve as the content for my third chapter, which is entitled “Student Reactions to Cable News Influence in the 2016 Presidential Election.” After interviewing with twelve undergraduate students at Trinity College, I can discuss (at a more profound level) the ways that the students gathered news about the 2016 presidential campaign and election. Their insights clarified how the partisan cable news media shaped how they behaved during the election; whether or not it increased their party voting; and how it may have changed their impressions of the presidential candidates. Although the attitudes and/or perspectives of twelve Trinity College students cannot be applied to young adults generally, they should still be deemed important. They are important for two reasons: one, the interviews provide a richer, more in-depth understanding about the partisan cable news effects; and two, student reactions expose a sense of agreement about our contemporary political environment. The conversations I had with twelve students helped me to understand how news sources have the potential to shape more than vote choice – they pointed out how the media as we know it (cable news, online news outlets, social media avenues) can and do mold how the public interpreted the 2016 presidential election.

The combined answers to these five questions ultimately illuminate that cable news content leaves a residual effect on the opinions and beliefs of its audience. The bivariate analysis brought the relationship between cable network choice and vote choice to light – exposing the power of Fox News, and subsequently, the diminished viewership of cable news by Clinton voters (and limited viewership of cable news more generally). The multivariate

analysis found the effects of race on the vote, as well as, separately, the effects of cable network choice. These logit tables reiterated the troubling influence of Fox News – as the right-leaning network outweighs partisanship and selective exposure. Instead of providing speculation as to why Fox News is in fact the most-watched and most influential of the networks, I will simply encourage it to be area of future research.

The results of the multivariate analysis specifically show that there is a strong effect of like-minded cable news content in bolstering viewers' vote choice for their respective candidate (e.g. Fox News viewers voting for Donald Trump, CNN viewers voting for Hillary Clinton). This does not go against the grain of the conclusions of other media polarization scholars (Levendusky 2013; Martin and Yurukoglu 2017). What is perhaps fascinatingly bizarre in my multivariate findings is that viewers who consumed cross-cutting cable news content during the 2016 presidential election – that is, they purposely watched cable news that went against their existing party ID or beliefs – were equally as likely to vote for the given candidate. For example, both Democrats and Republicans appear to have a greater likelihood of voting for Trump when they watch at least some, or only Fox News. The notion that partisan cable news content disproportionately affects individual's vote choice (regardless of preexisting attitudes, gender, and education level) is completely unexpected. This finding makes one point clear: not everything can be explained by my models. Certainly, journalists, pundits, and social scientists alike concur that this was the most unforeseen election outcome in American history (Tur 2017). But it is difficult to explain why individuals with strong political attitudes, in this particular presidential election, would shift their voting behavior so markedly because of Fox News and CNN. Perhaps the reasoning behind the unstable voting behavior is because of the largely negative cable coverage of Hillary Clinton and Donald

Trump. Perhaps it is simply because Democrats thought Fox News to be rather credible during the presidential campaign and election (and vis-à-vis for Republicans and CNN). Regardless, this finding will be important to unpack and examine in forthcoming studies.

### The Cable News Media and Polarization During the 2016 Presidential Election

The discussion in chapter 3 – which describes the collective findings of the bivariate and multivariate analysis – illustrates the extent to which partisan cable news polarizes its viewers. As noted, Fox News is the most influential network – signaling that more attention was paid to the pro-Trump, highly partisan source. Watching Fox News increased non-college educated white individuals' likelihood of voting for Donald Trump by twenty-three to twenty-four percentage points. The effect is true for Democrats as well. Watching Fox News only also increased college-educated individual's chances of voting for Donald Trump by twenty-eight percentage points. On the other hand, CNN increased non-college educated and college educated white men's and white women's chances of voting for Clinton (with no difference by education level) by about eleven percentage points. This is a noticeably reduced partisan effect in comparison to the conservative Fox News. The discrepancy between these two cable networks indicates asymmetric polarization on the right, in which Fox News is far and away the dominant TV news channel – at least, in terms of influencing voters.

Something important to note from prior chapters is that of the individuals in the 2016 American National Election Study who reported watching cable news, the majority preferred to watch either Fox News or the two other partisan cable networks (CNN or MSNBC). This is a revealing finding in itself. It means that individuals who did watch cable news during the 2016 election purposefully consumed biased content. Moreover, the greatest number of

respondents watched Fox News only (if we disregard those who did not watch cable at all). As such, there is a reinforcing nature related to cable news consumption. Viewers consume partisan cable news, and those same viewers become more polarized. If viewers watch only one partisan cable network (i.e. CNN or Fox News), their probability of voting for the respective party candidate increases immensely. This is a clear illustration of how partisan cable news programs can influence vote choice.

### The Post-Broadcast Media Sphere

The findings of this thesis are primarily interested in the effect of the most popular prime-time opinion programs on viewers (and U.S. eligible voters). A comment I have received numerous times – and rightfully so – is concerned with my lack of assessment of other partisan media outlets. Originally, I did not want to discuss the rest of our partisan media environment because I do not have a definitive answer to any question. I'm not entitled to comment on areas outside of partisan cable news because the results of the ANES bivariate or multivariate analyses cannot be generalized to a similar debate about partisan websites, radio shows, podcasts, or the like. That being said, widespread media bias was certainly an area of concern for Trinity College students. They were quick to express their anxieties about the integrity of partisan media more generally – while many did claim to have watched cable news during the 2016 presidential election, all of them got some degree of political news from online sources (e.g. New York Times, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram). I feel I owe it to them to include one particular concern, which both impressed and inspired me.

One particularly interesting point that came up in the twelve conversations I had with Trinity College undergraduates was about journalistic integrity. Part of the reason why this

topic came up was because I asked students the following question: “Do you think cable networks have more, less, or the same responsibility as print news to accurately report the news?” This question, more than others, sparked tangents and/or drawn-out responses. The general consensus is abbreviated by the reaction of one junior student: “No, they don’t.” I wanted her to clarify, so I asked: “You believe they... do not have the same responsibility?” Her response: “No, I think they should. But I don’t think they have the same responsibility.” What this junior student, and so many other students were getting at, was the inclination that cable news networks do not need to maintain the same soundness or validity that print sources are held to. One student elaborated by explaining that he thought cable news networks are important, but sometimes they are more biased than print sources. Another student brought up how factual misinformation “Fake News” can be “anywhere” – insinuating it exists in cable and print formats.

One student’s concerns about the integrity of her news sources eventually led to a crucial assertion. A senior, female student said: “I obviously didn’t watch it [cable news] ‘cause I didn’t really have access to it, but I also feel like I just wouldn’t watch it... I would try not to get it to sway my opinions or change my ideas just because each network is so one-sided. So, I would stick to print news like the New York Times or first accounts and maybe go instead to candidates’ websites and actually see what their policy stances are.” Her point got me thinking: if I were to keep exploring the topic of partisan media and its influence, I would certainly want to understand more about how partisan cable consumption might change how individuals go online and look for information. The relationship between journalistic responsibility, partisan TV news, and print/online sources would be a constructive subject matter for future studies.



## The Cable News Media and Democracy

After reading this thesis, you might be wondering: why does any of this matter? So *what* that partisan cable news does influence viewers' vote choice? Why is this important in the modern U.S. political sphere? As Levendusky (2017, 156) writes: "the United States had a partisan press for the first 150 years of our existence, and our democracy survived." Therefore, someone might add: what difference does Fox News (or, on a much lower level, CNN) really make? One might question why the partisan, twenty-four-hour news cycle would suddenly make difference when it has been around for decades.

But my objective and empirical ANES findings present several points worth added consideration. The first, and arguably most significant discovery, is that the conservative-leaning Fox News helped to elect Donald Trump, and effectively discouraged viewers from voting for Hillary Clinton. The second finding is that CNN does not have nearly as much influence as Fox News on vote choice, and MSNBC has even less of an impact than did CNN. Another logit model found that not watching any cable at all vastly increases the likelihood that non-college educated and college-educated individuals would vote for Hillary Clinton. This is not to say that partisan media has never helped a president win an election before. But the partisan cable news media (i.e. Fox News) threw their support behind the Republican presidential candidate, who ultimately pulled off "the biggest upset in U.S. history" (Goldmacher and Schreckinger 2016). We have to really consider the consequence of this. We should be asking: What if cable news was at least partially accountable for Trump's election? What other implications does partisan media have American politics? What, if anything, can or should be done? Should government, or a third-party, be limiting the scope of the cable news or online media as a result?

Given that only a small number of Americans tune into partisan cable news, we should also examine how shows on Fox News and CNN *still* have such a large impact on our decisions in the voting booth. The multivariate analysis showed that when partisan cable news was avoided leading up to the 2016 presidential election, individuals had an eighteen-percentage point greater probability of voting for Hillary Clinton. It is not a far-stretch to assume that non-cable watchers were more likely to vote for Clinton simply because they were not tuning in to partisan cable news – these networks help “... mold the larger political agenda and political discussion in America” (Levendusky 2013, 148). While I do not want to speculate, one might consider whether the content of the mainstream and partisan cable news networks either intentionally and/or inadvertently helped elect Trump. By that math, avoiding cable news content may have allowed for a greater affinity to Clinton. As such, the influence of partisan cable news media is felt even for Americans who never tuned in to Erin Burnett, Anderson Cooper, Sean Hannity or Bill O’Reilly. Even if the national cable news audience is limited, its effect on the U.S. population is very real.

My empirical findings (from ANES data) describe a partisan cable news environment that has detrimental effects on both viewers’ and non-viewers vote choice. Although I did not analyze the partisan media sphere as it relates to online sources and social media (and in no way claim to causally interpret the election result), I would still suggest that biased media (in any form) has consequences for U.S. citizens – due to the reactions from Trinity College students. Nevertheless, I am hopeful that the results of this study will serve as a basis to our understanding of the 2016 presidential election. I am looking forward to scholars’ continued study of partisan cable news and the media more generally in our ever-changing political sphere.

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