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Selective News Consumption and Individual Difference Variables on Political Polarization

by

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Honours Thesis – Psych 4891

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Abstract:

The increasingly involved relationship between news media and politics, particularly in the United States of America, warrants further scientific exploration into the dynamics that influence an individual's political attitudes, and by extension their political alignment. The present study examined the relationships between individuals' levels of political news consumption, the preference to selectively consume news, rates of political awareness, certain individual difference variables, corresponding political attitudes, and rates of political polarization. The individual difference variables measured were Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), Social-Dominance Orientation (SDO), Need for Cognition (NFC), and Egalitarianism. Political news consumption was hypothesized to predict political awareness. As political news consumption increased, preference to selectively choose news was hypothesized to predict greater levels of polarization, unless a high score on NFC was present. High scores on Egalitarianism were expected to predict typically left-wing or liberal attitudes, whereas high scores on RWA and SDO were expected to predict typically right-wing or conservative attitudes. Higher levels of political awareness were expected to strengthen the relationships between ideologies and specific political attitudes. Through Amazon Mechanical Turk, 379 residents of the United States (141 males, 237 females, 1 undisclosed) ranging from 19-74 years of age ( $M = 41.91$ ,  $SD = 13.33$ ) were assessed using a series of questionnaires administered online. Consumption of political news via Internet sources was found to significantly predict political awareness. Egalitarianism, RWA, and SDO were found to predict their respective political attitudes, with political awareness strengthening the relationship. Implications of the findings and directions for future research are discussed.

### Selective News Consumption and Individual Difference Factors on Political Polarization

Rates of political polarization in the United States have continued to steadily rise over recent decades (Doherty, 2014), as have the amounts of available news outlets, and the accessibility of various political perspectives via media has widened (Messing & Westwood, 2014). Understanding how individuals consume and interpret this media and the relationship their news consumption holds with certain individual difference factors may help explain the recent increase of political polarization the United States has experienced. The influence of selective exposure on individual's political news consumption habits have consistently been demonstrated to suggest that people tend to respond more positively to messages containing pro-attitudinal than counter-attitudinal information (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman 2012, Prior, 2005; Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata, 2013). The application of selective exposure by an audience when consuming political news can have more tangible consequences than the use of selective exposure when consuming other forms of media (such as entertainment television), as the selective consumption of political media has been shown to predict greatly increased rates political polarization (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2010).

The goal of this study was to explore the possible relationships between individuals' political news consumption across varying mediums of news media, their preference to selectively consume political news, political awareness, political attitudes, and political polarization along the political left/right alignment. This study also took into account several individual difference factors (Right-Wing Authoritarianism, Social-Dominance Orientation, Egalitarianism, and Need for Cognition), which were expected to predict the

political attitudes of participants. While the influence of selective exposure in news consumption on political polarization has been established, it is necessary to consider its role in combination with the influence of individual difference factors (particularly need for cognition, which has not been previously examined in this context) in the process of political polarization. The identification of individual difference factors that correlate most strongly with political polarization may allow for an increased capability to predict a susceptibility to polarization using measures of the relevant individual difference factors.

### **Political Polarization**

For the purpose of this study, political polarization can be considered the movement of individuals from more centric positions to more extreme positions (either left or right) on the political alignment spectrum. It is important to note that polarization refers to a split of political opinions between left and right wings, not an overall shift towards the left or right wings, and that when ideological divide occurs or widens, the dialogue between political parties is often limited (Doherty, 2014). Mutz and Mondak (2006) found that the exposure to diverse viewpoints available during an open dialogue can increase political tolerance as well as an understanding of opposing viewpoints. In relation to the selective consumption of political news, there is strong evidence that political partisan selective exposure is related to political polarization, with most of the evidence indicating selective exposure as a causal factor of polarization, and some evidence of a bi-directional relationship (Stroud, 2010). Also examining the role of partisan influence, Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) compared issue partisanship (correlation of issue attitudes with party identification) and issue alignment (correlation between pairs of issues) and found greater correlation with issue partisanship than with issue alignment, suggesting individuals

associate themselves more with their respective party's political alignment than with consistent attitudes across similar situations.

While the general consensus seems to be that levels of political polarization are increasing (Doherty, 2014), there have been assertions made that reports of the polarization of the general population have been exaggerated (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2008). Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2008) found that while the political elite (e.g., politicians, political advisors, political commentators, etc.) has become more polarized over the last two decades, evidence of polarization of the general population is suspiciously absent. Levendusky and Malhotra (2016) found that the media's coverage of political polarization increases citizens beliefs that the electorate is polarized, but also that these depictions actually cause viewers to moderate their own positions, yet increase dislike and resentment of the opposing party.

### **Selective Exposure**

The literature on selective exposure in news consumption has consistently demonstrated the preference of individuals to seek out information that confirms their existing beliefs, or alternatively, avoid information that challenges their existing beliefs (Garrett, 2009; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012; Prior, 2005; Strömbäck et al, 2013; Stroud, 2010). This process can be considered in terms of selective approach (seeking out pro-attitudinal information) and selective avoidance (avoiding counter-attitudinal information) (Garrett & Stroud, 2014). Garrett (2009a) found that individuals can exhibit a preference for opinion-reinforcing political information without systematically avoiding opinion-challenging information. In another study, Garrett (2009b) again found that opinion reinforcement is more significant

than aversion of opinion challenging information; furthermore, Garrett (2009) suggested that after a reader selects an article, there is no evidence an individual is more likely to abandon the article if it contains counter-attitudinal information. In relation to political alignment, Garrett and Stroud (2014) compared tendencies of selective approach and selective avoidance across political orientations. Garrett and Stroud (2014) found that on average, self-reported Republicans were more likely to avoid counter-attitudinal information, whereas non-Republicans were more likely to seek out pro-attitudinal information. Regarding selective exposure, specifically in relation to political news consumption, Knobloch-Westerwick and Kleinman (2012) pointed out that the sheer amount of information available during pre-election news cycles necessitates the use of selective exposure to some degree when selecting articles to read, as there are so many options available. Given this, in order to ensure unbiased news consumption it would be up to the individual to monitor their own interpretation of their selected news article to avoid cognitive biases.

Another factor in rates of selective exposure is the notion of endorsement by trusted sources, whether it be a friend or a public figure. Messing and Westwood (2014) looked at selective exposure and political polarization in social media and found that social endorsements (e.g. a 'friend' sharing a post on Facebook) were able to reduce levels of partisan selective exposure to indistinguishable from chance. With the increasing use of social media, the influence of social endorsements on selective news consumption can provide interesting opportunities for new research. According to Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre, and Shehata (2013), news consumption and political learning is conditional upon a combination of opportunity, motivation, and ability. The idea of social endorsements would

fall under Strömbäck et al's 'motivation' category, which logically would also contain most of the mechanisms which act upon an individual's levels of selective exposure. While this study does not directly examine social endorsements of news articles in social media, it does ask participants about their opinion of their social contacts as sources of news, the results of which may be interesting when considered in terms of social endorsement of news articles.

### **Motivated Information Processing**

Related to selective exposure in political news consumption is the notion of motivated information processing (MIP). Similar to selective exposure, MIP can be considered the habit of individuals to process or recall information consistent with their existing beliefs in a more positive way than they would process or recall information which challenges their existing beliefs (Clark, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 2008; De Dreu, Carsten, Nijstad, & van Knippenberg, 2008; Kahan, 2013; Meffert, Chung, Joiner, Waks, & Garst, 2006; Redlawsk, 2002). Findings related to MIP could have a large impact on political polarization via selective news consumption. Clark et al (2008) found evidence that politically undecided participants processed attitude-consistent messages more than they did counter-attitudinal messages; alternatively, securely-opinioned participants processed counter-attitudinal messages more than attitude-consistent messages. This finding seems optimistic in the realm of political polarization, as it suggests that even after an individual has developed a political alignment they will still be attentive and open to counter-attitudinal information, which in the political realm has been demonstrated to increase political tolerance and understanding of opposing political viewpoints (Mutz & Mondak, 2006).



## **Personality and Individual Difference Variables**

**Right-wing authoritarianism.** As mentioned previously, some of the individual difference factors being assessed for this study include traits which are correlated with a particular political alignment. For example, Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) in its own designation suggests an individual who scores high in its traits as being associated with the political right wing. As evidence of the construct's validity, high scores on measures of RWA have consistently been found to be correlated with traditionally right-wing oriented values and assertions (Altemeyer, 1988; Benjamin, 2016; Choma, Ashton, and Hafer, 2010; Cohrs, Kielmann, Maes, and Moschner, 2005; Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2015; Crowson & Brandes, 2017; Crowson, Thoma, and Hestevold, 2005; Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, and Heled, 2010; Funke, 2005; Hiel, Mervielde, and De Fruyt, 2004; McHoskey, 1996; Stone, 1981). Specifically, Choma, Ashton, and Hafer (2005) found that RWA scores were correlated with right-wing attitudes on social issues (e.g. women's choice, gay rights, etc), whereas scores on the construct Social Dominance Orientation (to be discussed further later in the paper) were found to correlate with right-wing attitudes on economic issues (e.g. government regulation of the market, support for social assistance, etc). Choma et al (2005) proposed that "RWA subsumes characteristics of conventionalism, authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression (i.e., a dimension of social or cultural conformity), whereas SDO represents a preference for intergroup relations that are hierarchical rather than egalitarian (i.e., a dimension of economic and political status)".

Considering past the inclusions of only the political right-wing, assertions have been made that the authoritarianism model can be viewed as the basis for most all contemporary political debate, and by extension, contemporary political polarization

(Devine, 2012; McFarland, 2011). These assertions suggest that the primary social policies which occupy the current political discourse and divide the major political parties can be viewed as opposing perspectives on aspects of the authoritarian model, such as opinions towards gay rights, the war or terrorism, illegal immigration, etc (McFarland, 2011). Devine (2012) argues that people tend to conceptualize liberalism and conservatism in relation to social policies which are strongly associated with religious values (present in the authoritarianism model), the opposing perspectives on which demonstrates the value conflict inherent in an authoritarian perspective on political conflict. Additionally, in his review of Hetherington and Weiler's 2009 *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*, McFarland (2011) suggests that in the future if political debates should shift their focus to topics such as the national debt, joblessness, energy costs, whose discussion is conducted in less authoritarian terms, then the current polarization between political parties along authoritarian terms may be replaced by a different dimension discussed in alternative terms.

**Social-dominance orientation.** Similar to RWA is the construct of Social-Dominance Orientation (SDO). SDO can be considered a measure of preference for hierarchy in society, both within and between groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). SDO is related to individual beliefs regarding social and political ideologies that support a group-based hierarchy (e.g, racism), alongside policies regarding intergroup relations (e.g, civil rights, social programs), and has been negatively correlated with empathy, tolerance, communality, and altruism (Pratto et al, 1994). Simply described, SDO is the degree to which you believe certain groups should dominate over others, and has also been consistently correlated with scores on RWA (Bostyn, Roets, & Van

Hiel, 2016; Choma et al, 2010; Cohrs et al, 2005; Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2015; Crowson & Brandes, 2017; Nicol, 2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). As mentioned during the discussion of RWA, SDO has been found to correlate with the political 'economic right', whereas RWA has been found to correlate with the political 'social right' (Choma et al, 2010; Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2015). It should be noted that the economic and social right have been found to be only moderately correlated, and as such should be considered as distinct facets of the right-wing (Choma et al, 2010).

Additionally, Cohrs et al (2005) found both RWA and SDO to be predictors of positive attitudes towards the restriction of civil liberties in order to allow for increased security surveillance. In summary, while RWA and SDO are distinct variables, each measuring specific tendencies or attitudes, both RWA and SDO have been consistently correlated with a right-wing alignment, and accordingly should be appropriate measures to assess individuals' right-wing or 'conservative' attitudes. Despite being dispositional variables rather than strictly political ideologies, for the purpose of this study SDO and RWA are being used as predictor variables and are expected to be highly correlated with right-wing political values.

**Egalitarianism.** Egalitarianism can be considered an individual's preference for equality across individuals and groups in society. For the purpose of this study, egalitarianism has been conceptualized as an opposite construct of SDO, and by extension should also be negatively correlated with RWA. Egalitarianism was included as a means by which to assess traditionally labelled liberal or left-wing values, as a lack of conservative values as indicated on RWA and SDO scores is insufficient to presume left-wing. This comparison of egalitarianism as a counterpoint and left-wing equivalent to SDO and RWA

has been used in previous research (Choma et al, 2010; Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2015; Crowson & Brandes, 2017; Ho et al, 2012). For the purpose of this study, high scores on egalitarianism are expected to be highly correlated with and predictive of left-wing political values

**Need for cognition.** Need for cognition (NFC) is a personality construct in which an individual feels compelled to think, or participate in, cognitively effortful processes (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). While NFC was conceived as a non-political construct, assertions have been made relating it to conflicting political perspectives. For example, lower NFC was correlated with adoption of economic system justification, specifically support for the tea party (right-wing) and opposition to the Occupy Wallstreet movement (left-wing) (Hennes, Nam, Stern, & Jost, 2012). Alternatively, Sargent (2004) found that individuals high in NFC were less supportive of punitive measures for crime, and associated this with individuals high in NFC endorsing more complex explanations for human behaviour than their low NFC counterparts. While support for the tea-party and opposition to redistribution of wealth would be considered conservative perspectives, lower support for punitive measures is a liberal stance. Because the political assertions that have been made involving NFC are tied more to specific issues than overall political ideologies, NFC itself can still be considered a politically neutral construct.

To summarize, the relevant individual difference factors which are being considered are RWA, SDO, egalitarianism, and NFC. RWA and SDO are expected to be highly correlated with and predictive of right-wing attitudes. Alternatively, egalitarianism is expected to be highly correlated and predictive of left-wing attitudes. NFC is included as a measure of the participant's desire to seek out new knowledge to help explain participants who actively

seek out news yet may not appear to succumb to political polarization. NFC is not predicted to be significantly correlated with left or right wing political attitudes.

As the availability of varying political opinions increases, so does the ideological divide between our mainstream political perspectives. Moving forward, it will be necessary and advantageous to have a conceived notion of the respective relationships that selective exposure, news consumption and various individual difference factors hold in the process of political polarization.

### **The Present Study**

As polarization in politics continues to increase and the gap between mainstream political perspectives widens (Doherty, 2014), research is warranted into the relationships between news consumption, dispositional factors, and political attitudes, in order to understand how these factors influence the ongoing political polarization. These relationships will become particularly pertinent given the recent and rapid diversification of the dynamics present in the on-going relationship between politics and mainstream media. Major figures in American politics, including the President of the United States himself, are interacting with mainstream media outlets in ways previously unheard of (Rainie, 2017). From the heaping of praise upon certain news outlets, while condemning others under the recently popularized condemnation of 'fake news', politics in the United States has entered into a novel and highly involved relationship status with the mainstream media. Acknowledging the influence both mainstream politicians and mainstream media have on their respective audiences, it is necessary to examine and attempt to understand the relationship that the selective consumption of information disseminated to the public holds with rates of political polarization. Likewise, it is also necessary to examine

individuals' own unique personality and individual difference factors as potential mediating or moderating influences, in order to allow us to better predict susceptibility to political polarization. The present research involved testing specific hypotheses as well as exploratory analyses.

### **Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** As an individual's levels of political news consumption increase, so should their levels of political awareness.

**Hypothesis 2:** As rates of news consumption increase, the preference to selectively consume news will predict greater levels of political polarization, as indicated by more consistent/extreme responses on political attitude measures. Individuals who utilize selective exposure in their political news consumption should become politically polarized. The more pro-attitudinal information consumed, the more entrenched the individual will become in their pre-existing beliefs.

**Hypothesis 3:** As political awareness increases, so will polarization (as indicated by more consistent/extreme responses on political attitude measures), unless the participant is high in Need For Cognition.

**Hypothesis 4a:** High scores on Egalitarianism will predict more consistent/extreme liberal responses on political attitude items, with the relationship being strengthened by higher levels of political awareness.

**Hypothesis 4b:** High scores on Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social-Dominance Orientation will predict more consistent/extreme conservative responses on political attitude items, with the relationship being strengthened by higher levels of political

awareness.

## Method

### Participants

There were 428 potential participants who completed the online study. After consideration of data quality measures, utilized participants for the study were 379 individuals recruited from the United States of America. Participants were comprised of 237 females, 141 males, with one respondent preferring not to disclose their gender. All participants were aged 18 years or older, with an age range of 19-74 years ( $M = 41.91$ ,  $SD = 13.33$ ). Participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk; and were compensated with \$0.50 worth of credit towards their Amazon Mechanical Turk account in exchange for their participation in the study.

### Materials

**Demographics.** Following a positive completion of the informed consent form, participants were asked their age, gender, level of education (less than high school, high school graduate, some college, four-year college degree, master's, terminal degree, other), current U.S. state of residence, and an open ended estimate of their expected annual income.

**Data quality items.** Three data quality items were included in the study to help ensure valid response data. The data quality items were dispersed among other measures and used the response scale of the measure they were imbedded in. An example of one of these data quality items is "To monitor data quality, please select 4 to continue" (answered using a 1-7 Likert-type scale). Participants were also reminded of the importance of

reliable data and were asked if in their honest opinion researchers should use the data they had provided. Then, participants were asked in an open-ended item to briefly describe some of the questions they had just answered in another attempt to ensure accurate and useful data was collected. Consideration of these items was used to create an exclusion criterion, which led to exclusion of 49 participants from being used in the study due to quality concerns from failing on these measures.

**News use measure.** The News Use Measure (NUM) (Beaudoin, 2011) was administered to assess participants' frequency of news consumption across varying sources (print, internet, network/cable television news), as well as the attention participants give to news from print, television, and internet sources. This 7-item measure utilizes an 8-point scale for questions regarding frequency of news use, with responses being scored as number of days per week news is consumed (ranging from 0 – 7). For example, 'about how many days per week do you get news from the Internet?'. Items regarding attention paid to news are scored using a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 = no attention at all, 7 = very close attention). For example, 'in terms of television, about how much attention do you pay to news about politics, economy, and social issues in the city where you live?'. Rates of news consumption were considered in terms of television (2 items,  $\alpha = .58$ ), Internet news (single item), and Newspaper news (single item). Attention paid to news was taken across mediums (3 items,  $\alpha = .64$ ).

**Social dominance orientation scale.** The Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDOS) (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle, 1994) was administered as a measure of participants' agreement with a hierarchical structure of groups in society. Specifically, high scores on social dominance orientation (SDO) have consistently been shown to correlate



with right-wing attitudes in terms of a social hierarchy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Items on the measure are designed as statements that respondents assign levels of agreement to, and are meant to assess preference for group hierarchy. For example, 'Group equality should be our ideal'; or alternatively, 'To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups'. The measure is 16 items in total, 8 of which are reverse-scored (1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16), and utilizes a 7-point scale for responses, with potential reactions to the posed statements ranging from 1 = extremely negative, 7 = extremely positive. This measure had strongly reliable in the present study ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Perceived support for egalitarian measure.** For this study, the Perceived Support for Egalitarian Measure (PSEM) (Horberg, Kraus, and Keltner, 2013) was conceptualized as assessing the opposite construct of SDO. Namely, where SDOS measures the degree to which individuals believe certain groups should dominate in society, PSEM measures the degree to which participants believe that all individuals deserve equal rights and treatment in society. The construct PSEM is measuring is Egalitarianism, which for the purpose of this study has been conceptualized as representing left-wing or liberal values. PSEM is a 4-item measure which utilizes a 7-point scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) to assess participants levels of agreement with four statements, for example: 'There is never a time when its okay for some people to get more than others, no matter what they have accomplished'. This scale had strong reliability ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Libertarianism – egalitarianism scales.** A similar measure to the PSEM, the Libertarianism – Egalitarianism Scales (LES) (Lauriola, Foschi, and Marchegiani, 2015) is an 8-item measure, again utilizing a 7-point scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). LES has two subsections, one regarding Libertarianism and one

regarding Egalitarianism, each four items long. For the purpose of this study, only the items assessing Egalitarianism are of relevance, as the Libertarianism items are vague enough that their responses could really fall anywhere on the political spectrum. Similar to the PSEM, the LES poses items as statements the participant is asked to give a level of agreement with, for example 'Incomes should be more equal, because every family's needs for food, housing, and so on, are the same'. The measure can be considered as two subscales, one measuring Egalitarianism ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and one measuring Libertarianism ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Egalitarianism Measure (Combination of PSEM and LES).** For the purposes of this study Egalitarianism was measured using a combined score from all items on the PSEM and Egalitarianism subscale of the LES for 8 items in total. The combined measure had strong reliability ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Right-wing authoritarianism – revised scale.** An updated and shortened version of the original right-wing authoritarianism scale, the Right-Wing Authoritarianism-Revised Scale (RWA-R) (Manganelli Rattazzi, Bobbio, and Canova, 2007) is a 21-item measure. Items are posed as statements that respondents provide a level of agreement towards, employing a 7-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree. Designed to assess individuals' levels of agreement with specific aspects of right-wing ideology, the RWA-R includes two subsections; the authoritarian aggression and submission items (10 items,  $\alpha = .97$ ), and the conservatism items (11 items,  $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Need for cognition scale.** The Need for Cognition Scale (NFCS) (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) is a 45-item measure which utilizes a 9-point likert-type response scale ranging from -4=very strong disagreement, +4= very strong agreement. Need for Cognition (NFC) is a

dispositional variable, with individuals who score high on NFC being more inclined to think, reason, or acquire new knowledge for their own satisfaction. The measure poses items as statements for which participants assign a level of agreement, and includes 25 reverse scored items throughout the measure. The measure had very strong reliability ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Political attitudes questionnaire.** The Political Attitudes Questionnaire (PAQ) (Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, and Haidt, 2012) is an 11-item measure, each item of which is designed to assess the respondent's individual opinion on a different controversial political issue. Before any items are presented, the measure reminds participants that individual opinions vary widely and that there are no right or wrong answers. Six of the 11 items have three or more response options which progress from being more liberal to more conservative (for example, 'Abortion: should be generally available to those who want it, should be available but under stricter limits than it is now, should be against the law except in extreme circumstances, should not be permitted at all'), and as such can be considered continuous variables (with higher scores denoting higher conservatism). The alternative five items have only two response options, liberal or conservative (for example, 'Gun Control: it is more important to control gun ownership, it is more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns'). For the purpose of this study PAQ is being used to help position respondents along the political spectrum, in order to examine political attitudes and polarization. Scores were standardized and averaged to form a single index of political attitudes. The measure had strong reliability ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Political polarization.** To further analyze the rates of political polarization among participants, the responses on the PAQ were standardized and the scores were considered

in terms of their distance from the political 'center', rather than as a part of a continuous left/right spectrum.

### **Measures of political attitudes and reliance on and credibility of online**

**political sources.** The Measures of Political Attitudes and Reliance on and Credibility of Online Political Sources (MPARCOPS) (Johnson & Kaye, 2013) is a 13-item measure which assesses respondents' reliance on and use of online news, and also includes an item of political self-identification on a response scale ranging from 1 = very liberal, 5 = very conservative, and several self-efficacy items relating to politics and political knowledge. Admittedly a weakness of this study, the MPARCOPS questionnaire contains the only two items present in this study regarding the *selective* consumption of news, one item asking participants how likely they are to purposefully connect to online political sources that share their point of view, and alternatively one item that asks participants how likely they are to purposefully connect to online political sources that challenge their point of view. Three of the items on MPARCOPS are rated using a 10-point scale, including both items referring to selective news consumption, as well as an item asking respondents to rate their own level of political knowledge, ranging from 1 = absolutely not knowledgeable, 10 = absolutely knowledgeable. The remaining 10 items are scored on a 5-point scale, including the political self-identification item mentioned earlier, an item asking participants' reliance on online political news sources (ranging from 1 = don't rely on at all, 5=heavily rely on), and several items regarding faith in government and belief about self-efficacy in politics. For the purpose of this study, the items regarding selective news consumption are vital to the hypotheses. Additionally, the other items provide information on online news use, as well as an important self-identification along the political spectrum. For the purpose of this

study, MPARCOPS was divided into subscales: selective news preference ( $\alpha = .67$ ), trust in government ( $\alpha = .75$ ), self-efficacy in government ( $\alpha = .81$ ), as well as the single items assessing political self-identification and the self-report of political knowledge.

**Political awareness scale.** The Political Awareness Scale (PAS) (Pasek et al, 2006) is a six-item measure that is designed to assess the political knowledge of respondents. Originally used in 2006, one of the items has been updated for this study to fit the current political standing (Dick Cheney changed to Mike Pence). The measure consists of four open-ended items asking questions to test basic political knowledge (for example, ‘what are the major political parties in this country? Which party, as far as you know, is more conservative?’), and two multiple choice questions of a slightly harder difficulty (for example, ‘whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional? The President, Congress, or Supreme Court?’). For the purpose of this study, PAS is being used to assess respondents’ levels of political awareness, so that political awareness as a construct may be examined in the context of selective news consumption and political polarization. Over 75% of participants scored perfectly on the PAS, and as a result a ceiling effect was in place affecting the utility of the scale ( $\alpha = .49$ ).

**News evaluation measure.** The News Evaluation Measure (NEM) (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006) was administered to assess each participant’s motivations for consuming news. This 6-item measure employs a 5-point scale (ranging from 1=not at all important, 5=very important) to evaluate participant’s assessment of importance of 6 possible motivations for consuming news. Respondents used the 5-point scale to rate the importance of the following characteristics of news: induction of pleasant feelings, to be current and up-to-date, to provide information useful to understanding public affairs, to

report on good/bad things that happen to ordinary people, to inspire emotion, and lastly being motivated to watch more for sound than sentiment. Motives assessed by the scale can be considered in two subsections, emotion-based ( $\alpha = .72$ ) and knowledge-based ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Perceived media news credibility measure.** The Perceived Media News Credibility Measure (PMNCM) (Melican & Dixon, 2008) was administered to participants in order to assess opinions on news credibility across a number of mediums. The complete measure is 28 items in length, and uses a 5-point scale (ranging from 1 = not at all, 5 = extremely). Participants were asked to use the 5-point scale to rate measures of credibility across various news mediums. For example, 'How would you rate each of the following media in objectivity? Print (newspaper or newsmagazines), radio, social contacts (family, friends, coworkers), television, electronic bulletin boards, traditional-based Internet sources, and non-traditional-based Internet sources'. The same forms of media were rated by participants in terms of credibility, objectivity, accuracy, and authority. All items considered together has a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha = .91$ .

### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk, with the study being conducted online via Qualtrics. Potential participants followed the directions from the advertisement on Amazon Mechanical Turk to the online survey within Qualtrics. Participants were asked to read carefully the letter of information, and if they wished to continue with the survey they were then asked to confirm their agreement by checking the box indicating their informed consent to participate. Following the successful confirmation of their informed consent, participants were then asked to provide demographic

information such as age, gender, expected annual income, level of education, and current state of residence. Following the completion of the demographic items, participants were then advanced to the remainder of the study, comprised of the 11 measures listed above. Measures were presented to participants in the same order as they are presented in the Materials section, with the focus moving first from participants' news consumption habits to their dispositional factors (RWA, SDO, NFC, Egalitarianism), then on to measures assessing participant's political attitudes and political awareness.

Upon completion of all measures, participants were reminded of the importance of reliable data, and were asked if in their honest opinion researchers should use the data they had provided. Then, participants were asked in an open-ended item to briefly describe some of the questions they had just answered in another attempt to ensure accurate and useful data was collected.

Upon completion of the data quality items, participants were provided with a debriefing form that outlines the hypotheses of the study and the major variables being looked at. The debriefing form also contained directions to two scholarly articles with a similar focus to this study, as well as the contact information of the principal investigator, advisor, UWO Office of Research Ethics, and the Associate Academic Dean at King's University College, should the participants have any further questions or concerns that had not been previously addressed. The debriefing form was available to print by participants for their own records. Following the debriefing form, participants were provided with a compensation code that could be entered into Amazon Mechanical Turk to redeem the \$0.50 credit agreed upon as compensation for their participation. The code itself was created at random by the researchers, with all participants receiving the same code to

ensure correct compensation for all participants. Following the compensation of all participants, the survey was deactivated on Qualtrics and the data analyzed.

## **Results**

Reported findings are grouped together by hypothesis and exploratory analyses.

### **News Consumption**

Analysis began with an examination of the first hypothesis; that increasing rates of political news consumption would positively predict political awareness. When entered into a regression model simultaneously, rates of internet news consumption were shown to positively predict levels of political awareness ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ), while newspaper consumption ( $\beta = .04, p = .50$ ) and television consumption ( $\beta = -.04, p = .45$ ) were not significant predictors of political awareness.

### **Selective Exposure and Political Polarization**

Next, analysis for the second hypothesis was conducted; regression analyses examining if the preference to selectively consume news would predict greater levels of political polarization as rates of news consumption increased. A series of regression analyses were performed using the preference to selectively consume news as a moderating variable for the relationship between levels of political polarization and forms of news consumption. These regressions were performed across all three mediums of news consumption (Television, Newspaper, Internet). No significant main effects or interaction effects were found during these regressions (all  $ps > .05$ ).

### **Need for Cognition and Political Polarization**

Next, analyses were conducted to test for the third hypothesis; that as political awareness increased, so would rates of political polarization, unless the individual was



Table 1:

*Means and Standard Deviations of Variables (N = 379)*


---

Variables (range of scale in brackets)	Means ( <i>M</i> )	Standard Deviations ( <i>SD</i> )
Political Attitudes (1 -3)	1.56	.39
Political Polarization ( <i>Z</i> - scores)	.90	.18
Political Awareness (0-1)	.94	.13
Selective News Consumption (1 – 10)	5.22	2.30
Television News Consumption (0 – 7)	2.92	2.14
Internet News Consumption (0 – 7)	5.90	1.60
Newspaper News Consumption (0 – 7)	2.28	2.49
Need for Cognition (-4 – 4)	1.83	.69
RWA – Aggression/Submission (1 – 7)	3.05	1.70
RWA – Conservatism (Reverse – Scored) (1 – 7)	5.09	1.40
Social Dominance Orientation (1 – 7)	2.47	1.32
Egalitarianism (1 – 7)	4.62	1.32
News Use Motive – Emotion (1 – 5)	2.65	1.06
News Use Motive – Knowledge (1 – 5)	4.55	.60
Trust in Government (1 – 5)	2.50	.84
Self-Efficacy in Government (1 – 5)	3.29	.89
Attention to News (1 – 7)	4.16	1.44
Perceived Credibility of News (1 – 5)	2.97	.55

high in Need For Cognition (NFC). When entered into a regression model, there was a non-significant interaction effect regarding the moderating influence of NFC (interaction  $\beta = .04$ ,  $p = .49$ ), yet significant main effects for political awareness predicting lower levels of polarization ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p = .01$ ), and for NFC predicting greater levels of polarization ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p = .02$ ). This suggests that the combination of higher NFC and higher political awareness is not a significant predictor of political polarization in either direction, yet both NFC and political awareness are able to significantly predict polarization independently (both predicting in opposite directions).

### **Individual Difference Factors**

**Egalitarianism.** Next, hypothesis four was examined; the first aspect being that egalitarianism will predict more liberal attitude responses, with the relationship being strengthened by higher levels of political awareness. When entered into a regression model, there were non-significant main effects for political awareness ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $p = .08$ ) and egalitarianism ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $p = .24$ ) predicting liberal attitudes, yet a significant interaction effect (interaction  $\beta = -1.13$ ,  $p = .008$ ). This suggests that higher levels of political awareness strengthen the relationship between egalitarianism and liberal attitudes.

**Right-wing authoritarianism.** The next aspect of hypothesis four is the right-wing or 'conservative' counterpoint to the egalitarianism prediction; that Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social-Dominance Orientation (SDO) will predict more conservative attitude responses, with the relationships being strengthened by higher levels of political awareness. We looked at both subscales of RWA; Conservatism and Aggression/Submission. When entered into a regression model there were no significant main effects for political awareness ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .35$ ) or RWA Conservatism ( $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p =$

.30) predicting conservative attitudes, and a non-significant interaction effect (interaction  $\beta = -.52, p = .10$ ). RWA Aggression/Submission was also entered into a regression model, which again showed no significant main effects for political awareness ( $\beta = -.08, p = .38$ ) or RWA Aggression/Submission ( $\beta = .40, p = .18$ ) predicting conservative attitudes, and a non-significant interaction (interaction  $\beta = .33, p = .25$ ).

**Social-dominance orientation.** Lastly we examined SDO, which when entered into the regression model showed a significant main effect for political awareness predicting more liberal attitudes ( $\beta = -.29, p = .009$ ), a non-significant main effect for SDO predicting attitudes ( $\beta = -.13, p = .68$ ), and a significant interaction effect suggesting the relationship between SDO and conservative attitudes is strengthened by political awareness (interaction  $\beta = .66, p = .04$ ). See Table 2.

### Exploratory Analyses

Analyses of the response data provided some interesting findings that lay outside of the original hypotheses.

**Motives for news consumption.** When entered into a regression model, Need for Cognition predicted the consumption of news for knowledge-based motivations ( $\beta = .13, p = .03$ ) (as opposed to emotionally motivated news use). Additionally, the consumption of news for knowledge-based motivations predicted more liberal attitudes ( $\beta = -.16, p = .002$ ), while consuming news for emotion based motivations predicted more conservative attitudes ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ).

**Trust in news media and government.** Regression analysis suggested that rates of political polarization predicted ratings of the news media as being less credible ( $\beta = -.17, p$

= .001). Additionally, trust in government predicted ratings of news being more credible ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ).

**Selective consumption and polarization.** Rates of newspaper news consumption were found to predict greater rates of self reported selective news consumption ( $\beta = .22, p < .001$ ). When examined in a regression analysis, the preference to selectively consume news also strengthened the relationship between SDO and conservative attitude responses (interaction  $\beta = .14, p = .002$ ), see Table 3. Additionally, conservative attitudes in general were shown to predict greater overall levels of political polarization ( $\beta = .76, p < .001$ ). NFC also predicted higher levels of political polarization ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ).

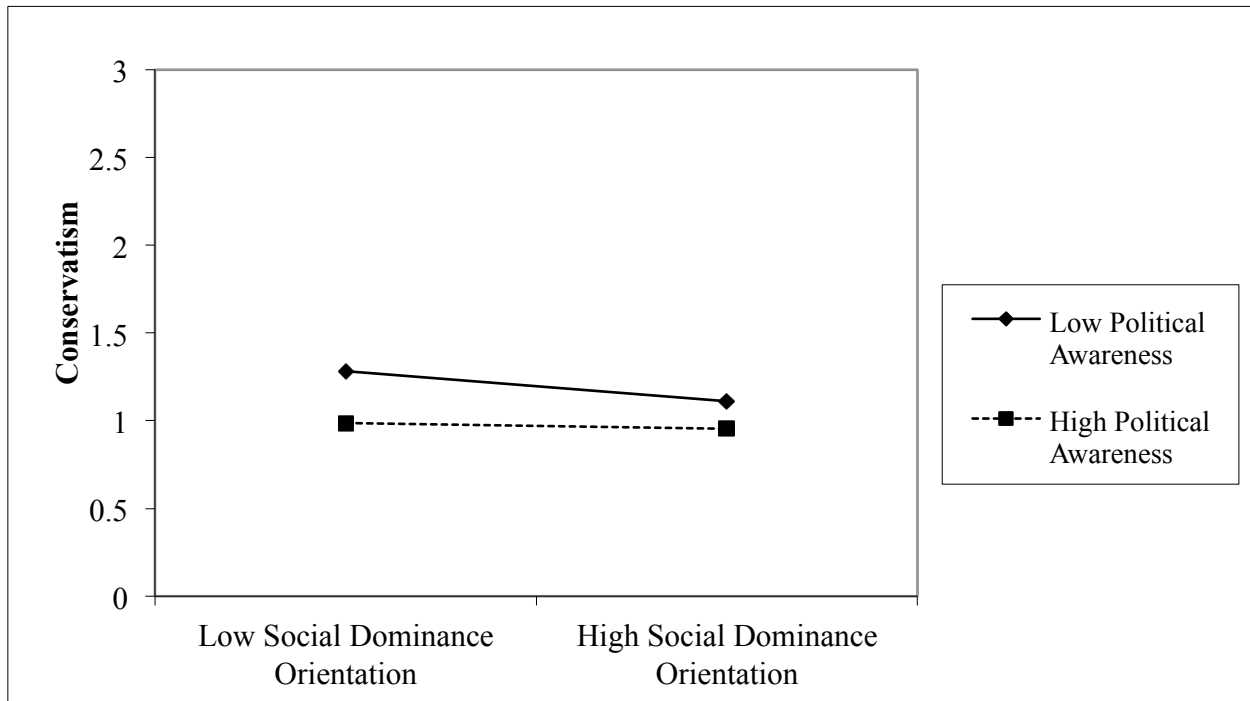
### **Overall Predictors of Political Attitudes and Political Polarization**

Predictor variables were entered simultaneously into two regression models, one predicting political attitudes and one predicting rates of political polarization. The predictor variables entered were rates of selective news consumption, RWA Aggression/Submission, RWA Conservatism, SDO, Egalitarianism, TV News Consumption, Internet News Consumption, Newspaper News Consumption, and Political Awareness.

**Political attitudes.** Four of the entered predictor variables were shown to significantly predict political attitudes when entered into a regression model together. The selective consumption of news was shown to predict more conservative attitudes ( $\beta = .07, p = .03$ ), as did RWA Aggression/Submission ( $\beta = .42, p < .001$ ), and RWA Conservatism ( $\beta = -.34, p < .001$ ). RWA Conservatism was a reverse-coded subscale, therefore the negative direction of the beta coefficient does indicate conservative attitudes. Egalitarianism scores significantly predicted liberal political attitude responses ( $\beta = -.23, p < .001$ ). All other observed relationships were non-significant. Refer to Table 5.

Table 2:

*Interaction Effect of Political Awareness on SDO predicting Conservatism (N = 378)*



*Note:* This figure illustrates the moderating influence of political awareness in strengthening the relationship between Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and Conservatism. The values are graphed using formulas and methods established by Dawson (2014) for graphing interaction effects from regression models with continuous variables.

Table 3:

*Interaction Effect of Selective News Consumption on SDO predicting Conservatism (N = 378)*

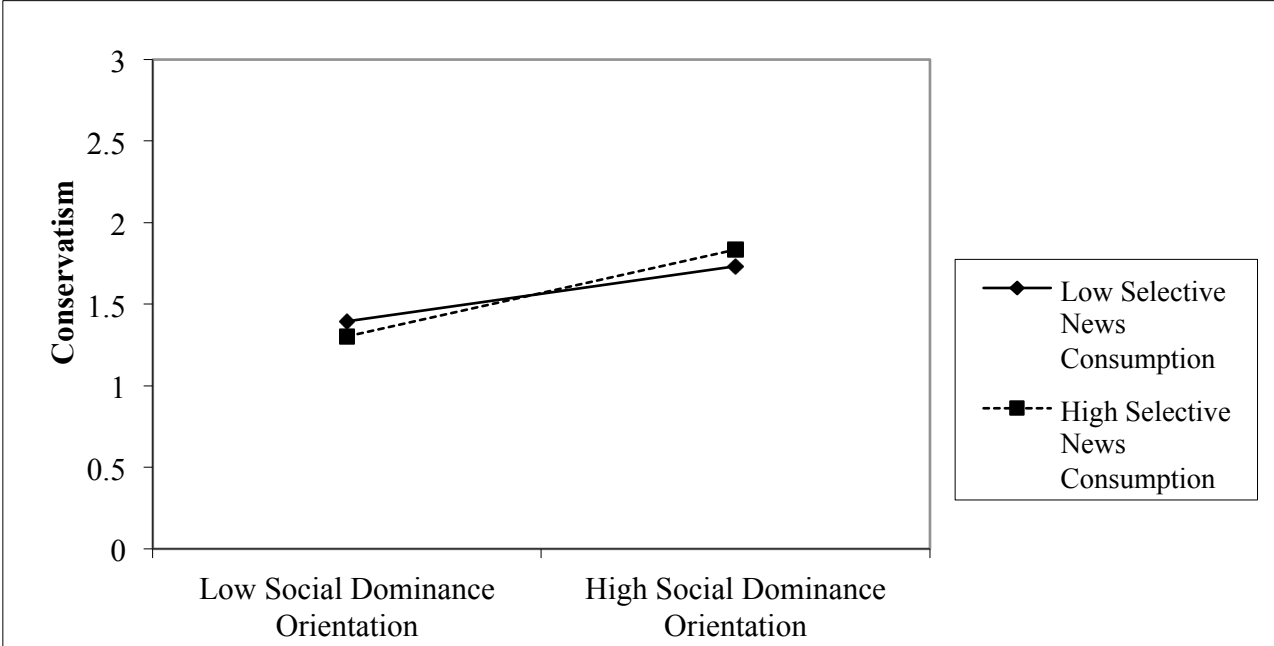


Table 4

*Correlation Matrix of Examined Variables (N = 379)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Political Polarization	1																
2. Political Attitudes	.76**	1															
3. Political Awareness	-.05	-.17**	1														
4. Selective News Use	.06	-.07	.08	1													
5. Newspaper News Use	-.09	-.05	.04	.22**	1												
6. Internet News Use	-.08	-.15**	.18**	.11*	.12*	1											
7. Television News Use	-.03	.09	-.00	.15**	.28**	.15**	1										
8. Egalitarianism	-.44**	-.57**	.06	.14**	.02	-.02	.03	1									
9. SDO	.39**	.53**	-.19**	-.14**	-.01	-.09	.04	-.71**	1								
10. RWA – Agg/Sub	.51**	.73**	-.27**	-.13**	-.07	-.18**	.13*	-.41**	.53**	1							
11. RWA – Conservatism (RS)	-.67**	-.74**	.13**	.09	.07	.15**	-.06	.51**	-.45**	-.65**	1						

Table 4

*Continued*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
12. Need For Cognition	.15*	.04	.00	.13*	.04	-.05	-.02	.13*	-.16**	-.02	.08	1					
13. News Use Motive - Knowledge	-.07	-.23**	.25**	.06	-.03	.23**	-.03	.19*	-.34**	-.26**	.15**	.13**	1				
14. News Use Motive - Emotion	.10	.30**	-.35**	-.01	-.00	-.24**	.19**	-.07	.24**	.49**	-.22**	-.13*	-.31**	1			
15. Self-Efficacy in Government	.02	.11*	.19**	.34**	.21**	.21**	.25**	.11*	-.06	-.22**	.18**	.32**	.08	-.16**	1		
16. Trust in Government	-.03	.04	-.00	.04	.11*	-.11*	.16**	-.04	.06	.10	-.12*	-.13*	-.11*	.15**	-.03	1	
17. Perceived Ratings of News Credibility	-.17**	-.12*	-.08	.06	.06	-.01	.19**	.30**	-.23**	-.01	.11*	.01	.11*	.16**	-.01	.21**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)



Table 5:

*Regression Analyses Predicting Political Attitudes and Political Polarization (N = 378)*


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Predictor Variables	Criterion Variables	
	Political Attitudes <i>(Higher scores representing more conservative attitudes)</i>	Political Polarization
Selective News Exposure	.07*	.17***
RWA – Aggression/Submission	.42***	.15**
RWA – Conservatism (Reverse- Scored)	-.34***	-.51***
SDO	.01	.03
Egalitarianism	-.23***	-.13*
TV News Exposure	.02	-.08*
Internet News Exposure	-.04	.01
Newspaper News Exposure	-.01	-.06
Political Awareness	-.01	.05

**Note:** Numbers presented are standardized Betas, \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

**Political polarization.** Five of the entered predictor variables were shown to significantly predict levels of political polarization when entered into a regression model together. The preference to selectively consume news predicted increased levels of political polarization ( $\beta = .17, p < .001$ ). Both subscales of RWA also predicted increased levels of polarization, Aggression/Submission ( $\beta = .15, p = .008$ ), and Conservatism [reverse-scored] ( $\beta = -.51, p < .001$ ). Alternatively, rates of television news consumption predicted lower levels of political polarization ( $\beta = -.08, p = .04$ ), as did scores on Egalitarianism ( $\beta = -.13, p = .03$ ). All other observed relationships were non-significant. Refer to Table 5.

### Discussion

Recent years have seen rates of political polarization in the United States continue to rise (Doherty, 2014). Coinciding with the rise in the polarization of political opinions, there has also been an overall increase in the amount and accessibility of varying political opinions made available to the public, particularly through Internet news sources (Messing & Westwood, 2014). It is critical that we understand the relationships that exist between various forms of news consumption, individual difference factors, and political attitudes and political polarization. The present study examined the relationships between rates of political news consumption, the preference to selectively consume political news, political attitudes, rates of political polarization, and several individual difference factors that were hypothesized to predict left/right wing attitudes.

#### News Consumption and Political Awareness

For hypothesis one, all mediums of political news consumption that were recorded (Internet, television, newspaper) were expected to predict higher levels of political awareness, yet only rates of Internet news consumption demonstrated a statistically

significant relationship with political awareness. It is possible that because the study was conducted online the sample was comprised of Internet focused individuals, and may have produced a response bias in rates of consumption of non-Internet news sources. There was also a ceiling effect in the scale used to measure political awareness which may have influenced results.

### **News Consumption, Selective Exposure, and Polarization**

For hypothesis two, as rates of political news consumption increased, the preference to selectively choose news was hypothesized to predict greater levels of political polarization. It was found that there were no significant interactions where the preference to selectively consume news across any of the news mediums predicted greater levels of political polarization. This is contradictory to both Stroud's (2010) findings and Iyengar and Hahn's (2009) research which suggested that the selective consumption of political news media does have a relationship with increased rates of political polarization. It is possible that because the items used in this study to assess rates of selective consumption are self-reports, the response data may be subject to some level of social desirability bias in which rates of selective consumption are underreported.

### **Political Awareness, Need For Cognition, and Polarization**

Consistent with the findings that suggest that the political elite are becoming more polarized, but not necessarily the average person (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2008), hypothesis 3 predicted that greater levels of political awareness would predict greater levels of political polarization, unless high in Need For Cognition (NFC). There was not a precedent in the literature for including NFC as a possible moderating variable in this relationship, yet it was hypothesized that the drive to reason and think beyond surface

interpretations that is inherent in NFC would act as a suppressing variable against polarization. Regression analysis showed a non-significant interaction effect, yet significant main effects for political awareness predicting lower levels of polarization, and NFC actually predicting higher levels of polarization. This means that while the combination of political awareness and NFC was not a significantly greater predictor of political polarization, independently both political awareness and NFC were in fact significant predictors of polarization. Evidence of NFC predicting greater levels of political polarization is contrary to the hypothesis, yet may have logical explanations based on prior research. In regards to NFC, it was hypothesized that those high in the construct would be more inclined to read further into issues, coming into contact with more opinions of varying perspectives, and would therefore be less likely to succumb to polarization. It is possible, however, that those high in NFC are maintaining their original attitudes throughout their deliberation, and through a confirmation bias may actually become more entrenched in their original position after consuming attitude-consistent information, as was found in Knobloch-Westerwick, Mothes, Johnson, Westerwick, and Donsbach's (2015) study.

With regard to political awareness predicting lower polarization, this was also contrary to our hypotheses but the conclusions we can draw are somewhat questionable due to the ceiling effect on that variable with a large majority of the sample scoring perfect on the measure.

### **Individual Difference Factors and Political Awareness on Political Attitudes**

It was predicted in hypothesis four that high scores on egalitarianism would predict more liberal responses on political attitude items, and that scores on Social-Dominance

Orientation (SDO) and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) would predict more conservative responses on political attitude items. Increasing levels of political awareness were expected to strengthen these relationships. In general, support for this hypothesis was found, with levels of political awareness strengthening the relationship between egalitarianism and liberal attitudes. The relationship between RWA Conservatism and conservative political attitudes was marginally stronger for those higher in political awareness. The relationship between SDO and conservative political attitudes was significantly stronger for those higher in political awareness. In general, the political ideologies predicted the expected attitudes, and levels of political awareness marginally increased the strength of the relationships between ideologies and political attitudes.

### **Overall Predictors of Political Attitudes and Political Polarization**

When entered simultaneously into a regression model along with other predictors, Egalitarianism and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) predicted their respective political alignment, namely Egalitarianism predicting liberal attitudes, and RWA (both subscales) predicting conservative attitudes. The preference to consume news selectively also predicted more conservative attitudes.

In relation to levels of polarization, when entered simultaneously into a regression model along with other predictors, both subscales of RWA (Aggression/Submission and Conservatism) predicted higher levels of political polarization, as did the preference to selectively consume news. Alternatively, rates of television news consumption and scores on Egalitarianism predicted lower levels of political polarization (See Table 3).

Overall, the findings suggest that political ideologies (in particular RWA and egalitarianism) and rates of selective news consumption do appear to exist in a

relationship with political polarization. SDO, both subsections of RWA, and egalitarianism correlated significantly with their respective political alignments when examined independently, consistent with Sidanius and Pratto (1999), Altemeyer (1988), and Crowson and Brandes (2017), respectively, with the relationships generally being stronger for those who are more politically aware. Selective news exposure was found to predict political polarization when controlling for ideologies, political awareness, and mediums of news consumption. When controlling for other variables, both subsections of RWA predicted greater levels of political polarization, while egalitarianism predicted lower levels of polarization.

### **News Use Motivations**

Motivations for consuming news appear to differ across liberal and conservative attitudes, with liberal respondents reporting higher rates of consuming news for knowledge-based motives, and conservative respondents reporting higher rates of consuming news for emotionally based motives. Overall, the results do have interesting findings on the relationships between ideologies, news consumption, selective exposure, and political polarization, and also raises valuable research questions for later studies.

### **Limitations, Implications and Future Directions**

While the findings of the study are noteworthy, there were possible limitations that may have influenced results. For example, as mentioned earlier the PAS measure used to assess political awareness experienced a ceiling effect in the responses, with over 75% of participants receiving a score of perfect political awareness. Because of the heavily skewed response set, predictions involving political awareness should be interpreted with caution. Also, there was an overall liberal skew to the sample; On the scale used to assess political

attitudes ranging from 1-3, where 1 is equal to the most liberal response set possible and 3 is equal to the most conservative response set possible, the sample combined for a mean score of 1.56. This suggests that our sample may have employed a liberal bias in their responses, and may not have been indicative of the proportions of liberals/conservatives that make up the American electorate. Another weakness of the study is that our assessment of selective news consumption relies entirely on participants' self-report, which may not be reflective of actual rates of selective news consumption.

Another aspect of our sample that warrants caution in interpreting the findings comes from finding respondents who reported low or non-existent levels of internet news consumption, as the technological familiarity the participant would require to have even arrived at the study within Qualtrics would indicate a level of tech savvy, and therefore would likely indicate the use of internet on a regular basis. If this was the case, it is possible those participants would use the internet frequently yet not receive any news from it, but this does seem somewhat unlikely. Finally, the online population from where the sample was drawn differs in many ways from the general population, and as a result may limit the generalizability of our findings.

The present study did open up several avenues for further studies which would make for interesting follow up research. One such avenue would be examining the specifics of Internet news consumption in more detail, and how it relates to the process of selective news consumption and political polarization. Specifically, examining the differences between seeking out news independently through news media websites, and having news catered to the individual via social media online feeds. Further research examining Internet news consumption via social media could also investigate the role of social endorsements

by “friends” on social media, and potential impact of social endorsements on selective consumption.

Another possible path for future research includes a more nuanced political breakdown, looking at dimensions of the left and right wings. For example, research could be conducted to determine any potential differences across the economic versus the social right/left in relation to selective news consumption and political polarization. Political alignment could also be examined in terms of reported partisan loyalty versus attitudes on specific political issues, to look for discrepancies between expected partisan attitudes and actual reported attitudes. Demographic factors such as age, location, income, and education may also prove to hold interesting relationships involving methods of news consumption, rates of selective exposure, and levels of polarization.

The findings from this study provide further validation to some established relationships; egalitarianism as a left-wing construct, SDO and RWA as right-wing ideologies, and selective news consumption predicting greater levels of political polarization. It also provided interesting findings that have potential to stimulate future research; the differences in news consumption motivations across the left and right political wings, the role of Need For Cognition in predicting increased political polarization, the moderating influence of political awareness on levels of polarization, as well as differences in methods of news consumption and rates of selective news consumption across the left and right political wings.

The findings from this research are particularly valuable in both the present political and media climates. In an environment where the increased availability of political news necessitates the use of selective consumption (Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman,



2012) in some form, it is important to be aware of the predictive relationship selective exposure holds with political polarization. As Doherty (2014) addressed, increased levels of political polarization often involves a limiting of constructive dialogue between political parties, a pattern which is not conducive to well informed democratic political policy. Alternatively, the exposure to various political perspectives available in an open political discussion has been shown to increase tolerance and understanding of opposing political viewpoints (Mutz & Mondak, 2006).

Together, the findings of this study as well as those of previous research point to the possibility lessening selective news consumption being an effective tool in suppressing levels of political polarization. Furthermore, the results from this study provided valuable information on differences in news consumption across political ideologies, which could hold valuable implications for future partisan-specific political news outlets. The present study also provided further validation to several established relationships and raised interesting findings regarding methods of selective news consumption and political polarization that has potential for valuable new research.

In summary, this study shows that measures of political ideology and methods of news consumption do exist in relationships with patterns of political alignment and polarization. This points to the importance of the role of the selective consumption of political news specifically on polarization patterns, a potentially detrimental relationship for the democratic political process. We wait for future research to further elucidate the dynamics of these relationships, and to eventually delve into possible causal factors of political polarization and the selective consumption of political news.

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