RUNNING HEAD: Perceptions of Opinionated News

Partisan Differences in Opinionated News Perceptions:

A Test of the Hostile Media Effect

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Abstract

The proliferation of opinion and overt partisanship in cable news raises questions about how audiences perceive this content. Of particular interest is whether audiences effectively perceive bias in opinionated news programs, and the extent to which there are partisan differences in these perceptions. Results from a series of three online experiments produce evidence for a relative hostile media phenomenon in the context of opinionated news. Although, overall, audiences perceive more story and host bias in opinionated news than in non-opinionated news, these perceptions – particularly perceptions of the host – vary as a function of partisan agreement with the news content. Specifically, issue partisans appear to have a "bias against bias," whereby they perceive less bias in opinionated news with which they are predisposed to agree than non-partisans and especially partisans on the other side of the issue.

Keywords: cable news; opinionated news; hostile media effect; selective perception; media bias

Recent years have introduced American news audiences to new models of opinionated broadcast journalism, as exemplified by the cable programs of Bill O'Reilly, Keith Olbermann, Lou Dobbs, and others. These formats represent a departure from television news' longstanding tradition of objective reporting in favor of a more overtly opinionated presentation style. A product of the contemporary media environment – with its move toward niche programming and its melding of information and entertainment – opinionated news is characterized by the explicit expression of political views. From CNN's Lou Dobbs' crusade against illegal immigration to MSNBC's Keith Olbermann's condemnation of the Iraq war, cable anchors have taken a clear stand on political issues while also delivering the news of the day.

The trend toward opinionation in television news has been variously conceptualized by scholars and journalists alike but all point to a clear departure from the balance and editorial separation that characterize traditional journalism. For example, the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2007, ¶ 5) calls it the "Answer Culture:"

> a growing pattern [which] has news outlets, programs and journalists offering up solutions, crusades, certainty, and the impression of putting all the blur of information in order for people…In a sense, the debate in many venues is settled – at least for the host.

Entman (2005) sees opinionated news as falling somewhere in between advocacy and tabloid journalism in that it shares the former's commitment to advancing a particular political agenda and the latter's commitment to commercial imperatives. Jamieson, Hardy, and Romer (2007, p. 28) refer to "partisan" media, "case makers who work from unveiled ideological assumptions," as distinct from the "detached" media, with its aspirations of objectivity, fairness, and balance.

Cable news' distinction as an outlet for journalist opinionation has been plainly observed by commentators in the popular press. A *New Yorker* profile of Bill O'Reilly described cable news as "increasingly a medium of outsize super-opinionated franchise personalities" (Lemann, 2006, p. 6, ¶ 1). Similarly, the *New York Times* observed, "What works in cable television news

is not an objective analysis of the day's events but hard-nosed, unstinting advocacy of a specific point of view on a sizzling-hot topic" (Carter & Steinberg, 2006, ¶ 4). A content analysis conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2005) offers more systematic evidence for cable news' trend toward opinionated journalism and one-sided commentary. The study found that 52% of cable news stories on CNN, MSNBC, and Fox offered only a single point of view about controversial issues, compared to 20% of stories on the network evening news. Further, the expression of journalist opinion appeared in 28% of cable news stories, twice what was found in network evening news broadcasts and nine times that on PBS's evening newscast, *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. Leading the movement toward opinionation was Bill O'Reilly: A full 97% of stories on Fox's *The O'Reilly Factor* contained O'Reilly's opinions. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010), cable news outlets are increasingly characterized by distinct political perspectives, adding ideological talk show hosts to their evening programming and eradicating opposing viewpoints. This is particularly true of Fox and MSNBC: In 2009, Fox's *Hannity and Colmes* became simply *Hannity*, following the departure of Sean Hannity's liberal co-host Alan Colmes; Fox also added right-leaning Glenn Beck, formerly of CNN Headline News, to its nightly lineup. For its part, MSNBC augmented its roster with left-leaning hosts Rachel Maddow and Ed Schultz in 2008 and 2009, respectively.

Injecting news with a point of view appears to pay off in the ratings: *The O'Reilly Factor* is the cable news leader (Carpenter, 2006), and MSNBC's opinionated hosts, including Olbermann and Maddow, have produced substantial audience growth for the network (Stelter, 2008). Some scholars even argue that bias and opinionation have become economic imperatives for news organizations in our fragmented media environment (Hamilton, 2005). Indeed, recent research suggests that audiences select cable news coverage that is presumed to match their own political predispositions (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008).

The proliferation of opinion and overt partisanship in cable news raises questions about how audiences perceive this content. Recent research has examined how the expected ideological leanings of cable network "brands" like CNN and Fox cue audiences to perceive news bias even where none exists (Baum & Gussin, 2007; Turner, 2007). Less attention, however, has been paid to the extent to which news that *is* biased is perceived as such. Bias in the news has been defined as "differential treatment of (e.g., favoring) a particular side of an issue" (Lee, 2008), or as "any tendency in a news report to deviate from an accurate, neutral, balanced, and impartial representation of the 'reality' of events and social world" (McQuail, 2010, p. 549). Certainly, opinionated cable news programs meet these definitions and are thus an example of news bias, but do audiences see it this way? A chief criticism leveled at opinionated news is that audiences will be unable to effectively detect its biases and therefore misconstrue opinion as fact (Carroll, 2004; Kann, 2006). This is a legitimate concern, given the subjective nature of media bias (Tsfati, 2003a, 2003b). Moreover, selective information processes, such as the hostile media effect (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985), suggest that partisan audiences – due to their *own* biases – could fail to recognize bias in news that comports with their views.

The aim of the present research, then, is to understand the impact of news opinionation, and its interaction with individual issue partisanship, on how audiences perceive broadcast news. Specifically, this research provides a test of the hostile media effect in the context of opinionated news. Following a review of literature on perceptions of bias in the news, methods and results from a series of three experiments comparing audience perceptions of opinionated and non-opinionated news are described. Results indicate that, overall, audiences perceive more story and host bias in opinionated news than in non-opinionated news, but that these perceptions – particularly perceived host bias – vary as a function of partisan agreement with the news content.

Perceptions of Bias in the News

Early research on source credibility assumed that credibility is a fixed, objective trait of the source (e.g., Hovland & Weiss, 1951). More recently, however, credibility – particularly as it pertains to the news media – has been better understood as a contextual, subjective assessment of the audience (e.g., Tsfati, 2003a, 2003b). Indicative of this subjectivity are the prevalent accusations of a general media bias among politicians, journalists, and the public, despite evidence from content analyses that consistently suggests otherwise (e.g., Niven, 2002; Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999). In fact, Watts et al. (1999) found that public perceptions of bias have little to do with objective content but instead follow from news coverage of political elites' allegations of bias – typically, a liberal bias charged by conservative elites. Thus, story content is assessed – not on its own merits – but on the basis of preconceived notions about the news media. Other studies have also suggested that individuals' expectations for bias in a news source or in the media, more generally, are likely to influence their perceptions of bias in news coverage (Baum & Gussin, 2007; D'Alessio, 2003; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Turner, 2008).

Perhaps the most crucial determinant of perceived news bias, however, is the extent to which coverage is seen as being disagreeable to one's own views. As Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross (2004) attest, "attributions of bias are born in perceptions of disagreement" (p. 798). Indeed, research demonstrates that issue partisans see their own side's views as being more a product of objective analysis and normative concerns, and less influenced by ideology, than the other side's views (e.g., Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). This is consistent with Ross and Ward's (1996) framework of naïve realism, which is organized around the premise that most individuals – because they understand their own views as direct, unfiltered perceptions of the world as it really is – are inclined to judge those who see things differently from them as biased.

Widespread evidence for the hostile media effect (e.g., Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998;

Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Vallone et al., 1985) – which is the tendency for partisans on opposing sides of an issue to see identical news coverage of that issue as biased in favor of the other side – suggests that the penchant to attribute bias to disagreeable others also extends to journalists and other third parties whose job is typically understood as providing neutral and unbiased information to the public. Pronin et al. (2004) explain it this way:

> If one's own views are experienced as ineluctable products of objective perception of the relevant issues or events (especially if one sees the world in 'black or white'), such third parties (to the extent they claim the world to be a shade of gray) will be seen as biased in favor of the 'other side' (p. 794).

In fact, the explanation for the hostile media effect that has received the most empirical support in the literature is the idea of selective categorization (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004; Gunther & Liebhart, 2006). According to this idea, opposing partisans attend to, process, and recall identical content from a news presentation but categorize the same aspects of a story differently – as contrary to their own position. In essence, each group sees a different stimulus, filtered through the lens of their partisanship. Selective categorization follows from social judgment theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961), which predicts that partisans, or those with high issue involvement, will have wider "latitudes" of message rejection and will thus find more of the views in the media to be disagreeable or biased than will non-partisans, for whom the news is likely to fall into either a latitude of acceptance or of non-commitment.

The original hostile media effect assumes that news coverage is balanced. The *relative* hostile media perception (Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, & Chia, 2001) relaxes this assumption, making it applicable to news that is slanted in favor of or against a particular issue. In the presence of a relative hostile media effect, supporters and opponents of a given issue perceive bias in the same direction (i.e., leaning toward one side), but each group perceives coverage as significantly more unfavorable to their own position relative to those in the other group. Put

slightly differently, partisans perceive *less* bias in news coverage slanted to support their view than their opponents on the other side of the issue.

In the context of partisan cable news, the relative hostile media effect suggests that liberals and conservatives would both perceive conservatively-slanted news coverage, for example, as biased against liberals; however, conservatives would see this coverage as less biased than would liberals. Coe et al. (2008) provide tentative support for such an effect. When randomly assigned to view either a liberal-leaning (Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*) or conservative-leaning (Fox News) program, conservatives perceived significantly more bias in the liberal program than did liberals, while liberals perceived more bias in the conservative program than did conservatives. Coe et al., however, did not tease out audiences' perceptions of the news stories themselves from their preconceptions of the channel or source. Thus, what is observed as a relative hostile media effect might be a function of prior beliefs about the media source rather than biased processing of the story or content (see Baum & Gussin, 2007; Turner, 2008). Still, based on these results, audiences appear more likely to identify bias in news coverage when it does not align with their partisan perspective.

Interestingly, then, whereas the implication of the original hostile media effect is a partisan public perceiving bias where none is present and thus potentially rejecting useful information, the relative hostile media effect suggests that partisans will fail to fully recognize bias in news that *is* biased, in instances when that bias is congruent with their views. The extent of this "bias against bias" and its importance for news processing are as yet under-explored. For one, the few extant studies of the relative hostile media effect do not statistically compare partisans to neutral or nonpartisan audiences to determine whether the latter are significantly less likely than the former to perceive bias in news programs that are in alignment with their views; without such a comparison, it is difficult to know how deviant partisans' misperceptions are.

Further, the relative hostile media effect has not been tested in the context of news opinionation, only slant. Whereas opinionation involves the overt expression of political views, slant is more subtle and is characterized by the quantity and tone of news coverage given to a particular issue or figure (Entman, 2007). Thus, by parading their political opinions and, in so doing, violating expectations for objective journalism, news personalities could signal to viewers – regardless of whether those viewers agree or disagree with the opinions being advanced – the presence of bias, thereby overriding the tendency toward a hostile media effect.

In fact, prior research suggests that message factors do, in some cases, trump partisan agreement in producing perceptions of bias. Dalton et al. (1998) found that newspaper readers were best able to detect the partisan stands of their newspapers when the newspaper sent a clear and unambiguous political signal; otherwise, individual partisanship predominated in judgments. The relative hostile media effect itself suggests that some manifest attribute of coverage leads partisans on both sides of an issue to see that coverage as consistently slanted in one direction. This raises the possibility of a threshold of non-objectivity beyond which even those who are sympathetic to a message can recognize the full extent of its bias.

Given the paradigm of objectivity within which American journalism has situated itself for the last century or so (Kaplan, 2002), media consumers likely bring with them to the news an expectation for objective reporting. While the pursuit of journalistic objectivity follows from ethical and professional standards, objectivity is also a device used by journalists to increase perceptions of credibility (Tuchman, 1972). In turn, many media consumers use norms of objectivity (e.g., detachment, balance, etc.) as benchmarks for assessing news bias. It is thus quite plausible that blatant deviations from that standard will cue perceptions of bias, regardless of partisanship. Consistent with this idea, past research suggests that when media content violates audience expectations, it is perceived negatively – irrespective of one's prior favorability

toward the media source (Arpan & Peterson, 2007) or even their partisan alignment with the content itself (Paletz, Koon, Whitehead, & Hagens, 1972).

Research Questions

Two research questions guide this research. The first is whether audiences, overall, will perceive more bias in opinionated news than in non-opinionated news. Here, the prior literature supports a directional hypothesis (H1): *Opinionated news will be perceived as more biased overall than non-opinionated news and in a direction consistent with its opinionation*.

The second research question is concerned with the interplay between news bias as an objective content characteristic (i.e., opinionated versus non-opinionated) and as a subjective receiver assessment (i.e., based on agreement with the news message). Of specific interest is how news opinionation will influence the magnitude of partisan differences in perceived bias. Here, the prior literature is equivocal. On one hand, opinionated news could stimulate a relative hostile media effect, whereby issue partisans perceive more bias in opinionated news that contradicts their views than opposing partisans. The expectation in this case is that by making partisans' agreement (or disagreement) with the news message more salient, opinionated news will elicit partisan differences in perceived bias similar to – or even larger than – those seen in studies of slanted and balanced news. However, other prior research (e.g., Dalton et al., 1998) suggests that when partisan cues in news are unambiguous, the news is less open to perceptual distortion. In this view, as opinionation in the news becomes more overt, issue partisanship will play less of a role in determining perceptions of bias. In light of these competing possibilities, a directional hypothesis is not proposed; rather, the second research question (RQ2) is considered exploratory: *How will news opinionation affect the size of partisan differences in perceptions of bias?*

Method

A series of three online experiments was conducted. Each employed a 3 x 3 between-subjects design. The first factor was news condition: Subjects were randomly exposed to one of three news stories centering on the same topic. Two stories were opinionated, representing either a pro-issue or anti-issue perspective, whereas the third story used a more conventional, non-opinionated format. The second factor was issue partisanship. Subjects were classified into one of three partisan groups (pro-issue, non-partisan, or anti-issue) based on responses to a baseline attitude measure. Study 1 was fielded in August 2007; Studies 2 and 3 in December 2007.

Beyond the basic design, the three studies differed in several key ways. For one, each focused on a different news topic. The news stimuli in Study 1 reported on a May 2007 speech delivered by President Bush at the Coast Guard Academy commencement in which he discussed declassified intelligence revealing that al Qaeda had been using Iraq to plan terrorist attacks against the United States. Study 2 was concerned with President Bush's October 2007 veto of the proposed expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The news stimuli in Study 3 reported on the October 2007 failed Senate cloture vote on the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which proposed to allow illegal immigrants who were brought to the U.S. by their parents as young children a path to citizenship.

Studies 1 and 2 were video-based and used actual television news programming as stimuli. This offered the benefit of high authenticity, but, as a consequence, inevitably implicated other variations in the format and content of the segments chosen for comparison. Moreover, by relying on naturally occurring news content, the host and channel of the news program were obvious to subjects, making it more difficult to discern whether subjects were basing their judgments of bias on the actual news content or on their expectations regarding the source. Study 3 therefore sought higher levels of control by constructing text-based stimuli, formatted to look like transcripts from a TV news broadcast. The presence and direction of opinionation were

randomly manipulated while a body of core story content was held constant across conditions. The stimuli omitted all host, program, and channel details so not to confound subjects' reactions to the news content with their preconceptions about the source. In this way, then, the first two studies complemented the third by balancing considerations of external and internal validity.

A final difference across studies involves the sampling procedure. Study 1 relied on a combination of snowball and convenience sampling methods.[1] For Studies 2 and 3, subjects were recruited from an online panel of survey respondents maintained by Survey Sampling International (SSI; www.surveysampling.com). SSI has developed a panel of approximately 1.7 million Americans 18 or older who participate in periodic online surveys. SSI claims to represent 70% of the online population (Survey Sampling International, 2007). Panelists are recruited online and are incentivized through a loyalty program. The resulting samples were broadly comparable to the general U.S. adult population in terms of gender and race but were somewhat younger and better educated. Sample comparisons are provided in Table 1.

– Table 1 here –

Experimental Procedure and Stimuli

Subjects were emailed a link to an online survey, hosted by surveygizmo.com. Random assignment to one of the three news conditions was programmed to occur automatically when subjects linked to the survey. After giving their consent to participate, subjects completed a number of baseline measures, including news exposure, demographics, media perceptions, and attitudes toward various issues. Subjects were then exposed to the news stimulus, following which they completed a post-test with perceived bias and other message evaluation measures.

Clips from MSNBC's *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* were used for the anti-war opinionated condition in Study 1 and the pro-SCHIP opinionated condition in Study 2. Clips from CNN Headline News' *Glenn Beck* were used for the pro-war opinionated condition in

Study 1 and the anti-SCHIP opinionated condition in Study 2. PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* provided the non-opinionated clips.[2] These programs were not only selected on the basis of their partisan stance (or non-partisan stance in the case of *NewsHour*) but also due to their relative obscurity in the broader media landscape. For example, in the second quarter of 2007, less than a third of the number of viewers who watched Fox News' top-rated *The O'Reilly Factor* watched *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* and even fewer watched *Glenn Beck* (tvnewser.com, 2007). Similarly, far less watch *NewsHour* regularly than the evening news on the commercial networks. This reduces the likelihood that respondents would carry preconceptions about the program. Indeed, more than two-thirds of the Study 1 sample, and roughly half of the Study 2 sample, reported not being aware of the biases, if any, of the three target news programs. Study 3, by using text-based stimuli that obscures the identity of the news source, did an even better job of isolating audience responses to the news content from their prior beliefs about the source.

The creation of the text-based stimuli in Study 3 began with a balanced account of the DREAM Act compiled from actual news reports. The story, which was approximately 800 words in length, was structured such that it contained equal amounts of information and argumentation for and against the DREAM Act; the reporting and commentary attributed to the anchor was relatively neutral in tone. Subjects assigned to the non-opinionated news condition were exposed to this balanced version. In order to create news stories for the opinionated conditions, story slant was manipulated by subtracting elements of the original balanced story that were inconsistent with the direction of the opinionation. This was done to increase the realism of the opinionated stimuli; overt opinionation in support of or in opposition to the DREAM Act would not be particularly believable if a completely balanced account of the news story was presented. Core facts were held constant across conditions; only the relative presence of arguments for or against the legislation varied. Finally, to formally establish opinionation, the anchors' remarks were

edited to include statements characteristic of opinionated news (e.g., emotional, sarcastic, or value-laden language, etc.). These statements were drawn from real news broadcasts (e.g., CNN's *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, Headline News' *Glenn Beck*) so that they were reflective of what opinionated commentators have actually said about the DREAM Act.[3]

Measures

Measurement procedures were generally consistent across studies. Table 2 summarizes the measures used to assess key research variables; additional details are described below.

– Table 2 here –

Issue partisanship. Because the interest of this research was in the effects of opinionated, issue-based news coverage and not liberal versus conservative news per se, it was deemed most appropriate to assemble subjects into partisan groups on the basis of their responses to pre-test attitudinal measures gauging support for the focal news issue rather than on the basis of general political ideology or party identification. Moreover, a focus on issue partisanship has been the approach taken in much of the research on the hostile media perception (e.g., Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Vallone et al., 1985). Thus, in Study 1, partisans were classified as pro-war, anti-war, or non-partisan as opposed to liberal/conservative or Republican/Democrat. Similarly, in Study 2, partisanship was based on support for government-supported healthcare and, in Study 3, on support for the rights and benefits of illegal immigrants. Multi-item 9-point Likert scales were used to assess support for the focal issue. Respondents scoring from 1 to 4 on the scale were classified as anti-issue partisans; respondents scoring above 4 and below 6 were classified as non-partisans, and respondents scoring 6 or higher were classified as pro-issue partisans.

News perceptions. Two measures of perceived bias were included, the first tapping into the degree of favoritism in the news *story*; the second capturing the extent of *host* opinionation. The directional measure of perceived story bias consisted of a three-item scale adapted from the

hostile media effect literature (e.g., Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). Respondents were asked whether the news story was strictly neutral, or biased in favor of or against the focal news issue. Responses were registered on an 11-point scale, with -5 as "strongly biased against," 0 as "strictly neutral," and +5 as "strongly biased in favor." Two additional items asked respondents to rate what percentage of the news story was unfavorable and favorable, respectively, toward the focal news issue on 11-point scales ranging from 0 to 100%. The unfavorability measure was reverse coded and both items were converted to a -5 to +5 response scale. All three items were then averaged to form a scale, where positive scores represent a perceived story bias favorable toward the focal news issue and negative scores a bias unfavorable toward the focal issue. The measure of perceived host bias was created by averaging responses to six 7-point semantic differential items assessing the extent to which the news host was perceived as biased, subjective, opinionated, emotional, expressing his personal view, and failing to separate fact from opinion. In Study 1, these items loaded together in a factor analysis of 16 items, adapted from Gaziano and McGrath (1986), intended to gauge source credibility.[4]

Analysis

For each set of data, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine the main effect of news condition on news perceptions. In the presence of a significant main effect, planned contrasts were used to compare the non-opinionated condition to each of the opinionated conditions. To then evaluate whether the size of partisan differences in news perceptions varied across news conditions, the interaction between news condition and issue partisanship was examined in a two-way ANOVA.[5] Significant interactions were probed by performing a simple effects analysis (Keppel & Wickens, 2004) of partisanship within each level of news condition. The Sidak correction was used to adjust significance levels for any post-hoc pairwise simple comparisons.[6] Analyses were first performed using perceived story bias as the

outcome measure and then repeated with perceived host bias as the dependent variable. Results for each study are presented separately below.

Results

Study 1 Results

Effects on Perceived Story Bias

ANOVA results indicated a strong main effect of news condition on perceived story bias (F (2, 124) = 192.61, $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .76$). Consistent with expectations, the anti-war opinionated segment was perceived as biased against the war, the non-opinionated segment was perceived as essentially neutral, and the pro-war opinionated segment perceived as biased in favor of the war (see Table 3). Planned contrasts revealed significant mean differences between the non-opinionated condition and both the anti-war and pro-war opinionated conditions (both $p < .001$).

– Table 3 here –

The interaction between news condition and issue partisanship was not significant (F (4, 118) = .94, $p = .45$; power = .40). Mean levels of perceived story bias by condition and partisanship, presented in Table 3, indicate that there were minimal differences among issue partisans in their perceptions in either opinionated condition. There was somewhat more divergence among partisans in the non-opinionated condition. In particular, it appears that pro-war partisans perceived the non-opinionated segment as somewhat biased against the war – and thus hostile to their own position – whereas both anti-war partisans and non-partisans perceived the same segment as relatively neutral. These patterns suggest that opinionated news may have washed out selective perception among partisans, whereas non-opinionated news generated a hostile media phenomenon, at least among war supporters. Likely there was simply not enough power to detect the relatively small interaction effect between news condition and partisanship.

Effects on Perceived Host Bias

As with perceived story bias, there was a main effect of news condition (F (2, 124) = 61.27, $p < .001$; η^2 =.50), such that perceived host bias was significantly lower in the non-opinionated condition than in either opinionated condition (both $p < .001$). However, there was also a significant interaction between news condition and issue partisanship (F (4, 118) = 4.30, $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .13$). The simple effects of partisanship on perceived host bias were significant in the non-opinionated (F (2, 118) = 3.61, $p < .05$) and pro-war opinionated conditions (F (2, 118) = 3.62, $p < .05$), and marginally significant in the anti-war opinionated condition (F (2, 118) = 2.74, $p < .07$). Thus, at least when it comes to perceived host bias, it does not appear that opinionated news eliminates perceptual differences among issue partisans, nor does it necessarily alter the size of these differences, given the roughly equal magnitude of partisanship effects in the non-opinionated and pro-war conditions.

Further, the means for perceived host bias in Table 3 reveal that the direction of partisan differences varied across news conditions, consistent with a hostile media perception: War partisans perceived less bias in the hosts of opinionated news that was consistent with their predispositions than their opponents on the other side of the issue. Indeed, simple pairwise comparisons indicated that in the pro-war opinionated condition, pro-war partisans perceived significantly less host bias than anti-war partisans (t (118) = -2.61, $p < .05$), whereas in the anti-war opinionated condition, the reverse was true, such that anti-war partisans perceived marginally less bias than pro-war partisans (t (118) = -2.33, $p < .07$). There were also marginal differences between pro- and anti-war partisans in the non-opinionated condition (t (118) = 2.31, $p < .07$), with the former group perceiving more host bias than the latter. Although in no instance did pro- or anti-war partisans differ significantly from non-partisans, in both opinionated conditions, anti-war partisans were more aligned with non-partisans than were pro-war partisans.

Thus, pro-war partisans might have been especially likely to exaggerate the presence of host bias in news with which they disagreed while underestimating bias in news with which they agreed.

Summary

Study 1 provides strong support for Hypothesis 1, in that opinionated news increased perceived story and host bias, relative to non-opinionated news. Regarding partisan differences in these perceptions, the results were split: Partisans uniformly perceived story bias in opinionated news, whereas perceived host bias varied as a function of partisan agreement with the opinionated news content. In interpreting the Study 1 results, it is important to keep in mind that the sample was relatively small and disproportionately anti-war. This made it difficult to reliably detect interaction effects involving partisanship given the small cell sizes for the pro-war and non-partisan groups. The study was also confined to a single issue context. To examine effects on news perceptions in a different issue context, we turn now to the results from Study 2, which focused on the proposed SCHIP expansion. The Study 2 sample was also larger and more well-balanced in terms of partisanship, providing for a more reliable test of interaction effects.

Study 2 Results

Effects on Perceived Story Bias

There was a strong main effect of news condition on perceived story bias (F (2, 420) = 287.55, $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .58$). Planned contrasts confirmed significant mean differences between the non-opinionated condition and both the anti-SCHIP and pro-SCHIP opinionated conditions (both $p < .001$). Mean differences were in the expected direction (see Table 4).

– Table 4 here –

There was also a significant interaction between news condition and issue partisanship (F (4, 414) = 2.71, $p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .03$), indicating that the size of partisan differences in perceived story bias varied across news conditions. Specifically, the simple effect of partisanship was

significant only in the non-opinionated condition (F (2, 414) = 3.91, $p < .05$). In this case, anti-government healthcare partisans perceived significantly greater bias in favor of SCHIP – and thus hostile to their own position – than pro-government healthcare partisans (t (414) = 2.79, $p < .05$). The effect of partisanship was marginally significant in the pro-SCHIP opinionated condition (F (2, 414) = 2.41, $p < .10$): Although all groups perceived a pro-SCHIP bias, anti-government healthcare partisans perceived marginally more bias than pro-government healthcare partisans (t (414) = 2.13, $p < .10$). There was no effect of partisanship in the anti-SCHIP opinionated condition (F (2, 414) = 1.20, $p = .30$). These results are thus suggestive of a hostile media perception, though primarily among anti-government healthcare partisans in the non-opinionated condition and, to a lesser extent, in the pro-SCHIP opinionated condition.

Effects on Perceived Host Bias

There was a significant main effect of news condition (F (2, 420) = 56.12, $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .21$). Planned contrasts further revealed significant mean differences, in the expected direction, between the non-opinionated condition and both opinionated conditions (both $p < .001$).

A significant interaction emerged between news condition and issue partisanship (F (4, 414) = 20.06, $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .16$). The pattern of means in Table 4 suggests that both the magnitude and direction of partisan differences in perceived host bias varied across news conditions. Although there were significant differences across levels of partisanship in each of the three news conditions, these differences were largest in the pro-SCHIP opinionated condition (F (2, 414) = 23.08, $p < .001$) and smallest in the anti-SCHIP opinionated condition (F (2, 414) = 10.76, $p < .001$); differences in the non-opinionated condition fell in-between (F (2, 414) = 13.29, $p < .001$). Simple pairwise comparisons revealed that in all three news conditions, anti- and pro-government healthcare partisans differed significantly in their perceptions of host bias. In the anti-SCHIP opinionated condition, anti-government healthcare partisans perceived the

host as significantly less biased than pro-government healthcare partisans (t (414) = -4.61, p < .001); though also perceiving less bias than non-partisans, these differences were only marginally significant (t (414) = -2.24, p < .08). There were no differences between non-partisans and pro-government healthcare partisans. In the non-opinionated and pro-SCHIP opinionated conditions, the reverse pattern emerged: Anti-government healthcare partisans perceived the news hosts in these two conditions as *more* biased than either of the other two partisan groups (all p's < .001, except with non-partisans in the non-opinionated condition, where p < .05). In the pro-SCHIP opinionated condition – though not in the non-opinionated condition – significant differences also emerged between pro-government healthcare and non-partisans (t (414) = -3.13, p < .01).

Summary

In sum, Study 2 replicated Study 1's support for Hypothesis 1, demonstrating heightened perceptions of story and host bias in response to opinionated news. As in Study 1, selective perception of story bias was most pronounced in the non-opinionated condition; partisans varied little in their perceptions of bias in opinionated news stories. Perceptions of the opinionated host, on the other hand, were again vulnerable to partisan selectivity: In a pattern consistent with a hostile media phenomenon, partisans who encountered a like-minded host perceived significantly less bias than did either opposing partisans or non-partisans. Biased processing was also evident in the non-opinionated condition: Anti-government healthcare partisans perceived the non-opinionated host as more biased than did members of the other two partisan groups. Still, partisan differences were strongest in the pro-SCHIP opinionated condition. For the third – and final – assessment of opinionation's effects on news perceptions, we turn to the results for Study 3, which was conducted in the context of news about the DREAM Act. In a departure from Studies 1 and 2, Study 3 relied on text-based – as opposed to video-based – news stimuli, which made it possible to obscure the identity of the news source.

Study 3 Results

Effects on Perceived Story Bias

There was a highly significant main effect of news condition on perceived story bias (F (2, 434) = 132.89, $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .38$).[7] There were significant differences, in the expected direction (see Table 5), between the non-opinionated condition and both the anti-DREAM Act (t (226) = 11.64, $p < .001$) and pro-DREAM Act opinionated conditions (t (243) = -5.33, $p < .001$).

– Table 5 here –

There was a significant interaction between news condition and issue partisanship (F (4, 428) = 3.25, $p < .025$; $\eta^2 = .03$). Partisan differences in perceived story bias manifested exclusively in the anti-DREAM Act opinionated condition (F (2, 137) = 5.04, $p < .01$). Anti-illegal immigrant partisans perceived relatively less anti-DREAM Act bias than the other two partisan groups, although this difference was significant only relative to pro-illegal immigrant partisans (t (111) = 2.83, $p < .05$). The simple effect of partisanship was not significant in either the non-opinionated (F (2, 148) = 1.86, $p = .16$) or pro-DREAM Act opinionated (F (2, 143) = 0.53, $p = .59$) conditions. These results are thus suggestive of a relative hostile media effect in the anti-DREAM Act opinionated condition, though not in the other two news conditions.

Effects on Perceived Host Bias

There was a significant main effect of news condition (F (2, 434) = 67.38, $p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .24$). The host in the non-opinionated condition was perceived as significantly less biased than the hosts in the opinionated conditions (both $p < .001$).

The interaction between news condition and issue partisanship was significant (F (4, 428) = 3.96, $p < .05$). The pattern of means for perceived host bias in Table 5 reveals a pattern highly similar to what was seen for story bias. Again, discernible partisan differences manifested only in the anti-DREAM Act opinionated condition (F (2, 428) = 7.26, $p < .01$). Here, anti-illegal

immigrant partisans perceived the least amount of host bias and pro-illegal immigrant partisans perceived the most, with significant pairwise differences between these groups (t (428) = -3.60, p < .01). The simple effect of partisanship was not significant in the non-opinionated (F (2, 428) = 1.23, p = .29) or pro-DREAM Act opinionated conditions (F (2, 428) = 0.46, p = .64).

Summary

The results from Study 3 further solidified support for Hypothesis 1. However, in a deviation from the previous studies, opinionated news triggered partisans' selective perception of both story and host bias, though only in the case of anti-DREAM Act opinionated news.

Discussion

Taken together, the results reported above suggest that audiences are quite capable of identifying bias in opinionated news. In all three experiments, subjects perceived significantly greater story and host bias in the opinionated news conditions than in the non-opinionated news condition, with the direction of perceived story bias consistent with that of the opinionated news message. These findings provide overwhelming support for Hypothesis 1.

In answering Research Question 2, however, the findings were more mixed. In Studies 1 and 2, perceptions of bias in the opinionated news stories did not vary significantly as a function of issue partisanship, whereas perceptions of story bias in non-opinionated news stories were at least suggestive of a hostile media effect. Only in the anti-DREAM Act opinionated condition in Study 3 was there any reliable indication that opinionated news triggers partisan selectivity in story perceptions (though there was also a marginally significant effect of partisanship in the pro-SCHIP opinionated condition in Study 2). While these results align, albeit inconsistently, with Dalton et al.'s (1998) conclusions – suggesting that the strong partisan cues present in opinionated news allow people to make more objective determinations of news bias – the results for perceived host bias tell a different story. In all three studies, perceptions of host bias were

subject to partisan differences in one, if not both, of the opinionated news conditions. Consistent with a hostile media effect, issue partisans perceived less bias in opinionated news hosts whose viewpoints cohered with their own than did non-partisans and especially partisans on the opposing side of the issue. In most cases, these partisan differences were as big as – if not bigger than – the differences seen in response to non-opinionated news, indicating that even blatant deviations from journalistic norms do not quell partisan selectivity in news perceptions, at least when it comes to perceived bias in the host of opinionated programs.

So, why, then, if partisans don't vary much in their perceptions of story bias in opinionated news do they differ almost without exception in their perceptions of host bias? One explanation may be that while the direction of story bias in opinionated news is fairly clear regardless of partisanship, this bias is seen as warranted and grounded in fact by those whose pre-existing attitudes cohere with the direction of that bias. So, using Study 1 as an example, pro-war partisans may have recognized that the pro-war opinionated *Glenn Beck*, due to its overt opinionation and strong partisan cues, favored the war in Iraq, but perceived – at least relative to their anti-war partisan counterparts – that this view was itself based on an objective, fairly reasoned assessment of fact and thus not necessarily indicative of bias on the part of the host. Consistent with this idea, research has found that people are more likely to assume that their positions and the positions of those with whom they agree are influenced by normative rather than non-normative factors – with the reverse true for those who hold different opinions (Robinson et al., 1995). Thus, partisans recognize that opinionated news is taking a particular political perspective, and they generally agree on the direction and magnitude of this bias. It is when partisans are asked to make a personal inference about the host and gauge the extent to which opinionation in the news is an outgrowth of his subjectivity, bias, emotionality, and personal views – as opposed to more normative considerations – that selective perception arises.

A useful parallel can be located in Hastorf and Cantril's (1954) classic study, which found that Dartmouth and Princeton students perceived stark differences in a football game played between the two schools' teams. From an objective standpoint – that is, according to the official record of the game – the Dartmouth team was penalized 70 yards; the Princeton team 25 yards. Nearly all (93%) of the Princeton students who participated in Hastorf and Cantril's study characterized the game as "rough and dirty." However, less than half (42%) of Dartmouth students agreed with this characterization, while a nearly equal proportion (39%) saw the game as "rough and fair" (a description they volunteered themselves). In other words, the vast majority of students from both schools perceived the game to be rough but diverged in their interpretations of the players' motivations (i.e., fair or dirty), depending on whether their school's team was objectively most at fault. This is akin to what was found in the present research: Issue partisans tended to agree on the amount and direction of favoritism displayed in an opinionated news story but disagreed as to the reasons for this favoritism – that is, whether it was a product of the host's subjective point of view, or a more fair-minded assessment of the issue. More specifically, partisans who saw their side being attacked by an opinionated news host perceived that host to be more biased than did partisans who shared the host's position – much as Princeton students saw the infractions committed by the Dartmouth team to be dirty and the Dartmouth students saw these as fair. In all, this suggests that when it comes to opinionated news, partisans may uniformly perceive favoritism in a story but still attribute that favoritism more or less to a host's personal biases, depending on whether they share the host's position.

The divergent results across the two measures of news perceptions suggest that the typical hostile media effect measure of perceived story bias may not be as sensitive to perceptual differences among partisans in an opinionated news context. Perceived story bias appears to be more dependent on the strength of the news' partisan signal (i.e., the stronger the signal, or

opinionation, the weaker the partisan differences in perceptions), whereas perceived host bias is more clearly a function of receiver characteristics – namely, partisan agreement with the source. This is ostensibly because assessing host bias requires making a personal inference about the host, which is a more subjective judgment than assessing favoritism in a blatantly opinionated news story. It is possible, then, that what we are seeing in the case of perceived host bias is not a hostile media effect per se – whereby partisans categorize ambiguous news content as contrary to their own position – but rather a form of motivated reasoning, in which audiences attempt to protect their pre-existing beliefs by discrediting the source of a counter-attitudinal news story (Zanna, Klossen, & Darley, 1976). The mechanism for selective perceptions of opinionated news is a useful subject for future research.

It is important to recognize that this overall pattern of findings was not entirely uniform. Study 3 yielded the same results for both perceived story and host bias. In both cases, partisan differences only manifested in the anti-DREAM Act opinionated condition and only among anti-illegal immigrant partisans. Given the much starker partisan differences found with perceived host bias in Studies 1 and 2, there was some concern that the patterns detected in those analyses might not have been a consequence of the experimental manipulation but instead a function of respondents' preconceptions regarding the biases of the news stimuli. That is, because Studies 1 and 2 relied on real news broadcasts as stimuli, while Study 3 did not, subjects may have been reacting to the source cues in these broadcasts as opposed to the news content itself (see Baum & Gussin, 2007; Turner, 2008). To account for this possibility, the baseline questionnaires for Studies 1 and 2 assessed preconceptions of a liberal or conservative bias in the target news programs. A variable was computed to distinguish between those respondents in each study who had a preconception of bias about the news program to which they were assigned (regardless of its direction) and those who did not. The previously reported findings for perceived story and

host were found to persist regardless of whether subjects had a source preconception or not.[8] Thus, there is no evidence that partisan differences in news perceptions in Studies 1 and 2 were a function of source preconceptions. It is possible, then, that the different pattern of findings in Study 3 was due to something particular about the issue of immigration reform, the construction of the news stories, or reading as opposed to watching the news. For example, it could be that with a print news transcript, the "anchor" is less salient and thus less discernible as an opinionated personality, thereby restricting the variability of perceived host bias.

Across the three studies, it was also the case that the tendency toward selective perception was especially prominent among those partisans whose issue positions were most closely aligned with conservative ideology (i.e., pro-war, anti-government healthcare, and anti-illegal immigrant partisans). For one, conservatively-minded issue partisans consistently diverged from non-partisans in their perceptions. On the other hand, liberally-minded issue partisans (i.e., anti-war, pro-government healthcare, and pro-illegal immigrant partisans) generally cohered with non-partisans in their perceptions of bias and opinionation; the single exception was in Study 2, in the pro-SCHIP opinionated condition, where pro-government healthcare partisans perceived significantly less opinionation than non-partisans. Thus, to the extent that the perceptions of non-partisan audiences can be assumed to provide an objective assessment of bias in the news, conservatively-minded partisans appear to have been most subject to perceptual distortions. This concurs with prior research (Eveland & Shah, 2003) which has found that hostile media perceptions are stronger among Republicans than Democrats.

The fact that liberally-minded partisans were, for the most part, less likely than conservatively-minded partisans to underestimate bias in opinionated news that concurred with their point of view might suggest a greater intolerance for opinionation in the news. Conservative political talk radio, which has been popular since the early 1990s, likely helped accustom its

listeners – who are disproportionately conservative (Cappella & Jamieson, 2008) – to bias in the media. At the same time, the widespread assumption among conservatives that the news media, in general, are liberally biased (Lee, 2005) might lead them to perceive conservatively opinionated media, like *Glenn Beck*, to be fair and balanced. Conservatively-minded partisans were also disproportionately likely to exaggerate biases in non-opinionated news and in opinionated news that was inconsistent with their partisanship. This too may stem from their suspicion of the mainstream news media, which likely created, in the language of social judgment theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1961), an especially large latitude of message rejection. In any event, it appears that opposing partisan groups hold different sets of expectations for the news media in general that translate, along with their issue-based predispositions, into differences in how specific instances of news are ultimately perceived.[9]

Despite these differences, liberally-minded partisans were not entirely immune to selective perception. Thus, although opinionated news, overall, does not share the credibility of traditional, objective formats, it is still safe to say that partisan agreement drives just how much bias is perceived in opinionated news – particularly when it comes to perceptions of the host. True to Gunther's assessment (1992), "it is what audiences do with news, as well as what newspeople do with news, that accounts for judgments of trust in mass media" (p. 63). Even in the presence of blatant journalist opinionation, audiences filter their perceptions of news through the lens of their own partisanship.

While these findings have important implications, there are limitations that should be kept in mind. First is the possibility that these studies underestimated potential effects. For one, Study 1 was under-powered due to limited sample size. Further, many prior studies on the hostile media effect have recruited participants who are highly involved in an issue through interest groups and activist organizations. In contrast, these studies sampled participants from the general

population; while this sampling procedure permits broader generalizability, individuals classified here as "partisans" may not have been sufficiently strong in their issue involvement to produce a reliable hostile media effect. In addition, although the three issues used in this research – the war in Iraq, healthcare and immigration reform – were purposefully chosen because of their controversial, partisan nature, as well as their high visibility in opinionated cable news programs, it is possible that these are not issues with an abundance of strong partisan supporters and opponents in a general population sample. With this in mind, the analyses were re-run, with the issue partisanship measures recoded to distinguish between extreme partisans (i.e., for anti-issue partisans, those scoring below 3 on the 9-point issue partisanship measure, and for pro-issue partisans, those scoring above 7) and weak or non-partisans (i.e., those scoring between 3 and 7). The results were relatively unchanged. Importantly, even when looking among extremists, there was limited evidence for selective perceptions of bias in opinionated news stories, with stronger partisan disagreement in perceptions of host bias.[10] Even so, the present research design provides for a relatively conservative test of the hostile media effect. It is thus especially notable that biased perceptions were observed among ordinary citizens; we can assume that such effects would be even stronger among activated issue partisans.

In addition, while the experimental methods employed in this research were useful in that they permitted inferences about causality, in so doing, they essentially forced exposure to the news stimulus. This too may have underestimated partisan differences in news perceptions, as selective perception is likely to be enhanced when people self-select media content. For example, when people seek out an opinionated news program specifically because it is expected to align with their partisan perspective, this is apt to amplify the tendency to understate the bias in that program. Future research should evaluate the extent of partisan differences in news perceptions when audiences selectively expose themselves to opinionated news.

A further limitation of the forced exposure scenario is that it assumes that exposure to media necessarily drives perceptions of those media; however, other scholars have suggested the reverse – that is, that trust in media motivates exposure choices (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Likely, these variables are involved in a cyclical process, whereby prior beliefs about the credibility of a news source encourage exposure to that source; exposure then validates those prior beliefs, spawning further exposure. Still, subsequent studies should strive to better sort out the causal relationships between opinionated news perceptions and exposure.

Finally, a drawback of conducting online research is that it excludes those without internet access; the video-based design of Studies 1 and 2 also limited participation to those with a high-speed internet connection. This may account for the under-representation in these samples of lower SES and older Americans (see Horrigan & Smith, 2007). Still, the samples used in this research, though not perfectly representative, were certainly more representative than the typical college-student sample relied upon in many experiments. Moreover, given that cable news viewers are more educated than the average American (Pew Research Center, 2006), an upwardly biased sample does not preclude generalization to the population of interest.

Even given some limitations, the fact that a fairly consistent and interpretable pattern of effects was observed across studies speaks to the veracity of the findings. Thus, the implications of this research should not be overlooked. Although it is encouraging that audiences, overall, recognize bias in opinionated news – as this may minimize their likelihood of being manipulated or misinformed by opinionated sources – the partisan selectivity in these perceptions is troubling. Trust in news sources has become deeply polarized in recent years – with Republicans, for example, attributing more credibility to Fox News and less to most other news organizations than Democrats (Pew Research Center, 2008). While some of this polarization in trust is due to individuals' *a priori* assumptions – sometimes false – about the ideological leanings of various

news sources (Baum & Gussin, 2007; Turner, 2007), the present research suggests that partisan differences in media perceptions also derive from biased processing of actual opinionated news messages. That is, issue partisans do seem to have a bias against news bias – in instances where that news bias coheres with their pre-existing viewpoints. To be clear, opinionation in the news is not inherently a bad thing (unless, arguably, it disguises itself as fact); rather, it may help to stimulate discourse and critical analysis (Jamieson et al., 2007). However, the likelihood that audiences will consider opinionated news valid food for thought is likewise dependent on how much they agree with the news message. Thus, just as prior evidence for the hostile media effect implies that audiences will reject balanced, impartial news as biased, so, too, do the present results suggest that news offering reasonable opinions on a political issue will be dismissed as the subjective musings of a partisan host. All told, the growth of opinionated news on cable and elsewhere might make it even easier for partisans to validate their personal political beliefs – by accepting at face value information that comports with their views while rejecting information that advocates for the other side. As a result, opinionated news might not only serve to propagate partisan divides in news perceptions but also in political attitudes and knowledge. Although further research is needed to explore how the influence of partisanship on the interpretation and evaluation of opinionated news bears on processes of persuasion and attitude polarization, the potential consequences of a hostile media perception in opinionated news loom large for the future of democratic cooperation in this contemporary era.

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Footnotes

[1] An online recruitment appeal, which described the study as one about television news and politics, was emailed to friends and colleagues who were not asked to take part in the study themselves but to forward the appeal to their own friends, family members, colleagues, etc. Subjects were also recruited via an online advertisement posted on craigslist. As an incentive, participants were offered the chance to win one of several gift certificates to Amazon.com.

[2]Each of the clips used in Study 1 was roughly five minutes long. Approximately the first two minutes consisted of a report from the show's host (or news correspondent Ray Suarez, in the case of *NewsHour*) on Bush's speech at the Coast Guard commencement, which included taped footage of Bush. While the PBS segment provided a relatively neutral view, Olbermann openly criticized Bush for trying to invoke fear in the American people in order to mislead them into supporting the war, and Beck emphasized the importance of continuing U.S. military involvement in Iraq in order to deter al Qaeda. The final two-thirds of each broadcast consisted of an interview exchange. In the case of Olbermann and Beck, the exchange was with a single guest sympathetic to their respective views, whereas the *NewsHour's* Ray Suarez interviewed two guests representing each side of the debate. The *Countdown* and *Glenn Beck* segments originally aired on May 23, 2007; the *NewsHour* segment aired on May 24, 2007. The *Glenn Beck* segment used in Study 2 originally aired on October 3, 2007, the day of Bush's veto of the SCHIP reauthorization bill, whereas both the *NewsHour* and *Countdown* segments aired on October 18, in the aftermath of the House of Representatives' failed veto override. Despite this discrepancy, all three segments similarly focused on details of the vetoed legislation and its surrounding partisan debate. Lehrer opened the *NewsHour* segment with news of the failed veto override. This was followed by a more detailed report on SCHIP, its proposed expansion, and the president's veto. Much of the segment featured alternating sound-bites from the bill's opponents

and supporters debating on the House floor. Beck and Olbermann provided commentary and reporting on SCHIP, followed by an interview with a guest sympathetic to their respective views. Beck condemned the SCHIP expansion as an attempt at socialized medicine, and Olbermann extolled the virtues of SCHIP and openly criticized Bush for his veto. The Study 2 segments were approximately four minutes in length.

[3]For each of the three studies, a pre-test was conducted online with a sample of undergraduates to ensure that the manipulation of opinionation was effective. In all cases, perceptions of news bias varied significantly across conditions in the expected direction, suggesting a successful manipulation. For the Study 1 and 2 pre-tests, subjects were randomly assigned to read *print* transcripts of the news clips. Identifying information about the news program and host was deleted to ensure that the stories were perceived as intended without being confounded by source preconceptions.

[4]The other items included unfair, doesn't tell the whole story, inaccurate, can't be trusted, mostly gives opinions, unqualified, inexpert, unreliable, unprofessional, and incompetent.

[5]Because participants self-selected into partisan groups, it is possible that the groups differed systematically on demographic and other background variables. For this reason, all analyses were repeated as analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), with age, education, and political orientation as covariates. Because the ANCOVA results differed neither substantively nor statistically from the ANOVA results, and because the use of ANCOVA to adjust for pre-existing covariate differences among groups is a delicate and controversial technique (see Keppell & Wickens, 2004, pp. 340-341), the ANOVA results and unadjusted means are reported in favor of the ANCOVA results and adjusted means.

[6]The Sidak correction was applied assuming a family of three tests, since there was a maximum of three pairwise comparisons across partisan groups within each news condition.

Pairwise contrasts were only tested for a given news condition if the simple effect of partisanship within that condition was significant.

[7]The ANOVA assumption of homogeneity of variance was not met. Because this threatens to bias the ANOVA results, the recommendations of Keppel and Wickens (2004) were followed in adopting a more conservative value for the nominal α level (i.e., $p < .025$) when testing the omnibus main and interaction effects. Further, given the presence of a significant interaction effect, simple effects were analyzed as separate single-factor designs rather than using a pooled error term. Finally, pairwise contrasts were tested using t-tests that assume unequal variances. Computation of the standard error and degrees of freedom for these tests followed the equations provided by Keppell and Wickens (2004, pp. 156-158).

[8]While the general pattern of findings hold true, in that all subjects, regardless of source preconceptions, perceived significantly greater story and host bias in the opinionated versus the non-opinionated news conditions, these perceptions were more pronounced among those without any source preconceptions. While these results suggest that audiences are more sensitive to bias in opinionated news when they hold no preconceptions about the program, this trend occurred uniformly across partisan groups (i.e., there was no three-way interaction between news condition, partisanship, and preconceptions) – thereby alleviating any concerns that the pattern of partisan differences in Studies 1 and 2 were a function of source preconceptions.

[9]Notably, if the analyses were repeated, substituting a measure of general political partisanship (i.e., conservative/republican vs. liberal/democrat) in place of issue partisanship, the interactions between partisanship and news condition were generally weakened and, in some cases, disappeared entirely. This suggests that the selective perception of opinionated news content was cued by individuals' identification as issue partisans more so than by their general political party membership or ideological orientation.

[10]In Study 2, the patterns of selective perception reported in Table 4 were sharpened among partisan extremists. Specifically, anti-government healthcare extremists perceived the non-opinionated news story as having a significantly greater pro-SCHIP bias than pro-government healthcare extremists *and* non-partisans (both $p < .05$). However, even among extremists, there were no partisan differences in perceived story bias in either of the opinionated news conditions. With regard to perceived host bias, the pattern of means was identical to that in Table 4; however, within each of the three news conditions, *all* pairwise comparisons between partisan groups were significant at $p < .05$. While these findings suggest that the method by which participants were classified as partisan in the main analyses (i.e., Tables 3-6) may have masked the true extent of partisan selectivity, it is important to keep in mind that the results using the extreme partisan classification are relatively unstable given the low cell sizes for extreme partisans (ranging from $n = 9$ to $n = 32$). Moreover, in Study 3, the patterns of means and pairwise differences were identical to those reported in Table 5, though the interaction between partisanship and news condition for both dependent variables was no longer significant (this could be a function of the limited sample size in the extremist cells). The Study 1 analyses were not repeated due to the small overall sample size. The complete results for Study 2 and Study 3 using the extremist partisan classification are available from the author by request.

Table 1. *Summary of Sample Characteristics*

	Current Population Survey [A]	RDD Sample [B] (*N* = 1,503)	Study 1 Sample (*N* = 127)	Study 2 Sample (*N* = 423)	Study 3 Sample (*N* = 437)
Gender					
Male	48%	52%	42%	51%	51%
Age					
18-24	13%	5%	10%	8%	2%
25-44	37	29	52	40	38
45-64	34	44	28	47	51
65+	16	22	10	6	9
Education					
Less than HS Grad	15%	6%	2%	0 %	2%
High School Grad	31	28	4	23	21
Some College	27	24	21	34	37
Bachelor's Degree	17	26	42	29	25
Advanced Degree	9	16	32	15	16
Race					
White	81%	85%	90%	86%	87%
Ideology					
Conservative	n/a	41%	18%	38%	33%
Moderate		39	29	46	46
Liberal		20	53	17	21
Party					
Republican	n/a	30%	24%	47%	35%
Independent		39	31	28	30
Democrat		32	46	25	35

[A] Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007

[B] Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, July 2007 Political Survey / Media Update, July 25-29, 2007

Table 2. *Measurement Summary for Key Variables*

Variable	Description	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
		Reliability		
Issue partisanship	Multi-item, 9-point Likert scale	6 items; α = .90	4 items; α = .74	4 items; α = .76
Perceived Story Bias	3 items adapted from hostile media effect literature	α = .96	α = .87	α = .89
Perceived Host Bias	6 semantic differential items	α = .92	α = .80	α = .92

Note. Cronbach's α reported.

Table 3
News Perceptions Means by News Condition and War Partisanship (Study One)

	Partisanship			
	Anti-war partisans	Non-partisans	Pro-war partisans	Overall
Perceived Story Bias[A]				
News condition				
Anti-war opinionated	-3.28 (1.6)$_a$ *n* = 29	-3.70 (1.9)$_a$ *n* = 9	-3.48 (2.1)$_a$ *n* = 8	-3.40 (1.7) *n* = 46
Non-opinionated	-0.16 (1.8)$_a$ *n* = 30	0.81 (1.8)$_a$ *n* = 7	-1.00 (0.8)$_a$ *n* = 5	-0.10 (1.8) *n* = 42
Pro-war opinionated	3.86 (1.6)$_a$ *n* = 22	3.52 (1.8)$_a$ *n* = 9	3.83 (1.1)$_a$ *n* = 8	3.78 (1.5) *n* = 39
Overall	-0.18 (3.3) *n* = 81	0.16 (3.6) *n* = 25	-0.10 (3.6) *n* = 21	-0.10 (3.4) *N* = 127
Perceived Host Bias[B]				
News condition				
Anti-war opinionated	5.09 (1.1)$_a$ *n* = 29	5.39 (.90)$_a$ *n* = 9	6.08 (.97)$_a$ *n* = 8	5.32 (1.1) *n* = 46
Non-opinionated	2.84 (1.1)$_a$ *n* = 30	3.62 (1.3)$_a$ *n* = 7	4.03 (.98)$_a$ *n* = 5	3.11 (1.2) *n* = 42
Pro-war opinionated	5.86 (1.0)$_a$ *n* = 22	5.81 (1.2)$_{a,b}$ *n* = 9	4.71 (.66)$_b$ *n* = 8	5.62 (1.1) *n* = 39
Overall	4.47 (1.7) *n* = 81	5.05 (1.4) *n* = 25	5.07 (1.2) *n* = 21	4.68 (1.6) *N* = 127

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses. Within rows, cell entries with different subscripts are significantly different from one another, $p < .05$.
[A] Perceived host bias ranged from -5 (perceived bias against the war) to +5 (perceived bias in favor of the war).
[B] Perceived host bias ranges from 1 (low perceived host bias) to 7 (high perceived host bias).

Table 4
News Perceptions Means by News Condition and Healthcare Partisanship (Study Two)

	Partisanship			
	Anti-government healthcare partisans	Non-partisans	Pro-government healthcare partisans	Overall
Perceived Story Bias[A]				
News condition				
Anti-SCHIP opinionated	-3.18 (1.9)$_a$ *n* = 38	-2.52 (1.9)$_a$ *n* = 37	-2.77 (2.0)$_a$ *n* = 70	-2.81 (2.0) *n* = 145
Non-opinionated	1.32 (2.3)$_a$ *n* = 36	0.55 (1.3)$_{a,b}$ *n* = 37	0.27 (1.6)$_b$ *n* = 74	0.60 (1.8) *n* = 147
Pro-SCHIP opinionated	3.33 (2.1)$_a$ *n* = 21	2.39 (2.2)$_a$ *n* = 39	2.34 (1.6)$_a$ *n* = 71	2.52 (1.9) *n* = 131
Overall	-0.03 (3.4) *n* = 95	0.18 (2.7) *n* = 113	-0.03 (2.7) *n* = 215	0.02 (2.9) *N* = 423
Perceived Host Bias[B]				
News condition				
Anti-SCHIP opinionated	4.39 (0.9)$_a$ *n* = 38	4.91 (1.0)$_{a,b}$ *n* = 37	5.32 (1.0)$_b$ *n* = 70	4.97 (1.0) *n* = 145
Non-opinionated	4.38 (1.3)$_a$ *n* = 36	3.70 (0.7)$_b$ *n* = 37	3.33 (1.1)$_b$ *n* = 74	3.68 (1.2) *n* = 147
Pro-SCHIP opinionated	5.96 (1.0)$_a$ *n* = 21	4.92 (0.9)$_b$ *n* = 39	4.29 (1.0)$_c$ *n* = 71	4.75 (1.1) *n* = 131
Overall	4.73 (1.3) *n* = 95	4.52 (1.0) *n* = 113	4.30 (1.3) *n* = 215	4.45 (1.2) *N* = 423

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses. Within rows, cell entries with different subscripts are significantly different from one another, $p < .05$.
[A] Perceived story bias ranged from -5 (perceived bias against expanding SCHIP) to +5 (perceived bias in favor of expanding SCHIP).
[B] Perceived host bias ranges from 1 (low perceived host bias) to 7 (high perceived host bias).

Table 5
News Perceptions Means by News Condition and Immigration Partisanship (Study Three)

	Partisanship			
	Anti-illegal immigrant partisans	Non-partisans	Pro-illegal immigrant partisans	Overall
Perceived Story Bias[A]				
News condition				
Anti-DREAM Act opinionated	-1.61 (2.5)$_a$ *n* = 81	-2.66 (2.3)$_{a,b}$ *n* = 32	-3.10 (2.1)$_b$ *n* = 27	-2.13 (2.4) *n* = 140
Non-opinionated	0.64 (1.7)$_a$ *n* = 79	0.93 (1.1)$_a$ *n* = 45	0.24 (1.5)$_a$ *n* = 27	0.65 (1.5) *n* = 151
Pro-DREAM Act opinionated	1.75 (2.4)$_a$ *n* = 82	1.85 (2.3)$_a$ *n* = 39	2.31 (2.2)$_a$ *n* = 25	1.87 (2.3) *n* = 146
Overall	0.27 (2.6) *n* = 242	0.25 (2.7) *n* = 116	-0.25 (2.9) *n* = 79	0.17 (2.7) *N* = 437
Perceived Host Bias[B]				
News condition				
Anti-DREAM Act opinionated	4.98 (1.1)$_a$ *n* = 81	5.47 (1.2)$_{a,b}$ *n* = 32	5.84 (1.0)$_b$ *n* = 27	5.26 (1.1) *n* = 140
Non-opinionated	4.07 (1.0)$_a$ *n* = 79	4.01 (0.8)$_a$ *n* = 45	3.70 (1.2)$_a$ *n* = 27	3.99 (1.0) *n* = 151
Pro-DREAM Act opinionated	5.27 (1.2)$_a$ *n* = 82	5.13 (1.1)$_a$ *n* = 39	5.37 (1.1)$_a$ *n* = 25	5.25 (1.1) *n* = 146
Overall	4.78 (1.2) *n* = 242	4.79 (1.2) *n* = 116	4.96 (1.4) *n* = 79	4.82 (1.2) *N* = 437

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses. Within rows, cell entries with different subscripts are significantly different from one another, $p < .05$.
[A] Perceived story bias ranged from -5 (perceived bias against the DREAM Act) to +5 (perceived bias in favor of the DREAM Act).
[B] Perceived host bias ranges from 1 (low perceived host bias) to 7 (high perceived host bias).