



Salisbury
UNIVERSITY



Honor College at Salisbury University

Honors Thesis

An Honors Thesis Titled

Heating Up the Media Climate: How Political Media May Affect
Public Opinion on Global Climate Change
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Designation to the

Honors College

of

Salisbury University

in the Major Department of

Political Science

by

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Date and Place of Oral Presentation: 4/26/19 SVSRC

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Heating Up the Media Climate: How Political Media May Affect Public Opinion on
Global Climate Change

Honors Thesis

Presented to The Honors College of Salisbury University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with University Honors

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May 2019

Dr. Adam Hoffman

Abstract

Scholars have focused on level of education, religious affiliation, and region of residence to explain the partisan polarization of climate change. This thesis offers an explanation for the persistence of the belief by a segment of the population of the United States that global climate change does not exist. The central claim is that politically biased media influences public opinion- specifically public opinion on the existence of climate change- and I suggest that partisan news actively polarizes the discussion of global climate change. I support this hypothesis with available online polling data and General Social Survey data of people's opinion on climate change, the types of media they consume, and party identification. I find that there is a correlation between the media that one consumes and their opinion on the existence of global climate change, though this correlation is especially pronounced among those who actively consume conservatively biased media and identify with the Republican Party. Results are discussed.

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Introduction

Of the myriad of problems currently facing our country, Global Climate Change has been a consistent and looming threat in the public sphere for the last 40 years. It is one of the few threats that not only affects or will affect every single person in the country, but every person in the world. Action is required to fix this issue, as it will worsen over time if it is allowed to continue unchecked. Progress in the United States has been slow on this issue. As discussion between our leaders has continuously stagnated, Global Climate Change does not. One of the major reasons why the country has been slow to take action is clear. In the United States, a large section of the population denies the existence of human-made climate change.

Research indicates that opinion about global climate change is predicted by level of education and region of residence (Gourevitch, 2014). However, the most powerful predictor of public opinion on this topic is political ideology (Nordhaus, 2013). Evidence suggests that people who consider themselves to be a member of the Republican Party who consume conservatively-biased media are more likely to deny the existence of human-caused climate change. This is due more to the Republican Party's stance on the issue rather than each person's personal opinion or knowledge on the subject (Williams, 2011). By examining the widening public divide on political ideology, the polarization of public opinion regarding climate change, and the perspective of various news sources, one can measure the correlation between consumption of conservative media and an overall denial of human-caused climate change.

The phenomena of climate change being an intensely debated subject in the United States has only become more cemented in the last decade. Could the polarization

of modern politics have contributed to a rise in politically motivated news? Could a rise in politically motivated news have increased voter sway away from the political center? If so, could it have affected an individual's belief in climate change? How has something that the majority of climate scientists agree on become the center of a debate over its validity? I am studying the effects of politicized information on public opinion of climate change, because I want to find out whether claims made by non-experts on the subject have wide-reaching effects on public opinion. This is done in order to bring awareness to and potentially find a way to combat the spread of misinformation about climate change as a whole.

While there are a range of variables that affect one's belief in global climate change, such as political ideology, age, and level of education, media may have a profound effect. In the United States, people who more often consume conservative media are more likely to deny the existence of man-made climate change.

Literature Review

Global climate change is exactly that: global. The issue has reached the forefront of the international political community. Effects are already beginning to be felt, with worsening storms, rising temperatures, and flooding (Dobbins et al., 2015). At this point, the United States has been given the choice to either lead or lag behind this transition to a cleaner world. With the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Climate Accord in 2015, the world is ready to take steps towards a cleaner future (Dobbins et al., 2015). With the creation of the Paris Climate Accord, 194 states and the European Union signed on, leaving only Syria (which is currently involved in a civil war) and Nicaragua (which wanted tougher restrictions) out of the Accord (Gallup, 2017). Despite this, President

Trump announced his intention to pull the United States (the world's second largest carbon emitter) from the Agreement back in August 2017, which received condemnations from people all over the world and resulted in Elon Musk (CEO of Tesla and SpaceX) and Bob Iger (CEO of Disney) resigning from Trump's advisory boards. As of November 7th, 2017, both Nicaragua and Syria have announced their intentions to sign the agreement, meaning that if the United States withdraws (which cannot technically be done until 2020), it will be the only country on the planet to not be a part of the Agreement.

Since global climate change arose as an issue on the world stage back in the 1970's, it has been a pressing issue in the eyes of the American public. However, it has become an intensely debated topic in America. Despite the fact that climate change affects billions of people around the world, the United States does not seem to take it as seriously as the rest of the world (Barber and McCarty, 2016). While the countries of the world have generally accepted climate change for the danger that it is, the US still has a sizable portion of the population that does not believe that humans are causing it, despite the overwhelming evidence (Howe, 2017). Since lawmakers create legislation based off of the needs and wants of their constituents, so as long as part of the public does not believe in climate change, nothing will be done (Ura and Ellis, 2012). This is due to the fact that belief in climate change has developed a political edge, and the two stances have each been adopted the two major parties in the US (Antonio and Brulle, 2011). This accompanies an interesting divisive trend in American politics.

Public opinion has been driven away from the political center on a variety of issues in recent years. Topics such as climate change, abortion, gun control, immigration,

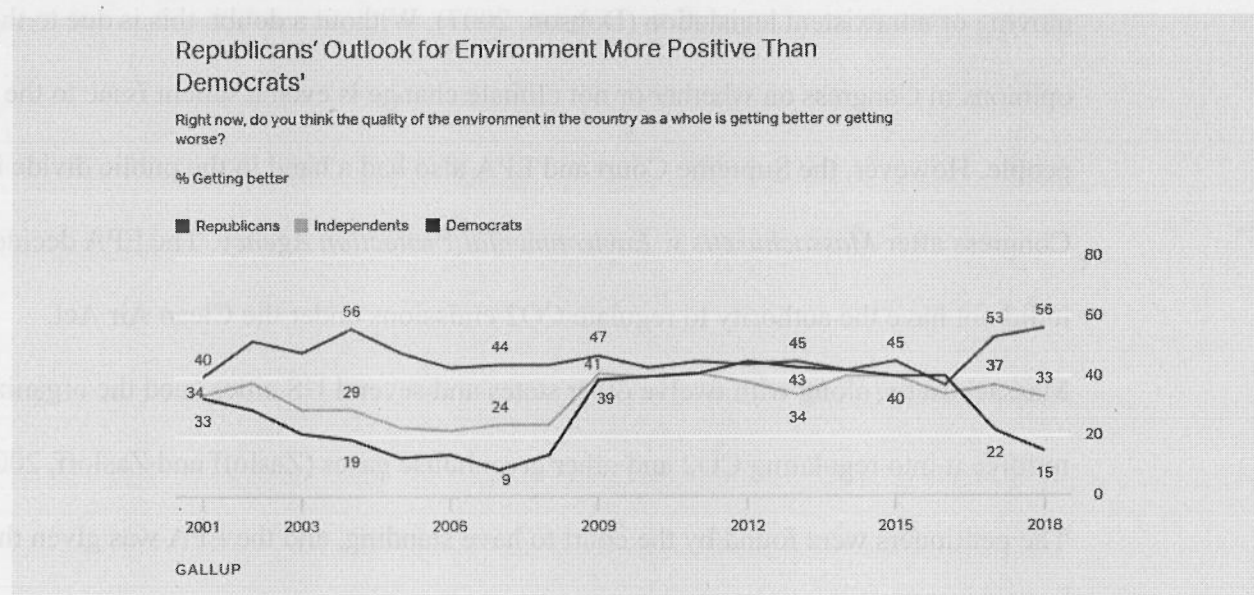
the Black Lives Matter movement, and LGBTQ rights have gripped the nation (Lapinski, 2013). These are the issues that define the current era of politics. Just as the political issues of the 1960's and 1970's shaped the Baby Boomers, the 2000's and 2010's are shaping the Millennials and Generation Z. The generational gap has resulted in a large demographic shift. While younger generations are increasingly multi-ethnic and diverse, the older population of the United States is overwhelmingly white (Keeter, 2008). Younger generations are increasingly open to social issues, such as gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and the legalization of marijuana. They are also increasingly stepping away from religion, as "non-affiliated" is the fastest growing "religion" in the United States. Research indicates that age can accurately predict support for abortion, immigration, LGBTQ rights, and big government (Keeter, 2008). This accompanies the increase of the "knowledge economy" in the United States. Rising education levels and ease of transportation allow for mass migration, fueling the growth of cities across the United States and the shrinking of rural populations (Keeter, 2008). Mobility has increased for younger people with opportunities, resulting in younger residents tending to live in different places than their predecessors.

As cities are growing, so are the economic opportunities within them. Research shows that family income, or one's economic class, can be used to predict one's opinion on a variety of social issues (Ellis, 2017). However, income is a unique factor, as often times the opinions of the poorest and wealthiest of society tend to overlap. The issues in which poor and rich tend to differ are often having to do with government spending. Issues such as gun control, immigration, and foreign policy are shown to be issues where the rich and poor tend to agree (Ellis, 2017). Richer people actually tend to be moderately

more liberal than their poorer counterparts, owing partly to their higher levels of education. Education has been shown in the past to have a correlation with liberal viewpoints.

As the young, rich, and highly educated lean more liberal, they are more likely to associate themselves with the Democratic Party (Keeter, 2008). However, studies show that party identification is influenced heavily by early political socialization, and that it is unlikely to change drastically throughout one's life (Weinschenk, 2010). Party affiliation itself has been shown in the past to be a massive predictor of one's opinion on political issues (Williams, 2011). These factors, along with worsening polarization, suggest that people are unlikely to change their views over the course of their lives, which gives credit to reinforcement theory: the idea that people seek out media that confirms the beliefs that they already hold (Muirhead, 2014). This suggests that public divide on issues such as global climate change will continue to worsen over time.

Figure 1: Gallup Poll on the Polarization of the Parties' Outlook on the Environment



Both Gallup and Pew Research make their polling data available online, allowing for it to easily be incorporated into this research. Both organizations work to ensure that their research is unbiased and accurate. They maintain polls of public opinion on a variety of subjects, ranging from global climate change to policy proposals. In the above poll, Republicans and Democrats are shown to be split over their belief on the current state of the environment. The most recent divide occurred in 2016, around the election of Donald Trump (Gallup, 2018). Since then, opinions have become more polarized. This could be due to the Republican Party having more faith in a Republican president, while the Democratic Party would have more faith in a Democratic president. President Trump has also worked in the last few years to remove many environmental regulations.

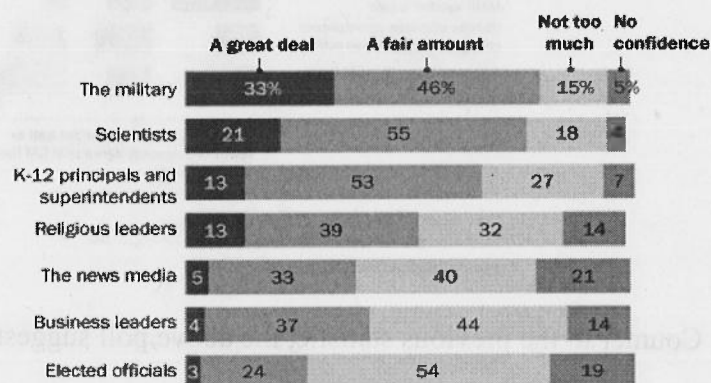
In the scientific community, there is near universal agreement that human activity is a primary contributor to global climate change. In the United States, however, climate change is still a fiercely debated subject in the public's view (McCright and Dunlap, 2011). The United States is currently the second largest contributor to greenhouse emissions on the planet (the first being China). Yet the country is plagued by slow moving or nonexistent legislation (Dobson, 2007). Without a doubt, this is due to the split opinions in Congress on whether or not climate change is even a salient issue to the people. However, the Supreme Court and EPA also had a hand in the public divide in Congress after *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency*. The EPA decided that it did not have the authority to regulate CO₂ emissions under the Clean Air Act. Massachusetts, along with twelve other states and several US cities sued the organization to force it into regulating CO₂ and other greenhouse gases (Zasloff and Zasloff, 2008). The petitioners were found by the court to have standing, and the EPA was given the

authority to regulate tailpipe emissions of CO₂ and other air pollutants (Zasloff and Zasloff, 2008). The EPA's initial position that it did not have the authority to do so could have helped contribute to the divide in Congress' decision-making over global climate change.

Figure 2: Pew Research Poll on American Trust in Groups

Americans' trust in military, scientists relatively high; trust in media, business leaders, elected officials low

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ of confidence in each of the following groups to act in the best interests of the public



Note: Those who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 10–June 6, 2016.

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The above poll on American trust in various groups show that the military and scientists top the list. Based off of this, some 76% of adults in the United States have at least a fair amount of confidence in scientists to act in the best interests of the public (Pew, 2017). Trust in them is higher than elected officials, business leaders, the media, and other various community leaders. This research should be encouraging, as the near-universal consensus on global climate change means that the American public trusts that scientists do not have some kind of ulterior motive when they report their findings. This graph instead suggests that Americans believe they are acting in the interest of the public.

Figure 3: Pew Research Poll on American Skepticism of Scientific Expertise

Many Americans are skeptical of scientific understanding, especially on climate, GM food safety

% of U.S. adults who say the following

	Very well	Fairly well	Not too well/not well at all
Medical scientists understand health effects of the MMR vaccine ...	47%	43%	10%
Climate scientists understand the causes of climate change ...	28	40	32
Scientists understand the health effects of eating GM food ...	19	44	35

Many Americans think scientists disagree, especially when it comes to GM food safety

% of U.S. adults who say the following

	Almost all	More than half	About half or fewer
Medical scientists agree the MMR vaccine is safe	55	28	15
Climate scientists agree climate change is due to human activity	27	35	35
Scientists agree that GM foods are safe to eat	14	28	53

53% of U.S. adults say about half or fewer of scientists agree that GM foods are safe to eat

Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 10–June 6, 2016.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Counter to the previous statistic, the above poll suggests that a little over half of United States adults believe that climate scientists understand the causes of climate change. Even fewer Americans are shown to believe that climate scientists agree that climate change is due to human activity (Pew, 2017). As the facts show that climate scientists both understand the causes of climate change and agree that humans are a major cause, the question becomes why the American public is not in consensus when overall they have high trust in scientists. This brings the topic back to the hypothesis of media, as studies show that only about 12% of Republican Fox News viewers believe that climate change is human-made (Shamsian, 2019). This is especially troubling since global climate change and what to do about it is, by nature, a political subject (Rosenbaum, 2017). This may appear to some as if scientists are attempting to politicize science, when

the truth is that any action taken on climate change must go through political channels, which is why the science appears to have been politicized (Pielke, 2014).

At this point, research suggests that there is a growing divide in American Politics. The last ten years have shown a massive drift farther from the center on the political spectrum (Ansolabehere and Konisky, 2014) (Chaves, 2011). The so called “Far Left” and “Far Right” camps have been growing, while the moderate camp has been shrinking (Abramowitz, 2010). This is apparent when examining the political elites of both sides. There is a substantial drift away from moderate politics (Ansolabehere and Konisky, 2014). There is speculation on what the exact cause of this polarization of modern politics is, and research suggests that a major cause could be motivated reasoning (Nir, 2011). This means that people seek out information with pre-formed biases as to what they expect and want the answers to be, and search for sources to confirm what they believe (Hulme, 2017). Motivated reasoning raises more questions, such as whether people seek out these sources because it is what they believe, or if they believe it because it is what the sources they sought out tell them. This, in turn, has been caused by the framing of issues done by the two major political parties in the United States. Framing can be as simple as changing the wording of a question to use “global warming” instead of “climate change,” which has shown to have differences in responses from polls (Schuldt, Konrath, and Schwarz, 2011). Despite this, the two terms are often used interchangeably in the public sphere.

Methodology and Procedures

The General Social Survey (GSS) from 2016 allowed for testing various factors that may predict public opinion on global climate change. These independent variables were party identification, level of education, family income, age, and whether or not one got their news from conservative sources. The dependent variable was an individual's belief in global warming. The research sought to determine whether or not these factors were significant in determining one's belief in global warming. By examining the polling data provided in the GSS 2016 data set and recoding variables, a regression model could be created, as well as a crosstab for each of the factors considered. Each variable was chosen from varying theories of why people do not and do believe in climate change, with conservative media consumption being the main focus.

Figure 4: Party Identification Crosstab

			Crosstab			
			beliefgwreal			Total
			.00	Believes	Denies	
partyID	.00	Count	22	173	94	289
		% within beliefgwreal	4.7%	3.3%	4.2%	3.6%
Democrat		Count	130	2625	126	2881
		% within beliefgwreal	27.7%	49.4%	5.7%	36.0%
Republican		Count	146	921	1273	2340
		% within beliefgwreal	31.1%	17.3%	57.4%	29.3%
Independent		Count	171	1593	726	2490
		% within beliefgwreal	36.5%	30.0%	32.7%	31.1%
Total		Count	469	5312	2219	8000
		% within beliefgwreal	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Degrees of Freedom: 6, Chi Squared: 1713.071, Lambda: .197, Significant: Yes

As a factor that has already been shown to be significant in the past, Party Identification was chosen as an independent variable. Polarization in American politics

has continued to worsen in the last decade, as indicated above. Climate change has become a political issue more than a social one. This serves as confirmation that one's political affiliation determines one's opinion on the existence of human-caused climate change. The variable taken from GSS was coded to include opinions from Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. As shown, party identification was shown to be significant in determining one's belief in global warming.

Figure 5: Level of Education Crosstab

Crosstab						
			beliefgwreal			
			.00	Believes	Denies	Total
Education	No HS	Count	19	92	55	166
		% within beliefgwreal	4.1%	1.7%	2.5%	2.1%
	High school graduate	Count	164	1206	607	1977
		% within beliefgwreal	35.0%	22.7%	27.4%	24.8%
	Some college	Count	122	1227	525	1874
		% within beliefgwreal	26.1%	23.1%	23.7%	23.5%
	2-year	Count	50	490	244	784
		% within beliefgwreal	10.7%	9.2%	11.0%	9.8%
	4-year	Count	69	1390	513	1972
		% within beliefgwreal	14.7%	26.2%	23.2%	24.7%
	Post-grad	Count	44	897	269	1210
		% within beliefgwreal	9.4%	16.9%	12.2%	15.2%
	Total	Count	468	5302	2213	7983
		% within beliefgwreal	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Degrees of Freedom: 10, Chi Squared: 115.730, Lambda: .021, Significant: No

Education was chosen as an independent variable because of the assumption that educated people would possibly know more about the subject. The theory here would be that education should have a positive correlation with a belief in global warming, since there is a near universal consensus among scientists that global warming exists. Higher levels of education also have a positive correlation with liberal viewpoints, thus

contributing to the theory. Instead, it was shown that education was not significant in determining someone's belief in global warming.

Figure 6: Conservative News Consumption Crosstab

Crosstab						
			beliefgwreal			
			.00	Believes	Denies	Total
conservativenews	does not watch conservative media	Count	404	5007	1348	6759
		% within beliefgwreal	86.1%	94.3%	60.7%	84.5%
	watches conservative media	Count	65	305	871	1241
		% within beliefgwreal	13.9%	5.7%	39.3%	15.5%
Total		Count	469	5312	2219	8000
		% within beliefgwreal	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Degrees of Freedom: 2, Chi Squared: 1342:081, Lambda: .144, Significant: Yes

As the main driver of the hypothesis, whether or not someone watches conservative news was chosen as an independent variable. The ability of the media to influence public opinion was another factor in this reasoning. This influence would be determined by the bias of the programs that one watches. In this case, since the hypothesis involves conservative beliefs, the variable was recoded to examine people who watch heavily conservative media. This variable was shown to be significant in explaining why someone would or would not believe in global warming.

Figure 7: Family Income Crosstab**FamIncRecode * beliefgwreal Crosstabulation**

			beliefgwreal			
			.00	Believes	Denies	Total
FamIncRecode	Poverty	Count	23	135	45	203
		% within beliefgwreal	6.0%	2.9%	2.4%	2.9%
	Poor	Count	148	1302	470	1920
		% within beliefgwreal	38.7%	27.9%	25.5%	27.9%
	Medium Income	Count	116	1601	705	2422
		% within beliefgwreal	30.4%	34.3%	38.3%	35.1%
	Wealthy	Count	94	1620	609	2323
		% within beliefgwreal	24.6%	34.7%	33.1%	33.7%
	Rich	Count	1	13	11	25
		% within beliefgwreal	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%	0.4%
Total	Count	382	4671	1840	6893	
	% within beliefgwreal	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Degrees of Freedom: 34, Chi Squared: 141.078, Lambda:----, Significant: No

Family income was chosen as a variable due to the theory that people with less income would have care more about fiscal issues than environmental issues. The theory here was not that there would be a correlation of rich people believing in global warming, but instead that people who were worse off would either not know or not care about the issue because they had more important things to worry about. This was shown not to be true, since family income was not a significant in determining one's belief in global warming.

Figure 8: Age Crosstab

AgeRecode * beliefgwreal Crosstabulation

			beliefgwreal			
			.00	Believes	Denies	Total
AgeRecode	Millennials	Count	46	538	84	668
		% within beliefgwreal	9.8%	10.1%	3.8%	8.3%
	Gen X	Count	197	1939	855	2991
		% within beliefgwreal	42.0%	36.5%	38.5%	37.4%
	Boomers	Count	202	2506	1087	3795
		% within beliefgwreal	43.1%	47.2%	49.0%	47.4%
	Silent Generation	Count	19	304	173	496
		% within beliefgwreal	4.1%	5.7%	7.8%	6.2%
	GI Generation	Count	5	25	20	50
		% within beliefgwreal	1.1%	0.5%	0.9%	0.6%
Total	Count	469	5312	2219	8000	
	% within beliefgwreal	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Degrees of Freedom: 14, Chi Squared: 124.920, Lambda:----, Significant: Yes

Age was recoded to separate ages into their respective decades. Age was chosen as a variable because of its potential to affect one's belief in global warming. The theory here is that older generations may not perceive global warming to be an issue, since it is a relatively new issue on the political front that was not prevalent until the 90's. As shown above, age was a significant factor in determining whether or not someone believed in global warming. Millennials and younger people were more likely to believe in the existence of global warming, while older generations like the Baby Boomers were not.

Figure 9: Regression Model

Model	Coefficients ^a					t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Beta	Standardized Coefficients			
1	B						
	(Constant)	.913		.032		28.614	.000
	conservativenews	.473		.016	.319	29.859	.000
	partyID	.067		.006	.112	10.609	.000
	Education	.002		.004	.005	.482	.630
	Family income	.000		.000	.017	1.576	.115
	age	.017		.004	.042	3.948	.000

a. Dependent Variable: beliefgwreal

Regression Equation:

$Y = a + X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + X_4 + X_5$ (or Belief in Climate Change = a + news source + party ID + education + family income + age)

Adjusted R² = .132

Global warming as a dependent variable was recoded to separate opinions into two groups: people who do and do not believe in global warming. This was done to simplify the results provided by each crosstab. When examined, two of the independent variables were shown to not be significant, while the other three tested were significant. The adjusted R² indicates that the variables do a fairly good job of determining whether someone would or would not believe global warming exists.

Results and Discussion

The multivariate regression model created shows the relationship between the dependent variable and the multiple independent variables. Independent variables with a high correlation with the dependent variable are considered to be “significant,” due to the fact that they can be used to predict the outcome of the dependent variable. Since the dependent variable had been recoded into two options, the independent variables would have to fall along those lines. The regression model shows that consumption of conservative media was the most powerful predictor out of the chosen independent variables, followed by party identification. Age was significant and able to be used as a predictor, but it was not as strong as the first two. Family income and level of education were shown not to be significant.

This means that there is a significant correlation between the three independent variables. For consumption of conservative media, the most powerful predictor, this means that those who consume conservative media are more likely to deny the existence of human-made climate change. For party identification, this means that those who identify with the Republican Party are more likely to deny the existence of human-made climate change, while those who identify with the Democratic Party are more likely to believe it. Lastly, younger people are more likely to believe in the existence of climate change, while older generations are more likely to deny it. The regression model ultimately is a good fit in explaining what factors may contribute to one’s opinion of global warming.

The simplified dependent variable of Belief in Global Warming made the resulting crosstabs much easier to interpret. Ultimately, only three of the five variables

were significant. Party identification has been known to be a significant variable in the past, while consumption of conservative media was the focus. The other independent variables were selected due to other potential theories as to what could contribute to the belief or disbelief in global climate change. Age, family income, and level of education had the potential to be significant (McCright and Dunlap, 2011). The data showed that of the three, only age was.

The finding that consumption of conservative media is a significant factor in determining one's opinion on global warming confirms the hypothesis. This suggests that there is a correlation between the two variables, though this does not confirm whether or not consumption of conservative media is a cause of one's opinion of global climate change. While this is the case, it is also not disproven, leaving open the possibility of future research into the subject.

Political identification was unlikely to change and was expected to give the result that it did. The result of age being a significant factor while family income and level of education were not was surprising. Level of education can sometimes be determined by family income, as richer people are better able to go to better schools and gain a better education. Due to this, the two variables are somewhat linked, and the fact that neither of them can be used to determine one's belief in global warming implies that rich and poor alike are divided over climate change. The same occurs with level of education, as those with higher education are still divided over the existence of climate change despite being more likely to be knowledgeable on the subject.

Age as a factor was significant, albeit not as significant as party identification and consumption of conservative media. With age, it's possible that its significance arises

from the fact that older generations are more likely to be conservative and younger generations are more likely to be liberal. However, the age difference also has other commonalities with the other variables, such as older generations are more likely to consume television as a source of news while younger generations tend to get their news from social media. This potentially links age with party identification and consumption of conservative media, leading to all three significant variables being unable to truly be separated from one another.

Limitations and Future Research

From the beginning, I knew that the goal would be to find whether or not consumption of conservative media was a statistically significant factor in determining one's opinion on global climate change. Due to this limitation, I sought a correlation instead of a causation, to hopefully bring attention to the fact that there is some kind of a link between the two. While this research did not find a cause, perhaps future research into the subject could do so.

My research ultimately is limited by the inherent connection between political ideology and type of media consumed. Reinforcement theory suggests that people will seek out and are more likely to remember information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. The theory also suggests the reason behind this as being that people do not like being proven wrong and feel uncomfortable when close held beliefs are challenged (McGrew and Wineburg, 2017). It is entirely possible that the reason for the significance of both political ideology and type of media consumed is due to the fact that people seek out and consume media that they already believe in. This would mean that media consumption itself is determined by political ideology.

While this may be true, this research supports the claim that that media consumption can still be used as a predictor of opinion on climate change. Take for example, a scenario where someone is leaning politically to the right. It is entirely possible that this person would then seek out media that reinforces these ideas (Muirhead, 2014). Perhaps this person leaned right, but still believed in the existence of Global Climate Change. Once this person begins consuming conservative media, their opinion on climate change may begin to change. Though reinforcement theory is an explanation for why people do not often seek out various sources, it is also possible that reinforcement theory suggests a cycle. As explained above, news sources have become increasingly polarized in recent years. It is entirely possible that once someone begins to seek out news that reinforces their beliefs, their beliefs become more extreme. This opens up a new avenue for potential future research.

Other new research that could result from this is detailing an explanation for why age was a significant predictor of opinion on climate change. Though it was not as significant as political ideology or type of media consumed, it was still considered a predictor. There are various potential explanations as to why the older one was, the more likely they were to doubt the existence of climate change. It is possible that older people do not view it as a pressing issue because they will not have to deal with the after effects. It is also possible that it too is linked with political ideology, as older people are more likely to be conservative (Keeter, 2008). Conversely, younger people are more likely to be liberal. Either of these could be considered explanations, and both tie belief in climate change back to party affiliation. Regardless, this is an avenue of research that deserves more exploration.

Though it is clear that political ideology and type of media consumed are extremely important in determining political ideology, this does not explain why education was not significant. Logic follows that the more knowledgeable about the topic one is, the more likely they are to believe in climate change. This would mean that those who have gone through higher education and thus have learned more about it should not doubt climate change's existence. This ultimately was not the case, as level of education did not determine opinion on climate change. More research should be conducted into determining why this is the case.

Lastly, family income did not appear to be a significant factor either. The different theories as to why it would have been significant were sound. The result implies that economic status does not affect one's opinion on climate change, which is strange since the poor are more likely to be affected by climate change. While they may not have the time or money to care about the issue, the fact that they're likely to be affected by it suggests that they should care more. The rich, on the other hand, have the time and money to learn about the issue. However, as discussed, level of education is also not a significant factor, thus making it possible that this is why the family income does not determine one's opinion on climate change.

In terms of future research, the so-called "fake news" phenomenon is trending. The unprecedented rise in biased and outright false media had a noticeable impact on the 2016 election (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Research indicates that some 62% of adults say that they get their news from social media, and that social media had a large role in spreading these fake news stories (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). "Clickbait" and misleading titles were also used widespread in order to garner the most amount of views

in the shortest amount of time (Cerase and Santoro, 2018). Fake news shared online also was shown to have benefitted Donald Trump more than Hillary Clinton (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). The issue has only just entered the mainstream, and with the 2020 election around the corner, it's likely that it will enter the forefront of the American psyche once again.

Conclusion

The evidence collected supported the initial hypothesis that those who consume conservative news are more likely to not believe in climate change. Whether or not someone consumes conservative news was shown to be a significant enough of a factor to determine someone's opinion on the existence of global climate change. While the research could not find proof that there is a causal link between consumption of conservative media and one's opinion on climate change, it does not mean that this is not the case. Further research into the topic is necessary for a well-rounded conclusion.

The fact that age was a significant factor alongside party identification and consumption of conservative media opens the door to research into the subject. I myself hadn't seriously considered that age could be a determining factor as to one's belief in climate change. The suggestion that younger generations are more likely to believe in climate change is an encouraging statistic. However, if family income and level of education are not significant determining factors, then there is work to be done in both of those sectors. If those with a higher level of education are not more likely to believe in climate change, then our education system is not doing its job. America should be arguing over how to tackle the issue, not whether or not the issue exists (Connelly et al., 2012).

Reversing the damage already done to our environment may be impossible, but resigning ourselves to defeat is not an option. We can still take significant steps to slow climate change's effects and counteract them (Landy, 2010). If younger generations are increasingly believing in climate change, this could be a turning point in American politics. In order to begin work to help our future, the American public must fully admit that there is a problem and that we are at least partially responsible. Though it may take up precious time that we don't have left, we can only hope that it will happen faster and work to ensure that it does.

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