Who Gets Covered?

Ideological Extremity and News Coverage of Members of the U.S. Congress

Michael W. Wagner
Associate Professor
Louis A. Maier Faculty Fellow
School of Journalism & Mass Communication
Affiliated: Department of Political Science
Affiliated: La Follette School of Public Affairs
University of Wisconsin-Madison

5054 Vilas Hall, SJMC
821 University Ave.
Madison, WI 53706
mwagner8@wisc.edu

Mike Gruszczynski, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Austin Peay State University
gruszczynskim@apsu.edu

Abstract:
Does the news media cover ideological extremists more than moderates? We combine a measure of members of Congress' ideological extremity with a content analysis of how often lawmakers appear in the *New York Times* from the 103rd to the 112th Congresses and on CBS and NBC's evening newscasts in the 112th Congress. We show that ideological extremity is positively related to political news coverage for members of the House of Representatives. Generally, ideological extremity is not related to the likelihood of coverage for senators. Finally, we show that extreme Republicans are more likely to earn media attention than extreme Democrats.

Keywords: political communication, polarization, gatekeeping, news reporting

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U.S. Congress

Journalism relies on the reporting of attributed opinions to present an immediate snapshot of the verifiable truth to an audience (Gans, 1979). Citizens, in turn, rely on news coverage of lawmakers' words and actions so that they can be held accountable for their actions. The power to select whose attributed opinions to include in political news coverage is a fundamental power that the media exercises as a political institution in the United States (Cook, 2005, Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The decision of whose opinions to give voice to is an especially consequential one in American politics. Journalistic rituals and norms generally result in stories reporting competition between two different sides on major political issues (Schudson, 2001; Tuchman, 1972). With 435 members of the House of Representatives, 100 senators, a president, dozens of prominent administration staffers, organized interest groups, experts, and citizens, journalists have many sources to choose from when seeking to cover the important issues of the day. Even in eras dominated by elite partisan polarization, there is considerable within-political party heterogeneity in the ideological orientations of individual members of Congress –not to mention considerable differences in the institutional structure of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate – giving reporters a wide range of types of lawmakers to choose from when seeking a quote for a story (see Woon & Pope, 2008).

If journalists are systematically more likely to choose to cover those who speak the most stridently on the Congressional floor, they are likely to quote ideological extremists who tend to speak in intense, partisan terms (Morris, 2001). This is important

because, as Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) have shown, individuals respond to competing frames by preferring to endorse the argument coming from the person's favored political party when the media present a political environment that is polarized, while the same arguments, in a moderate political environment, nudge people to favor the stronger argument, regardless of the argument's source. Thus, whether journalists are more likely to quote moderate or extremist lawmakers could affect whether citizens are more likely to accept the best arguments, as compared to partisan arguments, to solve problems. Additionally, the choice of who to cover could influence the public's perceptions of polarization itself – something that can foster polarization in the public as well (Wagner, 2007a).

Significance of Study

In this article, we combine a measure of individual lawmakers' ideology and a variety of professional, contextual, and demographic information of House and Senate members with how often those same lawmakers appear in political news coverage in the *New York Times*, the *NBC Nightly News*, and the *CBS Evening News*. In short, we show that the news media systematically favor extreme voices over moderate ones in the House of Representatives. We find clear evidence of this relationship even when controlling for the specific congressional session, how often the lawmaker gives public speeches, the length of time a lawmaker has served in office, whether the Congress member is a member of a party's leadership, the committees on which the lawmaker sits, the presence of unified or divided government, and the sex of the representative. Moreover, the effect grows over time, as the House has become more ideologically polarized. On the other hand, while we show evidence of a positive, bivariate relationship between ideological

extremity and coverage for senators, the effect diminishes considerably or disappears outright when controlling for other relevant factors.

In an era of increased partisan polarization at the elite level, extreme politicians are increasingly good fits for modern journalistic norms of judging newsworthiness. This calls into question traditional explanations of gatekeeping as relying on a value of moderation (Gans, 1979). Our study implies that journalistic values of objectivity need not be met by reflecting a narrow range of moderate elite views; rather, the objectivity norm can be met via an accurate accounting of extreme views – positions that are an accurate reflection of the widening "left-right" divide in Washington, DC (Carmines, 2011). This is especially important because as the ideological distance between the parties widens, the public tends to become more polarized (Hetherington, 2001; Wagner, 2007a). Finally, a focus on extremists may be a reflection of beliefs that covering more strident views would be seen as more exciting to media audiences from a market perspective of news production (Hamilton, 2005).

Literature Review

How Journalists Approach News Coverage

Traditionally, research seeking to connect the work that journalists do when they gather information with the stories they produce focus on the professional norms and routines journalists follow (Tuchman, 1972; Cook, 1996). Political reporters generally cover prescribed beats focusing on different government institutions, cultivating sources on those beats, and churning out timely, proximal, and conflict-laden stories that reflects mainstream elite debate (Bennett, 1990; Graber & Dunaway, 2014).

Journalists' routines are often flexible in practice (Eliasoph, 1988) as routines shift in an effort to meet the norm of objectivity (Schudson, 2001). Gans (1979) famously argued that moderation was an important news value that affected coverage decisions. Moderation could work as a sort of means of social control – signaling to entities and individuals that wanted media attention that extremity was not a value likely to foster news coverage. However, while Shoemaker and Reese (1996) noted that "fanaticism," ideological and otherwise, was something reporters were suspicious of, McCluskey and Kim (2012) recently showed that the rise of both political polarization and advocacy groups has resulted in contemporary newspapers favoring polarization over moderation with respect to the attention that advocacy groups receive in objective news coverage.

As Cook (1996, p. 472) argued, "the strategic ritual of objectivity and reporters' work routines. . .are insufficient, then, to explain the patterns in the news." Following Sigelman (1973) and Epstein's (1973) work highlighting the importance of the narrative dimension of reporting, Cook claimed that news stories need structured, dramatic conflict to see the light of day. The systematic seeking of dramatic, conflict-laden, but balanced stories containing a narrow range of elite sources are central components of how journalists approach their jobs (see also Bennett, 1990).

In American politics, the structure of the two-party system makes it easy for reporters to report objectively, as journalists can index debate between the two parties, even if many of the partisan sources themselves hold extreme views (Hershey, 1999; Wagner, 2007a). Morris (2001) showed that the most ideologically intense members of Congress were the most likely to engage in the process of giving "minute speeches," the kind of public addresses that television reporters could capture from C-SPAN to provide

sound bites to congressional coverage. What is more, these representatives tended to use more dramatic, extreme rhetoric when speaking. With respect those who do not tend to breathe partisan fire, moderate members of Congress are less likely to promote partisan messages they disagree with, potentially ceding even more airtime to more extreme representatives who are more likely to promote partisan messages (Sellers, 2010).

Whose views should we expect to make the news in what is both a changing information environment and an increasingly polarized political one? Traditionally, scholars have noted that journalists favor powerful elected officials such as those who are members of the party leadership or chair important committees in congress (Squire, 1988; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1982; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980). Other work has specifically focused on the Senate, arguing that senators receive more coverage since they are more prestigious sources than members of the House because they serve longer and have more individual control over floor debates than do House members (Fogarty, 2013; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Cook, 1996).

Thus, journalists have at least two reasons to be more likely to seek quotes from sources that occupy the extreme ends of each party's ideological spectrum. First, just as polarized and/or extremist advocacy groups gain more attention from journalists in the modern, polarized landscape (McCulskey & Kim, 2012; Shoemaker, Vos, & Reese, 2009), extreme partisans are more likely to make public pronouncements supporting or opposing legislation, making them more likely targets of media attention (Sellers, 2010). Gans' (1979) own examination of what kinds of sources are suitable to journalists when they are constructing a story reveals that the willingness to be quoted in a story begets future requests for comment (see also Fogarty, 2013).

Second, and despite high-minded protestations to the contrary, the news audience likes a good fight. While members of Congress receive less coverage than the president, political communication scholars assume, but have not generally directly tested, that reporters are more likely to cover lawmakers who prefer ideological bombs than wrapping their positions in moderation (Graber, 2010, but see Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992). To be sure, people are more aroused by viewing "in your face" television programming, even as the incivility of the debate and close-up camera angels negatively affect individuals' judgments of those with opposing views and political trust more generally (Mutz, 2007; Mutz & Reeves, 2005).

However, while extremity is a dominant factor with respect to predicting contemporary news coverage of interest groups, there are other factors unique to lawmakers that we must consider when predicting which Members of Congress (MCs) will make the news. First, MCs in leadership positions play important roles in determining political strategy, publicly expressing that strategy and cajoling members to fall in line. As such, they occupy positions of greater influence and import and should be more likely to garner media attention (Lipinski & Neddenriep, 2004). Second, the longer a member has served in Congress, she or he has had more time to take a multitude of public positions, develop relationships with journalists, and experience growth in individual power. Third, not only is there a gender gap in the number of female lawmakers strolling the halls of Congress, the news media have been shown to systematically seek out male lawmakers for comment more than female lawmakers (Zoch & Turk, 1998). Fourth, the actual effort lawmakers engage in, by giving speeches and/or

introducing legislation, to win coverage affects reporters' willingness to include those

MCs in political stories (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003).

Finally, and we believe most importantly, the chamber in which the federal

lawmaker serves could affect the type of lawmaker that is more likely to get covered.

Kuklinski and Sigelman (1992) found that ideologically extreme senators were more

likely to get television news coverage than moderates, but they did not control for the

efforts senators make to earn news attention (see Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980). Moreover,

members of the U.S. House of Representatives are traditionally more polarized than

members of the U.S. Senate (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006) and the rules of the

Senate filibuster make moderate senators more newsworthy than moderate House

members. That is, a moderate senator is more likely than an extreme senator to be able to

stop a filibuster in a sharply divided Senate. The median House member does not have a

similar level of power. Thus, extremists in the House should be more likely to get

attention than extremists in the Senate.

Hypotheses

We are seeking to answer the question, what factors predict the likelihood of a

member of Congress being covered in news coverage of a political issue? Our theoretical

argument, based on a review of the extant literature, has shown that coverage should most

likely be given to lawmakers who serve in party leadership structures, serve as committee

chairs, are in the opposite party of the president, and are men. We move beyond the

existing literature by arguing that – for members of the House of Representatives – a

crucial, but untested, factor may matter more: whether the lawmaker is an ideological

extremist. Thus, we seek to test our major hypothesis, listed below, across several specifications in order to understand the robustness of our results.

H1: Members of the House of Representatives in either major party who are more ideologically extreme than their party's average member will be more likely to be included in news coverage as compared to ideological moderates. We expect the same in a bivariate relationship for senators, but when controlling for other relevant factors discussed above, we expect the ideological extremity effect to disappear.

We also test expectations building on previous work examining determinants of congressional news coverage.

H2a: Members of Congress who are members of the party leadership are more likely to be included in news coverage than other lawmakers.

H2b: Members of Congress who chair committees are more likely to be included in news coverage than other lawmakers.

H3: Members of Congress who are in the same political party as the president will be less likely to be included in news coverage than Members of Congress in the opposite party.

H4: U.S. Senators will be included in more news stories than U.S. House members.

Data and Research Design

In order to test whether journalists are more likely to give attention to lawmakers who are more ideologically extreme, we compare an estimate of individual lawmaker ideology with the volume of attention received by lawmakers in the *New York Times* from the 103rd Congress to the 112th Congress. We chose the "national paper of record,"

rather than an incomplete sampling method attempting to represent a broader media

ecology, because the *New York Times* is an agenda-setter for other news media (Reese

and Danielian, 1989). As such, the *Times* serves as a reasonable, though incomplete,

proxy for the kind of coverage other news organizations might be expected to provide

(see Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). Furthermore, in the Web 2.0 era, the *New York Times*

has maintained its agenda-setting role, even within blog networks, blogs networks that

continue to follow *Times* coverage on many (but not all) issues (Meraz, 2009). Thus,

even in the 21st century media environment, there is evidence that what appears in the

New York Times is likely to appear more broadly throughout the media ecology.

We capture coverage in the *Times* by making use of the *New York Times Linked*

Open Data API (accessible at http://data.nytimes.com), as well as data on individual

legislators' committee membership, place in the Congressional leadership structure,

party, and gender. The API collects the article abstracts of *New York Times* articles.

Article abstracts only mention the most important elements of an article, so if a member

of Congress is mentioned in an abstract, she or he was not an afterthought in a story, but

rather, the MC was an important part of it (Baumgartner, De Boef, & Boydstun, 2008). It

is important to note that our strategy does not guarantee that a lawmaker was quoted in

the article. In other words, our use of the *New York Times* API should be thought of as a

data set that contains significant mentions of a lawmaker in news coverage but not as a

comprehensive measure of how often lawmakers were directly quoted.

Since some lawmakers may make more of an effort to earn news media attention

than others, we also measure "attention-seeking" behavior of members of Congress by

counting the number of (200+ word) floor speeches given in each legislative session (see also Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980).

To test the robustness of our findings across different platforms of the mainstream news media, we also conduct analyses of broadcast news coverage on the *NBC Nightly News* and *CBS Evening News*. We choose broadcast television outlets to supplement our analysis for a variety of reasons. First, Jerit and Barabas (2008) argue that television news viewing can decrease knowledge gaps among news users who have a harder time benefitting from newspaper coverage. Thus, including television networks in our analysis allows us to draw deeper implications regarding the reach of our findings. If television outlets cover more extreme members of Congress in a manner similar to that of the *New York Times*, it increases the likelihood that more citizens will be introduced to and understand the views of extreme lawmakers, making polarization more likely (Wagner, 2007a). It also helps serves to buttress our argument that the *Times* is an agenda-setter for the news media more generally.

We use CBS and NBC but not ABC in our analysis. Jerit (2009) notes that when used in concert with print sources, CBS provides a "representative view of information that was appearing" in media around the country (76). However, we chose to include one additional network to CBS as "the Eye" was generally the lowest rated network during the time period we analyze. We chose NBC, in part, because the Tyndall Reports available for the years we analyze suggest that NBC's issue agenda was often a bit different than those of CBS and ABC. Moreover, Groeling's (2008) analysis shows differential behavior between NBC and the other networks in terms of coverage of presidential approval polls. As such, we chose to add a network that behaved a bit

differently, at least in some ways, from CBS to increase the likelihood of capturing any potential systematic differences in CBS and NBC's coverage of extreme lawmakers. As it turns out, the two networks were not different in terms of the amount of attention they paid to extreme lawmakers, but we believe including both in our analyses add to the robustness of our findings.

In order to capture only those points in time in which people receiving news coverage were elected Members of Congress (MC), each MC's term of office was pulled from Poole and Rosenthal's *DW-NOMINATE* dataset (accessible at http://voteview.com). *DW-NOMINATE* scores are derived from a dynamic, weighted multidimensional scaling method to analyze congressional roll call data. *DW-NOMINATE* scores are regularly used to estimate the political ideology of partisan lawmakers (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, 2006). A score close to -1 is interpreted as a liberal score. A score of 1 represents a conservative score and a score of 0 is thought of as a moderate score. For example, in the 113th Congress, Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren has a score of -.622 while Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican, has a score of .939. Maine Republican Susan Collins, who has been dubbed the most moderate senator, has a score of .088.

The *New York Times' Article Search API*, which interfaces with headlines and article abstracts, was then recursively searched using a *Python* script for each member's first and last names[1] in the time spanning January 1 of the first Congressional session and December 31 of the second session, with the resulting counts pulled. Each member's resulting Congress-article count results were then merged into the *Nominate* dataset. In

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[1] Search queries were constructed by requiring first and last names to appear concurrently through the use of the "First Last"~1 query style.

all, we pulled article counts for 4,863 members of Congress-legislators (3,972 House, 891 Senate), with a resulting total of 242,030 articles (107,875 House, 134,155 Senate) [2].

We collected broadcast news coverage of Congressional members in much the same way using the *Internet Archive*'s television news API, searching for each Congressional member's full name in both the *CBS* and *NBC* flagship evening news shows during the 112th Congress. This data collection netted 1,680 broadcast news segments mentioning House members and 295 broadcast news segments mentioning Senate members.

We coded for whether or not MCs had chaired standing committees in either chamber, whether they were a member of the party leadership, and their gender through the use of Stewart and Woon's (2011) House and Senate committee assignment data. Dummy variables were created for whether MCs were part of either the majority or minority party's leadership or chair of a standing committee for each Congressional session, as well as for the gender of each MC. We also created dummy variables for whether legislators' party controlled each chamber and whether the president's party matched the MC's own for each term. Finally, we created a variable measuring each legislator's time in office (in Congressional sessions).

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[2] In order to capture the effect of the amount of previous coverage given to each legislator, we conducted a similar API search, but restricted to the fourth quarter leading in to each term (e.g., the previous quarter for the 112th Congress would span October 1-December 31, 2010). We do not include the results that include this variable in our models as the results are consistent with the findings we present.

To measure attention-seeking behavior of Congressional members, we culled

floor speech data from the *Sunlight Foundation's Open Congress API*, which offers every

floor statement for the Congresses we analyze. In order to avoid brief statements of

procedural nature that were clearly not attempts to stoke media coverage (e.g., yielding

time), we counted only those statements on the floor of each chamber that were

composed of 200 or more words.

We are most interested in the effect of ideological extremity (irrespective of the

direction of that ideology) on news media attention, so we use the absolute value of the

DW-NOMINATE 1 measure from Poole and Rosenthal's dataset. Because our dependent

variable consists of the number of articles covering each legislator over the 103rd-112th

Congresses, our dependent variable is count distributed. As such, we make use of

negative binomial regression in the subsequent analyses. One concern with count data is a

preponderance of zeros in analyses; our House data netted 231 legislator-Congress

pairings with zero article counts (~6% of the sample), while the Senate data netted 13

legislator-Congress pairings with zero article counts (~2% of the sample). Thus, the low

number of observations with no articles in the *New York Times* does not appear to be

inflated, so straight negative binomial regression was deemed appropriate for our

analyses.[3]

Results

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 presents our results for the House of Representatives. We begin by

directly testing the influence of House member extremity on article counts in the *New*

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[3] Zero-inflated models were compared to regular negative binomial models with no
significant improvement in model fit.

York Times, shown in Table 1, Model 1.[4] For the House, ideological extremity had a positive and significant bivariate relationship (*b = 0.904, p < .01*) on media coverage; the predicted number of articles referencing moderate legislators (*Ideological Extremity = 0*) was 19.24,[5] while extreme legislators (*Ideological Extremity = 1.0*) in the House were predicted to receive 47.52 articles.

Of course, ideological extremity may not explain news attention as well as MC's own attention-seeking behavior. To that end, in Model 2 we introduce variables measuring the number of floor speeches given by each member of the House during each session and legislator characteristics, including the number of sessions they served in office, whether they were members of (either party's) leadership, chaired a committee, were female, whether each member's party controlled the House chamber (*party control = 1*), whether they shared the president's party (*presidential party = 1*), and interactions between the two. We interact these variables because of theoretical expectations that members of Congress will be more likely to receive media attention when in the minority, with especially large effects when both the minority in their chamber and not in the president's party, because of the media's reliance on conflict for narrative (Cook 1996 but see Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1982). The coefficient estimates are shown in Model 2 of Table 1, with the marginal effects plotted in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 About Here]

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[4] We were initially concerned that candidates for the presidency in either the House (e.g., Paul Ryan in 2012, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Joe Biden in 2008) would dramatically skew the number of articles and resulting models. However, neither dropping these cases nor controlling for them substantially or substantively changed our model results, so we leave these cases in each analysis.

[5] Predicted article counts obtained by exponentiating the model point predictions.

Once again, House members' extremity continued to positively and significantly correlate with their level of media coverage ($b = 1.123, p < .01$), even after controlling for floor speeches, leadership status, committee chairs, gender, and minority status. Notably, the substantive importance of the ideological extremity results does not diminish across model specifications. In Model 2, extreme members of the House were predicted to receive coverage in 28.7 articles, three times the number of their centrist counterparts (9.34). The effect of floor speeches was positive and significant ($b = 0.001, p < .01$). Being a member of House leadership ($b = 2.468, p < .01$) or chairing a standing committee ($b = 0.490, p < .05$) was likewise associated with 100.83 and 5.9 article increases, respectively. Female House members were again associated with lower media coverage ($b = -0.139, p < .05$), with 1.21 fewer article mentions for females, on average.

There was a significant and positive main effect for legislators' party controlling the House ($b = 0.132, p < .01$), as well as a significant, negative effect for members sharing the president's partisan affiliation ($b = -0.284, p < .01$). Members of the controlling party could be expected to receive 1.32 more articles than those in the minority, while those in the president's party received 2.31 fewer articles, on average. Finally, rejecting H3, there was no significant interactive effect between sharing the president's party and controlling the House chamber ($b = -0.122, p > .05$).

Model 3 of Table 1 closes our initial analysis of our House data by conditioning ideological extremity on the Congressional session by means of an interactive relationship. It makes sense theoretically to account for Congressional sessions, as the time period covered in this research saw a dramatic rise in polarization in both the lower and upper chambers (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006; Carmines, 2011). All of the

previous controls used in the prior model continued to exhibit similar effects in both direction and magnitude (though the p-value for *Chamber Control* rises above the .05 level).

The main effect of our primary variable of interest – extremity – also continued to have a positive and significant effect on article count (*b = 0.581, p < .01*), though the magnitude of its independent effect dropped from previous models, with extreme legislators receiving 10.3 more article mentions than moderate legislators. However, conditioning the effect of extremity on the Congressional session demonstrating a positive multiplicative effect between the two variables (*b = 0.063, p < .10*), though only at the less conservative p < .10 level. This means that as with each unit-increase in Congressional session – which doubles as a measure of an increasingly polarized House according to the chamber polarization data maintained by Poole and Rosenthal – the effect of extremity has gone up; for example, in the 103rd Congress, an ideologically extreme House member is predicted to receive around 20 more articles than a moderate House member. However, an ideologically extreme member of the House in the 112th Congress – a much more polarized body – could be expected to receive around 40 more articles than a moderate member.

[Table 2 About Here]

We next orient our analysis to the effect of member extremism on newspaper coverage of the U.S. Senate, shown in Table 2. As we predicted, we found a significant and positive bivariate effect between ideological extremism and media coverage for senators (*b = 1.036, p < .01*), with the predicted number of articles for centrist senators at 101.49 while extreme senators had a predicted article count of 286. Controlling for

nothing else, the most extreme senators were *much* more likely to be covered by the *NYT* than middle of the road senators. This initial analysis supports H1 (extreme MCs get more coverage) and H4 (senators receive more coverage than representatives).

[Figure 2 About Here]

Model 2 includes the individual legislator characteristics as well as our political context variables. The model coefficients are shown in Model 2 of Table 2 and effect predictions are plotted in Figure 2. The effect of ideological extremity was positive and significant (*b = 0.606, p < .01*), with extreme senators receiving 48.73 more articles than their moderate counterparts. The effect of floor speeches continued to be significant, albeit small (*b = 0.002, p < .01*). Senate leadership (*b = -0.178, p > .05*) and chairing a committee (*b = 0.104, p > .05*) continued to be non-significant. The effect of sex on coverage persisted (*b = 0.357, p < .01*), with women in the Senate receiving 25.10 more article mentions than males, while terms in office was again not significantly related to article count (*b = 0.006, p > .05*).

When accounting for political context in Model 2, both chamber control (*b = 0.378, p < .01*) and sharing the president's party (*b = 0.821, p < .01*) was positive and significant; additionally, interacting the two produced a negative effect (*b = -1.434, p < .01*). While controlling the Senate and sharing the president's party was associated with an independent increase of 26.87 and 74.46 articles, respectively, members whose party controlled the chamber *and* who shared the president's party received fewer articles (46.24), on average, than members who controlled the chamber but didn't share partisanship (85.40), members who shared presidential partisanship but were in the out-

party (132), and members in the out-party who did not share the president's partisanship (58.5).

As with the House, Model 3 brings in the effect of ideological extremity as conditioned by Congressional session/increasing level of polarization in the senate chamber. As in previous models, contextual variables retain their direction and significance; however, as we expected, the effect of extremity on article counts again drops from significance ($b = 0.048, p > .05$). Moreover, there was no significant interactive effect between extremity and Congressional session, unlike our House models ($b = 0.069, p > .05$), though Congressional sessions themselves did have a positive and significant (albeit small) effect on article counts ($b = 0.083, p < .05$).

Though these results are generally consistent with our expectations, the possibility exists that given its status as an elite newspaper, the *New York Times* reports on Congress differently than sources used more often by non-elite citizens (see Jerit & Barabas, 2008). To that end, we undertook a supplementary analysis of network news coverage of Congress by culling broadcast mentions of members of Congress from NBC and CBS. The data was collected through the *Internet Archive*'s television news transcript API by again searching for each member's full name and counting the number of broadcast reports mentioning the member. Unfortunately, because the archive has only a small overlap with our *NYT* dataset – our newspaper data ends in the 112th Congress while the television archive's data begins midway through the 111th – we only subject the 112th Congress to this test. However, this represents a useful robustness check of our major arguments and analyses.

[Table 3 About Here]

Table 3 presents the results of our analysis, which includes ideological extremity, floor speeches, and the member-level characteristics used in previous models (no system-level characteristics were used because the system is invariant at one time point). Model 5 for the House shows that ideological extremism predicts broadcast news mentions in much the same way as it did for *NYT* coverage, with polarization increasing the likelihood of coverage vis-à-vis moderate members of the House ($b = 2.294, p < .01$). Though the substantive effect is not as large as for the *NYT* – extreme members of the House receive, on average, 1.9 more broadcast reports mentioning them than moderate members – this likely owes to differences in format, as the broadcast news format affords far fewer stories about Congress than print.

There was no effect of floor speeches in predicting House members' coverage by network news stations. Party leadership, however, was positive and significant ($b = 1.968, p < .01$), with members of leadership receiving 1.2 more articles than non-leadership members. Committee chairs also received more coverage, though at a lower threshold of significance ($b = 0.812, p < .10$), while there was no difference in coverage of female members as compared to males. Finally, the number of terms in office was positive and significant ($b = 0.126, p < .01$).

The Senate model of network news coverage tells a different story. Our primary variable of interest, ideological extremism, was not significantly related to coverage by the two networks ($b = 1.093, p > .05$). Floor speeches, our measure of attention-seeking, was significant ($b = 0.005, p < .05$), with each additional floor speech associated with a very modest increase of 0.002 in broadcast news reports. Floor speeches are guaranteed video sound bites, which likely contribute to the effect of this variable on television news

coverage. Interestingly, committee chairs tended to receive less coverage than non-committee chairs ($b = -1.870$, $p < .01$), and no difference existed between males and females, unlike the *NYT* Senate models. Finally, the number of terms in office was positively and significantly related to broadcast news coverage ($b = 0.098$, $p < .05$), with each additional term served associated with 0.05 more broadcast mentions.

[Table 4 About Here]

In addition to our findings, the possibility exists that there is a differential effect regarding the coverage that ideologically extreme members of Congress receive that is on the basis of party, so we close out our analyses with a brief exploration of the interaction of partisanship and extremity by interacting the two variables in models of both *NYT* and network news coverage (Table 4). To wit, we ask an additional research question in this article: are there differences in whether extreme Republicans or extreme Democrats receive coverage from major news organizations? For comparability across our newspaper and broadcast news data's sake, we use the 112th Congress for these models.

When accounting for the interaction between party and extremity, we found no significant effect for extremity on its own. However, the interaction was positive and significant in three of four cases (both *NYT* and network news for the House, as well as Senate network coverage (and not Senate *NYT* coverage)), suggesting that ideologically extreme Republicans tend to net more news coverage than ideologically extreme Democrats. In fact, in each of the significant models, the effect of ideological extremity was nearly flat (though slightly positive) for Democrats while Republicans received significantly more coverage due to ideological extremism.

Discussion

Our analysis makes several contributions to our understanding of the news media's role in a democratic society. First, the results add evidence to a growing line of research suggesting that moderation may not be an enduring news value; rather, moderation's value may vary given the political context of the time. The increasing diversity of the information environment coupled with a dramatic growth in polarization among federal lawmakers has resulted in extreme members of Congress receiving more news coverage than their moderate counterparts. This is especially true in the House of Representatives, where the most extreme representatives earn more than three times the coverage of their moderate colleagues (see Figure 1, upper-left quadrant). Our findings regarding senators were mixed. Senators receive far more coverage than House members on average, but extreme senators are only more likely to receive increased news coverage under some specific model specifications in the *New York Times* and not at all in network television coverage. When extreme senators did receive more news attention than moderate ones, the substantive impact that extremity had on coverage was flatter than was the impact for extreme House members (Figure 1 and Figure 2, upper-left quadrants).

The growth of partisan polarization in Congress (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, 2006) and people's reaction to it (Wagner, 2007b), and the increasing diversity of the information environment (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008) have animated our examination of moderatism in news coverage (see also McCluskey & Kim, 2012). Clearly, the *New York Times*, still considered the most important American media outlet, is not following the value of moderation in its coverage of Congress. Neither are broadcast television outlets. Given the set of years covered in the newspaper analysis and the confirmation of our

main findings in the network television news data, the analysis casts a revealing light upon the increasingly polarizing nature of national political news coverage in the United States.

Studies of the American news media's coverage of politics often focus on elections, especially in an era of the "permanent campaign." Given that national news generally focuses less on specific House and Senate races than local media do, we did not take account of election-based coverage in our analysis. Indeed, since moderate lawmakers may be more electorally vulnerable, our hypothesis tests are conservative since moderate lawmakers would be receiving "extra" election-based coverage in our data, potentially muting the extremity effect. When we included variables that measured either the time to or from the closest election, our main results were unaltered in both chambers. Thus, we did not report those models here. However, we believe that if local and regional news outlets were being analyzed, it would be important to take account of election coverage as compared to other coverage of MCs.

Second, we show the importance of understanding the different incentives facing reporters when covering members of the House as compared to the Senate, especially in eras of polarization – times when the filibuster becomes part of "standard operating procedure" for the Senate's minority party. Our results suggest that news organizations and their reporters are sensitive to the ways in which the different rules of the Senate and the House affect the relative power lawmakers have. News outlets reflect those sensitivities in their congressional reporting. The differences in the nature of the power of, for example, an ideologically moderate individual senator (who can regularly cast a determinative vote on a filibuster) and an extreme one (who generally cannot) are so vast

that reporters respond to lawmaker extremity differently based on the chamber from which the congressional ideologue is doing the talking.

Though common wisdom is that senators who are frequent sources in news coverage appeal to journalists because they are "mavericks," our analyses suggest that people like Sen. John McCain – who have developed a reputation for bucking their party—have an actual voting record, at least according to the *DW-NOMINATE* measure, that looks more like an ideologue than a moderate maverick. Generally, the extreme senators are not more likely to get attention from the news media when we control for theoretically relevant factors such as one's prior media attention and membership in the party leadership structure. For House members looking to get noticed, this analysis suggests the use of a more ideologically oriented megaphone. For those who might be strategically avoiding promoting a message (Sellers, 2010), dispassionate rhetoric and moderate positions are more likely to get the cold shoulder from reporters looking to fill their copy with drama and conflict.

An additional implication of our work is that because ideologically polarizing rhetoric is more likely to find its way into news coverage, citizens may be more likely to engage competing partisan frames by accepting the frame offered by their own party even if the arguments advocated by the other party is stronger (Druckman, Peterson, & Slothuus, 2013). What is more, if people are more likely to believe things that *are not accurate* because they learned about them from a trusted partisan source in a polarized environment, the news media's objective accounting of a polarized legislative branch has powerful implications for the health and future of the American experiment.

First, in addition to the *Times*, our analysis shows that network television is systematically covering extreme lawmakers more than other lawmakers as well. Since individuals who may not benefit from reading newspapers like the times can reduce the knowledge gap by watching television news, the fact that broadcast networks paint a more extreme picture of Congress suggest a mechanism by which citizens learn about and respond to elite polarization (Hetherington, 2001; Carmines, Ensley, & Wagner, 2012). Future research should examine the potential differential effects that newspaper and television coverage of extreme partisans in Congress has on public polarization.

Second, systematically favoring the most extreme voices – while providing an accurate reflection of the ideological boundaries of debate in Washington – could help explain why *perceptions* of polarization are often even greater than *actual* policy polarization in the U.S. (Mitchell, Hibbing, Smith, & Hibbing, 2014). In short, a skewed sense of the commonly reported differences between the two major parties could foster partisan polarization. What is more, these misperceptions are likely very difficult to correct (Nyhan & Riefler, 2010). Despite new developments in journalistic practices, such as the rise of fact-checking, attempts the news media make to point out fact errors is met by the audience with skepticism, outright rejection, and even the development of stronger beliefs that are actually false. In the "race for clicks" among new media journalists, we might expect newer outlets to be even more likely to favor extremists on the one hand, but to the extent that journalists are working in new media, they should be more likely to place a greater premium on traditional news values and journalists' own professional standards than market concerns (Graves et al., 2016).

Third, lawmakers strategically attack the media, diminishing the trust that Americans have for the media (Ladd, 2012). Baughman's (1989) historical examination of powerful Americans' responses to their experiences with the "third-person" effect helps to explain a variety of important actions they took to restrict press freedom, alter access to the media, and influence public opinion. Further, understanding how powerful elites are likely to respond to news coverage can help explain what leaders thought about "if not how the mass media affected them, how they believed the mass media touched others," (Baughman, 1989, p. 18).

Fourth, our exploration in Table 4 of the partisan nature of the coverage of ideological extremists reveals that far-right Republicans get more media attention than far-left Democrats. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as a sign of liberal media bias; casting Republicans as out of touch and Democrats as representatives that are closer to the average American. On the other hand, the focus on extreme Republicans in Congress could reflect "the political reality of the time" (Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1982, p. 828). We interpret our exploratory results in Table 4 as an accurate reflection of a Republican Party that is becoming more ideologically conservative. Carmines' (2011) demonstration that newly elected Republicans are to the right of returning Republicans in Congress while newly elected Democrats are to the ideological *right* of returning Democrats in Congress suggests that a systematic tendency for news outlets to favor covering extreme Republicans is not an example of bias, but "paradox of objectivity" (Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1982, p. 829).

Finally, our research design highlights the benefits of programmatically searching text to analyze. The process is more extendable than traditional content analysis

techniques; in future research, bringing in more sources (blogs, other broadcast or newspaper sources) is low cost and allows research on media coverage to proceed more quickly. The major benefits of conducting a search via Python, or any other scripting language, is the ability to systematically and efficiently parse through a large volume of text. While human-based searches are better for deriving meaning from the texts, programmatically doing so allows a level of text searching not possible with human coders.

As with any study, ours is imperfect. While we use three different news sources in our analyses, the analyses that extend beyond one congressional session are limited to one source of news. The *New York Times* is commonly seen as an agenda-setter for the rest of the news media (Boydstun, 2013; Reese & Danielian, 1989; Gans, 1979), but it is merely one major outlet that covers political news. Far more people watch network television news than read the Grey Lady. While our results stemming from the *New York Times* data hold with respect to the data from CBS and NBC, future work should endeavor to examine television coverage over time. While Meraz (2009) shows that the *Times* still acts as an agenda-setter for web-based media outlets in the 21st century information ecology, future studies should include cable and web-based news sources to provide a more comprehensive picture of the information environment.

Additionally, we treat all issues as equal in our analysis. Previous work has established that news coverage is often more favorable to the party with the reputation for "owning" an issue (Hayes, 2010). Whether extremists or moderates of a party are likely to be included in coverage on the issues on which a party has a favorable reputation remains an open question. Thus, future research should expand the scope of analysis

beyond major newspapers to network and cable television coverage of politics and to account for variance across a wide range of issues to paint a more comprehensive picture of the factors that influence whose views make the news.

Our analysis is also silent on lawmakers' strategic decisions to promote (or fail to promote) messages (Sellers, 2010). Our measure of legislator activity shows the results of those strategic decisions. Depending upon whether a MC supports her or his party's position on an issue and/or whether the issue in question is controversial or salient in a MC's district or state, a lawmaker's availability to be covered might be skewed by atypical silence or talkativeness. As such, examinations of the strategic factors that influence when lawmakers become willing fodder for media attention ought to be pursued in the future.

Conclusion

Democratic theorists have long extolled the necessity for quality debate and compromise among lawmakers. The very design of democratic governance requires elites to deliberate and work together to reach consensus. However, the coverage of the ideological positions that dominates the current state of national partisan politics may impede that ability or willingness of elites to work together and to compromise, two essential qualities for effective governance. If the news media continue to be more likely to give prominent attention to the partisan elites that are touting the most extreme issue positions, the democratic experiment may suffer.

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Table 1: Determinants of House Members' *New York Times* Coverage

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Extremity	0.904**	1.123**	0.581**
	(0.121)	(0.116)	(0.223)
Floor Speeches		0.001**	0.001**
		(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Party Leadership		2.468**	2.427**
		(0.114)	(0.130)
Committee Chair		0.490**	0.426**
		(0.096)	(0.093)
Female		-0.139*	-0.165**
		(0.055)	(0.055)
Terms in Office		0.058**	0.058**
		(0.005)	(0.005)
Chamber Control		0.132**	0.078#
		(0.044)	(0.044)
Shared Party		-0.284**	-0.396**
		(0.096)	(0.098)
Control*Shared		-0.122	0.010
		(0.110)	(0.112)
Congress			0.012
			(0.018)
Congress*Extremity			0.063#
			(0.037)
Intercept	2.957**	2.234**	2.349**
	(0.061)	(0.064)	(0.104)
X-sq	55.10**	1534.13**	1538.07**
N	4488	4424	4424

** p < .01, * p < .05 (two-tailed tests)

Table 2: Determinants of Senate Members' *New York Times* Coverage

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Extremity	1.036** (0.277)	0.606* (0.276)	0.048 (0.495)
Floor Speeches		0.002** (0.0003)	0.002** (0.0003)
Party Leadership		-0.178 (0.232)	0.116 (0.230)
Committee Chair		0.104 (0.123)	0.198 (0.121)
Female		0.357** (0.121)	0.252* (0.120)
Terms in Office		0.006 (0.009)	0.012 (0.009)
Chamber Control		0.378** (0.099)	0.333** (0.098)
Shared Party		0.821** (0.183)	0.545** (0.184)
Control*Shared		-1.434** (0.220)	-1.188** (0.218)
Congress			0.083* (0.036)
Congress*Extremity			0.069 (0.087)
Intercept	4.620** (0.111)	4.069** (0.141)	-4.714 (3.857)
X-sq	10.74**	143.55**	177.91**
N	891	891	891

** p < .01, * p < .05 (two-tailed tests)

Table 3: Determinants of NBC/CBS Coverage of the 112th U.S. Congress

	House - Model 5	Senate – Model 5
Ideological Extremity	2.294**	1.093
	(0.608)	(1.076)
Floor Speeches	-0.003	0.005*
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party Leadership	1.968**	-1.091
	(0.441)	(1.449)
Committee Chair	0.812#	-1.870**
	(0.471)	(0.599)
Female	0.345	-0.348
	(0.290)	(0.522)
Terms in Office	0.126**	0.098*
	(0.022)	(0.042)
Intercept	-1.654**	-0.574
	(0.432)	(0.618)
X-sq	89.444**	30.945**
N	565	89

** p < .01, * p < .05, # p < .10
Standard errors in parentheses

Table 4: The Effect of Partisanship and Extremity on Media Coverage

	House - NYT	House Network	Senate NYT	Senate Network
Extremity	-0.064	0.737	-0.287	-4.025#
	(0.689)	(1.271)	(1.227)	(2.302)
Floor Speeches	-0.0001	-0.003	0.004**	0.005**
	(0.0009)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Party Leadership	1.606**	1.840**	-0.577	-1.126
	(0.252)	(0.438)	(0.816)	(1.405)
Committee Chair	1.116**	0.782	0.099	-1.331*
	(0.279)	(0.496)	(0.324)	(0.660)
Female	0.356*	0.355	0.269	-0.123
	(0.160)	(0.290)	(0.258)	(0.505)
Terms in Office	0.086**	0.125**	0.020	0.099*
	(0.013)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.043)
Republican	-1.659**	-2.195*	0.062	-1.553
	(0.483)	(0.926)	(0.605)	(1.101)
Republican*Extremity	2.565**	3.367*	0.952	5.858*
	(0.881)	(1.651)	(1.435)	(2.658)
Intercept	2.950**	-0.892	3.881**	0.606
	(0.298)	(0.561)	(0.442)	(0.814)
X-sq	220.74**	95.69**	36.86**	31.44**
N	565	565	89	89

** p < .01, * p < .05, # p < .10
Standard errors in parentheses
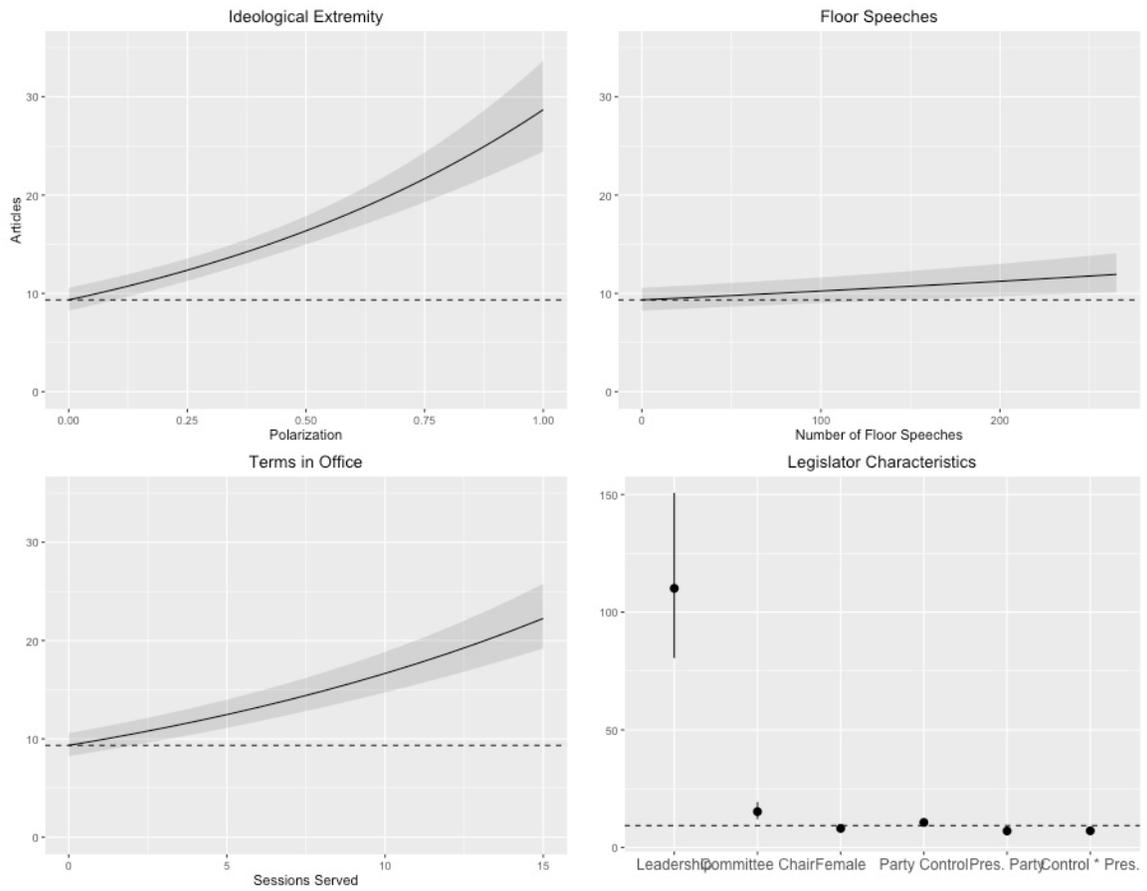
Figure 1: Predictors of House Members' *New York Times* Coverage

Figure 2: Predictors of Senate Members' *New York Times* Coverage