ABSTRACT

TITLE OF DISSERTATION:	AMERICAN JOURNALISM AND THE DEVIANT VOTER: ANALYZING AND IMPROVING COVERAGE OF THE ELECTORATE IN THE TRUMP ERA
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This study examined media coverage of the 2016 presidential election to identify whether Trump voters were framed as deviant as defined by Daniel Hallin's Sphere Theory (1986). In a content analysis of 384 reports produced in the last six weeks of the election by national and local outlets, this study found that journalists framed Trump voters as outside the political norm through the use of delegitimizing cues. Previous scholarship (Luther and Miller 2005; Robinson et. al. 2008; Taylor 2014; Billard 2016) has defined delegitimizing cues as frames that signal negativity to the news consumer. Using a coding system and a qualitative examination of the media reports, this study operationalized deviance through the identification of six delegitimizing cues applied to the Trump voter. The conclusion was that the media framed Trump voters using delegitimizing cues that differed from the coverage of Clinton voters and signaled deviance to the news consumer.

Hallin defined three spheres of normative practice for journalists: consensus, legitimate controversy and deviance. Each sphere has different normative practices and goals. According to Hallin's theory, most political coverage falls into the sphere of legitimate controversy. This study suggests that when journalists were confronted with voters considered a threat to democracy, normative practices shifted and coverage of the Trump voter moved into the sphere of deviance. This framing then contributed to a misunderstanding of the electorate by the media.

An examination of differences in national and locally-based reporting in this study found that local media framed voters in a more nuanced manner. In addition, local media reports included details suggesting that political polls were an inaccurate descriptors of local voters.

Also included in this dissertation is a summary of the media debate that followed the 2016 election and suggests political reporters were unaware of the shifting roles and practices during the campaign.

Finally, this study suggests that framing voters as deviant contributes to the polarization of the U.S. political system. It aims to analyze the media coverage of the 2016 voter with the goal of illuminating current practices and suggesting improvements in the relationship of the media and the voters.

AMERICAN JOURNALISM AND THE DEVIANT VOTER: ANALYZING AND
IMPROVING COVERAGE OF THE ELECTORATE IN THE TRUMP ERA

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

To my husband Jim, above all. Thank you for seeing the world differently than anyone else.

To our children Madeleine, John and Charlotte who each contributed their unique talents and were an essential part of the workforce that was required to get this done. What a moment to see each of you as scholars, researchers and, occasionally, as therapists.

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Finally, this dissertation owes a thank you to the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland for the opportunity to pursue this degree. It is a beautiful place to become a scholar.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The 2016 presidential election presented a challenge for political journalists who understood their role as an integral part of the U.S. democratic system. On the one hand, journalism practice requires the media to provide balanced and objective information. The constitutionally-protected role of the media is to inform the electorate about the campaign so voters can understand the issues and candidates and then cast an informed vote. On the other hand, Donald Trump's campaign operated outside the political norm and the thousands of supporters who showed up at his rallies were often openly hostile of the media. Trump insulted his opponents, appeared unversed about policy issues, faced scandal after scandal during his campaign and rallied his supporters using language many identified as racist. Many journalists labeled Trump and his supporters a threat to the U.S. democracy. Facing the deadline pressure of a presidential campaign, the media struggled to understand their role and the best practices of election coverage. They missed the likelihood of Trump's election, but more importantly, the media missed the chance to establish a conversation about the issues driving his support.

At the heart of the challenge was a concept that scholars have studied for decades -- the role of the media in a democratic election and the normative practices associated with that role. Members of the media who were outraged by Trump and his supporters urged their peers to stop covering him objectively and instead sound an alarm that this election could threaten the U.S. system of democracy. However, professional practice urges objectivity, fact-gathering and source-based reporting. To political reporters assigned to cover the presidential election,

abandoning objectivity sounded like a betrayal of their profession. As Schudson (1995) once defined it, these practices are the "hallmark" of contemporary journalism and differentiate the professional media from anyone one else witnessing the campaign.

On election night 2016 as results rolled in, many members of the media publicly recognized that the choice of the electorate was much different than they had reported during the campaign. Hillary Clinton was not going to win the election as most major media outlets had predicted because Trump's support was registering in surprising corners of the country. At nearly 11 p.m. EST, the Associated Press called Florida and then North Carolina for Trump. As the night wore on, Trump won more states that the media had predicted Clinton would carry: Iowa, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan. These were not traditional swing states. Even in states that supported Clinton there were unexpected pockets in the political landscape. In Minnesota, Illinois, and New York some counties flipped their support away from the Democrats by more than 20 percent, meaning counties that had voted Democratic in 2012 were voting for Trump in large numbers. This type of support signaled that a majority of Republican voters and a significant number of Democratic voters had sent Trump to the Oval Office. These voters were part of a political movement that could not be dismissed as a fringe element of the American population, as the media had nearly uniformly portrayed Trump supporters throughout the campaign.

Journalists recognized something had failed during their election coverage and they began a public self-examination centered on one question: how did we miss this? The morning after the election journalists Anna Palmer, Jake Sherman and Daniel Lippman wrote, "We were all wrong. That seems obvious, right? But we were more than wrong. We were laughably oblivious. The entire Washington political-media complex completely missed the mark. Not by

inches or feet, but by miles."[1] For several weeks, television and news outlets devoted time and space to the coverage of the election and their big miss. The media was not alone. Scholars such as Graber and Dunaway (2017) described the coverage of Brexit and the Trump election as a moment when the media was out of touch with a large portion of the electorate: "(j)ournalists from both countries are marveling at their failure to anticipate the depth of discontent felt among broad swaths of the public" (p.152). Just weeks after election day, a collection of media scholars published an analysis of what went wrong. In that roundup, public policy scholar Short (2016) wrote: "Trump's stunning electoral win demonstrates not so much the strength of his candidacy but the depth of despair felt by about the country's direction. His win is the equivalent of a scream of resentment, an articulation of alienation and a symbol of a deep crisis of legitimation," (p.102).

Journalists struggled to understand their role, and therefore their normative practices, in the 2016 election. Many scholars have suggested that the media should have been more proactive in identifying Trump as deviant during the election. By following standard journalism practices of balanced coverage and objectivity, they argue, the media normalized an abnormal candidate and potentially accelerated his campaign. McNair (2016), for example, argues that covering Trump with objectivity normalized fascist politics and he criticizes the media for bestowing respectability on Trump's politics. "(T)he slide into fascism will simply become another news story, another 'he said/she said' performance of balance, legitimized by the fact that this is what democracy delivered" (p.12). Mazzoleni (2016) is more forgiving but makes the same point. "How could the media ignore such a bizarre presidential hopeful? That's point. They just

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[1] Palmer, Anna, Jake Sherman and Daniel Lippman. (2016, November 9). We were all wrong. *Politico*. Retrieved from: https://www.politico.com/tipsheets/playbook/2016/11/we-were-all-wrong-what-dc-should-expect-trump-to-clinton-i-respect-you-new-power-players-in-all-red-washington-bday-john-harris-217304.

couldn't? So they covered his triumphant march toward the nomination, using the horse race frame, the one that they are long accustomed to," Mazzoleni wrote (p. 21). Patterson (2016) identified many trends in the election coverage but highlighted false equivalencies as one of the most important. Patterson argues that the media "reported all the ugly stuff they could find, and left it to the voters to decide what to make of it." Baym (2016) is more pessimistic. Journalism no longer stands separate from politics, he argues. Baym calls this discursive integration and defines it as a "deep blending" of politics, news, entertainment, commerce and marketing. Because Trump proved to be good for television news ratings, "commercial television news is structurally incapable of providing pushback," (p.1).

This study holds that all of these arguments are valid criticisms of the election coverage of 2016 (and there are many more.) However, they do not fully explain the media coverage of the Trump voter. Understanding the coverage of the voter through Sphere Theory, the risk of covering the voter as deviant becomes clearer. Raising an alarm about voters that threatened democracy, journalists missed an opportunity to explore Trump's support on a more granular level. There was a mystery in the 2016 campaign that went largely unreported: why were so many voters attracted to a candidate who violated the central tenets of the behavior and character of presidential candidates? Understanding the coverage through the lens of Hallin's Sphere Theory, it is easier to unravel the mystery of why the media did not recognize the scope of Trump's support. If Trump supporters were identified as deviant, then the role of journalists was no longer to objectively understand and report. The role of the journalists shifts to identifying the deviance and protecting democracy from the effects of this deviance. This dissertation suggests that understanding the Trump voter as deviant was an understandable and logical response by

political journalists but that it also contributed to a misunderstanding of the political landscape in the 2016 election.

The Lens of Sphere Theory

At the heart of Hallin's Sphere Theory lies an understanding of the shifting professional practices assigned to the different roles a journalist fulfills in a democracy. Many scholars have recognized and defined the role of the journalist in a democratic society. This study relies on Hallin's 1986 definition that identifies three areas of practice: the spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy, and deviance. Aiming for objectivity is the comfort zone of the professional journalist. Yet objectivity is not central to all the roles that the media fulfills. In stories that support community values, normative practices and newsroom rituals encourage the reporters to present only one side of the story: the heroic fireman, the patriotism of the military, the love we feel for pets. It would be jarring and upsetting for the reporter to seek two sides on these topics and sources. In Sphere Theory, these stories fall into the sphere of consensus. Similarly, the reporter also puts aside objectivity when raising an alarm about impending danger or deviant behavior. When a source claims aliens are talking to him, this source would be covered as deviant (or ignored). Hallin (1986) used the example of war protestors early in the Vietnam War. Bucking the patriotism many felt and government sources encouraged, these protestors were framed as deviant and outside the norm. Similarly, investigative reporting doesn't always seek balance or neutrality. It aims to shine a spotlight on misconduct, a breach of trust or a failure of justice. Finding corruption or illegal behavior, the journalist does not shift to find sources that argue in favor of this behavior. They aim to root out those responsible. These types of stories fall into Hallin's sphere of deviance, where practice does not include pursuing multiple perspectives in a source-based report but focuses on raising an alarm.

Finally, the goal of objectivity lies in a third role, the arena where debate is legitimate and encouraged. Topics that fall into this area include political debates, elections and controversy. This type of journalism is the most familiar for the media and the news consumer. Hallin defined this type of journalism as the sphere of legitimate controversy and described it as the "stuff of democracy" (p. 117). This is where practices taught in journalism school are applied: the inverted pyramid is used, it is source-based and factually driven, journalists seek alternative perspectives and pursue a range of opinions about issues facing the democracy.

Hallin developed Sphere Theory to explain journalistic approaches to coverage of the Vietnam War, which changed in tone and practice over time. It holds that that members of the media employ different normative practices depending on the perception of the news event he or she is covering. This model recognizes that the role of the journalist is not simply the transmitter of information. It is also the defender of community values and the alarm bell when confronted with threats to democracy or community. Hallin identified that journalists shift into and out of these spheres, each with different normative practices.

In the weeks following the election, media scholar Matt Carlson (2016) suggested that coverage of Trump did not fall into the sphere of legitimate controversy, as campaign coverage usually does. Instead Carlson argued that journalists were covering Trump supporters as deviant and applying the normative practices associated with this sphere. "(J)ournalism does not respond well to unorthodoxy; it is regimented and orthodox, driven by patterns that make possible the unending crush of news stories" (p.11). Instead, Carlson argued that the media covered Trump as they would cover a threat to democracy, as something deviant where "objectivity is supplanted by shared loathing" (p 11). He suggested that the role of the journalist shifted during the campaign coverage, whether the media realized it or not and that many journalists viewed Trump

as so far outside the sphere of legitimacy that the rules of political coverage no longer were required and were very difficult to apply. In the sphere of deviance, as defined by Hallin, journalists abandon neutrality and "play the role of exposing, condemning or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the political consensus," (Hallin, p.117). Carlson suggests that Trump's unorthodox candidacy, which blurred the lines of deviance and legitimacy for many, was an inherently difficult news event to cover because the rules of practice for these two spheres are very different. Carlson called for future scholarship using Hallin's theory to understand the difficulty of covering Trump during the 2016 election.

Expanding sphere theory to voters

Building on Carlson's observation, this study uses the lens of Hallin's Sphere Theory to examine coverage of the Trump voter and suggests that the difficulty the media faced during the 2016 presidential election stemmed from shifting roles and practices as they moved from the sphere of legitimate controversy to the sphere of deviance. Campaign coverage has traditionally fallen squarely in the sphere of legitimate controversy. Normative practice in this sphere is the pursuit of objectivity through fact gathering and source-based reporting, according to Hallin. This study identifies that journalists did not stay in this sphere when covering Trump supporters. Based on a content analysis and qualitative reading of media campaign coverage during the last six weeks of the 2016 election, this study finds that journalists often framed Trump supporters as deviant. When confronted with sources that fall into the sphere of deviance, Hallin suggests, the media will put aside neutrality and use language that marks the source or event as a threat to the community. This study argues that journalists often shifted from the sphere of legitimate concern to the sphere of deviance while covering the election and the normative practices they employed shifted with them.

Research using Hallin's sphere of deviance traditionally has focused on the coverage of war protestors (Luther and Miller 2005, Murray et. al. 2008, Taylor 2014). This is a natural outgrowth of Hallin's initial research on the media coverage of the Vietnam War, which found that protestors were often labeled deviant in the early years when patriotism and optimism defined public sentiment. Luther and Miller built on Hallin's study and examined media coverage of protestors during the 2003 U.S.-Iraq war. They found that when the media covers an event or source that falls into the sphere of deviance, journalists employ frames that signal the deviant nature of the subject. Luther and Miller called these frames "delegitimizing cue words," (p. 3). Taylor studied the shifting nature of political issues and identified times when topics or sources moved from legitimate to delegitimized or in the reverse direction. Journalists signaled changes in legitimacy through "subtle lexical choices" (p. 48), Taylor found.

Billard (2016) expanded the realm of this application to examine media coverage of transgender people. Billard operationalized the concept of delegitimizing language used to signal deviance with the development of a list of legitimacy indicators. Using the National Lesbian and Gay Journalist Association Stylebook and GLAAD[2] media reference guide, Billard developed a set of nine "Legitimacy Indicators" to measure "the various aspects of respecting the self-identifications and human dignity of transgender individuals." (p.5) The study found that coverage of transgender people in major national newspapers was "extremely limited" (p.1). However, the coverage that did exist nearly universally contained language identified as delegitimizing. Some of the legitimacy indicators that Billard measured included whether the media used the name a transgender person identified with or chose to use the name given at birth,

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[2] Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, a media organization formed in 1985 to protest coverage of HIV and AIDS in New York City.

whether the author uses slurs such as "tranny," "she-male" or other transphobic term, which

pronoun the journalist chose to describe a transgender person, citing criminal backgrounds

unrelated to the article, mischaracterizing transgenderism as drag or cross-dressing, and equating

transgenderism with a sexual perversion. Billard found that the media shifts normative practices

when confronted with sources or actors considered by journalists to be outside the norm. This

study builds on this scholarship and expands the scope of sphere theory to the study of elections

and voters.

The state of election coverage

Many scholars (Bennett 2017; Patterson 2016; Tiffin 2014; Hallin 1992) have identified

flaws in normative practices of election coverage that narrows the scope of sources, avoids

discussion of issues, zeroes in on controversy and emphasizes the horse-race nature of the

election. These practices fall into the sphere of legitimate controversy, which is where political

coverage is expected in Sphere Theory. Patterson (2016) documented the lack of issue coverage

and the hyper-focus by the media on covering the election as a horserace. Ignoring issues in

favor of polls and opinion surveys, the media has limited the opportunity to explore issues, he

argues. Patterson found less than 10 percent of media reports in the 2016 election addressed

issues. Within those reports, the voice of the voter is rarely heard. Rather, the reports focus on

the positions of powerful political actors. Bennett (2019) argues that coverage of Trump

supporters in the 2016 election falls into his theory of indexing, defined as the "tendency of

mainstream news organizations to index or adjust the range of viewpoints in a story to the

dominant positions of those whom the journalists perceive to have enough power to affect the

outcome of a situation" (p.16). By limiting the range of perspectives and issues debated, the

media not only eliminates many different viewpoints from the public debate but offers more

power to the political actors who are defining the sphere of legitimate controversy. Cook (2006) argues that indexing has led to a homogenization of the news, where all major news outlets report on the same topics and rely on the same powerful political actors as sources. The symbiotic nature of the relationship between the media and elected officials has turned the media into a branch of the government, Cook argues. Hallin (1992), in a separate study, identified the "shrinking soundbite," which is the growing trend to reduce the space and time that a source is offered to explain his or her perspective. Tiffen et. al. (2014) built on Hallin's study and found that the media is shifting to fewer sources in their news reports and focuses primarily on political actors.

All of these trends have contributed to a tendency by the media to narrate the news or explain the news from the perspective of the journalist as a story where facts are slotted in to make a point for the audience. As Hallin (1992) and Bennett (2017, 2019) have identified, the trend toward narrative news decreases the media's reliance on facts and source-based reporting and invites the reporter to adopt the role of analyst and interpreter. It places the journalist within the powerful world of elite political actors that define the agenda of political discussion (Iyengar and Kinder 2010). The range of accepted political debate is limited in this world by those in power and in a position to bring attention and action to an issue. Narrating the news, journalists have adopted the role of contextualizing and explaining political events based on their perspective and expertise. By covering only those in power, shifting a focus away from issues and relying more and more on a style that places the journalist at the center of media reports, the media has relegated the voice of the electorate to a minor role. Confronted with ideas that are outside the mainstream of political power, the media recognizes it as deviant rather than part of mainstream debate. This study aims to identify how journalists slipped out of the role of

objective reporting and into the role of democratic watchdog and aims to encourage a wider understanding of what makes up the sphere of legitimate controversy.

National and Local Reporting

This study was based on a content analysis and qualitative reading of 384 election news reports produced by three national newspapers and five local Pennsylvania newspapers during the last siz weeks of the 2016 presidential election. The local newspapers were included to measure whether journalists based in the same communities as the voters they were covering framed voters in a more nuanced manner than national reporters did. Many scholars have tied the challenges of covering the 2016 election to the decline of local reporting resources. Graber and Dunaway (2017) found that "elite national journalists" who usually relied on information from their colleagues in smaller bureaus and locally-based news outlets "were unable to pick up on the extent of public discontent" (p.153) in the 2016 election. Similarly, Hermida (2016) argues that "tectonic shifts" in how Americans receive and share their news fails to inform the voter. The gatekeepers of news have been undermined by economic realities and technology and proximity to the voter by news organizations is gone, Hermida argues. As a result, Lewis and Carlson (2016) suggest that the loss of local newspapers has changed our definition of news. They argue that towns suffering economic hardship, like factory closings, are those most likely to also lose their media outlets. Without media representation, the perspective of rural and small town residents was often not represented in the news world. After the election, journalists Bryant and Ordway (2018) suggest that major media organizations missed the support for Trump because they are "disconnected" from poverty. As a result, this study compares and contrasts the reporting of local and national newspaper election coverage in an effort to point to a path forward in election coverage of a wide range of voters.

Goals of this study

The broad goal of this study is to contribute to scholarship on the relationship of the media to the electorate in the U.S. democratic system. Specifically, this study aims to offer insights on normative practices that can assist the media in covering and informing voters during an election. Recent surveys by media organizations suggest that American confidence in the media is low. In late 2019, a Gallup poll found that only 41 percent of Americans said they had a "fair amount of trust" in the media to report "fairly and accurately."[3] While that figure is up from the distrust displayed immediately following the 2016 election, it is still alarmingly low. A 2019 Columbia Journalism Review poll found that 60 percent of those polled believed journalists were paid by their sources sometimes or very often.[4] Many studies show a growing divide between the media trusted by Republicans and Democrats. A 2020 Pew survey measuring confidence in more than 30 news sources found that the difference between the confidence that Republicans and Democrats place in major media organizations has grown significantly in the past five years.[5] As distrust, anger and polarization toward the media grows in society, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of ways in which the media can improve election coverage and fulfill its mission in a democracy.

The campaign of 2016 was a difficult assignment for political reporters, as their post-election debate illustrates. While Clinton won more popular votes, Trump won an unexpectedly large percentage of votes in key states in order to win the presidency. The tension of how to

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[3]Brenan, Megan. (2019, September 26). Americans' Trust in Mass Media Edges Down to 41%. *Gallup.* Retrieved from: https://news.gallup.com/poll/267047/americans-trust-mass-media-edges-down.aspx
[4]Columbia Journalism Review. (2019, Winter). Poll: How does the public think journalism happens? Retrieved from:
https://www.cjr.org/special_report/how-does-journalism-happen-poll.php.
[5]Potter, Debra and Katrina Eva Matsa. (2014, March 24). A Boom in Acquisitions and Content Sharing Shapes Local TV News in 2013. Pew Research Center Journalism and Media. Retrieved from:
https://www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/a-boom-in-acquisitions-and-content-sharing-shapes-local-tv-news-in-2013/.

cover a candidate that many perceived as a threat to democracy created a dilemma that journalists were forced to confront as they produced copy on deadline and identifying Trump supporters as deviant would have been a natural and predictable response, according to Sphere Theory although this lens has not been deployed widely as a method to study voters. However, that lens seems to be a logical answer to the questions posed by journalists themselves about how the media coverage of 2016 miscalculated the response of the voter to Trump.

In order to determine whether voters were framed as deviant as defined by Hallin, this study developed a coding scheme to measure deviance and legitimacy based on the work of previous studies and expanded the application of Sphere Theory to the media coverage of voters.

Research Questions

Based on previous scholarship, the following research questions will be explored in this dissertation:

R1: Did the media coverage of the 2016 election frame the Trump voter as deviant or outside the sphere of legitimate controversy as defined by Hallin (1992)?

R2: Did local journalists cover local Trump supporters in a manner different from national reporters? If so, did this coverage reflect a greater understanding of issues important to the local voter?

R3: How did the media understand their coverage of the voter in the debate that followed the 2016 election? Did that debate offer feasible solutions for future coverage of voters?

These research questions suggest the following hypotheses:

H1: Many journalists covering the 2016 election identified Trump as deviant from the political norm, as defined by Hallin (1986), and covered the campaign according to the norms prescribed by this model.

H2: Many journalists covering the 2016 election also identified Trump supporters as deviant and outside the sphere of legitimate consensus, as defined by Hallin (1986) and covered those voters according to the norms prescribed by this model.

H3: Local journalists may have been more nuanced in their understanding of their communities and less likely to use the deviance model when covering these voters during the election.

H4: Journalists understood their coverage of the 2016 election as flawed and generated a public debate about changes in normative practices following the election.

The scope of this dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter Two is a literature review. This study falls into the field of agenda setting and framing analysis. Specifically, this study will apply Sphere Theory, developed by Hallin, to the election coverage by the media in the 2016 presidential election. The premise is that the media understood the Trump voter as deviant, as defined by Sphere Theory, and therefore shifted its normative practices away from objectivity and fact-gathering and toward a narrative style that sounded an alarm. Many scholars have demonstrated how Sphere Theory is useful in understanding the coverage of political actors and events that run contrary to values perceived by the media to be shared community standards (Luther and Miller 2005, Murray et. al. 2008, Taylor 2014, Billard 2016). This study builds on this scholarship by applying Hallin's theory to an examination of the coverage of voters as first suggested by Carlson.

As a result, Chapter Two begins with a discussion of Sphere Theory, including a discussion of objectivity. Objectivity is a defining concept in modern U.S. journalism, yet it is often misunderstood and ill-defined. This chapter explores the very American origins of

objectivity and how the pursuit of this goal affects news gathering practices. As a central tenet of

the sphere of legitimate concern, this study explores how objectivity helps define the size and

scope of accepted political debate and normative practices.

The chapter moves on to explore how Sphere Theory fits into the literature on election

coverage by the media. Specifically, it explores the growing body of work that explores whether

the news media is fulfilling its role as the provider of information to the voters during an

election. As mentioned earlier, many scholars have documented shifts in normative practice that

have built up since the Vietnam War and Watergate eras. This study holds that these changes in

journalistic practice have encouraged a shrinking understanding of what topics and which actors

make up the sphere of legitimate controversy in Sphere Theory. Chapter Two includes a deeper

analysis of these trends and how it contributes to a narrower scope of accepted political debate.

Finally, Chapter Two examines scholarship that examines the contribution of local reporting and

examines the forces that are working against the success of smaller newspapers.

Chapter Three is an examination of the method used in this study. This chapter explores

in greater detail how other scholars have operationalized Sphere Theory. It explains how those

methods were used to develop a coding analysis that was applied to the content of newspaper

coverage of the last six weeks of the 2016 election. Building on Luther and Miller and Taylor,

the coding analysis examines whether journalists used de-legitimizing language to frame the

Trump supporter as deviant. Billard developed a set of "Legitimacy Indicators" for the coverage

of transgender people based on the best practices defined by GLAAD and the National Lesbian

and Gay Journalist Association Stylebook. Following Billard's example, the coding system was

designed using guidelines for election coverage developed by media organizations including *The

Handbook for Journalists During Elections,* published by Reporters Without Borders and

Society for Professional Journalist and the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy's 2018 report on how to cover poverty. It was designed to identify language within the newspaper reports that might signal to the reader that Trump voter was deviant. The coding system applied the same measures to an analysis of the Clinton voter.

The study method focused on gathering and analyzing media content in three national newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA TODAY* and five local Pennsylvania newspapers during the last six weeks of the 2016 presidential campaign, September 25 to November 8. These articles were selected using a keyword search on Nexis Uni and measured using quantitative and qualitative methods to determine whether the voter was framed as deviant. This chapter includes the results of the coding scheme and quantitative study of these articles, as well as an explanation of the keyword search, coding scheme and qualitative analysis.

Local newspapers were included in this study to measure differences in coverage between national and local newspapers. Pennsylvania newspapers were chosen for two reasons. First, Pennsylvania was a surprise swing state in the election and representative of the several states that were traditionally Democratic and predicted to support Clinton. The voters of Pennsylvania have supported Democratic candidates for president in every election since 1988. In the weeks before the election, *The New York Times* gave Clinton an 89 percent chance of carrying Pennsylvania and that prediction was supported by five national polls. Yet, Trump won the state with 48.8 percent of the vote compared to Clinton's 47.5 percent. In 2012, Obama won with 51.9 percent of the vote compared to 46.5 percent for the Republican challenger, Mitt Romney. The second reason is the fact that the University of Maryland's subscription to Nexis Uni includes Pennsylvania newspapers with a wide range of size, political leaning, histories and locations. It is

the largest database of local newspapers in a state predicted to vote for Clinton. The five local newspapers included in this study will be *The Philadelphia Inquirer, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Public Opinion (Chambersburg), Lebanon Daily News,* and *The Evening Sun (Hanover).* The coverage of the 2016 election will be compared and contrasted to national coverage in *The New York Times, The Washington Post* and *USA TODAY.*

Chapter Four outlines the results of this study which found that the Trump voter was often framed as deviant. Using language that described the voter's education, race, use of insults toward the other party's candidates and supporters, belief in conspiracy theories, and odd clothing or language the media signaled to its readers that the Trump supporter was less respectable than other members of the community and a not a valued source of information during the 2016 election. This chapter includes the results of the coding analysis and quantitative study of the newspaper accounts. It identifies a pattern of word choice and style in each of the newspapers and contrasts the coverage of the Trump voter with the coverage of the Clinton voter, which the coding scheme measured in the exact same way.

Offering examples from the quantitative study as well as a quantitative overview of the results from the coding analysis, this chapter suggests that understanding the media coverage of the election through the lens of Sphere Theory offers a unique insight into the media challenges of the 2016 election coverage. It highlights the language used to separate the Trump voter from the Clinton voter and reflects values held by the media as a whole. Through this quantitative and qualitative examination of the media content, this study aims identify the shifting roles the media played in the election and suggest better practices for voter coverage in future elections.

Chapter Five starts with scholarship about the differences in local and national reporting and reports the findings of this study on the differences in reporting on the election between

national and local newspapers, specifically *USA TODAY, The Washington Post, The New York Times* and five Pennsylvania papers: *The Philadelphia Inquirer, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Public Opinion (Chambersburg), Lebanon Daily News,* and *The Evening Sun (Hanover).* This study found that local newspapers often covered voters in a more nuanced manner than the national media did. It offers one path forward for improvement to election coverage.

Chapter Six is an analysis of the debate within the journalistic community about campaign coverage immediately following the election. This project examines how journalists began this self-examination before the final results were in on Election Day 2016 and follows this discussion until Inauguration Day 2017. At that point, Trump's policy choices dominated the news reports and the debate was largely dropped in favor of coverage of the breaking news. As the media prepares to cover another presidential election in 2020, some have returned to themes of this debate.[6] Most have not and the risk is that a lack of understanding about what went wrong in 2016 will mean a repeat of these mistakes in future elections.

This chapter explores the range of problems and solutions suggested by member of the media, especially the political correspondents. The purpose of including an overview of this debate in this study is to highlight the problems and potential solutions the media recognized and also to highlight what they did not identify. This study suggests that the media was unaware of the changing roles they adopted when covering the Trump supporter. Perhaps by understanding these shifting roles and the practices associated with them, the media can better cover the electorate in future elections. The debate is a hopeful sign that the media is looking for ways to adapt.

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[6] As an example, Dean Baquet, executive editor of the New York Times, discusses "The Lessons of 2016" on the New York Times- produced podcast The Daily. https://podcruncher.co/play/4q5j

Chapter Seven is the conclusion. For many in the media, the voters who supported Trump were threats to society, a deviant part of the electorate that could damage the U.S. democracy. Confronted with voters that held very different values than they did, the media sounded an alarm. Instead of resorting to normative practices of objective fact-gathering and reporting, political reporters shifted into the practices associated with emergencies as outlined in Hallin's sphere of deviance. The result was that the media missed the story of the election and the opportunity to discuss the issues that attracted many voters to Trump's candidacy. By reporting on the voters who wanted change in areas once labeled taboo, the media could have facilitated discussion and brought more clarity to the election. Instead, Trump voters were painted with the broad brush of deviance through delegitimizing cues that signaled to the reader that these voter were outside the norm. This framing encouraged the media and their news consumers to dismiss the Trump voter, leading to a misunderstanding of the electorate and a missed opportunity to encourage a discussion about the issues facing the nation in the 2016 election.

Conclusion

Elections are a time that the media really matters in a democracy. Campaign coverage is one of the roles that offers a bright light for news organizations: they are still needed. As Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) found, the public still turns to the media in elections and times of crisis. As the media struggles through these challenges, the role of journalism in a democracy has never really changed. The public still needs reliable information about the candidates, issues and other voters during an election in order to cast an informed ballot. This study suggests through its findings that the media should alter normative practices when covering voters in an election. The sphere of legitimate controversy is too narrowly defined by elite political actors, including the media itself. Understanding that the electorate is made up of

many different types of voters, with cross-pressured interests and influences, suggests that

election reporting of voters should be nuanced and issue-oriented. Through a greater reliance on

sources and facts, the media should aim for its North Star of objectivity and report on all

elements that might affect an election campaign, especially the most critical element: the voters.

Chapter Two: Literary Review

This study aims to add to scholarship on media coverage of an election by applying Sphere Theory to the coverage of voters in the 2016 presidential election. It contributes to literature that has applied Sphere Theory to media coverage of other political events and suggests that understanding the role of the journalist in an election leads to a greater understanding of professional practices employed when reporting on voters. This study also reviews recent scholarship on the content of media coverage in U.S. presidential elections. Much of this scholarship points to trends that are reducing the parameters for what topics are considered legitimate debate and which voices are heard in the media during an election. Based on this review, this study proposes a changed understanding of Sphere Theory, one where the sphere of legitimate controversy is shrinking and an increased number of political actors and topics are understood by the media as deviant. The goal of this review is to explain Sphere Theory, the scholarship that has employed the theory, review literature that explores trends in media coverage of elections (which would fall into the sphere of legitimate controversy) and explain how this study adds to this body of work.

The case for sphere theory

Schudson (2003) applied Sphere Theory to an examination of journalism content following the 9/11 terrorist attack. "Hallin's conceptualization is useful and clarifying," (p. 40) he wrote. Like Schudson and others (Carlson 2016, Billard 2016, Luther and Miller 2005, Murray et. al. 2008, Taylor 2014) this study argues that Sphere Theory is an excellent tool to study media coverage of moments of political upheaval. Sphere Theory is a particularly useful

tool to measure the media content of the 2016 election coverage and any election in which the media perceives the electorate to be acting in an unexpected manner. It suggests that the media was following professional standards in their coverage of the voters in 2016 but was unaware of the shifting roles they were fulfilling during the election. Identifying that the media employs different professional standards while fulfilling different roles in society, Sphere Theory offers a method to measure normative practices during times of change. It also recognizes the shifting roles that the media plays in a community and how those roles affect professional norms. Focusing on the changing nature of how a political event or actor is perceived by the media, it is more precise than agenda setting theories, although it fits in that tradition. Similarly, Sphere Theory recognizes framing as a journalistic tool and identifies framing as a method to measure practice.

Sphere Theory was developed by Hallin in 1986 to explore coverage of the Vietnam War, which shifted as public attitudes toward the conflict changed. It has most commonly been applied to the study of media coverage of war protestors (Luther and Miller 2005, Murray et. al. 2008, Taylor 2014) because protestors are often identified as deviant when a war begins but as a it drags on and public acceptance of a conflict wanes, the media adapts its understanding of these political actors and recognizes them differently. Hallin developed Sphere Theory to help understand the media's response to political change and identify areas for improved political coverage. As a theory, it resonates with the changing political environment of the 2016 election and recognizes the challenges of covering Trump supporters.

Understanding election coverage through the lens of Sphere Theory, it becomes clearer that the challenge for the media in 2016 was the shifting normative practices that the changing political landscape required. Confronted with voters who were outside the norm, journalists

shifted spheres. No longer were they working within the sphere of legitimate controversy, they had shifted to the sphere of deviance. Professional practice in the sphere of deviance is different and does not rely on the pursuit of objectivity. Instinctively, much of the media reported on and framed the Trump voter as a deviant element of society that threatened democracy.

Based on the survey of journalistic responses to the election (see Chapter 7), this study suggests that this shift was not perceptible to the professional journalists assigned to cover the presidential election. The media shifted practices because that is normative practice when confronted with voters understood to be outside the norm. For the seasoned journalist, these shifts are routine practice. Assigned to cover a story within the sphere of legitimate controversy, journalists report by gathering facts, interviewing sources on both (or many) sides of a topic and writing a report using language that is neutral and accurate. Assigned to cover a topic or source outside this sphere, professional practice changes. These practices include identifying the deviant element through language that frames the source or event as abnormal or dangerous. Journalists do not remain neutral when faced with this type of story; rather, their role is to alert the community. (Professional practice in sphere theory is explored more fully below). What made the 2016 election difficult to cover accurately was the unrecognized shift from the sphere of legitimate controversy to the sphere of deviance that occurred when covering the Trump voter.

At the same time, many scholars (Bennett 2016, 2017; Patterson 2016; Cook 2006; Hallin 1992) have demonstrated that some trends in professional practice have developed over time within the sphere of legitimate controversy that might discourage the exploration of different types of voters by media outlets. The sphere of legitimate controversy is the coverage of elections with which most news consumers are familiar. It includes presidential campaigns, voter coverage, and an exploration of the issues raised during an election. This study suggests this area

of journalism is getting smaller, encouraging more journalism to fall into the other two spheres of coverage: consensus and deviance.

This study adds to the body of scholarship that has applied Sphere Theory to media coverage. Below is a greater exploration of how Sphere Theory has been applied and how this study builds on that scholarship by expanding it to the coverage of voters. The concept that the sphere of legitimate controversy is being restricted is also a new suggestion. It follows from a rich body of scholarship that has documented changing normative practices over decades. Understanding these changes through the existing literature, it is not much of a leap to view the sphere of legitimate controversy -- the public arena for political debate -- as shrinking. As a result, this chapter also explores scholarship on normative practices in an election.

Finally, this study examines voter coverage through the lens of newspaper content. This study will focus on content produced by three national newspapers and five Pennsylvania newspapers. These organizations are older, sometimes called "the legacy press" and have lost readership and revenue with the rise of social media. Yet several points suggest these news organizations are the best site for studying election coverage. First, these news organizations are high profile, professional news outlets with dedicated political reporting staffs. In a study on the effects of traditional media on the news agenda during elections, Harder et al. (2017) drew a distinction between news produced through journalism practice and information produced and passed along by social media. Traditional media legitimize news and offer context while social media offers speed but often is passing along information that is not newsworthy, Harder found. The eight newspapers, local and national, included in this study practice journalism and produce news content. Patterson (2016) demonstrated that traditional news organizations, specifically newspapers, focused on issue coverage more than other types of news outlets. If this is a study of

journalism and its role in democracy, it is best to study news organizations that promote professional journalism and aim to fully cover issues and the voters.

Second, newspapers are important actors in the interconnected, hybrid flow of information. Intermedia agenda setting studies are premised on the concept that content flows to and from old news platforms to new ones and that journalists are influenced by the content produced by other news organizations. Most political communication scholars place traditional news media as an important element in the flow chart of news production (McCombs et. al.2014; Funk and McCombs 2017). Scholarship on the role of traditional newspapers in intermedia agenda setting during an election points to a greater role for traditional news outlets. Harder et. al. (2017) identified "highly regarded media outlets" such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* as important influences on the content choices of other news organizations. As McCombs (2014) describe "prominent media" influence the content of other, smaller news organizations.

Partisanship and Polarization in the Media

Scholarship on partisanship and polarization in the media is a field that has grown in response to the growth and success of partisan media organizations. Much scholarship has focused on right-wing news outlets and their role in the spread of disinformation. Jamieson and Capella (2008) outlined the rise of a conservative media that operates like an echo chamber, anchored by outlets such as Rush Limbaugh's radio program. The study highlighted a growing number of media outlets attracting an audience of like-minded listeners that reinforced conservative beliefs. Levendusky (2013) added to this field by finding that partisan media outlets have a strong effect on citizens with "extreme" political views and that these citizens pull their political parties further from the political center, thereby contributing to greater polarization

across society. After the 2016 presidential election, Druckman and Levendusky (2018) refined this argument and suggested that partisan media outlets have a stronger effect than previously realized because of a "two-step" communication system in which viewers or readers of partisan outlets share what they read to others, mainly through social media. While both the left and the right have media outlets aimed at partisan audiences, Faris et.al. (2017) added that right and left-leaning outlets are "rooted in different traditions and journalistic practices," (p.1) and that right-wing outlets ignored professional norms more often than left-wing outlets.

Similarly, Benkler et. al. (2018) argue that the spread of disinformation in the 2018 election stems from a decades-old split between right-wing media and all other news outlets. The rise of Fox News, Brietbart News and others created an "asymmetric media ecosystem" that was in place and ready to amplify narratives that supported the conservative agenda during the election, the authors argue. Benkler et. al. use the term "radicalization" as opposed to "polarization" to describe right-wing media outlets because they did not find a symmetry between the practices of right and left-leaning media outlets. Not only did false narratives circulate among the conservative outlets, the study argues, but these narratives also spilled into the mainstream media which sometimes promoted them unchecked.

Julian Sanchez, a Cato Institute scholar, coined the term "epistemic closure" to describe the lack of insight and interrogation that right wing media outlets promoted and the imbalance between right-wing and left-wing media outlets. "So suppose it's true that there's a real asymmetry here—the obvious question, if we're going to sideline the cheap partisan explanation that conservatism intrinsically appeals to the stupid or closed minded, is *why* this should be true now,"[7] Sanchez wrote six years before the 2016 election. Scholarship on polarization and

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[7] Sanchez, Julian (2010, April 7). Epistemic Closure, Technology, and the End of Distance. http://www.juliansanchez.com/2010/04/07/epistemic-closure-technology-and-the-end-of-distance/

partisanship in the media offers an important explanation of the political landscape of the 2016 election. It suggests that a portion of the electorate felt alienated from the "mainstream" and turned to a radicalized media eco-system, which in turn failed to adhere to professional norms in reporting the news. So the question, as Sanchez asked, is why?

There is a correlation between this study and the scholarship on polarization in the media. This study aims to add insight into how the voter in the 2016 election was covered. It suggests that the mainstream media framed the Trump voter as a deviant part of the electorate and that this, in turn, led to a misunderstanding of the election by the media and their news consumers. Understanding the voter coverage using Sphere Theory recognizes that professional norms encouraged this practice and discouraged an exploration of the issues important to this slice of the electorate. Presumably some of the same voters that were dismissed in the election coverage were also consumers of right-wing media (although that presumption ignores nuances within the electorate including voters who supported Obama in 2012 then Trump in 2016 and voters who were consumers of multiple outlets rather than just openly partisan media). This study will not answer Sanchez's question of why voters were turning to a radicalized media system leading up to the 2012 or 2016 election. Nor will it add to the exhaustive studies by scholars such as Benkler (2018) and Faris (2017). It aims instead to offer insight into how the voters in general, and conservative voters in particular, are understood by the mainstream media and suggests that through improved normative practice the media can be a source of information about the wide range of political perspectives that currently make up the American democracy. It might also contribute to a greater understanding of why those voters are seeking out a "radicalized" media eco-system and, presumably, rejecting the mainstream press.

Defining sphere theory

Hallin (1986) developed Sphere Theory to explain journalistic approaches to coverage of the Vietnam War, which changed in tone and practice over time. The theory outlines three "spheres" of journalistic practice: consensus, legitimate controversy and deviance. Sphere theory holds that journalists employ different normative practices depending on the perception of the news event he or she is covering. The sphere model is drawn as three concentric circles similar to a donut (See Figure 1). The innermost circle is labeled the sphere of consensus, the middle circle is the sphere of legitimate controversy and the outermost, which is unbounded in the model, is the sphere of deviance. Each sphere has different standards of journalistic practice and the boundaries of the spheres are fluid. A topic or actor can fall into the sphere of consensus, flow into the sphere of legitimate controversy and end in the sphere of deviance. It can flow in any direction depending on factors such as public perception or a journalists' understanding of the issues.

Hallin's Sphere Theory

Sphere of
Consensus

Sphere of
Legitimate
Controversy
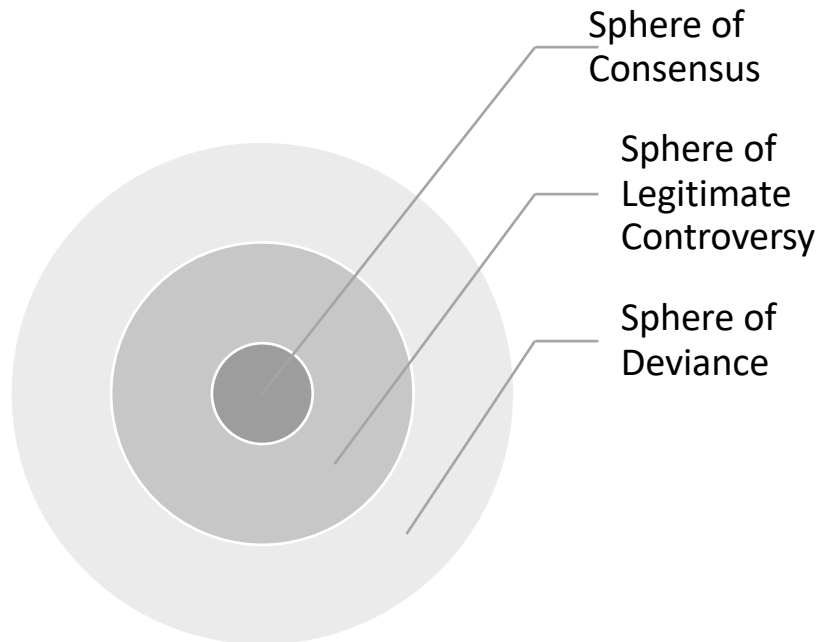
Sphere of
Deviance

Figure 1

Legitimate controversy

The sphere of legitimate controversy is the most recognizable form of journalism in the

U.S. This is where objectivity is the normative goal for the media and the press aims to cover

different sides of an issue or news event without partisanship. When covering news events in the

sphere of legitimate controversy, journalists strive to serve as a neutral observer of topics

understood to be central to the functioning of a democracy. Hallin called this sphere the "stuff of

democracy" (p.116). Topics that are introduced in the sphere of legitimate controversy are

"recognized as such by the major established actors of the American political process" (p.116).

For example, elections, issue debate and breaking news events are topics that fill this sphere of

coverage. The limits of this sphere "are defined primarily by the two-party system, by the

parameters of debate between and within the Democratic and Republican parties and the

decision-making processes of the executive branch," according to Hallin (p.116). Powerful

political actors define the boundaries of the sphere of legitimate controversy, determining which topics are part of the agenda and which are not. Bennett (2016) called this practice "indexing," which he defined as the "tendency of mainstream news organizations to index or adjust the range of viewpoints in a story to the dominant positions of those whom the journalists perceive to have enough power to affect the outcome of a situation" p.16). Hallin's description of how topics and actors are accepted into the sphere of legitimate controversy does not use the term "indexing," yet Bennett's description fits with Hallin's. Indexing describes a practice in which the media rely on those in power to define the political agenda and, in return, the media meets professional practices of writing about topics likely to be debated and voted on. It limits the discussion of what is legitimate political topics and whose voices are heard in a debate, but it also allows the media to focus its resources and produce copy efficiently.

Journalists signal to their news consumers that a topic falls into the sphere of legitimate controversy through the use of framing and word choice. In Hallin's study of the Vietnam War, early coverage was characterized by the framing of government officials, generals, politicians with legitimizing cues and war protestors with de-legitimizing cues. As the political climate changed and public opinion turned against the war, these legitimizing cues shifted and sources such as war protestors moved from the sphere of deviance to the sphere of legitimate controversy.

Professional practice within the sphere of legitimate controversy is the pursuit of objectivity, or as Hallin described, "the routines of objective journalism" (p.6). Once a topic for coverage has been chosen, the journalist then pursues that topic using fact-based reporting that relies on information from sources and strives to include two or more sides of each conflict or debate. This is where "journalists seek conscientiously to be balanced and objective" (Schudson,

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2002). Yet, as many scholars agree (Schudson, 1978; Mindich, 1998; Nord, 2001), objectivity is difficult to define. As a central tenet to Sphere Theory, this study will explore the history and definition of objectivity as a central tenet of American journalism.

Objectivity

Mindich (1998) argued that objectivity is a term often described in negatives and not understood by the profession that embraces it. He defined objectivity as having five parts: factivity, detachment, balance, use of the inverted pyramid and nonpartisanship. Factivity is the reliance on facts to report a story (see an exploration of its history below). Detachment is related and means the reporter follows the facts and does not allow preconceived ideas to interfere with reporting. Nonpartisanship is an ethic that encourages the reporter to offer all sides of the story fairly. Balance means offering undistorted reporting that presents two or more sides of an issue. Finally, Mindich defines objectivity as requiring the use of the inverted pyramid, which is the ranking of facts in a news report from most important to least and presenting those facts to the news consumer in that order.

According to many journalism scholars (Schudson, 1978; Mindich, 1998; Nord, 2001), journalists adopted objectivity as a normative goal during the Progressive Era (1890-1920) when reformers were crusading for large-scale social and political change. Newspapers became an important part of the reforms when journalists moved into the role of investigative reporters, relying on facts and sources to expose corruption and fraud. Nord explains that the era idealized facts and emphasized the power of the individual to understand and absorb information through their own lens, which would then lead to civic action. Nord called this "factivity" and described it as a belief system based on the premise that pure, unbiased facts allow for inductive reasoning. Nord argues that the journalism practice of neutrally presenting facts to the reader draws on the

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Protestant view that inductive reasoning is a path to God. Through facts any individual can arrive at a truth and become closer to God. Facts, according to the understanding at the time, were pure and journalists were considered a central part of the discovery of truth, according to Nord. Understanding the roots of this concept, it is easier to understand how objectivity became the "North Star" and "supreme diety" of modern U.S. journalism, as Mindich described (p. 10).

Objectivity is an important concept when understanding of Sphere Theory. When journalists are using a non-partisan tone, seeking out multiple perspectives on a topic, ranking facts without bias, following the facts using source-based reporting and presenting those facts in a balanced manner, those journalists are operating within the sphere of legitimate controversy. Outside this sphere, in either the sphere of deviance and/or consensus, objectivity is not the norm. It is fair to argue that objectivity is an elusive term and therefore Sphere Theory suffers from relying on a concept that is difficult to define. However, as Mindich argues, it is the basis of most professional practice. Journalists are taught to gather facts and report them in a neutral and objective manner. Hallin seems to have used objectivity as a short-hand for normative practices that promote balance and fairness when covering political events. It is fair to argue that a deeper, more nuanced definition of what makes up objective practice in the sphere of legitimate controversy could improve the theory. Nevertheless, Hallin's description of when objectivity is the normative goal is very clear -- it lies squarely in the sphere of legitimate controversy and is abandoned in the spheres of consensus and deviance.

Understood Through Sphere Theory

Confronted with CONSENSUS
(Patriotism, Holidays, Tradition)

Framed positively, Lack of objectivity

Confronted with LEGITIMATE CONTROVERSY
(Elections, political debate, social issues)

Framed neutrally, Objectivity Rules

Confronted with DEVIANCE
(Unacceptable social behavior,
Threats to democracy)

Framed Negatively, Lack of Objectivity
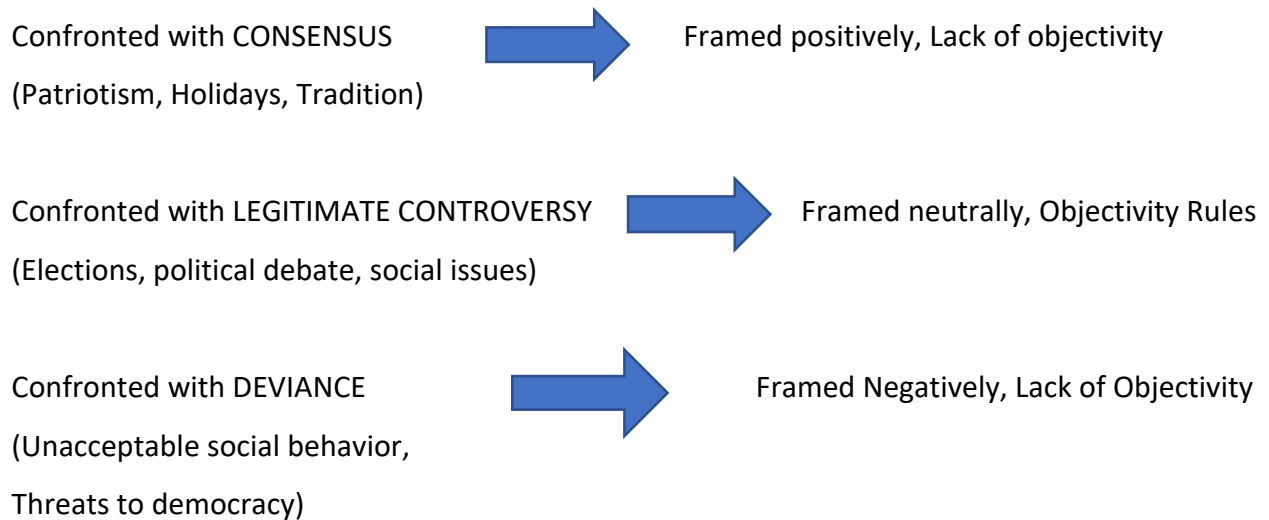
Figure 2

Sphere of Consensus

The sphere of consensus is found in the center (the 'donut hole') of the model. This is the area of shared beliefs. The role of the journalist in the sphere of consensus is to emphasize and reinforce shared values. They are community builders. Examples of stories that derive from the sphere of consensus are stories about children or pets that are endearing, weather that is threatening, holidays and traditions. Because these values are so commonly accepted and shared, journalism practice does not require objectivity. There is no need to seek an alternative opinion about whether a snowstorm is disruptive or a fireman is a hero for rushing into the burning building. In fact, that would be jarring and inappropriate to the reader or the viewer because the point of the report is to recognize and reinforce the consensus of opinion.

Schudson's (2002) study of post-9/11 journalism differed from most applications of Sphere Theory, which have focused on the sphere of legitimate controversy or the sphere of

deviance. Schudson found that in the weeks following the attacks, the media operated within the sphere of consensus as defined by Hallin. This shift, from the sphere of legitimate controversy to the sphere of consensus, was instantaneous and focused primarily on the lack of objectivity. "U.S. journalists instinctively and willingly abandon the effort to report from a neutral stance," Schudson wrote when confronted with events that they identify as falling within the sphere of consensus. Schudson identified those events as tragedies, public danger, threats to national security and the events of 9/11 fell into this sphere. This shift from one sphere to another – and the normative practices that accompany it --happen instantly when the media recognizes an event as outside the sphere of legitimate controversy: "(J)ournalists shifted modes as if changing to another musical key or switching to a different language," (p.40), Schudson wrote. He is highlighting an important element of Sphere Theory: the shifting nature of coverage based on the journalist's perceived role. Schudson described the language and framing of the news reports following 9/11 as "priestly" or "pastoral" and identified examples of news reports that emphasized shared community values and the "intimacy" of the shared experience of 9/11. This is different than media reports that stem from the sphere of legitimate controversy, where this tone would be inappropriate. But confronted with a shared national tragedy, the media shifted their tone and practices to reflect the shared community value of outrage and sorrow, Schudson argues.

Hallin's description of the sphere of consensus reflects a rich field of scholarship that understands the journalist as a community builder. Robinson (2014) edited an entire issue of *Journalism Practice* devoted to the topic of community-based journalism. She defined it this way: "community-based journalism should emphasize the "local" in all of us: that is, the idea that we can be among community as long as we are connected in some way to others," (p.1).

Carey (1997) identified the importance of journalism in community building in the U.S and defined two roles for the media in the U.S. democratic system: the model of information and the model of conversation, with the latter being most important. Communication, he pointed out, draws from the same root words as community and common and he argued in favor of a greater role for the journalist in developing conversations around shared community values. Hermes (2006) urges journalism research to focus on more on the interconnection of journalism and community. Graber and Dunaway (2017) point to a reduced number of community newspapers as a source of concern for the future of U.S. election coverage.

Sphere of Deviance

On the other side of Hallin's model is deviance. In this sphere falls the identification of actors, events, and trends that threaten a community. In the model, the sphere of deviance falls outside the center. For Hallin, this is the "realm of those political actors and views which journalists and the political mainstream of society reject as being unworthy of being heard" (p. 117). The role of the journalist is to disregard or denounce these types of stories, set the boundaries of political consensus and defend "the limits of acceptable political conflict" (p. 117). The definition of this zone shifts over time as norms of acceptability shift. In the past, stories about same-sex marriage or extramarital affairs by politicians might have fallen into this category but now fall into the sphere of legitimate controversy. Hallin recognized that one way to mark something as deviant is to withhold coverage. Billard noted that invisibility, or the media's refusal to cover a topic or source, is one way the media can mark a topic as outside the sphere of legitimate concern and in the sphere of deviance. That is one reason the model has this sphere as unbounded, because the topics unaddressed are limitless.

When the media covers an event or source that falls into the sphere of deviance, journalists employ frames that signal the deviant nature of the subject. Luther and Miller called these frames "delegitimizing cue words" (p. 3). Taylor studied the shifting nature of political issues and identified times when topics or sources moved from legitimate to delegitimized or in the reverse direction. Journalists signaled changes in legitimacy through "subtle lexical choices" (p. 48), Taylor found. Most research using Hallin's sphere of deviance has focused on the coverage of war protestors (Luther and Miller 2005, Murray et. al. 2008, Taylor 2014). This is a natural outgrowth of Hallin's initial research on the media coverage of the Vietnam War. However, Billard expanded the realm of this application to examine media coverage of transgender people. Billard operationalized the concept of delegitimizing language used to signal deviance with the development of a list of legitimacy indicators. Billard's study highlighted the transient nature of the sphere of deviance. Discussion of transgender people is moving from the sphere of deviance into the sphere of legitimate controversy much as topics such as gay marriage have moved. Billard credits this shift to changing social attitudes, however, and argues that the media follows rather than leads in areas of social change. This study builds on this scholarship to expand Sphere Theory to the media coverage of voters during an election.

Agenda Setting

To understand sphere theory more fully, it is helpful to explore the broader field it falls into: agenda setting, which is the concept that when the media highlights a particular issues or event, it draws greater public attention to those issues and events, (Iyengar, 2017). Not only does the media's choice of topics matter, but so does the way the topic is covered, according to Iyengar. The concept grew out research on the effect of the media on the public, especially in political news coverage. Early research on media effects focused on the propaganda model,

which assumed that the media had the power to change the opinion of voters (Herman and Chomsky1988). However, scholarship on media effects soon shifted to accept a minimal effect of the media on the consumer. In the famous Elmira Study, Berelson et. al. (1954) studied influences on voter choice in the 1948 presidential election. Based on the results of this study, Berelson formulated the minimal effects model, which found that voters were influenced by factors closer to home such as family and friends and that the mediate. Building on this concept, Campbell et. al. (1976) developed the "funnel of causality" model that emphasizes the importance of socio-economic factors when a voter is choosing party identification, which then factors into which policy issues and political campaigns that voter will choose to support. The Berelson studies came to be known as the Columbia model, which emphasized the setting of the voter and the Campbell studies as the Michigan study, which emphasized party identification. Both schools argue that media coverage of a campaign matters less than other factors and therefore the media has a limited effect on the voting behavior of the electorate. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) explored the role of "priming," which they defined as the media (especially television) "calling attention to some matters while ignoring others" (p.63). In presidential campaigns, this can mean raising the importance of an event or issue at the expense of others or focusing on the horserace aspect of the election at the expense of issues. Hundreds of subsequent studies in agenda setting have parsed the different effects of the media on the voting public. Oates (2008) argues that despite the fact that news reports have minimal effects on how a voter chooses a candidate, the media matters in a democratic society because it provides information to the voters that helps them match preferences to political candidates, it helps voters establish long-term political party preference, and media reports can help sway close elections or contested issue debates.

Intermedia agenda setting studies are premised on the concept that content flows to and from old news platforms to new ones and that journalists are influenced by the content produced by other news organizations. Recent scholarship on the role of traditional newspapers in intermedia agenda setting during an election points to a greater role for traditional news outlets. While this study acknowledges the minimal effects of the media it also recognizes that many studies have shown newspapers are important actors in the interconnected, hybrid flow of information. Harder et. al. (2017) points to the rise of public participation in the gathering of news. Events can be reported with greater speed when citizens witness it and post to social media. The public has come to expect speedy reporting of breaking news and this works against the professional reporting of an event by journalists. However, Harder found that social media lacks the power to set the agenda of conversation in the same manner as professional news sites. Chadwick et. al. (2013) identified the interconnection between traditional news sites and social media, calling it a hybrid flow of information, where social media often serves as an echo chamber to news gathered by professional organizations. Most political communication scholars place traditional news media as an important element in the flowchart of news production (Chadwick, 2013; Oates and Moe, 2016; McCombs, Shaw and Weaver, 2014).

Harder identified "highly regarded media outlets" such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* as important influences on the content choices of other news organizations. While McCombs (2014) found that "prominent media" influence the content of other, smaller news organizations. The newspapers chosen for this study are news organizations that are older than social media sites and are sometimes called "the legacy press." Newspapers have lost

readership and revenue with the rise of social media.[8] Yet, major U.S. newspapers are still high

profile, professional news outlets with professional political reporting staffs that reach millions

of readers daily in their print and digital editions. In a study on the effects of traditional media on

the news agenda during elections, Harder et al. (2017) drew a distinction between news produced

through journalism practice and information produced and passed along by social media.

Traditional media outlets often lag behind social media in announcing and spreading news but

professional media outlets add "value" to the information by legitimizing it as important to

society and placing the facts in context, Harder said. Because of the hybrid nature of the news

flow -- the numerous streams of information and constant flux of incoming information -- it is

often difficult to measure the effect of one outlet on the other, Harder wrote. Yet some outlets,

such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, are highly regarded and still influence

the news agenda of other media outlets, he wrote.

Framing

Within agenda studies, scholars have focused much research on the content of media

coverage. Through word choice, story placement, sources used and other journalistic tools, the

journalist "frames" how the reader, listener or viewer understands the news that is being

reported. Entman (1993) helped apply the idea of framing to journalism based on sociologist

Erving Goffman's concept of framing as a tool used to describe complex ideas, the process

through which societies reproduce meaning. Framing theory is based on the assumption that how

a text is written, or framed, will influence how the audience understands it. Entman defined

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[8]The estimated total U.S. daily newspaper circulation (print and digital combined) in 2017 was 31 million for weekday and 34 million for Sunday, down 11% and 10%, respectively, from the previous year, according to the Pew Research Center "Newspaper Fact Sheet." June 13, 2018. http://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers/.

framing as "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). Framing is an inherent part of journalism. McQuail (2005) states that it is "almost impossible" for a journalist to avoid using frames because they allow the writer to explain complex ideas in relation to facts the reader already understands (p. 378). When producing a broadcast or news article, journalists employ all four elements of framing, according to Entman. Framing theory allows journalism scholars to unwind the production of a news report to recognize how the journalist packaged the news event he or she was reporting on. Within that packaging are fingerprints of the reporter, whether the reporter was trying to personalize the event or not. He or she chooses a way to define the event, place it in context, laces the report with moral judgement, and presents potential solutions to the issue at hand, according to framing theory.

Since Entman's definition, many scholars have applied, refined and debated framing theory. Scheufele (1999) developed the concept of "frame building" which is the process of creating frames that the media and public easily recognize. To study frame building is to examine the processes that contribute to the creation of a frame for communication. Some debate whether framing inherently includes a bias and how that bias affects the relationship between journalism and politics. Robinson (2002) states that the terms "slant" and "bias" is interchangeable with "frame" (p.137). On the other side, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) argue that most journalists do not aim to "spin" a story or "deceive" their audience when using frames. They argue that framing is a "necessary tool" and is designed to help reduce the complexity of the issues journalists report (p.12). Scheufele and Iyengar (2017) argue that framing studies have been confounded with agenda setting and priming. They distinguish framing effect research as

the study of communication effects that are "not due to differences in what is being communicated, but rather to variations in how a given piece of information is being presented" (p. 620). Scheufele and Tewksbury, who guest-edited the special edition of the *Journal of Communication* dedicated to the study of framing, argue that a lack of agreement or even understanding about how to conceptualize framing, agenda setting and priming theory has led to "inefficiency and even gridlock" in the field (p.18). Matthes (2009) supports this assessment. His study of international journal articles found that the term "framing" was defined in widely inconsistent manners and that most studies failed to include the fourth part of Entman's definition, moral evaluations, as part of their studies.

This study recognizes the importance of framing theory. Election coverage requires the communication of complicated ideas to the public. This is arguably the most important role the media can play in a democracy. As a result, the language and images used by the media to communicate the events and issues involved in a presidential campaign can influence how the public understands the election. This study is based on the premise that the language used to describe the Trump voter in the 2016 election identified that voter as deviant and outside the norm of society. Hallin's Sphere Theory, which falls into the general category of framing theory, specifically identifies the situations when journalists would use deviant frames as opposed to frames that identify the voters as within the sphere of legitimate controversy. This study aims to contribute to the field of framing theory and ,more specifically Sphere Theory, by applying this lens to the content of election coverage and an analysis of the framing of the voter.

Content of the 2016 Media Election Coverage

This study suggests that the sphere of legitimate controversy is getting smaller due to practices that are considered the norm in newsrooms and have been documented in previous

scholarship. Below is an exploration of these practices and how they affect the range of debate and the number of sources included in the media discussion of elections.

Issue Coverage

Many studies have documented journalistic changes that minimize the examination of issues during a political campaign (Patterson 2016; Bennett 2017). Patterson has focused his studies on media reports during an election, arguably the most important time period for issue coverage in a democracy. Over the past 20 years, Patterson (2017) outlined a pattern of coverage that de-emphasizes the examination of political issues. His studies newspaper coverage of the 2016 election overwhelmingly focused on the horserace aspect of the election. The study identified 42 percent of newspaper articles published during the Trump/Clinton election cycle focused on which candidate was ahead in the polls or likely to lead in the polls. (The study identified more than 100 polls published between August 8 and Election Day, more than one poll released a day.) Controversies involving the candidates or their staff made up the next most common topic, compromising 17 percent of the stories. Only 10 percent of the sample studied newspaper articles published during the 2016 election focused on the issues important to the voters. In addition, Patterson's study identified that a large percentage of those stories were not on the substance of the issue, but rather controversy about the candidates' policy commitments or a change in the candidate's position. Covering the election as a horserace between candidates is a pattern that has increased over each presidential election for the past twenty years, according to Patterson. Journalists chose to write about the horserace four times as often as they wrote about how Clinton or Trump would handle public policy issues if elected president. This framing reduces an election to a contest, similar to a sporting event. Jamieson and Cappelli (1997) studied voter response to this type of election coverage. They found that voters responded

positively to issue-based coverage and negatively to horse-race style coverage, responses that included signs of depressed learning and increased cynicism.

Negative Bias

Patterson's other important finding in his study of the election coverage of the past twenty years was a media bias toward the negative. His studies found that the majority of election stories that are negative in tone and far outnumbered stories that focused on positive elements of the campaign. In the 2016 election, Patterson calculated a 19 percent increase in media reports that were negative in tone compared to the average number of negative stories in the six preceding presidential elections. Patterson found that during some weeks of the post-convention election coverage, the ratio of negative stories to positive stories was 10 to 1: "The real bias of the press is not that it's liberal. Its bias is a decided preference for the negative" (p. 19). Watts and Rothschild (2017) conducted a similar study focused only on *The New York Times* in the last few weeks of the election. Their results mirrored those of Patterson. Watts and Rothschild found that front page stories in *The New York Times* about the campaign focused overwhelmingly on scandals or controversies involving the candidate, with far fewer articles that covered policy issues. Their results found 291 articles about scandal or controversy compared to 70 that mentioned policy issues, with most of those offering little to no detail on those issues. Watts and Rothschild wrote that the concerns about social media spreading false information during the election "diverts attention from the culpability of the mainstream media itself," (np). That culpability, the authors argue, is focusing on the negative at the expense of the issues.

Journalism is meant to expose negative aspects of politics, Patterson wrote, "(y)et an incessant stream of criticism has a corrosive effect. It needlessly erodes trust in political leaders and institutions and undermines confidence in government and policy," (p. 18). In addition,

Patterson argued that "bashing both sides" does not create an objective perspective. It blurs distinctions of magnitude. The media reports "all the ugly stuff they can find and leave it to the voters to decide what to make of it," (p. 19). This type of reporting creates false equivalences and distorts distinctions among controversies, policy platforms, and major differences among the candidates. The effect is anger toward journalists by the public because news reports highlight negative aspects of society and a loss of effectiveness when journalists do report important events or expose wrongdoing. Journalists "lose the bite of the watchdog when everyone and everything is condemned," Patterson argues (p. 20).

Informing the Public

Like Patterson, Bennett (2017) agrees that the media's watchdog role has been diminished. Bennett points to the media's reliance on official sources as the reason. Because journalists rely on sources that are in power, they are less likely to see and report on wrongdoing, he argues. During an election, this means talking to party officials, pollsters, elected officials, candidates and even other journalists rather than talking to the voter, exploring the issues that matter to the voting public or exposing wrongdoing. Adding to the diminished role of a watchdog, Bennett argues that media reports have shifted toward sensationalism and soft news in the past twenty years.

Zaller (2003) famously defended the rise of soft news and sensationalism, arguing that the media should adapt to a public that was not interested in democratic debate. Zaller called for a new, less demanding media system that only provided citizens with minimal information about the workings of government and policy issues. Zaller argued that criticism of soft news and sensationalism was based on an unrealistic ideal of citizens in a democracy. Instead of constantly informing the electorate, the media should aim to simply alert the public when government fails

to operate as it should similar to a burglar alarm, Zaller argued. The media consumer would act as a "monitorial citizen" ignoring the process of governance until the media sounds an alarm.

Bennett (2003) called Zaller's argument "perfectly backward" and dismissed the idea that the media's obligation to inform the public was an "onerous" obligation. He argued that the public had become desensitized to a media that was always trying to attract new consumers through sensationalized news reports. The "incessant ringing of alarms about dubious problems," not important to the functioning of democracy but good for ratings has soured the public's relationship with the media, Bennett argued (2003, p. 131). The news consumer fails to be alarmed when the media constantly draws its attention to matters that are not important, Bennett wrote. Zaller's argument that public should take a passive role, waiting for the press to sound alarms to wake up, ignores this desensitization. In addition, Bennett argued, the burglar alarm system fails to account for false alarms when the media hypes a story. It also fails to account for moments when the media fails to sound the alarm, either through a failure to uncover the problem or a desire to report on stories with higher audience interest. Finally, Bennett argued, the idea that the news system is either a collection of soft news or a series of issue-related stories that turn off the public is a false argument. Both types of reporting exist in most major news organizations and, depending on the news flow, the balance of those two types of stories fluctuates.

Bennett said the real issues isn't that the public isn't capable of following news reports important to a democratic debate. It is that the media outlets have sounded a false alarm about stories that are not important to the functioning of democracy. The result is that readers and audiences tune out the coverage and are turned off by the press, according to Bennett. This in turn encourages a more dramatic approach. Politicians use stronger, 'shriller" language to get the

attention of an audience that is turned off and the press uses more dramatic language to call

attention to topics that are not urgent, Bennett writes.

Narrative Driven News

Narrative-driven news consists of media reports that are packaged to fit a narrative theme

where journalists are the storytellers. Narrative style has two slightly different meanings in

journalism scholarship. As Bennett (2017) articulates, one school sees journalists as emerging

into cultural storytellers, defining the national identity through their interpretation of news events

(Gans 1979; Barnhurst and Nerone 2001). The other school understands narrative news as the

increasing role of journalists as analysts, explaining news events in their own voice (Hallin

1992). Both perspectives recognize a shift away from source-based reporting and analysis to

explain news event. Bennett argues that narrative-driven news has risen and journalists "have

stepped more into the center of news stories than in earlier periods" (2017, p. 253). Hallin found

that as sound bites decreased, the media's control over the story frames increased. Journalists

began using the words of politicians and other sources as "raw material" to support a news frame

developed by the reporter.

Narrative style also includes the use of journalists as experts. During the 2016 campaign,

Bennett identified the trend of journalists to interview other journalists assigned to the same story

as part of their reporting. In addition, journalists often stepped into the role of pundit and

commentator in their own articles and broadcasts, blending newsgathering with analysis.

Offering their own opinion on a news event, journalists are changing the role of the reporter.

Bennett (2016, 2017), Patterson (2016), and Hallin (1992) argue that this practice, which seems

to violate professional norms of objectivity, is a central part of narrative style journalism.

Identifying themselves as political insiders rather than objective observers, journalists become

their own experts. The descriptive style of reporting based on who, what, where, and when has shifted to an interpretative style that requires an answer to "why," with the voice of the journalists providing the answers (Patterson 2017).

Shrinking Soundbite

In his 1992 study, Hallin identified another major change in the nature of media in a separate, later study. In his study titled "Sound Bite Democracy," Hallin identified that the content of news broadcasts had shifted dramatically to allow the journalist to speak more and offered sources far less time to present their own perspectives. Hallin found that over a twenty-year period from 1968-1988 the average soundbite on television news had shrunk from 43 seconds to 8.9 seconds. During the 1968 Nixon-Humphrey election, Hallin reported that nearly 25 percent of evening news soundbites were more than a minute, some as long as two minutes. By the 1988 presidential election, soundbites were only long enough to cover a quick quip such as Bush's "Read my lips: no new taxes." Soundbites represent the amount of time a source is able to present his or her perspective of a news event during the course of a broadcast. A reduction in the soundbite time means less time for sources to speak in their own voice. At the same time, Hallin found that the length of the news broadcast did not shrink dramatically. The shrinking soundbite represented a shift in the style of news delivery that once relied on the information and words of sources but now focuses on a packaged story narrated by the journalist. Less time for sources to speak has meant more time for the journalist to interpret, pull apart quotes and explain a story to the viewer: "Now such words rather than simply being reproduced and transmitted to the audience, are treated as raw material to be taken apart, combined with other sounds and images, and woven into a new narrative" (p. 34). Hallin called this a shift from

a passive role for journalists to a much more active role that requires the journalist to package a news event, with an easily-identifiable theme, story-line and wrap-up.

In his 2016 study of the national political party conventions, Patterson measured soundbites featured in television news reports and found that journalists, not sources, did most of the talking during broadcasts. Politicians have adapted to this shift in the power balance. Campaigns aim to provide journalists with a soundbite that can easily be fit into a broadcast or a quote written into a news story, Patterson found.

Other scholars have identified the same shift in newspaper coverage. Ryfe and Kemmelmeier (2010) tracked the quoting practices of five American newspapers during the period of transition to modern news (1876-1916). Despite variation in size, location, and partisan orientation of the newspapers, Ryfe and Kemmelmeier found that trends in quoting practices moved together across all five newspapers, indicating a shift in journalism practices that ushered in the modern era. The study pointed to the inclusion of direct quotes in news articles taken from the spoken word rather than the written; increasing use of government officials as primary sources; the rise of quotes from campaign speeches; and shorter quotes. Most significantly for this study, Ryfe and Kemmelmeier attributed this shift to a political event: the presidential contest of 1896 between William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan and the breakdown of the third-party system. Ryfe and Kemmelmeier argue that changes in the quoting practices of journalists were dramatic, a moment of punctuated equilibrium prompted by a political event rather than a gradual historical shift. Their study is significant because it identified the shift from a partisan press to a more professionalized press that relied on normative standards and it suggests that the reason for the shift was political events. Like other scholars (Mindich, 1998, Schudson, 1978), Ryfe and Kemmelmeier identified this as a shift toward the use of objectivity

as a standard, a sign of professionalism. Ryfe and Kemmelmeier's contribution was to suggest that the shift in normative practices stemmed from the events of the election of 1896, which was a candidate-centered election that ushered in an era of populism. Much like the campaign of 2016, the campaign of 1896 revolved around the candidates' ability to stir the political passions of an electorate that felt ignored. Journalists, working at multiple different organizations, were compelled to change their practices to accurately cover the election and attract readers who were interested in the fiery words of the candidates, Ryfe and Kemmelmeier argue. Allowing more sources more room to speak for themselves, journalists adopted a practice that became standard practice for 20th century newspapers. Linking Hallin to Ryfe and Kemmelmeier, this pattern of sourcing continued until the mid-1960s.

Indexing

In Sphere Theory, legitimate controversy is defined by modern political actors, most prominently actors in the two-party system. According to Hallin, these actors determine which topics fall into the sphere of legitimate controversy and journalists take their cues from these sources. Many scholars have studied the range and diversity of sources in the modern U.S. media. Bennett (2005, 2016) identified a practice he labeled "indexing" as "the tendency of mainstream news organizations to index or adjust the range of viewpoints in a story to the dominant positions of those whom the journalists perceive to have enough power to affect the outcome of a situation" (p. 16). The premise is that journalists routinely interview only a narrow range of sources because those sources are most influential and easily accessible. Bennett drew on Ericson et al. (1989), who recognized a similar pattern in journalism: "Typically, the journalist seeks a source in the know to say it is so, and has a routine, predictable supply of sources in established organizations" (p. 1). In political coverage, this means elected officials,

party officials, lobbyists, bureaucrats, political activists, and those who work for them. Outside ideas from non-powerful sources, such as voters or citizens, are rarely included in the media coverage of an event. According to Bennett, this system means that power becomes the definer of truth. Regardless of the validity of outside ideas or perspectives, journalists tend to only report on the viewpoints of those in power.

Journalists participate in this system because it supports the normative practices of balance, fairness, and objectivity, according to Bennett. Reporters are accurately covering the story and getting two sides of an issue from those in power but are typically failing to acknowledge that there may be many more perspectives on an issue. If a story includes a Democratic proposal and the Republican response, with quotes from leaders in both parties framed fairly and placed prominently in a news report, the reporter can feel confident that he or she has produced a news report that meets professional standards even though many other perspectives might exist on the topic. Under pressure to produce copy quickly for multiple platforms, reporters rely on indexing as a professional method. Davies (2008) used the term "churnalism" to describe the pressure the media feels to quickly produce more copy each day. In order to meet this demand in a professional manner, Bennett argues that journalists focus on the positions being promoted by those in power. Journalists are focusing on the most likely outcome of a public policy debate, rather than exploring the best outcome or range of options available.

Sphere Theory and the Election

Applying indexing theory to an examination of the 2016 election, it becomes easier to understand how most major news organizations failed to predict the election of Trump to the presidency. According to Bennett (2017), "the core dynamic of the institutional organization of news involves filtering stories according to power balances in political institutions that are

covered" (p. 251). This leads to a homogenous output including the ranking of stories, the narrative lines that emerge and use of sources to frame the stories. In other words, when hundreds of journalists assigned to cover the presidential election of 2016 all talk to the same small pool of official sources (and then echo what they hear in conversations with each other), thus they will all report the same things in the same way. When small pieces of information conflict with the narrative promoted by those in power, those facts are rejected or minimized. In the 2016 presidential campaign, indexing sources was established as journalistic practice and accepted as the best method to report and write about the election.

Cook (2006) goes further to describe the media as a "de facto" branch of the government. Some scholars (Sparrow, 2006; Ryfe, 2006) describe this view of the media as New Institutionalism, the term coming from the idea that the media is an institutionalized part of the system of governance rather than an independent observer. Cook describes a symbiotic relationship between the press and government officials where politicians need media coverage to highlight their role as elected officials and therefore feed the media a steady diet of news. This homogenizes the news stream, resulting in multiple news organizations creating very similar outputs. Cook points to similar topics, frames, and slants as proof that the media acts a single political organization. Cook argues that the mutual dependency of elected officials and the media is dangerous to democracy because the media loses its independent voice.

Vox Pop

In the sphere of legitimate controversy, the voice of those who are not in power are often ignored. Elite political actors are the primary sources included in media reports and signal which issues should top the media agenda. Media scholars such as Kleemans (2015) and DeKeyser and Raeymaecker (2012) have documented the trend of journalists to include "the ordinary citizen"

as a source in news productions. But they found that citizen voices rarely challenge the ideas presented by elite political actors included as sources in these reports. The common men and women included in these stories were being used as a colorful illustration of an expected idea. Kleemans found that studies counting the number and type of sources were misleading. Measuring the prominence of citizen sources and the capacity in which they were used in the broadcast, the scholars found that citizen sources were considered "passive" and "mere illustrations" and that only the elite sources "actively" affected the content of the news report. DeKeyser and Raeymaecker found that "prominent, quality daily" newspapers were less likely to feature citizen voices than "popular" daily newspapers were. This means that news sources that were more respected, and often imitated by other news sources, determined citizen sources to be less important. In addition, they found the dramatic rise of the use of citizen voices in news stories to be a "shift in the margins" (p. 835) that fills only a tiny percentage of the news.

Applying studies on sourcing to sphere theory, it is easier to understand how news sources can move within Hallin's spheres. In the sphere of consensus, the voice of the citizen is used as a prop to support the consensus. As Hermes, Kleeman and others have found, the vox pop is used primarily to illustrate a larger point of a media report. In the sphere of consensus, that means the citizen voice is a cheerleader for the shared value(s) that the news report is celebrating. But when the citizen voice is challenging the status quo, they are moved to the sphere of deviance. Studies on the framing of war protest coverage (Gitlin, 1980; Luther and Miller, 2005; Murray et. al., 2008) highlight this point. They have found that the media framing of citizens participating in protests uses language that labels them as deviant, especially early in a protest movement before public opinion has been swayed or affected: "(I)f the protests are viewed as challenging elite consensus or upsetting the status quo, the media tend to delegitimize,

marginalize, or dismiss the efforts of the protestors through various techniques such as relying on official sources or using negative expressions to describe the protestors" (Luther and Miller, 2005, p. 80).

In the sphere of legitimate controversy, studies on indexing demonstrates how elite actors define the boundaries of political discussion. As many scholars have shown, (Bennett, 2016, 2017; Cook, 2006; Sparrow, 2006; Ryfe, 2006), the media defers to politically powerful sources for many reasons, including professionalism. When citizens attempt to change the political agenda, the media resists and those sources are moved from the sphere of legitimate controversy to the sphere of deviance.

Role of Social Media

One salient criticism of Sphere Theory is that it fails to account for the challenges faced by the media with the rise of technology and social media. The boundaries of the sphere of legitimate controversy is challenged by the rise of so many news sources online. It is more difficult to recognize what is consensus and deviance when the range of debate is expanded in so many ways in the online world. The media's gatekeeper role has been uniquely challenged by the rise of the internet. Without a centralized source of information, many scholars question whether a public sphere for the debate of ideas – the sphere of legitimate controversy in Hallin's theory -- can exist.

Sphere theory was developed by Hallin before the rise of the internet. The development and integration of the internet has created many challenges for the media, yet it has not significantly altered how news reports are written. Within the professional media, framing is still an accepted practice and Sphere Theory is a strong lens to understand these practices. In a blog post that explained Sphere Theory, media scholar Jay Rosen (2009) argues that the rise of social

media does not diminish the useful nature of Sphere Theory. However, he argues that the rise of social media reduces the power of journalists to define the boundaries of Sphere Theory: "(T)he authority of the press to assume consensus, define deviance and set the terms for legitimate debate is weaker when people can connect horizontally around and about the news." Rosen argues that social media allows citizens to connect when they otherwise might have been ignored or assigned to the sphere of deviance by the media. Rosen is not arguing against a press that defines the boundaries of the sphere but rather in favor of a more informed understanding that the spheres exist and that journalists are keepers of the boundaries. "That journalists affirm and enforce the sphere of consensus, consign ideas and actors to the sphere of deviance, and decide when the shift is made from one to another -- none of this is in their official job description. You won't find it taught in J-school, either. It's an intrinsic part of what they do, but not a natural part of how they think or talk about their job. Which means they often do it badly. (sic) Their "sphere placement" decisions can be arbitrary, automatic, inflected with fear, or excessively narrow-minded," Rosen wrote. Hallin responded to Rosen's blog and argued for a press that understood the boundaries and took a more informed role in creating the sphere of legitimate controversy.[9]

Conclusion

Hallin's Sphere Theory is a particularly useful lens to examine the 2016 election because it helps to answer the question of how the media could have misunderstood the voter in its coverage of the campaign. Normative practices shift when journalists are confronted with different actors and events. In the sphere of legitimate controversy, the normative practice is the

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[9] Rosen's blog is titled Pressthink.com. The January 12, 2009 entry is "Audience Atomization Overcome: Why the Internet Weakens the Authority of the Press." Rosen describes the sphere model as "easily the most useful diagram I've found for understanding the practice of journalism in the United States, and the hidden politics of that practice." Daniel Hallin responded to the blog. For Hallin's full response, see http://archive.pressthink.org/2009/01/12/atomization.html#comment52316.

pursuit of objectivity to provide information and understanding to the electorate. However, in the sphere of deviance, objectivity is no longer normative. Instead, journalists move into the role of watchdog – sounding the alarm that a deviant segment of society is threatening democracy. Understanding the shifting norms of sphere theory, it is easier to understand that the media covers different sources and topics in different ways. Previous research using Sphere Theory demonstrates that the media employs delegitimizing cues about sources when those sources express ideas that challenge the status quo or threaten the agenda of elite political actors (Luther and Miller, 2005; Murray et. al, 2008; Taylor 2014; Billard, 2016). Scholars such as Patterson have documented the declining coverage of issues in the 2016. This study suggests that by framing the Trump supporter as a threat to the U.S. democratic system, the media missed the opportunity to explain this voter to their readers and to better report the political landscape in 2016.

Scholarship on normative practices covering an election point to the likelihood that the media will make this type of mistake again. The accepted practices of the media, as documented by this scholarship, are moving away from talking to voters and exploring the issues they care about. The monitorial citizen, as defined by Schudson (1998), relies on the media to cover the issues that matter to them. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) found that the demand for information about political issues rises and falls. During times of heightened political activity, such as elections, the public demands information about issues facing the country. But tuning into the news for election coverage, these voters find a limited range of debate focused only established political actors. Election coverage focuses on polls not issues, as Patterson found. The rise in narrative journalism puts the journalist in the role of analyst and explainer, but

without fact-based reporting and a wide range of sources their reports can fail to cover the political landscape accurately.

The U.S. system of democracy has a unique reliance on the informed voter. Representational Democracy, as James Madison termed it, was designed to be of the people and for the people. That means elected officials should be chosen to represent the views of the voters who elect them. Media organizations in the U.S. have a constitutionally protected role in this system. The public is expected to draw its information about the issues facing the country and the debate surrounding solutions from independent, competing news organizations. Media scholar James Carey (1997) wrote that the "public is the god-term of journalism, the be-all and end-all" (p.192). He meant that the public's need to know should be the starting point for journalism in a democracy. It is not the responsibility of the press to create a conversation; instead the media should take its cues from the concerns of citizens, inform them of the facts, and facilitate the public debate. Applying Sphere Theory to the examination of media coverage of the 2016 voters, this study aims to determine whether the Trump voter was framed as deviant and whether the media missed an opportunity to create a conversation that explored this support. By understanding past normative practices, this study suggests that future election coverage might improve.

Chapter Three: Methods

This study relies on a qualitative and quantitative examination of news reports about voters published during the last six weeks of the 2016 election. Specifically, this study is designed to identify whether Trump voters were framed as deviant, as defined by Hallin's Sphere Theory, and whether coverage of the voter differed between local and national news outlets. This chapter explores how the study was created and executed, with a particular focus on previous scholarship on the operationalization of deviance.

Why newspapers?

This study focuses on content produced by three national news and five local news organizations: *The Washington Post, The New York Times, USA TODAY, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, The Lebanon Daily News, The Evening Sun,* and *Public Opinion.* Online and print newspapers are older organizations, sometimes called "the legacy press" and have lost readership and revenue with the rise of social media.

Yet these media organizations are professional news outlets with dedicated political reporting staffs that aim to objectively cover news events. Sphere theory is premised on the concept of professional practice. Through the norms of news gathering and writing, the media identifies to the media consumer whether a political event or an actor is in the sphere of consensus, legitimate controversy or deviance (Hallin 1986). Media organizations that mix political perspectives with news coverage are not appropriate for the study of deviance in their coverage. Professional practice also differentiates news organizations from social media sites. In the 2016 election, social media played a significant role in the dissemination of information (accurate and inaccurate.) Social media was an important source of information for millions of voters in the 2016 election. However, as Bennett (2016) succinctly identified, the participatory

nature of social media excludes professional practice. This study is an examination of professional journalism practice in the 2016 election. The goal of this study is to illuminate and suggest improved practices for future study.

In addition, this study aims to compare local and national media organization to determine differences and look for best practices. Newspapers are a medium that is similar in national and local venues. They compare well. The database Lexis Uni, available at the University of Maryland, included a wide selection of national and local newspapers. The availability of these local and national newspapers was an important factor in the selection of newspapers as a news medium to study.

Finally, these newspapers were selected because they brought different elements to this study. The local newspapers are from different areas of the state of Pennsylvania, an important swing state in the 2016 election that was predicted to vote Democratic. They range in size and location. Two were based in cities, the others in more rural areas. Some have large reporting staff, others very small. In short, they represent a variety of newspapers aimed at different types of readers in urban, rural and suburban settings. The national newspapers were selected because they all have professional political reporting staff dedicated to election coverage and they dedicate a significant portion of their news coverage to political events. *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* are publications identified by scholars such as Harder et. al. (2017) as "highly regarded media outlets" that are important influences on the content choices of other news organizations and influential sources in the hybrid flow of information in election coverage. Finally, *USA TODAY* was included because of its national distribution, different style of writing that might attract a broader audience, and its inclusion in the University of Maryland Nexis Uni database.

The local newspapers examined in this study include *The Philadelphia Inquirer, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Public Opinion (Chambersburg), Lebanon Daily News,* and *The Evening Sun (Hanover)*. These newspaper vary in size and range of their audiences.[10] For example, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* is the largest of the local newspapers included in this study with a self-reported daily circulation of 197,310 readers in 2020.[11] *The Philadelphia Inquirer* covers the city and the suburbs of Philadelphia, an area that includes more than 6 million people.[12] *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* is the next largest and reports a daily circulation of 80,000. However, in 2018 the newspaper stopped publishing on Tuesday and Saturdays and limited its print editions to three days a week.[13] The greater Pittsburgh metro area is estimated to be about 2.3 million, a number that has dropped for the past seven years.[14]

Comparatively, *The Lebanon Daily News* located in southeastern PA, the *Evening Sun* in Hanover in central PA and *Public Opinion* in Chambersburg are all much smaller newspapers now owned by Gannett and do not publish circulation numbers. *Public Opinion*, and *The Lebanon Daily News* publish a print and electronic edition everyday compared to the *Evening Sun* publishes only three days a week. These three smaller newspapers have very small staffs- the

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[10] Accurate newspaper circulation statistics are difficult to determine and compare. The Alliance for Audited Media produces estimates based on readership and circulation figures. However, many newspapers, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have stopped fully reporting their circulations. For more information on the state of newspaper circulation and readership measures, please see Pew Research Center Media and News (2019, July 9) Newspaper Fact Sheet. Retrieved at:
https://www.statista.com/statistics/273503/average-paid-weekday-circulation-of-the-new-york-times/.
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[12] Bond, Michealle and John Duchneskie. (2019, April 18) Slow but Steady. *The Philadelphia Inquirer.*
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[13] See: https://www.pgmediakit.com/statistics-demographics/.
[14] Gratzinger, Ollie. (2020, March 26) Pittsburgh has reported a loss of population for the seventh year in a row. *Pittsburgh City Paper.* Retrieved from:
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websites list two or three editiorial staff writers or editors at each organization and content is shared from the parent company Gannett. Each also has a long history in their communities: *The Lebanon Daily News* was founded in 1894; *Public Opinion* was founded in 1896, the *Evening Sun* in 1915.

This study aimed to include a diverse group of local newspapers. Clearly, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* is a much larger newspaper than any of the other media included in the local section of this study. It is based in a city with a growing population and an expanding suburban community. Conversely, the *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* is slowing publication and covers a community that is losing residents. However, like the three much smaller newspapers – *Evening Sun, Public Opinion* and *The Lebanon Daily News*, each newspaper focuses its news on local rather than national events and has a professional reporting staff that reports under their own bylines. By diversifying the types of local news organizations, this study aimed to draw conclusions that were not about one type of local newspaper and encompassed a range of styles, sizes and publication schedules.

Of the total 387 reports examined in this study, 91 were produced in the local Pennsylvania outlets. The majority, 52 news reports, were published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* the largest circulation newspaper in Pennsylvania. Far fewer were published in the other four local newspapers: 19 in the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, 9 in the *Lebanon Daily News*, 6 in the *Evening Sun* and 5 in *Public Opinion.* The latter three small newspapers were all owned by Gannett in 2016, which also publishes *USA TODAY*. The *Lebanon Daily News* and *Public Opinion* were published daily, while the *Evening Sun* (with a staff of 5) was published three days a week. Each newspaper included in the local study covered a different region of Pennsylvania,

with small overlaps.[15] There were 296 national news reports included in this study with 189 published in *The New York Times*, 59 in *The Washington Post* and 48 in *USA TODAY*.

Nexis Uni Keyword Search

Selecting which newspapers to include allowed this study to move onto creating a database of news stories. Using Nexis Uni, this study attempted to create a keyword search of that focused on coverage of the voter during the 2016 election.

Using the University of Maryland's access to Nexis Uni, the keyword search started broadly with "Clinton, Trump, voter" and the time limit of the year 2016. The evolution of the search syntax is included so that others can replicate the process and (with the final search terms as reported below) replicate the same search. Producing far too many results that did not focus on the voter, the keyword search was altered to focus on hard news reports in this manner:

"hlead (voter) and hlead (clinton or trump or candidate) and section(front_page or news or a or A01 or pg. 1 or pg. 1a or pg. a1 or page 1 or national or state) and length > 400."

The inclusion of the terms Clinton and Trump in the headline or lead resulted in more articles focused on the voter. The news report was also featured prominently in the newspaper or online because it was featured in the front or news section of the report. However, on the negative side, this keyword study missed incidental mentions of the voter, only included the longer stories (such as those published in *The New York Times*) and severely limited the number of shorter stories, which meant fewer local stories and those from *USA TODAY*. To meet those concerns, the keyword search was altered to:

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[15] Lebanon Daily News covered the Lebanon Valley, in southeastern PA. Evening Sun covered Hanover and Adams County in central PA. Public Opinion covered the Cumberland Valley in southern PA. The Pittsburg Post-Gazette covered Pittsburg and its suburbs in western PA. The Philadelphia Inquirer covered the city of Philadelphia and its suburbs in eastern PA.

"voter w/25 clinton or trump and section(front_page or news or A01 or pg. 1 or pg. 1a or pg. a1 or page 1 or national or state) and length > 300"

And was limited by the following filters:

Date: Sept 1 2016-Nov 8 2016

Newspapers

Location: DC, NY, PA, United States

Sources: NYT, WP, USAT, Pub Opinion, Evening Sun, Lebanon Daily News, Phil Daily News, Pittsburgh Post, Phil Inquirer.

This produced 652 results but with a small number of results from local newspapers and *The Washington Post* and too many results from *The New York Times*.

Working with a Lexis Uni representative, this study developed a search strategy that focused on longer media reports that also had the term voter within 25 words of Clinton or Trump, a length of greater than 300 words, and were hard news reports as opposed to lifestyle, television listings, editorials, columnists, calendars and other non-news reports.

The date of the search was altered to run from September 25, 2016, the last Sunday in September, to November 8, 2016, election day. This time period was chosen because it fell after the primaries and conventions and focused on the general election. This allowed a more direct comparison of Clinton/Trump voters as other candidates had been eliminated at this point. The dates also incorporated reactions to three presidential debates and a vice-presidential debate. It included seven Sundays, which is often a day when longer, more in-depth articles are published in the media. And, it was a time period of intense campaigning across the country. As a result, this time period struck a good balance between limiting the number of articles to a number that

could be quantitatively and qualitatively studied and concentrated the search on a time when voters were deciding between two presidential candidates.

One challenge in producing a successful keyword search was the different styles of the newspapers included in the search. *USA TODAY* and the local newspapers tended to produce shorter news articles while *The New York Times* produced longer reports. If the word limit did not require more than 300 words in *The New York Times*, the results produced dozens of short reports that were not news. However, this requirement eliminated many relevant reports produced in the other newspapers. The solution was to run two separate but very similar keyword searches. Here is the final keyword search:

"voter or supporter and clinton or trump and section(front_page or news or A01 or pg. 1 or pg. 1a or pg. a1 or page 1 or national or state) and length>500 and not byline (compiled or Associated Press)"

After the search was run, the following filters were applied:

Content Type: News Timeline: Sep 25, 2016 to Nov 08, 2016 Publication Type: Newspapers Location by Publication: Dist. of Columbia or Pennsylvania or United States Sources: The Philadelphia Inquirer or USA TODAY or The Washington Post or Pittsburgh Post-Gazette or Public Opinion (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania) or The Lebanon Daily News (Pennsylvania) or The Evening Sun (Hanover, PA) or The Philadelphia Daily News.

This search produced 250 results.

In *The New York Times*, the following keyword search was run:

"voter or supporter w/25 clinton or trump not debate and section(front_page or news or A01 or pg. 1 or pg. 1a or pg. a1 or page 1 or national) and length>1000 and not byline (compiled OR Nate Cohn or Associated Press)"

The following filters were applied:

Content Type: News Timeline: Sep 25, 2016 to Nov 08, 2016 Publication

Type: Newspapers Location by Publication: New York Sources: The New York Times.

The search produced 159 reports.

What this study measured

This study was based on the following research questions:

R1: Did the media coverage of the 2016 election frame the Trump voter as deviant or outside the sphere of legitimate controversy as defined by Hallin (1992)?

R2: Did local journalists cover local Trump supporters in a manner different from national reporters? If so, did this coverage reflect a greater understanding of issues important to the local voter?

R3: How did the media understand their coverage of the voter in the debate that followed the 2016 election? Did that debate offer feasible solutions for future coverage of voters? These research questions suggest the following hypotheses:

H1: Many journalists covering the 2016 election identified Trump as deviant from the political norm, as defined by Hallin (1992), and covered the campaign according to the norms prescribed by this model.

H2: Many journalists covering the 2016 election also identified Trump supporters as deviant and outside the sphere of legitimate consensus, as defined by Hallin (1992) and covered those voters according to the norms prescribed by this model.

H3: Local journalists may have been more nuanced in their understanding of their communities and less likely to use the deviance model when covering these voters during the election.

H4: Journalists understood their coverage of the 2016 election as flawed and generated a public debate about changes in normative practices following the election.

As these questions and hypotheses suggest, this study aims to determine whether media reports produced during the general election of 2016 framed Trump supporters as deviant, as defined by Hallin's Sphere Theory. Journalism practice "has not one but many different sets of standards and procedures, each applied in different kinds of political situations," Hallin wrote (p.10). When confronted with deviance, journalists "slant" their coverage through negative framing of a source or event, according to Hallin (p.148). Framing a source or event as deviant differs from framing them as within the sphere of legitimate controversy. Normative practice when covering events or actors that fall into the sphere of legitimate controversy is the pursuit of objectivity. Most political news coverage falls into the sphere of legitimate controversy and aims to incorporate these professional practices.

However, when covering deviant events or actors, the media shifts into another practice, according to Hallin. In this sphere, journalists "plays the role of exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the political consensus. It marks out and defends the limits of acceptable political conflict" (Hallin, p.117). For the journalist, the shift from one sphere to the other happens seamlessly. Relying on their own understanding of legitimate controversy and deviance, the media will adopt different practices preparing media reports. The difference in practice between the sphere of legitimate controversy

(where the pursuit of objectivity is norm) and sphere of deviance (where sounding an alarm is the norm) can be measured.

In addition to measuring the framing of deviance, this study aimed to compare and contrast the use of deviance in five local news outlets in Pennsylvania with three national news outlets. This study aimed to determine whether local news outlets framed voters in a more nuanced manner than national newspapers did. Nuance was defined as having less deviance in the framing of voters measured quantitatively through the coding scheme and offering more information about voters and their views on the issues and candidates in the qualitative examination.

Operationalizing deviance

Hallin's 1986 study operationalized deviance in television news reports by measuring the tone of the broadcast. The framing of actors and events were coded as favorable/unfavorable and whether the journalist editorialized about the event or actors. Following Hallin's study, Aday, Livingston, and Herbert (2005) applied Sphere Theory to the examination of U.S. television news reports of the 2003 Iraq invasion. Their coding scheme, similar to Hallin's, first identified the subject of the report (which provided a range of topics included in the war coverage) and then measured the tone of the report according to neutral, critical or supportive. Neutral was operationalized as an absence of value-laden language. Critical and supportive tones were evaluated through a coding scheme of terms related to war coverage.

Luther and Miller (2005) applied the concept of deviance to the coverage of war protestors and introduces the concept of legitimizing and delegitimizing cues. Media coverage that frames events or actors as deviant includes "delegitimizing cues." Delegitimizing cues are a signal to the reader that the source or event is not within the mainstream, that the source or event

falls outside the parameters of legitimacy and is even a threat to the norm. Legitimacy was defined as "that which connotes propriety, lawfulness, and characteristics reflective of the core values associated with America" and de-legitimacy was defined as "that which connotes anarchy, unlawfulness, and anti-Americanism" (p.85). Luther and Miller developed a list of delegitimating cue words that included terms such as "arrested, violence, felony, dissent, idiots, disorderly, hell, threat, arrest" and compared it to a list of legitimation cue words that include terms such as "peace, democracy, bless, love, Americans, freedom, God, family, honor." To evaluate whether protestors were framed as deviant, Luther and Miller measured the frequency of legitimizing and delegitimizing cue words, assigned each story a total and then subtracted the delegitimizing cue word total from the legitimizing to give the story a score. Robinson, Goddard, Parry and Murray (2008) built on this model to continue the study of the relationship of the media to government sources during war and revisited the 2003 Iraq invasion to examine British media. They amended Aday et. al.'s model to include an assessment of the topic addressed in the report and whether that topic was value-laden.

Building on this scholarship, Billard (2016) applied the concept of delegitimizing cues to examine the media coverage of transgender people. Coding a sample of articles published in 13 major newspapers from 2004 to 2013, Billard identified patterns of journalistic practice that he identified as delegitimizing transgender people. Using the National Lesbian and Gay Journalist Association Stylebook and GLAAD media reference guide, Billard developed a set of nine "Legitimacy Indicators" to measure "the various aspects of respecting the self-identifications and human dignity of transgender individuals." (p.5) The study found that coverage of transgender people in major national newspapers was "extremely limited" (p.1). However, the coverage that did exist nearly universally contained language identified as delegitimizing. Billard argued that

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the use of this type of language by journalists was a normative practice that negatively impacts the transgender community in the "political arena and public perceptions" (p.1).

This study relied on previous scholarship that operationalized deviance in the framing of news reports, as explained above. Following the example of Luther and Miller (2005), Robinson, Goddard, Parry and Murray (2008) and Billard, this study created a coding system that to measure delegitimizing cues. Unlike previous scholarship, however, this study applied these cues to the coverage of voters during a presidential election. Of the previous scholars that had developed a coding system to examine delegitimizing cues, only Billard expanded Sphere Theory past the study of the media's coverage of war protestors. As a result, this study relied on Billard's method of developing a new coding system. Billard's coding system to measure the framing of transgender people was developed using the definition of best practices defined by GLAAD and the National Lesbian and Gay Journalist Association Stylebook.

Professional Standards

Following Billard's example, the coding system for this study was designed using guidelines for election coverage developed by media organizations including The Handbook for Journalists During Elections, published by Reporters Without Borders and Society for Professional Journalist and the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy's 2018 report on how to cover poverty.

These guidelines encouraged the practice of objectivity in all aspects of election coverage and did not recognize the legitimacy of covering deviance as Sphere Theory does. Therefore, the overarching advice in these guidelines is the pursuit of objectivity. However, several key points did stand out and encouraged the coding system to include a comparison between Trump voters

and Clinton voters. They included the following from The *Handbook for Journalists* During an Election:[16]

- "The tone of news stories must be neutral. They should report on differences between the parties but without judging them in any way," (p.20).

- (w)rigint style, layout and- especially – the choice of photos should not show unfairness or bias for one candidate over another," (p.20-21).

- "The underlying principle is that all parties and candidates are to be treated in fair, impartial and neutral fashion," (p.19)

And these from the Society for Professional Journalists Code of Ethics,[17] which encourage journalists to:

- "Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources."

- "Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant."

- "Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear."

- "Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting."

These guidelines contributed to the creation of the coding system and the examination of the news reports in the qualitative analysis. Understanding the goals of election reporting is an important step in understanding how deviant framing contributes to the media's role in the democratic system.

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[16] Reporters Without Borders for Freedom of Information, (2015 ed.) "Handbook for Journalists During Election." https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/handbook_for_journalists_during_elections.pdf.
[17] Society of Professional Journalists, (Sept. 6, 2014) "SPJ Code of Ethics." https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp

Media Identification of Deviant Framing

Following the 2018 election, several journalists studied normative practice when covering working class and rural voters and developed some specific advice for future election coverage. Bryant and Ordway (2018) examined the coverage of poor and working-class communities, Smarsh (2018) looked to rural communities. Each report suggested that journalists often marginalize the communities they are assigned to cover without meaning to do so. Marginalization, they suggest, is a response to being confronted with something outside the normal experience of the journalist. The response is sometimes highlighting the more demeaning aspects of the poor, working class or rural world they are sent to cover. Through language, choice of details, and a lack of nuance, journalists often send the message that these communities are outside the norm.

Bryant and Ordway suggest that low-income individuals are marginalized when media coverage focuses solely on economic status as "the central framing of their identity," (p.2). When journalists exaggerate or overly highlight differences, the authors argue, it is exploitative. It makes a news story more interesting to the reader and creates better copy for the journalist, but is using the source in a negative way. Using details such as fast food consumption, television viewing, or misuse of a word, the journalist is using something very common to convey how desperate and different these communities are. Bryant and Ordway label this type of writing "poverty porn" (p. 6). Details are an important part of a news story, but not when they are used unequally, the authors argue. At that point, journalists are "guiding how other people view" people with limited means (p. 6). Smarsh (2018) makes a similar argument about news coverage of rural communities. Journalists that "venture into the hinterlands" of rural America often come with preconceived notions about class and place that leads to an oversimplification or

mischaracterization of the political, social and cultural nature of the rural landscape, Smarsh argues. Details such as poor grammar or misuse of a word is a code to the reader that this person's perspective can be dismissed. The reader can identify these details as "shorthand" for deviance, Smarsh argues.

Qualitative and Quantitative Examination

In order to examine the coverage of the voter, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative measures. The qualitative measures included a reading of the news reports produced after the keyword search and a second reading after the quantitative review. The qualitative review included a coding system that marked each news report for elements of deviance, whether the tone suggested "no good choice in the race" (see below for a fuller explanation), examples of local coverage that differed from national, examples where the voice of the voter was both highlighted and dismissed. The news reports where elements of deviance were highlighted were then read more carefully to determine their context and determine if other elements were included that helped balance the details that suggested deviance, such as a voter that explored the issues or explained support for the candidate or an explanation as to how or why the voter was wearing odd clothing or other unusual details.

In the examination of local newspapers compared to national newspapers, the qualitative examination was especially helpful. The tone of the local news reports was often more intimate: descriptions of a community excited by the presence of a national political candidate where the writer seemed to share the excitement or references to gathering spots such as the hair salon and diner that were familiar. These elements were not measured on the coding sheet and would have been lost without a close reading of the texts. For example, some news reports highlighted the lack of education of the Trump supporter but also offered a fuller description of the voters quoted

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in the news report including background information. Others explored issues important to the voters. These additional details often seemed to suggest that the news report shifted from the sphere of legitimate concern to deviance within the same report, as Hallin suggests happens often. At other times the detail was not an example of deviant framing but rather a factual detail framed in an objective manner that a close reading and analysis made clear.

In addition, the qualitative review was a helpful follow-up to the coding sheet. Tagging a news report that stood out from other reports – perhaps as a strong example of deviance or an example where local news differed from national reports – allowed the coding work to proceed without distraction because it was understood that the researcher would return to that report for a fuller examination.

Building the coding sheet and quantitative measures

Based on scholarship that has studied deviance, professional standards and an exploration of normative practices by members of the media, this study developed a coding sheet that aimed to measure deviance. Some consideration (and effort) was given to coding for legitimacy or a lack of legitimacy. After reading through the results of the keyword search, measuring language that suggested deviance seemed more appropriate to the results, more tailored to the research questions and hypotheses of this study, and successfully used by previous scholarship. So the coding system was designed, in large part, to measure deviance.

To develop a list of delegitimizing cues, as Luther and Miller (2005) and Billard (1999) did, the study started with a qualitative review of the 384 news reports produced by the Nexis Uni keyword search to identify a pattern of delegitimizing cues. Several themes emerged: education, unemployment, race, conspiracy theories, costumes, insults, chants, odd use of words, noise, revolution, clothing with insulting or angry messages, use of the word "shy" or

"squeamish" to describe public support for the candidate. Some of these themes were eliminated or combined with others in the coding system. For example, the theme of noise was often associated with the Trump rallies. While they were consistently reported to be louder or rowdier than Clinton rallies, the concept of noise at a political rally is not unusual. So the delegitimizing indicator of "noise" was eliminated from the coding sheet. The cues of chants and insults were similar but eventually chants were eliminated as a part of the coding scheme because, again, chants are a regular feature of political rallies and insults became a separate category.

Based on the identified delegitimizing themes, this study employed Google forms to develop a coding sheet. Several versions of the coding system were worked through. An early version included 75 questions. However after coding approximately 25 stories, it was deemed too time-consuming. It was revised and pared down so that the final version included 39 questions, including 10 identical questions to measure deviance in the coverage of Trump and Clinton voters. Most of the questions were answered with a yes or no answer. Of the questions measuring deviance in the framing of Trump or Clinton voters, not all were successful measures. For example, there was very little difference in whether Trump or Clinton voters were identified as unemployed. In addition, the type of work both Trump and Clinton voters were identified by were very similar. An early coding system included questions to identify clothing descriptors, unusual habits, odd phrasing of language or grammar. These elements were combined in a later version to one question that measured the inclusion of "unusual details such as clothing, habits or expressions." A yes answer to this question triggered a qualitative review to determine what the unusual detail was and examine its context.

The final coding sheet measured six delegitimizing cues in the framing of voters that suggested deviance: lack of education, socially unacceptable, lack of diversified race, suggestion

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of conspiracy theories, insulting the other candidate or supporters, and inclusion of unusual details. For the coding scheme, these cues were developed into the following yes or no questions.

- Is the education level or lack of education of the voter mentioned?

- If so, is the education level framed in negative terms?

- Was support of the candidate described as socially unacceptable?

- Are the Trump/Clinton voters identified by their race?

- If the race is identified, please identify which races are associated with Clinton/Trump supporters.

- Are Clinton/Trump voters described or quoted as believing in conspiracy theories such as the election is rigged, that guns will be confiscated, the other party is engaging in fraudulent behavior or some other conspiracy?

- Are Clinton/Trump supporters quoted as insulting the other candidate or candidate supporters? This would include the use of words such as liar, criminal, rapist to describe the candidate and his/her supporters.

- Are Trump supporters described as "shy" or "squeamish" or unwilling to announce their support for the candidate?

- Are Trump supporters described using unusual details - such as clothing, habits, expressions?

The final coding sheet is included at the end of this chapter as Appendix A.

Negativity

Included in the coding system were several questions to measure the coverage of issues. Patterson (2016) found that less than 10 percent of news reports produced during the election

included a discussion of the issues. Based on Patterson's findings, the coding scheme included two questions to determine whether voters addressed issues when included in the reports. Those questions were "Does the voter mention an issue(s) that he or she is concerned about in the election such as health care, the economy, trade or immigration?" and "Do(es) the voter(s) discuss either candidate's qualifications or lack of qualifications to be president?" Both questions were included in the section of the coding scheme that applied to all news reports (as opposed to those questions that applied only to news reports that included sources identified as Trump voters or Clinton voters.) While this topic was not fully explored, it was included to determine whether stories that included the voice of the voter had a higher percentage of addressing issues or qualifications of the candidates. (The findings supported Patterson's findings that neither topic is addressed often.)

Patterson found that the dominant theme of the 2016 election coverage was a negative tone. The news reports produced by the keyword search supported Patterson's finding. Specifically, this study noted a theme in the news reports that implied that neither candidate was a good option in the election. As a result of this qualitative observation, the coding scheme included the question "Does the article imply or state that voters believe that neither candidate is qualified or that there is no good choice in the election?"

Vox Pop

In addition to measuring deviance in the framing of the voter, the coding scheme was designed to identify how often the voter was included as a source. In order to measure the frequency, this coding scheme compared the number of voters included as a source to the number of professional political analysts such as pollsters, political scientists, politicians, and media analysts. It then simplified the comparison to a yes/no question: Are there more

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professional political sources in the article than voters?

As a follow up question, the coding scheme included the question "(i)f both types of sources are included in the article, are voters quoted AFTER most of the politicians or political observers in the article?" According to professional journalism practice, journalists rank elements of a news report and place the most important at the beginning. This practice is referred to as the use of the inverted pyramid. (Mindich 1999). Based on this practice, recognizing where the voter's voice is included in an article can reveal how important the reporter understood that source to be to the news report. The coding scheme asked if voters were included after political sources as a measure of understanding the importance of the voter as source to the journalist.

The concept of "vox pop," as defined by scholars (Kleemans et. al. 2015, DeKeyser and Raeymaecker 2012) asserts that citizens are rarely an important source in a news article. Rather, elite actors such as professional political observers and politicians are the drivers of a news report. When citizens are used in political stories, they are often used either to illustrate a point made by a different source or used as colorful entertainment for the reader. Rarely are the ideas important to the voter the centerpiece of a news report. Measuring the frequency and location in the story as compared to elite political actors such as politicians or professional political analysts was an attempt at measuring whether the voter was treated as a "vox pop" element of the story.

Local News Comparison

One important component of this study was the comparison of local news coverage of Trump voters in the 2016 election compared to national media coverage of these voters. Scholars have suggested that a decline in local reporting contributed to the misunderstanding of Trump's support by the media in the election (Hermida 2016, Lewis and Carlson 2016). This study aimed to explore coverage in both mediums to determine if local media understood local voters in a

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manner different than national media did and whether that coverage offered a path for future

coverage for all media. (Chapter 5 on local results explores previous scholarship on local media

and outlines the results of this study.)

To compare local news to national news, the coding sheet included a category to identify

which newspaper published the article. Google forms works seamlessly with Excel to create a

spreadsheet of answers. Based on these initial codes in the column that reported the name of the

newspaper, the results of local news reports on the coding sheet were separated from national

news reports results. This yielded a quantitative comparison for each question included on the

coding form.

In early attempts at coding, local news was coded in order followed by national news.

This segregated approach meant the coder read similar news reports, one after the other. Coding

in this manner allowed the reader to recognize patterns of difference between the different news

mediums but also occasionally dulled the recognition of deviance.

After comparing local news reports to national news reports results on the coding form,

local news reports were re-read to recognize differences in style and examine language tagged as

deviant. In addition, elements such as the headlines, bylines, story length and placement in the

newspaper were noted.

Future Research

The qualitative review of news articles made clear that the coding system developed for

this study was imperfect. Reading the news reports carefully, there were sometimes examples of

deviance not caught by the coding system and others that identified a deviant element but not the

context that softened the suggestion of deviance. In addition, despite many revisions, the coding

system included time-consuming elements that did not yield fruitful results (such as the list of

professions). Future research using quantitative measures should consider the list of delegitimizing cues developed for the coding system as a starting point and improve this list. The coding system did not include an analysis of headlines, photos, placement in the paper. Examining these features could be part of a future study.

In addition, the coding system did not solely focus on the deviant framing of the voters. It included small measures of whether issues were included, the treatment of the voter as vox pop and the negative tone of the report toward the two candidates. It is a fair criticism of this study that perhaps the coding system attempted to measure too many elements or that the inclusion of one or two questions did not fully explore these aspects of the news report. These questions were included in the final coding system because they seemed to contribute to a fuller understanding of the framing of the voter and election coverage. However, future research could easily separate these elements into different studies and explore them more fully.

Despite these imperfections, this study identified and measured deviance in the coverage of the voter. Using qualitative and quantitative measures, it attempted to assess the news reports accurately and holistically. It seems clear that deviance was an element in the framing of the Trump voter in the 2016 election and it is likely that other elements, such as the treatment of the voter as vox pop, the lack of exploration of issues and and/or a negative tone toward the candidates are areas that deem continued exploration.

Chapter Four: Results

The results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media coverage of the last six weeks of the 2016 election support the hypothesis that journalists understood Trump supporters as deviant as described by Hallin's Sphere Theory. The 384 articles analyzed for this study found a pattern of identifying Trump supporters as uneducated, primarily White voters that espoused conspiracy theories and insulted Hillary Clinton and her supporters. Compared to the coverage of Clinton voters, Trump voters were more likely to be described as "shy" or "squeamish" in their public support of the candidate and more likely to be framed using unusual details about their appearance, habits or verbal expressions. The results also support previous scholarship that found issues were rarely the focus of media political coverage and not described as important to the voter (Patterson 2016). In addition, the results of this study identified that the media missed the opportunity to explore the motivations of all voters. News reports included far more political analysts to speak on behalf of the voter than actual voters. When both political analysts and voters were included in the newspaper content, voters usually were placed after these sources, often at the end of a story. Finally, the content analysis of the election coverage found a tendency to suggest that the election offered voters "no good choice." While Trump supporters were framed in a manner that suggested deviancy, Clinton supporters were often framed as unenthusiastic or disenchanted, creating the impression that neither candidate was desirable.

As defined earlier, Sphere Theory was developed by Daniel Hallin (1986) to explain media coverage of the Vietnam War. Hallin found that journalistic norms and practices changed when members of the media were confronted with events they understood to be outside the

sphere of legitimate controversy.[18] This change in practice was a shift from the pursuit of objectivity to the identification of deviance. Hallin found that normative practice encourages journalists to change how they cover a deviant event. When confronted with something understood to be a threat to democracy, journalistic practice encourages the media to frame the event or actors as a threat and sound the alarm to society. When an event or actor is understood to be part of the legitimate debate, the normative practice is the pursuit of objectivity through reporting and fact-gathering. Hallin explained that during the Vietnam War, the media understood political dissent as deviant and understood the origin of deviance as "outside the mainstream of society," (p.194). As a result, early coverage of war protestors focused on the "most radical factions and most militant tactics," (p.194). Hallin found that "the antiwar movement could rarely become news except by playing the deviant role, usually by "provoking" (sic) violence or charges of aiding the enemy" and this led to the "(t)he movement increasingly defined *itself* (sic) according to the deviant role in which it was cast by the media," (p. 194). In other words, it was a circle. Mainstream society rejected the antiwar movement, the media reflected this rejection and framed protestors as deviant members of the political spectrum, the protestors adopted this deviant role to get news coverage. This encouraged a greater divide between mainstream society and the protestors.

As the public's understanding of the Vietnam War changed, media coverage changed. Spheres, as Hallin defined them, are porous. People and events shift in and out the spheres as the journalist understands them, triggering different normative practices. Eventually mainstream society accepted and embraced the message of domestic opposition to the war (although not

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[18] For a greater exploration of Sphere Theory, see Chapter Two: Theory.

always the protestors and their attention-getting strategies) and the media shifted practices to include opposition as a legitimate part of the debate.

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that Trump voters were covered as deviant, as defined by Hallin's Sphere Theory. Clearly not all coverage fell into the sphere of deviance. The 2016 media coverage of the election shifted in and out of legitimate controversy and deviance. But, as Billard identified even occasional framing as deviant can marginalize a group within society. As Billard wrote, the media is a powerful enforcer of what is acceptable. Framing a voter as outside the norm excludes the exploration of issues and opinions that motivate that voter. In addition, according to Hallin, it can also encourage the deviant behavior of voters to get media attention.

This study does not suggest that the media was wrong in framing Trump voters in this manner. As Hallin demonstrated in his study, this is normative practice for the media. However, this study suggests that awareness of these shifting practices might be useful in future election coverage. Understanding the impact of framing voters as deviant, the media should make an informed choice about what type of coverage it provides the public. This study suggests that the choice to cover these voters as deviant was a missed opportunity to explore the issues and motivations important to millions of voters, leading them to support a candidate like Donald Trump and adding to the polarization of the electorate. Like coverage of early Vietnam War protestors, the coverage of Trump voters as a legitimate part of the democratic discussion might encourage less division in the public arena.

The 2016 election coverage may have contributed to a misunderstanding of the electorate by the public and encouraged coverage that suggested to the news consumer that Hillary Clinton was likely to win the presidency. (This study recognizes that many factors may have contributed

to this misunderstanding including polling. For a greater exploration of the media's response to the election coverage, please see Chapter Six: Mea Culpa.) Finally, this study aims to identify the fact that normative practices shift during election coverage and encourage members of the media to recognize this fact and choose how they intend to frame voters.

Findings Explained

These findings are based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of newspaper articles produced by a Nexis Uni keyword search. The search covered content produced between September 25 to November 8, 2016, by three national newspapers and five Pennsylvania-based newspapers, including *The Washington Post, The New York Times, USA TODAY, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, The Lebanon Daily News, The Evening Sun,* and *Public Opinion.* Below is a description of findings from each media outlet, including the results of a quantitative coding-scheme analysis and a qualitative examination of the content.

The coding scheme (Attachment A) measured 384 articles produced by the keyword search: "voter or supporter and clinton or trump and section (front page or news or A01 or pg. 1 or pg. 1a or pg. a1 or page 1 or national or state) and length>500 and not byline (compiled or Associated Press)" for all newspapers except *The New York Times*. For *The New York Times*, the search was modified to include longer articles, thereby generating a roughly equal number of news reports for each of the national newspapers to: "voter or supporter w/25 clinton or trump not debate and section (front page or news or A01 or pg. 1 or pg. 1a or pg. a1 or page 1 or national) and length>1000 and not byline (compiled OR Nate Cohn or Associated Press)." The keyword search was refined multiple times (for more on this see Methods Chapter 3) and was designed to produce articles either about the voters or featuring the voice of the voter(s) in the front section of the newspaper, written as a news report.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

This study was designed to explore the coverage of the voter in the last six weeks of the 2016 election by news organizations that follow professional norms and aim for objectivity. Following the election, many members of the media engaged in a self-critical discussion to determine how coverage had failed to understand the voters and predict Trump's victory. (For an analysis of this debate, please see Chapter Six). This study suggests that examining the news coverage using the lens of Hallin's Sphere Theory provides insight into answering these questions. In most political coverage, the media aims to cover the event using normative practices that support the pursuit of objectivity.[19] This type of coverage is labeled the sphere of legitimate controversy by Hallin. However, when journalists are confronted with events or actors they consider deviant, journalistic practices shift. The role of the media is no longer objective news gathering but to sound the alarm that something deviant is afoot. (For a broader discussion of Sphere Theory, please see Chapter Two). This study holds that journalists understood the Trump supporter as deviant, a threat to democracy, and covered these voters in this manner. It further suggests that this coverage contributed to a lost opportunity to explore the thoughts of the electorate because the practices associated with the coverage of deviance does not encourage in-depth reporting.

This chapter provides the results of a study designed to answer the following research question:

R1: Did the media coverage of the 2016 election frame the Trump voter as deviant or outside the sphere of legitimate controversy as defined by Hallin (1986)?

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[19] Many news outlets do not pursue objectivity. This study aimed to focus on news outlets that followed professional norms for the pursuit objectivity. For a greater exploration of the definition of objectivity, please see Chapter Two: Theory.

It is based on the following hypotheses:

H1: Many journalists covering the 2016 election identified Trump as deviant from the political norm, as defined by Hallin (1986), and covered the campaign according to the norms prescribed by this model.

H2: Many journalists covering the 2016 election also identified Trump supporters as deviant and outside the sphere of legitimate consensus, as defined by Hallin (1986) and covered those voters according to the norms prescribed by this model.

This study also addressed two additional research questions and hypotheses. Those questions are answered in Chapters Five and Six.

Deviance and Delegitimizing Cues

Hallin's (1986) study of the Vietnam War coverage was broken in two parts: the early coverage of the war in *The New York Times* and television news evening news broadcasts in the later years. The study is largely a qualitative analysis of the shifting roles and practices that the media played in response to different political actors for the time period 1961-1973. His book *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*, begins at the earliest days of the conflict and narrates the media's response chronologically. The majority of Hallin's analysis relies on and is demonstrated with quoted passages that explain his observations. The study does employ quantitative measures to measure the media response, however. Primarily, it measures for favorable and unfavorable statements of political actors involved in the war, including "domestic opposition," and the frequency of normative practices such as editorializing, attribution and the topics covered. Hallin developed Sphere Theory to explain the shifting patterns of media behavior.

Subsequent scholars have adapted Hallin's study using Sphere Theory to develop to quantitative studies that rely more heavily on coding schemes. Aday, Livingston, and Herbert (2005) examined U.S. television news reports of the 2003 Iraq invasion. Their coding scheme, like Hallin's, first identified the subject of the report (which provided a range of topics included in the war coverage) and then measured the tone of the report according to neutral, critical or supportive. Neutral was operationalized as an absence of value-laden language. Critical and supportive tones were evaluated through a coding scheme of terms related to war coverage. Robinson, Goddard, Parry and Murray (2008) built on this model to continue the study of the relationship of the media to government sources during war and revisited the 2003 Iraq invasion to examine British media. They amended Aday et. al.'s model to include an assessment of the topic addressed in the report and whether that topic was value-laden.

Luther and Miller (2005) used Hallin's sphere model to examine coverage of war protestors and developed a coding scheme to analyze legitimizing and delegitimizing cues. Legitimacy was defined as "that which connotes propriety, lawfulness, and characteristics reflective of the core values associated with America" and de-legitimacy was defined as "that which connotes anarchy, unlawfulness, and anti-Americanism" (p.85). Luther and Miller measured the frequency of legitimizing and delegitimizing cue words and in stories where both types of words appeared, they subtracted one from the other to give the story a score. Billard (2016) used Hallin's sphere model and built on Luther and Miller to step outside of war and protester coverage and examine media representations of the transgender community. Interestingly, this last study offered the most parallels for a study of media coverage of Trump supporters. Billard studied newspaper coverage of transgender people and developed a list of nine "legitimacy indicators" to measure the tone of the news article. The legitimacy indicators

are in some ways a measure of the respect the reporter demonstrated to the subject of transgenderism and the individuals interviewed or described in the articles. They are specific to the discussion of transgenderism, for example they include pronoun usage, genital focus, and sexualization as indicators. However, Billard also uses measures such as shock tactics, name-calling, and defamation as measures of legitimacy.

This study employs Billard's form of analyzing language designed to measure legitimizing and delegitimizing language. (For more information on how the coding system was developed see Chapter 3, Methods.) Billard's application of Hallin's sphere theory identifies one of the important roles journalists have in a democratic society: identifying what is socially acceptable and what is illegitimate. Through language, journalists signal to their readers and other journalists who follow their example that a subject could be in or out of the sphere of legitimacy. Billard highlights how discrimination against transgender people has been a normative practice in most major newspapers. Although delegitimizing language used in the coverage of transgender people seems to be on the decline, Billard credits awareness created by social activists and scholars - rather than awareness by journalists - as being the engines of change in newspaper language.

Based on previous scholarship, this study developed a list of seven delegitimizing cues in the framing of the Trump voter in national and local media: support for the candidate of choice is socially unacceptable; the voter lacks a college education; the voter insults other voters or candidates; the voter is described as having unusual habits, clothing or speech; the voter believes in conspiracy theories; the voter's race; and rallies that gather these voters are dangerous. News reports in this study were analyzed qualitatively using a coding scheme (Appendix A) and

quantitatively to determine if delegitimizing cues were a part of the media election coverage of voters and, if so, how those cues were included in descriptions of voters.

Category One: Socially Unacceptable*:*

Result: This study found that 20.4 percent of the news reports that included a description of Trump voters also had language that described some or all of those voters as "shy," "reluctant" or some other term that suggested they were embarrassed by their support for the candidate. In news reports describing Clinton voters, less than 6 percent of the stories described voters as being reluctant to announce support for their candidate. (Results included Trump voters: 20 out of 98 yes/ Clinton voters: 6 out of 104 yes).
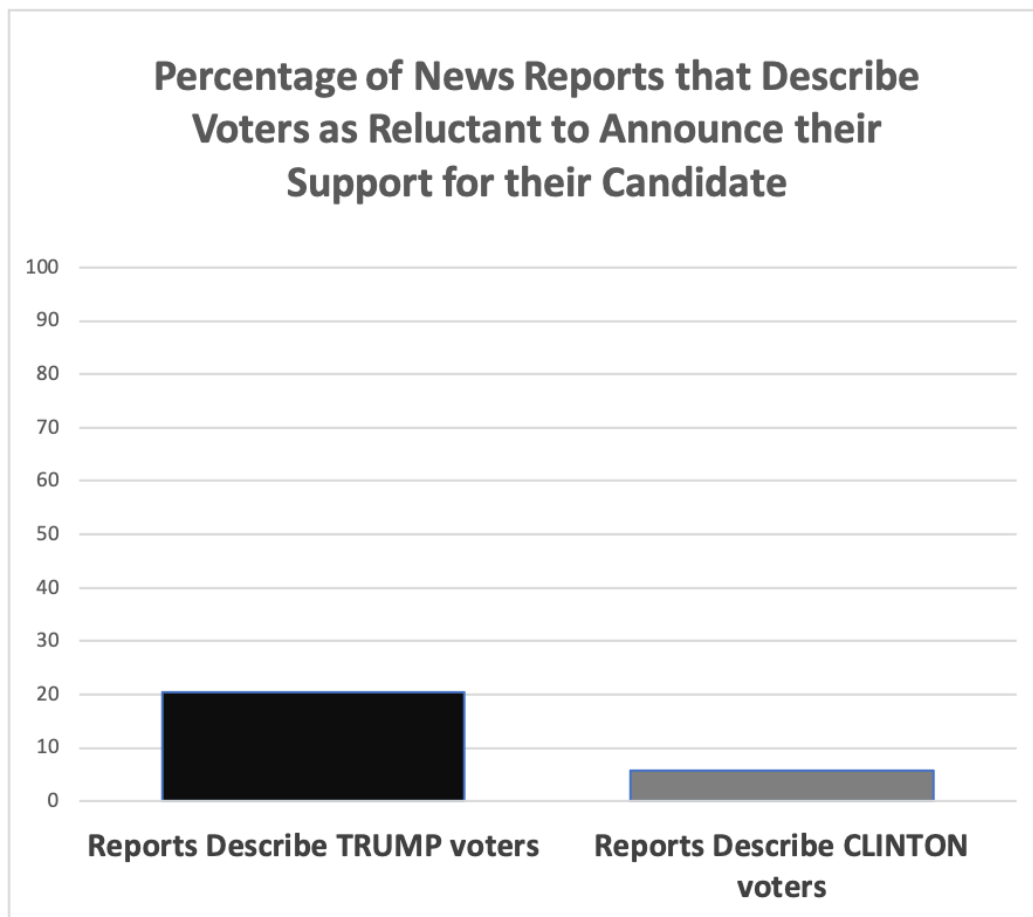
Figure 3

Explanation: "Socially Unacceptable" is the name assigned to the framing of voters that suggests they were reluctant to admit their support for Trump publicly. This delegitimizing cue was developed to measure and analyze language that suggested or stated that Trump voters were not expressing their support for their candidate because it was stigmatized in their communities. Reading the media coverage of the 2016 election, terms such as "shy," "rreluctant," or "squeamish" were included in descriptions of the Trump voters. It was often used in descriptions of polls as a caveat that they might not be measuring the full range of support for Trump. This delegitimizing cue was built on previous scholarship. Klar, Weber and Krupinov (2017) developed their study based on Patterson (2016) to examine whether negative coverage of Trump the candidate "stigmatized Trump supporters and led to social desirability biases" (p. 433). Klar et. al. found that expressions of support for Trump were muted or withheld during the election because it was not socially acceptable in many environments to be labeled pro-Trump.

This study found a considerable number of news reports mentioned this phenomenon. News reports were examined to determine if they mentioned the word "shy" or "squeamish" or any term that identified reluctance to vote for Trump or Clinton. In most examples, voters did not identify themselves in that manner. Rather, news reports speculated or quoted sources as speculating that Trump had more support than the polls showed because of "squeamish voters." As an example of coverage that uses this delegitimizing term, consider the following *USA TODAY* article, published on Election Day 2016:

"It would be a fitting end to the craziest presidential election in living memory if all the polls were wrong.
The Trump campaign is counting on that. For months, they've encouraged talk about Donald Trump's secret weapon, his ace in the hole. One might even call it Trump's trump card: The "hidden" Trump voter. Such voters certainly exist, but it may turn out that they're outnumbered by the hidden Hillary vote.

First, let's look at the case for Trump. It's true that pollsters have found that there are "shy Trump" voters. Shy voters -- a term borrowed from the British, to describe "shy Tories" -- are people too embarrassed to tell pollsters their real preference." [20]

The article defines Trump voters as "too embarrassed" and then later goes on to describe them further in this way:

"The voters who tend to be squeamish about admitting to prefer Trump tend to be affluent college-educated whites. The share of these voters in the electorate isn't large enough to sway the final tally as much as the Trump campaign would like, particularly because many no doubt live in blue states -- California, New York, Washington and Illinois -- where Trump will lose regardless. (Though it does seem that the recent tightening in the polls is largely attributable to many of these voters.)
Trump supporters say there's another hidden Trump vote: the legions of white "low propensity" voters pollsters fail to contact. If Trump can activate this hidden army of voters, the theory holds, make way for the tsunami."[21]

The article states that educated voters would be "squeamish" about admitting to

supporting Trump but does not explain why. It leaves the reader with the impression that if you

have an education, then you would not support Trump. (Or if you did, you might feel ill.) This

may have been a fact in 2016 (and again perhaps in 2020) but there is no reporting on or

explaining these phenomena. It reads as pure speculation. In addition, the report attributes the

identification of "legions of white 'low propensity' voters to Trump supporters. This suggests

that someone who supported Trump knew about large segments of voters who were not being

counted in the polls. Who were these sources with this insight? In hindsight, investigative

reporting on this tip might have led the reporter to an important element of the election.

In comparison, the article also described hidden Clinton voters. Those voters are

described in the following manner:

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[20] Jonah Goldberg. (November 8, 2016 Tuesday). Clinton's Hidden Voters; Trump's Election Day bet on a wave of 'shy' voters looks like a risky one. *USA TODAY*. Retrieved from https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5M47-Y6J1-JC8N-K049-00000-00&context=1516831.
[21] Ibid.

"There's also anecdotal evidence that there are in fact "hidden Clinton" voters among married Republican women."[22]

Despite mentioning hidden Clinton voters in the lead and headline, this is the full description of those voters in this report. As in the earlier example, the sourcing on this statement is vaguely written as "anecdotal evidence." The implication of this statement is that married Republican women are afraid to publicly announce their support for Clinton because their spouses support Trump. Interestingly, this framing manages to make both Clinton and Trump supporters look deviant.

These examples were drawn from one *USA TODAY* report that was particularly full of deviant framing. However, it does highlight use of this delegitimizing cue. In many other reports, this cue was included as a detail, often in stories about polling. A typical example that would have registered in this study as a delegitimizing cue that suggested the voter was socially unacceptable includes this phrase published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer:* "the belief that polls are missing millions of silent Trump backers."[23] The term silent was coded as a cue for deviance because it suggests something out of the ordinary in a negative manner. It begs the question, rarely if ever explained in these news reports, why would backers of a major political candidate not announce their support? When the question remains unanswered, it suggests the reason is something socially unacceptable.

In late October 2016, media reports included descriptions of Trump voters who were adopting the "shy voter" description. (This is similar to the Trump voters' embrace of the comment by Hillary Clinton that many Trump supporters belonged in a basket of deplorables.

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Thomas Fitzgerald. (November 1, 2016 Tuesday). In Ohio, Trump faithful believe new Clinton emails will lift their man. *The Philadelphia Inquirer.* Retrieved from: https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/politics/presidential/20161101_Ohio_faithful_hope_for_Trump_surge_on_new_Clinton_emails.html.

That comment spawned voters to wear buttons and t-shirts with logos such as "Adorable

Deplorable" or "Deplorables for Trump.") In a news report that featured a photo of a voter

holding a sign that read, "the silent majority stands with Trump," *The Washington Post* reported

on the shy Trump voter this way:

> "This is an extension of the "silent majority" argument Trump and his surrogates have
> been making throughout the campaign. They even have signs.
> The idea is to signal that Trump's base is bigger than it appears because some backers —
> plagued by the scourge of political correctness, of course — feel they must criticize him publicly.
> The Trump campaign has even suggested that telephone polls underestimate the billionaire's
> support because some voters are afraid to admit to another person that they plan to vote for
> Trump."[24]

This coverage suggests a complicated social dance: Trump voters claim their numbers are

larger than polls suggest because some elements of society have made it "politically incorrect" to

support Trump. Yet, the *Post* report suggests this is not true. Another report published in October

in *The Washington Post* with the headline "Shy Trump supporters? This new evidence says no"

attempted to measure whether a shy Trump voter existed and suggested it did not:

> "According to the "shy Trump supporter" hypothesis, polls overstate the size of Hillary
> Clinton's lead because some members of Trump's "silent majority" decline to state their choice
> for president to pollsters. Although they may support Trump for partisan or policy reasons, they
> are embarrassed to admit their support for fear of being associated with Trump's socially
> disapproved views on race and gender."
> Later in the report, it read:

> "The study provides no hint of a silent majority that withholds its opinions from pollsters
> but will nevertheless turn out to vote for Donald Trump on Election Day."[25]

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24 Borchers, Callum. (2016, October 6). The Donald Trump campaign takes its 'silent majority' case to the media.
The Washington Post.
 Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/06/the-donald-trump-campaign-takes-
its-silent-majority-case-to-the-media/.
25 Coppock, Alexander. (2016, October 25). Shy Trump supporters? This new evidence says no. *The Washington
Post*. Retrieved from:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/10/25/shy-trump-supporters-this-new-evidence-says-
no/

The silent Trump voters is an important delegitimizing cue because it suggests both that there was a reason for voters to keep quiet about their support of one of two major political candidates and that there is a part of the electorate that the media was not covering well. As the election results suggested, the media did miss large pockets of Trump voters. The "silent" voter that was referred to by the media was an important, deciding factor in the presidential election that was often mentioned and very rarely explored. The fact that the cue was as common as this study found suggests that the media built the idea of the "shy" voter into its coverage but did not investigate it. This lack of reporting led to a misunderstanding of the electorate in media reports that predicted Clinton would win and suggested to readers that Trump voters have a reason to hide their support. In addition, the use of this delegitimizing cue does not merely reflect societal values, it enforces them. By identifying the presence of voters who were silently supporting Trump but not exploring the issues or motivations behind that support and the social pressure to stay silent, the media participated in the cycle of delegitimization and polarization

Category Two: Uneducated

Result: The education level of voters was a common detail to build into a description of voters in the coverage of the 2016 election. In 20.4 percent of the newspaper articles where Trump voters were mentioned, their education level or lack of education was referenced. For Clinton voters, the number was even higher: 25.3 percent of the stories mentioned the education level of voters. (Results included Trump voters: 20 out of 98 yes/ Clinton voters: 25 out of 103 yes).

News Reports including Education as a Descriptor
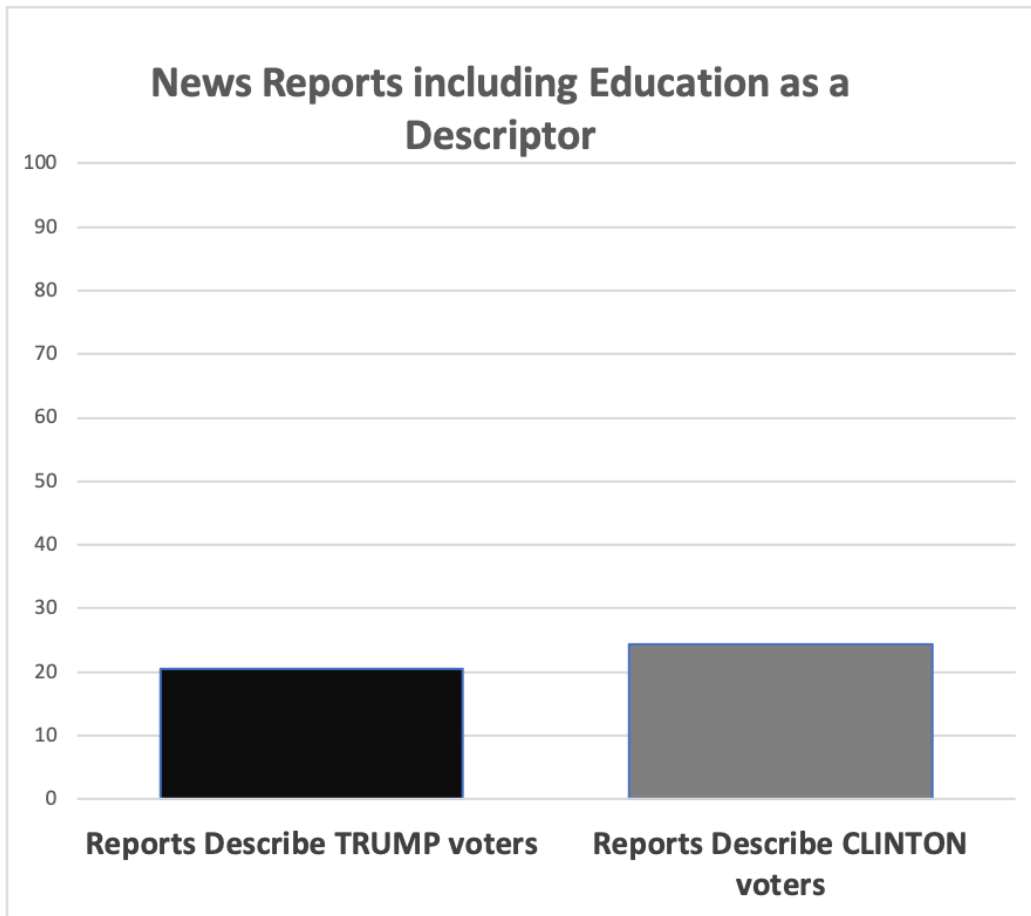
Figure 4

Explanation: The educational breakdown of the electorate, according to Pew Research

Center's U.S. Politics and Public Policy analysis of the election, found that 63 percent of voters

in the 2016 election were non-college graduates and 37 percent of voters did hold a college

degree.[26] As the Pew analysis demonstrates, a large majority of voters lacked a college degree.

However, the framing of the education level of the voters in this study, rarely - if ever - included

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[26] Pew Research Center, U.S. Politics and Policy. (2018, August 9). An examination of the 2016 electorate, based on validated voters. Retrieved at: https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters.

the fact that voters without a college education were the majority, perhaps even the norm. Instead, voters who did not have a college degree were often framed as "lacking."

As the results of this study show, the education level of Clinton voters was included in news reports slightly more often than they mentioned the education level of Trump voters. A qualitative examination of this cue revealed that when describing Clinton voters, education was framed as a positive attribute, but the education level of the Trump voters was nearly exclusively described in negative terms. For example, "college-educated women," was a commonly used phrase to describe Clinton voters, while "lacking a college education" was often used for Trump voters. The following news report in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* was a good example of the results found in this study: "Polls show white college-educated women backing Clinton by double-digit margins, a voting bloc that could offset turnout by white non-college-educated men for Trump."[27]

The inclusion of education as a descriptor for voters was a delegitimizing cue for Trump voters and a legitimizing cue for Clinton supporters. In addition, as *The Philadelphia Inquirer* example suggests, the difference of positive and negative framing of Clinton and Trump supporters was often included in contrast to each other. Sometimes the framing suggested that an educated person would not support Trump, such as this example from the *The New York Times*: "college-educated women—who would have considered voting Republican but are repelled by Mr. Trump"[28] or this from *The Washington Post*:

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[27] Hanna, Maddie. (2016, November 7). Trump's 'Locker Room' Talk Eclipses Clinton's Historic Moment. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Retrieved from https://
www.inquirer.com/philly/news/polics/20161106_Trump_s__locker_room__talk_eclipses_Clinton_s_historic_moment.html.
[28] Peters, Jeremy; Richard Fausset, Michael Wines. (2016, November 1) Black Turnout Soft in Early Voting, Boding Ill for Clinton. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/02/us/politics/black-turnout-falls-in-early-voting-boding-ill-for-hillary-clinton.html

"Educational achievement remains a clear dividing line and one of the potential mold-breakers of this campaign. Republicans have generally won the votes of whites with college degrees and those without. This fall, among white voters without college degrees, Trump leads by four points or more in 14 of the 15 states surveyed, most by sizable margins."[29]

This latter example is interesting because it is describing polling data and a potential change in the voting pattern of the electorate, facts that a report that falls into the sphere of legitimate controversy would include. (Although it excludes that fact that a large majority of all voters do not hold a college degree). However, the framing of the voters as "without college degrees" lacks any exploration: no quotes from voters without a college education, no expert explaining what socio-economic forces would encourage this shift, no community members describing the reasons that these communities were voting Republican.

This lack of reporting made education one of the most polarizing details in the news reports of 2016. Many different variations of this cue were found including: his mostly white, less educated base."[30] " Trump has done well among another group of voters not inclined to cast ballots: those who do not have a college education";[31] "The crisis is not confined to the white men backing Donald Trump, who has commanding majorities among men without college educations";[32] "He has strong support among white voters without college degrees" and "a

[29] Balz, Dan. (2016, October 18) Clinton Holds Clear Advantage in New Battleground Polls. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/clinton-holds-clear-advantage-in-new-battleground-polls/2016/10/18/2885e3a0-94a6-11e6-bc79-af1cd3d2984b_story.html.

[30] Burns, Alexander (2016, November 6) Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump Scramble to Make Their Final Pleas. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http:// https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/07/us/politics/campaign-clinton-trump.

[31] Page, Susan (2016, October 3) Many Are Asking if It's Ethical Not to Vote. *USA TODAY*. Retrieved from http: https://www.pressreader.com/usa/usa-today-us-edition/20161003/281479275912322.

[32] Chira, Susan. (2016, October 23) Men Need Help. Is Hillary Clinton the Answer? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/23/opinion/campaign-stops/men-need-help-is-hillary-clinton-the-answer.html

higher concentration of non-college-educated voters."[33] In fact, every media outlet included in this study used language that described Trump voters as lacking a college degree during the general election coverage.

This is not to argue that education should not be included as a detail in election reporting. The results of the election found that education was a strong measure of predicting voting patterns in communities. Nate Silver, editor of *FiveThirtyEight*, published a statistical analysis of counties in the U.S. that examined vote choice and the percentage of residents that held college degrees.[34] The analysis found a correlation between the number of residents with college degrees in a county and the likelihood of those communities voting for Hillary Clinton, even more than it was likely to vote for Barack Obama. The counties with the fewest college degrees were more likely to vote for Trump.

However, highlighting the lack of a college of education among Trump voters as compared to Clinton voters has one clear implication: an educated voter supports Clinton. These voters were often described through statistical data or as a group and rarely as individuals. What was missing from the coverage was a thoughtful examination of why communities where fewer voters have college educations were attracted to Trump. Instead, these voters were labeled with a cue that suggests they were ignorant. Framing and a lack of reporting turned a potentially insightful fact into a delegitimizing cue. For example, many respected professions, sometimes labeled as "blue collar" in American society, do not require a college education: farmers,

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[33] Tumulty, Karen and Dan Balz. (2016, November 6) Battleground Fight Intensifies. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: https://www.stripes.com/news/us/battleground-fight-intensifies-1.437851.
[34] Silver, Nate. (2016, November 22) Education, Not Income, Predicted Who Would Vote for Trump. *FiveThirtyEight*. Retrieved from: https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/education-not-income-predicted-who-would-vote-for-trump.

firefighters, members of the military, electricians, plumbers. Large communities supporting Trump were summed up and dismissed as "voters lacking a college education."

A college education is not a requirement to cast a vote in the U.S. democratic system. As a measure of the electorate, it is a worthwhile statistical measure. However, when presented too often as a contrast between voters, held out as the norm when in fact a majority of voters do not hold a college degree, and repeating this detail without fully exploring how and why it matters, citing a lack of education becomes a delegitimizing cue and can contribute to a lack of understanding that works against accurately informing the electorate.

Category Three: Race

Results: The race of voters was another detail regularly mentioned in the coverage across all media outlets for both Clinton and Trump supporters. Nearly 35 percent of the reports in this study that described Trump voters also mentioned their race. Overwhelmingly, when the race of Trump supporters was mentioned, they were described as "White." As with the "Education" cue, more news reports identified the race of Clinton supporters than Trump supporter. Nearly 45 percent of the articles that described Clinton voters included an identification of race. However, Clinton supporters were more likely to be described as a race other than White. As demonstrated in the charts below, nearly half of the voters described as supporting Clinton were identified as either African American or Hispanic.

In the 2016 election, according to the Pew Center for Research, the breakdown of the race of the entire electorate included: 74 percent White voters, 10 percent Black voters, 10

percent Hispanic voters.[35] The Pew study did not include any other racial measures. (Results

included Trump voters: 34 out of 99 yes/ Clinton voters: 46 out of 104 yes).

Percentage of News Reports that Include Race as a Descriptor
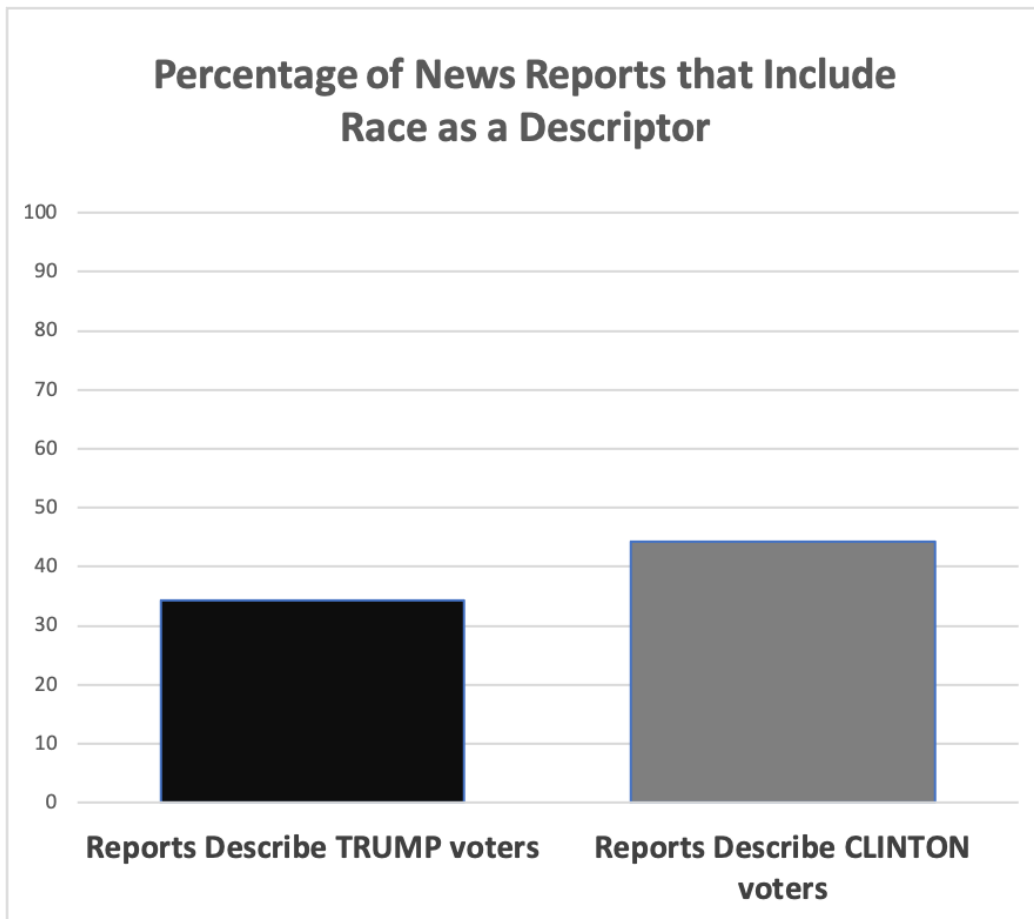
Figure 5

When race was mentioned to describe voters, Trump supporters were almost always

described as White. The results of the 2016 election support the fact that most of Trump

supporters were White. Trump won 54 percent of the White vote compared to Clinton's 39

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[35] Pew Research Reports, U.S. Politics and Policy. (2018, August 9). An examination of the 2016 electorate, based on validated voters. Retrieved from:
 https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/.\

percent. Clinton won support from minority voter with 66 percent of the Hispanic vote and 91

percent of the Black vote, compared to 39 percent of Hispanic voters and 6 percent of Black

voters for Trump.[36] These results also reflect similar racial breakdowns of support for

Republican and Democratic presidential candidates in recent elections, although Clinton won

slightly less of the minority vote than Obama did, which contributed to her loss.[37]

As a result, describing Trump voters as primarily White was an accurate description.

However, the descriptor of race, primarily the use of the term "White" to describe Trump voters,

was found to be a delegitimizing cue after a quantitative analysis of the results for several

reasons. First, as Pew Research Reports show, Trump's support among White, Black and

Hispanic voters did not vary from the support offered to Republican candidates over the past 20

years. In fact, Trump won more of the Hispanic and Black vote than Mitt Romney did in 2012

and nearly the same percentages as Sen. John McCain when he ran as the Republican candidate

for president in 1988.[38]

Scholars Carnes and Lupu (2020) argued that Donald Trump's support among White,

working class voters stems from long-term shifts in the electorate, not the candidate. Carnes and

Lupu argue that media reports that portraying "white working class" as offering "unprecedented

and crucial support" to Trump were wrong. Their study found that Trump's support came from

the same sectors of society that previous Republican candidates have drawn from and the idea

that Trump was a rallying symbol for blue collar workers was not accurate. "The white working

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Tyson, Alec and Shiva Maniam. Behind Trump's victory: Divisions by race, gender, education. (2016, November 9) *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved at:
https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education.

[38] Ramakrishnan, Karthick. (2016, November 2016). Trump got more votes from people of color than Romney did. Here's the data. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/11/trump-got-more-votes-from-people-of-color-than-romney-did-heres-the-data.

class was not uniquely central to Trump's election and there was nothing unprecedented about his support among this group," Carnes and Lupu argue (p.3). Instead, the study argues, "The relationship between education, income, race, and presidential voting is evolving. But observers will never understand that evolution if they get stuck on the simple narrative that it was something about Trump that appealed to the working class." (p.12). Similarly, Morgan and Lee (2017) argued that "racial prejudice, anti-immigrant sentiment, concerns about economic security, and frustration with government responsiveness may have led many white, working-class voters to support an outsider candidate who campaigned on these themes." However, they go on to state that the issues and motivations of the white working class reflects historical trends and "give(s) no support to the related claim that the white working class changed its positions on these matters in response to the 2016 primary election campaign or in the months just before the general election," (p.1).

In other words, Trump voters in 2016 were not supporting different causes or turning out in different racial breakdowns than Republicans have in the past and that historical trends would suggest. As this scholarship suggests, the media suggestion that White voters were attracted to Trump because his rhetoric supported racist views or divisions among races is not accurate. Similar support among White voters went to much less controversial candidates such as Mitt Romney and John McCain. While Trump may have been a divisive, angry or even racist candidate, the evidence suggests that this did not change racial voting patterns. His support came mostly from a traditional Republican base. Yet, the racial descriptor "White" was used in nearly a third of the articles mentioning Trump voters. Highlighting the race suggested that this was something new and alarming in the U.S. democratic system. It allows the suggestion that Trump supporters were motivated by race, without fully exploring this suggestion, and this leads news

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consumers and the media to dismiss these voters as a deviant part of society. And, as Carnes and

Lupu (2020) suggest, misunderstanding this fact in the media means that real truths are not

explored.

Coupling the suggestion that the Trump voter was uniquely motivated by race was the

pairing of the term White with descriptors that the voter was also angry. A quantitative review of

the news reports that identified Trump supporters as White commonly also described those

voters as supporting Trump because of resentment or anger. An October 2016 report in *The New*

York Times is a good example: "frustration and resentments evident among Trump's supporters

have roots." Similarly, a September report in *The Washington Post:* "a test of whether Trump can

expand his support beyond his base of aggrieved white voters, most of them men" also highlights

the themes of this type of coverage. The terms "frustration and resentments" and "aggrieved" are

strong terms that are not explained or investigated these reports. It suggests that White voters

supported Trump because of anger rooted in race as opposed to issues. Studies like Morgan and

Lee (2017) and Carnes and Lupu (2020) suggest that issues motivating Trump supporters were

the same type of issues that motivated the Romney and McCain voter. Trump's language and

campaign style did not attract more White voters than previous Republican candidates have.

What was missing from the election coverage was an exploration of why and how the White

voter appeared more angry or aggrieved or resentful. It suggests a moment for greater

exploration and in-depth reporting for the media and an insight into the Trump voter that the

election coverage did not offer.

Finally, the most important reason this descriptor was determined to be a delegitimizing

cue for this study was the description of White extremists that was included in news reports

about of Trump supporters. Several news reports suggested that Trump supporters tolerated, or

even supported, the views of racial hate groups. Clearly Trump's campaign attracted voters who

held racists views, felt emboldened by Trump's candidacy and were vocal in their positions.

What was rarely explored in the coverage was what percentage of Trump supporters shared these

views. As a delegitimizing cue, this was a powerful frame. Understanding voters to be tolerant of

hate groups allows the news media and consumers to dismiss the views of all Trump voters. A

small suggestion of hate can be a powerful delegitimizing tool to reject a large number of voters.

This study considered allegations of racism to be the most delegitimizing cue in the

election coverage because it was often included without attribution. For example, consider this

from a report in *USA TODAY*: "They also note that a number of racists and anti-Semites seem

attracted to Trump's campaign."[39] The term "they" in this quote refers to critics of the Trump

campaign, who are not quoted or identified in the report. The report does not explain or attribute

this observation. A similar example published in *The Washington Post* included the phrase

"offensive language and ethnic insults became routine at Trump rallies."[40] This report offers the

same assessment without explanation or attribution. Another example includes a report in *The*

New York Times about Black voters that reads: "some go so far as to wonder if Mr. Trump's

supporters have been planted by the Klu Klux Klan."[41] Again, this report is vague on attribution.

The term "some," similar to the term "critics" is not followed with concrete examples or quotes

from sources who support this statement. In a more damning report, *The New York Times* ran a

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[39] Jackson, David. (2016, November 8). Trump conducts election eve campaign marathon.
 USA TODAY. Retrieved from https: https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/11/07/donald-trump-campaign-final-day/93412700/.
[40] Marc Fisher. (2016, October 22). What is the long term effect of Donald Trump? *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/what-is-the-long-term-effect-of-donald-trump/2016/10/22/a4cd0f94-8a6d-11e6-875e-2c1bfe943b66_story.html.
[41] Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. (2016, October 30) Black Voters, Aghast at Trump, Find a Place of Food and Comfort. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/31/us/philadelphia-donald-trump-black-voters.html

story the Sunday before Election Day on Trump's "extremist" supporters. The story featured

several self-identified white nationalists who supported Trump's candidacy and reported that the

campaign had brought these groups "out of the shadows." The news report was headlined,

"Donald Trump's Extremist Supporters Feel Like Winners Either Way," and included:

"Of course, Mr. Trump's populist candidacy has energized ordinary Americans across the
country who previously felt alienated from the political system, but it has also emboldened
extremist groups that say he has validated their agendas."

A few paragraphs later, it stated:

"The biggest beneficiary may well be the so-called alt-right, the once obscure and now
ascendant white nationalist movement."[42]

Including these terms to describe Trump voters without careful, in-depth reporting does

not benefit the media, the reader, or the democratic system. Highlighting them without context

contributes to the framing of the Trump voters as deviant and is a clear example of shifting

normative practices that moves these voters from the sphere of legitimate controversy to the

sphere of deviance where the media aims to alarm the public rather than inform.

Many issues facing the country in 2016 had roots in race: immigration, the Black Lives

Matter movement, poverty, educational inequities. Yet a Pew Report on issues important to the

voter in 2016 suggests that race was not the most important motivation in the election. The Pew

Report put the economy at the top of the list of issues with 84 percent of voters identifying it as a

"very important" factor in their vote, followed very closely by terrorism and foreign policy.[43] By

suggesting that the White Trump supporter was angry, the media missed an opportunity to

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[42] Mahler, Jonathan and Julie Turkewitz. (2016, November 6). Donald Trump's Extremist Supporters Feel Like
Winners Either Way. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https:
https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/07/us/politics/donald-trump-extremist-supporters.html.
[43] Pew Research Center U.S. Politics and Policy. (2016, July 7) 2016 Campaign: Strong Interest, Widespread
Dissatisfaction.
Retrieved from: https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/07/07/4-top-voting-issues-in-2016-election/

untangle the issues of economic depression, immigration, terrorism and race and explore the differences that separated the Trump voter from the Clinton voter on these topics. Future research would benefit from a deeper exploration of language used to the describe the race of voters and how often it was paired with language that suggests this is a motivating factor for the voters.

At the same time, this study does not suggest that racial divisions were not a motivating force for Trump voters. Scholars such as Hooge and Dassoneville (2018) found that racial resentment and anti-immigrant sentiment were "important determinants" of who would support Trump. As a candidate, Trump often used racial stereotypes and insults in his campaign speeches. Yet, despite the common use of racial descriptors, Trump's supporters' views on race were rarely explored in the media coverage. Clearly, there are normative barriers to exploring race in election coverage. Few voters self-identify as racist and it can require a skilled interviewer to navigate this topic. Yet, this study found that the media highlighted racial differences of both Clinton and Trump voters and suggested it was fueled by anger without much exploration. Unsupported by reporting, it is a delegitimizing cue that ignores whether anger and resentment are present and if so, why. In addition, it is worth considering whether the media's habit of highlighting race without explanation may have contributed to the polarization of the electorate based on racial lines that became a prominent issue in the 2020 election.

Category Four: Insults

Results: This category measured how often Trump and Clinton supporters were quoted as insulting or calling each other names. This study that 49.5 percent of the news reports that mention Trump supporters also quoted them insulting either Hillary Clinton or her supporters. In news reports that referred to Clinton supporters there was also a high rate of insults. Nearly 43

percent of the news reports that described Clinton voters also quoted them as insulting Trump or his supporters. Insults were coded to include strong words such as "liar," "criminal," "rapist" and were not included if the voter was quoted as simply disagreeing or disliked the other candidate. (Results included Trump voters: 44 out of 99 yes/ Clinton voters: 44 out of 104 yes)
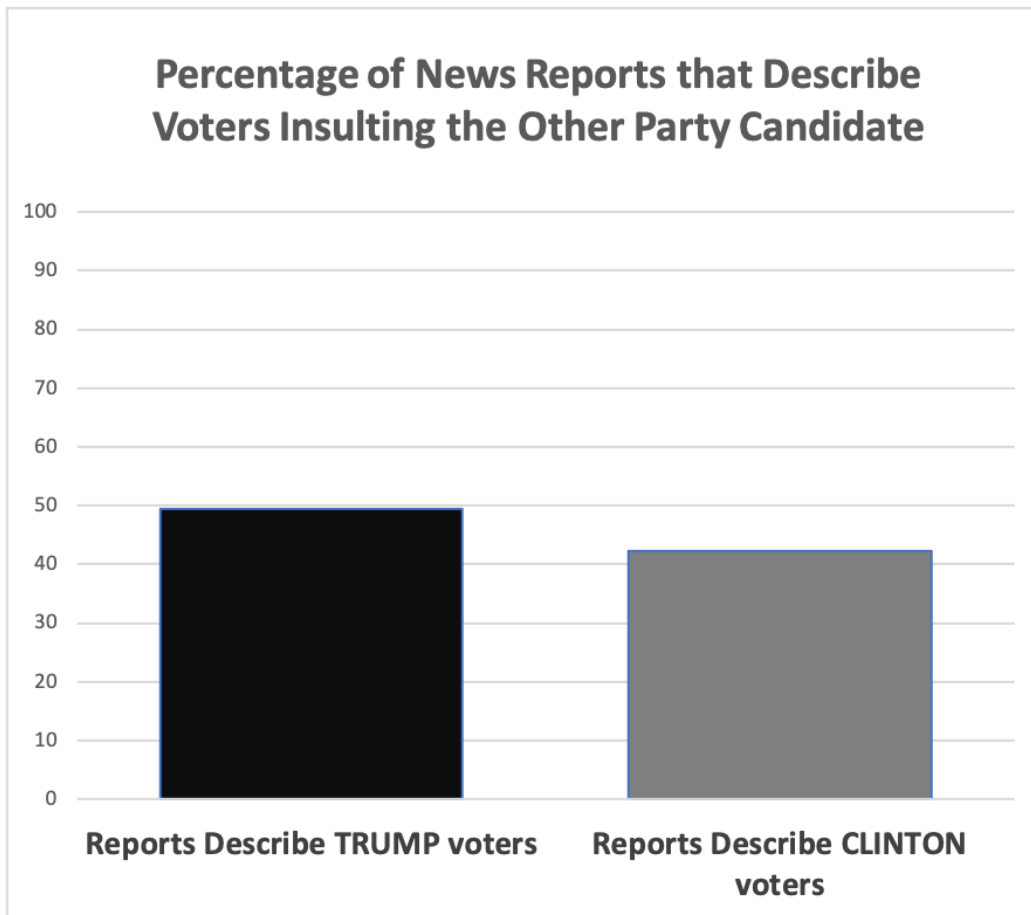
Figure 6

This delegitimizing cue reflects the tendency of the news reports to use the voter as an interesting detail or entertainment within the article rather than a source of information. The high rate of news reports that featured voters insulting other voters or the candidates devalues the voice of both the Clinton and Trump supporters. This is not to suggest that these types of statements were not offered often on the campaign trail. The pattern of insulting your opponent

stemmed from the candidates themselves in 2016. Trump included insults in almost every campaign rally speech. He called Clinton a "monster," "a weak person," "unhinged," "unbalanced," "liar" and "[44] and he regularly referred to Clinton as "Crooked Hillary." [45] Clinton also famously insulted Trump supporters. At a Democratic fundraising for her election, Clinton was quoted as saying:

> "You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right?" she said to applause and laughter. "The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamaphobic — you name it. "[46]

As a result, it is not a surprise that the rate of insults attributed to voters was high. However, it was coded as a delegitimizing cue because it also reflects a pattern by the journalist when framing a news report about how the voice of the voter will be represented. When choosing between topics to include in the coverage of the voter, the media often chose the colorful insult rather than the exploration of issues. This study found that in 27.6 percent of the news reports included in this study that described voters, they were quoted as mentioning an issue important in the election. (See Figure 9 below.) That leaves nearly 75 percent of the news reports that mention voters, yet exclude a mention of issues. Comparatively, nearly half the articles mentioning voters were found to include insults.

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[44] At a rally in Green Bay, Wisconsin on August 4, 2016. For a transcript see: https://www.c-span.org/video/?413593-1/donald-trump-endorses-speaker-ryan-ahead-primary.
[45] For more on Trump's insults see: Itkowitz, Colby. (2016, April 20) 'Little Marco,' 'Lyin' Ted,' 'Crooked Hillary:' How Donald Trump makes name calling stick. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2016/04/20/little-marco-lying-ted-crooked-hillary-donald-trumps-winning-strategy-nouns/
[46] Chozick, Amy. (2016, September 10) Hillary Clinton Calls Many Trump Backers 'Deplorables,' and G.O.P. Pounces. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/us/politics/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables.html.

An example of reports that attributed insults to voters included these final lines from a

November 2016 news report in *The New York Times* about former President Clinton's role as a

campaigner:

"A white middle-aged man standing beside his young son in the back shouted the refrain
often heard at Mr. Trump's rallies: "Lock that bitch up."
Mr. Clinton continued as if he had not heard a thing." [47]

In the above example, the detail of the white, middle-aged man yelling out an insult that includes

a curse word to the husband of the candidate while standing next to a young child, presumably

his son, is particularly jarring and the image the writer chose to conclude the report with. As the

study results suggest, insults were a common delegitimizing cue for Trump and Clinton voters.

The result was that it was very common to find news reports that featured voters and insults and

not include the issues important to those voters. For example, consider this passage from *The*

Philadelphia Inquirer about Cuban American voters who disliked Trump:

"(H)e has something in common with exile Carlos Bautista, a retired stationery engraver
who senses an authoritarian streak in the GOP nominee that reminds him of Argentina's Juan
Perón, Fidel Castro, and other dictators.
"He's the classic bad guy in all the old movies," said Bautista, 76. "To me, he is an
animal. He don't care about nothing or nobody but himself. . . . Too much power in one person is
bad, very bad." [48]

Or this description of a Trump rally in an October 2016 report in *The Washington Post*:

"On the other side of the street, a Trump supporter in line screamed: What about Bill
Clinton? Clinton is still a rapist!" A vendor sold blue yard signs that said: "Trump that b---- (sic)
before it's too late." Another sold T-shirts showing a cartoon of Trump urinating on the word
"Hillary."[49]
And this example from an October report in *The New York Times*:

[47] Horowitz, Jason. (2016, November 7) Bill Clinton Evokes Past, but From the Periphery of His Wife's Campaign.
The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/07/us/politics/bill-clinton-campaign.html.
[48] Gabriel, Trip. (2016, October 12). Donald Trump Faltering? Die-Hard Fans Refuse to Buy It. *The New York*
Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/12/us/politics/donald-trump-voters.html.
[49] Johnson, Jenna. (2016, October 11). Base is Increasingly Worried that a Trump Win Isn't Assured. *The*
Washington Post. P. A1.

"At lunchtime on Thursday, the first day of early voting here, Fred Ames, 73, was standing in a line of more than 120 voters waiting to cast ballots. His T-shirt had a picture of Mr. McCrory ad the words 'human garbage.'

He faulted the governor, who earned a reputation as a moderate in his 14 years as mayor of Charlotte, for failing to stand up to more conservative Republicans in the Legislature.

"Essentially," Mr. Ames said, "he has no backbone."[50]

The media is participating and abetting a cycle when it highlights the voters insulting each other. The behavior that attracts attention is often repeated and exaggerated, Hallin (1986) found. His study identified that when political actors are framed as deviant in the media, these same political actors will go on to exaggerate their deviant behavior to gain further media attention. Therefore, highlighting the more deviant elements of a political group, Hallin argues, that the media is actually encouraging this type of behavior. The cycle of delegitimizing behavior (See Figure 1 in Chapter Seven: Conclusion) encourages political actors to act out in a deviant manner to gain attention for their cause which the media highlights, encouraged by press coverage of previous deviance, political actors ramp up their behavior and attract more press attention, Hallin wrote.

Recent scholarship has found that voters are growing more and more hostile to members of the other party. Iyengar and Krupenkin (2018) used American National Election Studies data to determine that "hostility" toward the opposing party has grown dramatically in the past 20 years. The study concluded that negative feelings toward the opposing party has become more consistent and serves a motivating force for political participation. In fact, the study found that negative feelings toward the opposing party is the greatest motivator of political involvement, more than positive feelings toward the party that the voter associates with. Patterson (2019) found that the increasing negativity described in Iyengar and Krupenkin (2018) was also present

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[50] Fausset, Richard and Jackie Calmes. (2016, November 26) Protests and Storms Make North Carolina's Election Year 'a Bizarre Experience.' *The New York Times.* Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/26/us/north-carolina-election-year.html.

in the media coverage of the 2016 election. Patterson measured the tone of election news reports and found that the tone of coverage of both candidates was overwhelmingly negative, peaking at 84 percent negative for one week in October 2016. His study identified that the negative tone of election news reports has increased with each presidential election since 1960 and was a function of the candidates or their supporters in 2016. "As journalists would have it, the Trump and Clinton camps were the cause of all the negativity. And it was certainly true that the election was unusually nasty. But to attribute the tone entirely to the opposing camps is to ignore the pattern of presidential election coverage during the past few decades," Patterson wrote (2016, p.4).

The trend toward greater hostility is encouraged by media coverage of voters using insults toward the opposing party. This increased polarization exists and should be covered, but highlighting it at the expense of other descriptions of the voter has consequences that this study urges the media to examine.

Category Five: Conspiracy Theories

Results: This study found that nearly 40 percent of the news reports that described Trump reporters also included the voter's belief in a conspiracy theory. Comparatively, less than two percent of Clinton supporters were quoted as believing in a conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theories were coded as language that stated that the voter(s) believed in ideas such as military revolution would follow the election, Clinton would confiscate all guns, or the election was rigged. The difference between Trump voters and Clinton voters framed with this delegitimizing cue was one of the biggest disparities of the study. (Results included Trump voters: 36 out of 95 yes/ Clinton voters: 4 out of 104 yes).

Percentage of News Reports that Describe Voters as Believing in Conspiracy Theories
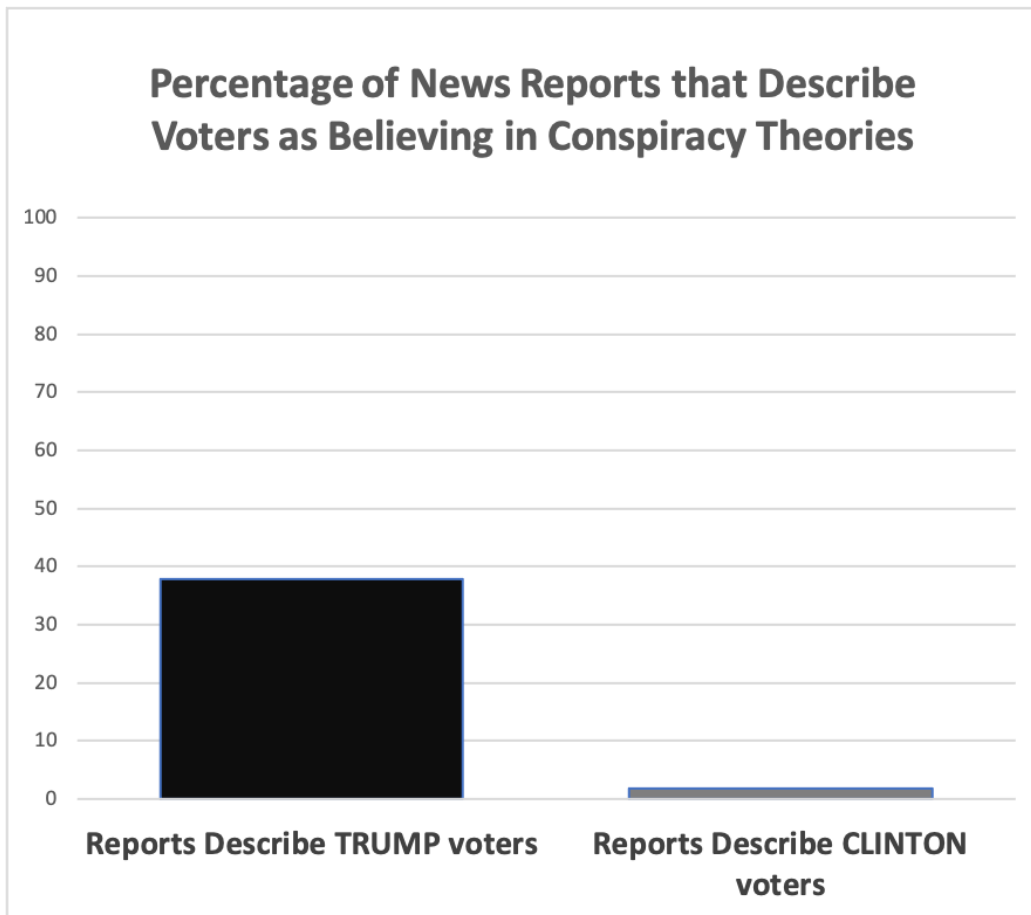
Figure 7

As a candidate Trump regularly suggested exaggerated claims on the campaign trail about rigged election processes, the government taking away guns or media bias. So, it is no surprise that some Trump supporters were quoted as concerned about these issues. However, given the lack of issue coverage and the high rate of associating Trump supporters with some of the most controversial and exaggerated claims of the campaign, this was one of the most obvious delegitimizing cues of the coverage. Similar to the cues of insults and odd behavior, clothing or speech patterns, this framing could have been replaced with an exploration of the issues and motivations of voters. But these details are often colorful, perhaps even humorous and offer the

journalist a chance to add this sensational element to a political news story. In addition, as these

other cues do also, they contribute to the deviant framing of the Trump voter and the idea that

these voters are an easily dismissed element of society not a significant political force.

Examples of this delegitimizing cue were common in the news coverage. Consider this

report on Trump supporters at a rally featured in *The New York Times*:

"They also repeated conspiracy theories that flourish online. 'A lot of people affiliated with Hillary have died over the years, and nobody says nothing about it,' said Eric Bulger, a retired police officer with the Port Authority for New York and New Jersey."[51]

Or this unattributed example from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that ran the day before the

Election Day:

"It's easy to find Republican voters sincerely convinced Clinton would confiscate their guns."[52]

And this report from *The New York Times* with the headline "Trump Backers See

Revolution if Clinton Wins":

"Jared Holbrook, 25, of Green Bay, Wis., said that if Mr. Trump lost to Hillary Clinton, which he worried would happen through a stolen election, it could lead to another "Revolutionary War."
"People are going to march on the capitols," said Mr. Holbrook, who works at a call center. "They're going to do whatever needs to be done to get her out of office, because she does not belong there."[53]

And this example from *USA TODAY*:

"At a campaign town hall in Newton, Iowa, last week, Trump's running mate, Mike Pence, faced a woman who said she was "ready for a revolution."
"Our lives depend on this election," she said with emotion. "Our kids' futures depend on this election and I will tell you just for me, and I don't want this to happen but I will tell you for

[51] Gabriel, Trip. (2016, October 12). Donald Trump Faltering? Die-Hard Fans Refuse to Buy It. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/12/us/politics/donald-trump-voters.html.
[52] Fitzgerald, Thomas. (2016, November 7) A presidential election unlike any other. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Retrieved from: https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/politics/20161106_2016__A_presidential_election_unlike_any_other.html
[53] Parker, Ashley and Nick Corasaniti. (2016, October 28). Trump Backers See Revolution if Clinton Wins. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/us/politics/donald-trump-voters.html.

me personally if Hillary Clinton gets in, I myself, I'm ready for a revolution because we can't have her in."

When Pence demurred, saying "Don't say that," she went on: "What are we going to do to safeguard our votes? Because we've seen how the Democratic Party is just crooked, crooked, crooked."[54]

The delegitimizing cue of believing in a conspiracy theory contributed to the media's framing of the Trump voter as deviant. In the above examples, the voters who are quoted in believing that that there will be a revolution, the election is rigged, that guns will be confiscated or that "people died" when associated with Clinton are one of the few mentions of the voters and their specific concerns in the news reports they were featured in. Framing voters expressing these types of suspicious thoughts as opposed to concerns about issues the country faced in the presidential election, the media made a similar choice as they did when including insults. It adds to polarization by highlighting animosity between voters and makes the Trump voter easy to dismiss because their beliefs do not seem grounded in reality. When 40 percent of the news reports featuring Trump voters includes the delegitimizing cue of "believing in conspiracy theories" but less than 30 percent include the voter mentioning issues, suggests how tempting it might be for a journalist to include this type of quote in a news report.

Scholarship on conspiracy theories that are circulated on social media suggest that the media is often being manipulated when it highlights this type of disinformation. Marwick and Lewis (2017) concluded that during the 2016 election many online groups worked to manipulate social media sites to gain attention from mainstream news organizations by spreading false and misleading information and conspiracy theories. The study found that these online groups were

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[54] Jackson, David and Susan Page. (2016, October 16). Rigged election? A chorus of complaint from Team Trump. *USA TODAY. Retrieved from:*
 https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/2016/10/16/rigged-election-chorus-complaint-team-trump/92195244/.

mostly far-right political organizations but also included "an amalgam of conspiracy theorists, techno-libertarians, white nationalists, Men's Rights advocates, trolls, anti-feminists, anti-immigration activists, and bored young people." Like Hallin's theory that the media encouraged deviant framing in war protestors, Marwick and Lewis (2020) found that online groups were able to gain mainstream media attention by "attention hacking," which increased the visibility of their political agenda. "The media's dependence on social media, analytics and metrics, sensationalism, novelty over newsworthiness, and clickbait makes them vulnerable to such media manipulation," (2020, p.1). Similarly, Haughey, Muralikumar, Wood and Starbird (2020) found that the "misinformation beat," as they termed reporting on conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation, is complicated. "Even in seemingly cut-and-dry situations, there are concerns that journalists may be amplifying mis- and disinformation through their efforts to debunk it," (p.5). Recognizing the inclusion of conspiracy theories in news reports as part of a cycle of manipulation and as a delegitimizing cue that allows news consumers to dismiss Trump voters, the choice to include this type of disinformation attributed to voters should be reconsidered in future election coverage.

Category Six: Odd Behavior, Clothing or Speech

Result: This study found that when Trump supporters were included in media reports more than 18 percent of the articles included a description of those voters that distinguished those sources as "odd." Clinton voters were described in this way in less than 1 percent of the reports. The coding for this was designed to recognize very unusual behavior, language or clothing that was highlighted in a media report. (Results included Trump voters: 18 out of 98 yes/ Clinton voters: 1 out of 104 yes).

Percentage of News Reports that Describe Voters as Odd
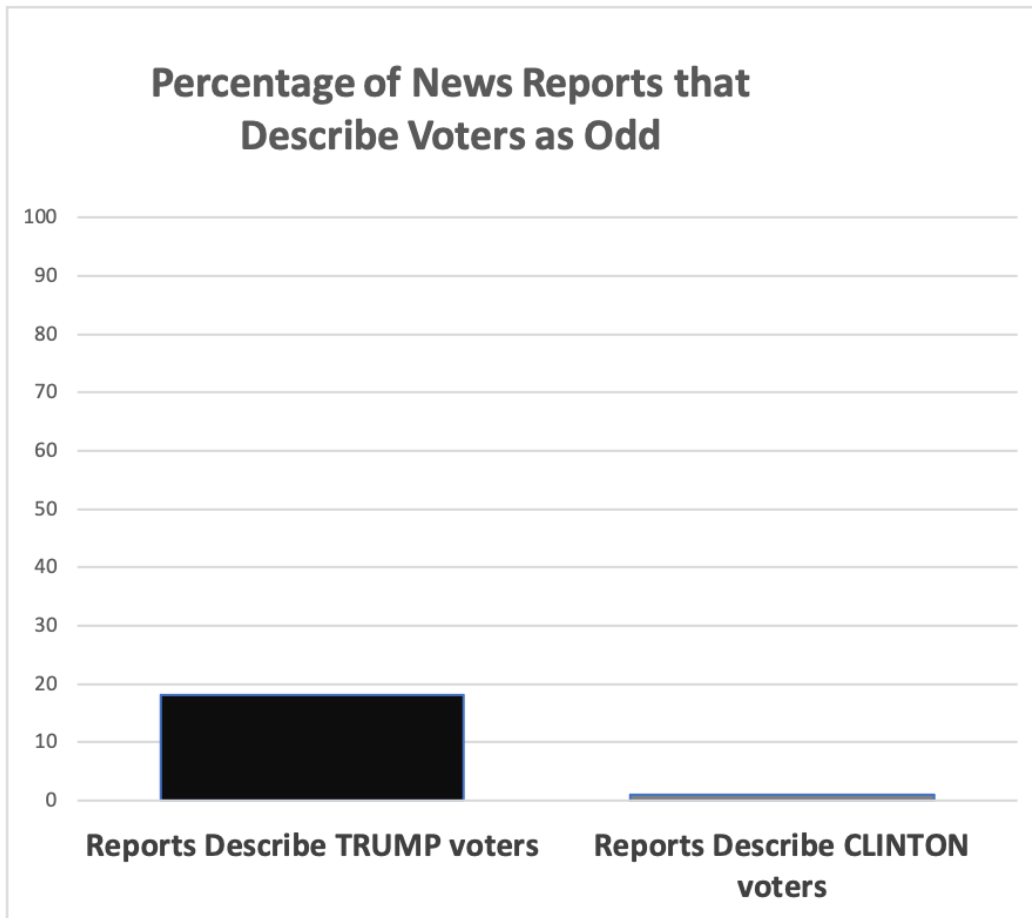
Figure 8

The framing of odd details such as behavior, clothing or speech in the news reports examined in this study were considered a delegitimizing cue because they highlighted a detail about the voter that seemed out of step with his or her community and was not presented in a positive tone. These types of details added to the perception that the Trump voter was a deviant part of society and not an important political group that cared about issues.

For example, the lead of a front-page article in *The Washington Post* described an 89-year-old Trump supporter named Cathy Frasca, who "woke up at 5 a.m. and hand-wrote a four-page letter to Donald Trump." The article goes on to describe Frasca as wearing

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"a yellow T-shirt featuring a screaming Hillary Clinton, flames and the message, 'Liar! Liar! Pants suit on fire." [55] Two days later, *The New York Times* published a report where the first voter quoted was a 70-year-old Trump supporter named Lewis Beishine, who was described as "drinking at 11 a.m. on a Friday at Cusat's Café, a bar owned by the mayor, who lives upstairs." Later in that article, another voter was described as "Nick Zapotocky, 31, who now has three deadbolt locks on his front door."[56] Many articles highlighted the Trump supporters who wore prison costumes to the rallies. "(T)he voters trickling in - more than one dressed as Clinton in a prison jumpsuit."[57] Another example, from *USA TODAY* illustrates both the conspiracy theory, lack of issue coverage and the use of odd language and details:

"Since the polls are starting to shift quite a bit towards Hillary Clinton, I've been buying a lot more ammunition," says Rick Darling, 69, an engineer from Harrison Township, in Michigan's Detroit suburbs. In a follow-up phone interview after being surveyed, the Trump supporter said he fears progressives will want to "declare martial law and take our guns away" after the election. "You can say I'm wearing my tin-foil hat," Darling says. "I don't know what's going to happen. It's so unpredictable...If it all falls apart, I'm going to be ready if I have to be. I'm going to be a good Boy Scout."[58]

[55] Johnson, Jenna. (2016, October 11). Base is increasingly worried that a Trump win isn't assured. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5KX8-DNC1-DXXY-3007-00000-00&context=1516831.

[56] Appelbaum, Binyamin. (2016, October 13). Divisions in an Evolving Economy. *The New York Times.* P. B1.

[57] David Weigel. (2016, November 1). Clinton's resilience with black voters is put to test. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5M2R-TFV1-JBFW-C53X-00000-00&context=1516831.

[58] Page, Susan and Karina Shedrofsky. (2016, October 27). Poll: 51% fear Election Day violence; Clinton up, but voters anxious; many Trump backers won't recognize a win by Democrat. *USA TODAY.* Retrieved from,: https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/10/26/poll-clinton-builds-leads-nation-worried-election-day-violence-trump/92712708/.

While only 18 percent of the news reports included these delegitimizing cue, when it was included it a powerful suggestion that Trump voters were outside the norm, or deviant, in more than their political beliefs. Clinton voters were not framed using this delegitimizing cue. Certainly, some Clinton voters displayed odd behavior on the campaign trail or in interviews, but it was not often featured in news reports examined in this study. In many of these reports, the voters displaying odd behavior, language or clothing were the only Trump voters included in the article. In the final example above, published in a *USA TODAY* report, the article states that the voter, Mr. Darling, was interviewed a second time over the telephone. That suggests that the reporter chose to call the engineer from the Detroit suburbs after he participated in a poll conducted by the newspaper. His follow-up quote, where he talks about wearing a tinfoil hat, having guns taken away and being a "good Boy Scout," does very little to illuminate his earlier statement, but does make him appear more deviant.

The Voter in General

This study also looked at the framing of voters in general, as opposed to the differences between the descriptions of Trump and Clinton voters. The most noticeable trend was that the voter was not often included in election news reports, even when the headline and lead suggested that the article was "about" voters. In only 50.5 percent of the news reports that were about voters actually included the voter as a source or a description of voters in general. In other words, many news reports that talked about voters rarely included information about actual members of the voting public. Instead, this study identified a trend among the media to talk about the voter rather than interviewing voters. It was far more common for a news report to include a political analyst describing voters than it was for a news report to include on-the-ground reporting interviewing voters in their home communities. In addition, this study found that when

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voters were included in a news report, they were often featured at the end of the report, after other types of sources. This suggests that voters were an unimportant element of the report.

The final observation and measurement in this part of the study was that a significant number of news reports that featured voters also suggested that the candidates offered the voters "no good choice." This suggestion was common enough that it was included in this study, with the likelihood that understanding this measurement would most likely come in future scholarship.

These observations were identified in a qualitative examination of the news report and then measured in the coding scheme. The following are the three categories that were identified and measured and the results of this study.

Measurement One: Lack of Issue Coverage

Result: This study found that in news reports that included a description of the voter, less than 28 percent included mention of an issue important to that voter in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. This measurement was coded to include any political issue attributed to either a group of voters or an individual in the news reports included in this study.

Percentage of News Reports that include Discussion of Issues Important to Voters
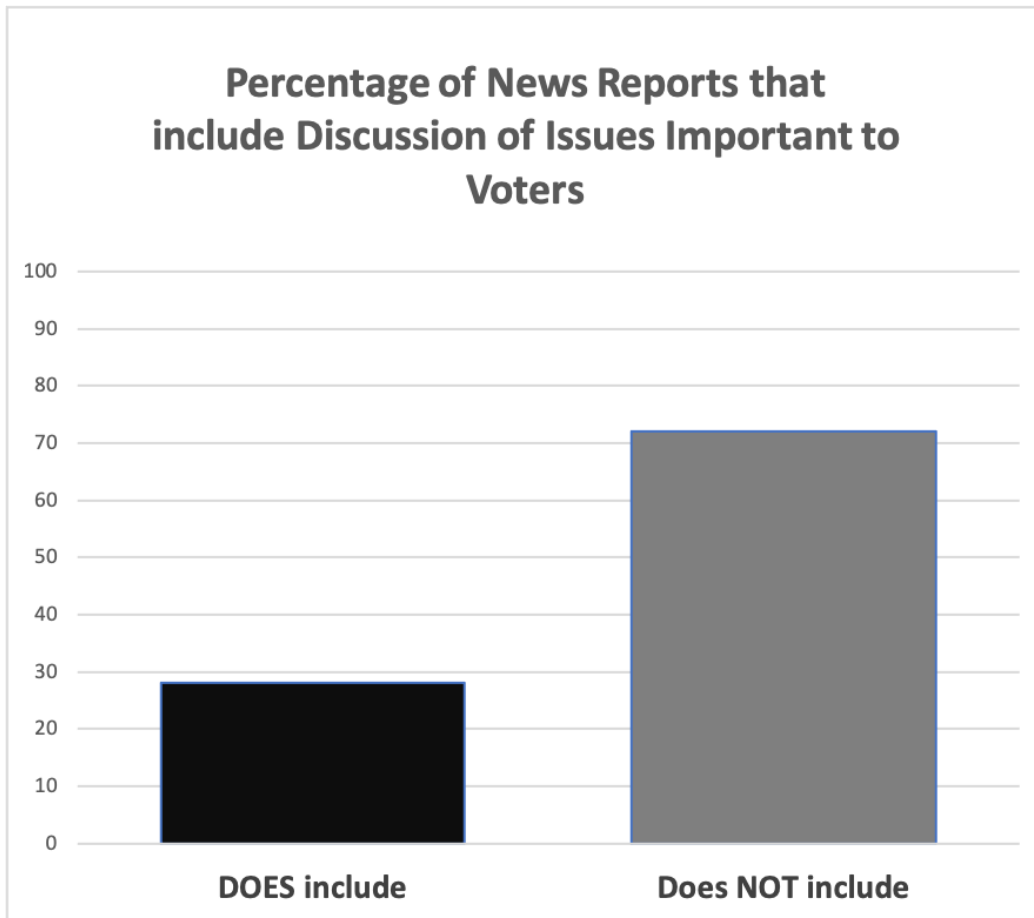
Figure 9

Examples of news reports that excluded the voice of the voter about issues were common in this study – more than 72 percent fell into this category. The lack of issue coverage was noticeable, for example, consider a report published in *The Washington Post's* regular political column called The Fix. Published 15 days before the election with the headline, "Donald Trump's chances of winning are approaching zero," [59] the report focused solely on statistical analysis and lacked any sources at all. Another example was a report in *USA TODAY* about

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[59] Cillizza, Chris and Aaron Blake. (2016, October 17). Donald Trump's chances of winning are approaching zero. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/24/donald-trumps-chances-of-winning-are-approaching-zero/.

Clinton's targeting of Republican voters that ran October 15 with the headline, "Clinton Courts Trump's Core: White Men." Despite featuring White men in the lead, no voters were included in the report but three professional political observers speculated about what might motivate these voters to switch parties. [60]

Measurement Three: Voters as a Source

Result: This measurement examined whether political sources were used as a source in news article and if so, if those sources outnumbered voters as a source in a news report. In addition, it measured whether voters were placed after political sources in a news report that featured both. The study found that more than 66 percent of the news reports analyzed in this study included professional political observers such as politicians, pollsters, political analysts and academics. When professional political observers were included as sources, they outnumbered voters as a source in 82 percent of the reports. And, when both types of sources were featured, voters were included in the report after the political observers in more than 63 percent of those reports.

As the previous findings on the use of the voter in a news report has explained, professional political analysts were often used to explain or predict potential voter behavior in place of actual voters. Normatively, this is a customary practice and a practical one. It is time-consuming, potentially inaccurate, and expensive to conduct on the ground reporting of voters. Political analysts spend their time and resources conducting research that can sum up voting trends and explain polls. Turning to these types of sources makes sense for the journalist on deadline. However, as the 2016 election found, the polls and the analysis by experts was

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[60] Przybyla, Heidi. (2016, October 14). Clinton Courts Trump's Core: White Men. *USA TODAY.* Retrieved from: https://www.pressreader.com/usa/usa-today-us-edition/20161014/281479275935196

misleading and suggested that Clinton would win the election. Relying on the analyst as opposed to the challenging work of on-the-ground reporting of the voter in different communities may have contributed to the misunderstanding of the electorate in 2016.

The findings of this study supports Patterson's (2016) finding, which measured the topic of news coverage in the election year. That study found that only 10 percent of the news reports focused on policy issues. This study differed from Patterson in that it measured whether voters were given the chance to discuss issues in a report that featured voters, but it supports the general finding that issues are not a focus of election coverage. Given that the articles studied came from the last six weeks of a presidential election, during a time when there were three presidential debates and a vice-presidential debate and that most articles were reported from political events involving voters, the lack of voters discussing issues is disappointing. Coupled with the high rate of delegitimizing cues this study found, the voter becomes an easily dismissed element of news coverage.

Percentage of News Reports that Include Analysts as a Source
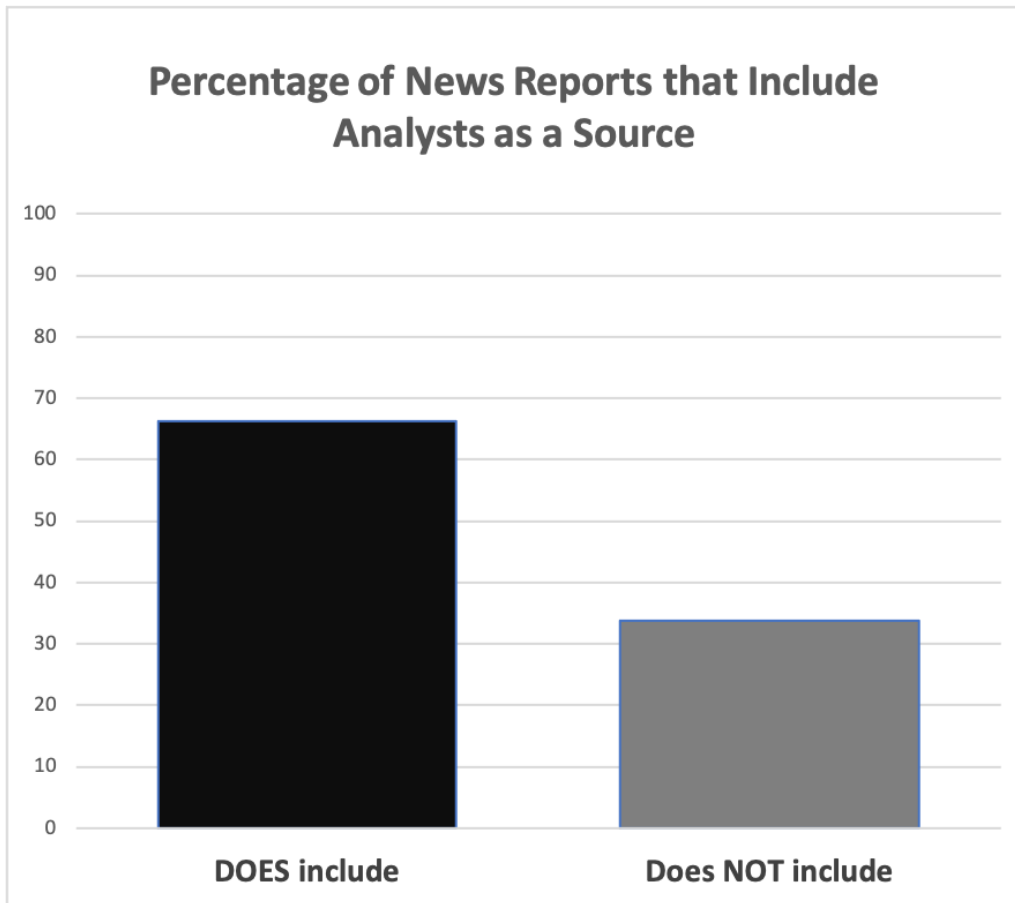
Figure 10

As the previous findings on the use of the voter in a news report has explained, professional political analysts were often used to explain or predict potential voter behavior in place of actual voters. Normatively, this is a customary practice and a practical one. It is time-consuming, potentially inaccurate, and expensive to conduct on the ground reporting of voters. Political analysts spend their time and resources conducting research that can sum up voting trends and explain polls. Turning to these types of sources makes sense for the journalist on deadline. However, as the 2016 election found, the polls and the analysis by experts was misleading and suggested that Clinton would win the election. Relying on the analyst as opposed to the challenging work of on-the-ground reporting of the voter in different communities may have contributed to the misunderstanding of the electorate in 2016.

Percentage of News Reports that include MORE Political Analysts than Voters as a Source
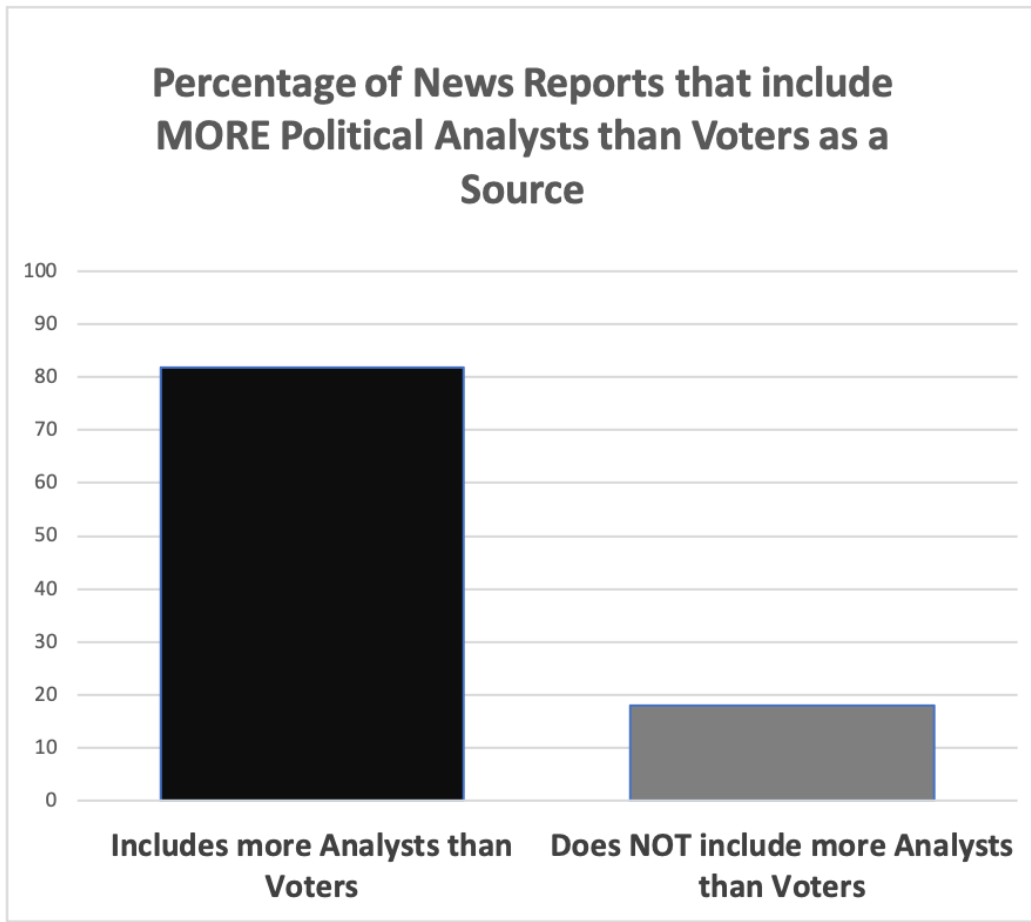
Figure 11

In addition, when voters were included as a source in media reports, they usually were placed at the end of an article. This placement is interesting when considered through the lens of journalistic practice. As defined by Mindich (2006), use of the inverted pyramid is a key element in the pursuit of objectivity and is defined as "a system of ordering facts in descending order of importance" (p.65). Mindich writes that it is impossible to overstate the importance of this practice in the pursuit of objectivity because it requires to the journalist to avoid chronological reporting and determine what is most important for the news consumer to learn first. Understood this way, the practice of placing a fact or source at the end of the news report signals that it is the

least important element of the article. Of course, the ranking of facts is a subjective exercise and can reveal what the journalist considers most important.

Measurement Four: No Good Choice

Result: The final finding of this study was that a significant percentage of news articles examined for this study included language that suggested that the presidential election of 2016 offered voters "no good choice." More than 25.9 percent of the news reports included in this study were found to include this suggestion. The term "no good choice" was coded to include language that suggested that the two major party candidates in the U.S. presidential election, Trump and Clinton, did not offer voters a choice they could support. As the findings indicate, this was a common theme present in the news reports and was either attributed to political analysts or observers, in quotes from voters or stated unattributed by the reporter.

Examples of framing that suggested that the election offered voters no good choice included this unattributed statement included in an October report from *The New York Times:*

"For voters across party lines, the presidential race was already ugly, already exhausting and already dominated by two candidates many voters found deplorable."[61]

And this example, also from *USA TODAY* with the headline "A Sharpened Debate: Many are Asking if it's Ethical not to vote this year for President?"

"It's not: 'How much do I like these people?'" says Jan Leighley, an American University professor and co-author of Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality and Turnout in the United States. "It's: Does it make a difference between this person I do not like opposed to that person I do not like?"[62]

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[61] Healy, Patrick and Farah Stockman. (2016, October 17). "Ripples From the 'How Low Can They Go' Campaign" *The New York Times*. Retrieved from:
"https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/17/us/politics/presidential-election-voters.html.
[62] A sharpened debate: Is it ethical to not vote this year for president?
https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/10/02/sharpened-debate-ethical-not-vote-president-obama-clinton-trump/91336286/

Percentage of News Reports that Suggested the Election Offered No Good Choice
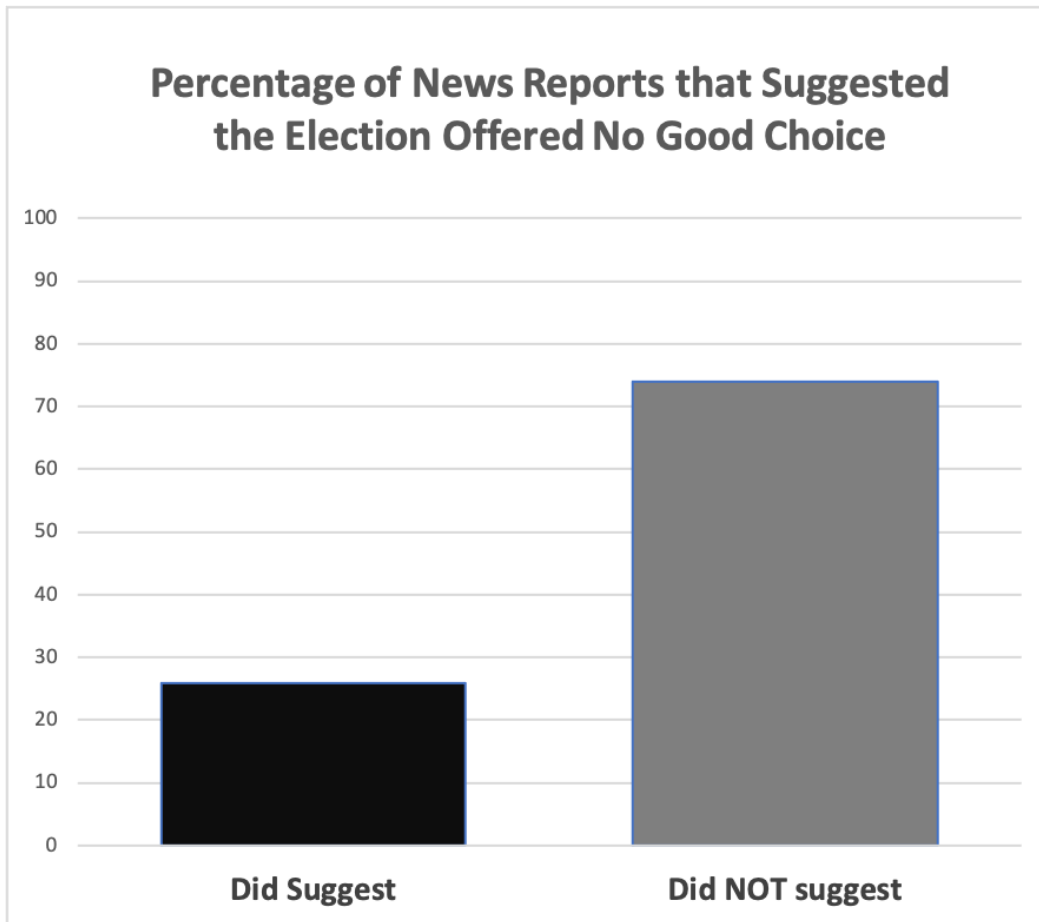
Figure 12

The following examples from a report in *The Washington Post*, presents this theme

through a quote from Rep. Paul Ryan, then Speaker of the House:

"While Ryan did not mention Trump by name Friday, he suggested that he understood
voters may feel there is no good choice for president this election.
"I know some people are avoiding making any choice at all," he said. "I don't begrudge anyone
that."[63]

Other reports framed the presidential election as a "joke." This report ran in the style

section of the *The New York Times*:

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[63] Snell, Kelsey. (2016, October 14). Paul Ryan makes case against Clinton, without ever mentioning Trump. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from:
 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/10/14/ryan-rolls-out-policy-speech-and-fundraising-haul-amid-trump-firestorm/.

"There is another way to appropriately view this election: as farce. That's the spirit the online magazine Slate will channel at the Gist," read the report that included the headline, "Worst Party of the Year? Election Night."[64]

A final example, also from *The New York Times,* was published in September of the general election:

"As students stopped at sidewalk A.T.M.s to prepare for parents' weekend, they expressed lukewarm support for Mrs. Clinton. Paula Atfield, a freshman from Cleveland, said she was voting for Mrs. Clinton because, "she's not Trump," but added that the election was seen as a "joke" on campus.
"Neither of them are suitable," she said. "Most people aren't even voting."

Framing the presidential election as offering no good choice to the voter sends a message to the news consumer: why vote? However, the results of the election suggest that the voters did not agree with this assessment. According to a report by the American Presidency Project at the University of California Santa Barbara, the voter turnout in 2016 was slightly higher than in the previous two presidential elections. In 2016, approximately 59.2%of the voting age population of the U.S. participated by voting, compared to 58 % in 2012 and 57% in 2008. [65] As these statistics suggest, the American voter showed up at the polling place in similar percentages as they have in recent presidential elections. As Iyengar and Krupenkin (2018) found, it is possible that the motivations for voting are shifting from support for a candidate to opposition against another. But the end result seems to be the same, similar numbers of voters feel compelled to participate in the election.

From a normative perspective, this finding raises the question of how why this theme was present in the coverage. Was this something expressed often on the campaign trail or was it the

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[64] Kurtz, Steven. (2016, November 3). Worst Party of the Year? Election Night. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/03/fashion/for-election-night-the-champagne-loses-its-fizz.html.
[65] Wooley, John and Gerhard Peters. Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections. The American Presidency Project: UC Santa Barbara. Retrieved from,: https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/voter-turnout-in-presidential-elections.

perspective of members of the media? If it was not a reflection of the mood of the electorate and was a perspective shared by elite political actors, did this theme affect the outlook voters had for the candidates? This study suggests further research into election coverage that frames the race as offering voters "no good choice." It is unclear whether this suggestion was unique to the 2016 election and the candidates presented or is part of a trend in coverage. In addition, it is unclear how this type of framing impacts the election. Future research on language included in election reports that suggest 'there is no good choice" might suggest changes in normative practice that improves election coverage.

Conclusion

The results of this study, quantitative and qualitative, support the hypothesis that Trump voters were framed as deviant in the coverage of the 2016 election. Taken alone, each of the delegitimizing categories could be considered minor details in the election coverage. Clearly, Trump's campaign rallies were rowdy events attended by thousands of voters, some dressed in costumes, chanting ugly insults. Yet taken together, the list of delegitimizing cues built into the framing of the Trump voter by the news reports examined in this study suggest that journalists were operating outside the sphere of legitimate controversy. The framing cues paint a picture of the Trump voters as odd, silent, fearing conspiracies, insulting other candidates, uneducated, and lacking diversity. Add that to coverage that rarely quotes any voters as interested in issues, relies on political analysts to speak for voters and routinely places the voice of the voter at the end of the story. The result is a description of Trump voters that are easily dismissed as a deviant element of the American electorate that is not recognized as the political force it became.

According to *The New York Times* election coverage, more than 62 million Americans voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election, nearly 3 million fewer voters than cast a ballot for

Hillary Clinton. Of course, the location of the voters meant that Trump won 306 votes in the Electoral College, compared to Clinton's 232.[66] As reported by *The New York Times*, Trump's total – 62,985,106 – was more votes than Obama received in 2012, but less than Obama won with in 2008.[67] In other words, Americans voted for Trump in numbers that were not unusual to turnout for a presidential candidate. When more than 62 million voters support one of two major presidential candidates, those voters can not all be dismissed as deviant.

Sphere theory holds that when journalists are confronted with actors or actions they consider deviant, professional norms and practices shift. Understanding Trump voters as deviant, the media stuck to professional practices and labeled the voters through their framing in details such as their clothing, odd behavior, conspiracy theories, insults and homogenized race. However, this study suggests that a greater understanding of differences would encourage the media to accept many different types of voters into the sphere of legitimate controversy and out of the sphere of deviance

The danger of this type of framing is that it does not encourage an exploration of the voter and, as a result, the media and their news consumer fail to understand the motivations of the electorate. In 2016, the informed voter went to the polls (or stayed at home) believing that Hillary Clinton would win the election and that the deviant Trump voter could not or would not amass in numbers strong enough to carry their candidate to victory. When Trump won, not only was the media surprised but they were also at a loss to what could have motivated millions of voters to support Trump (for a greater exploration of the media response, please see Chapter 6).

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[66] https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/president.
[67] For 2008 results see: https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2008/results/president/map.html. For 2012 results see: https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/president.html.

In many ways, the election coverage of Trump voters was a missed opportunity for the media to highlight and explore the differences within the electorate.

The results of this study suggest that media coverage of elections could be improved by recognizing the shift of normative practices in the sphere of legitimate controversy to the sphere of deviance. Voters in general are ignored as an important source. When they are included in a news report and framed as deviant, they are even easier to disregard as an important part of the election process. For the media, framing the voter as deviant led to a lack of deeper investigation into the Trump voter that might have led to greater insights about the electorate as a whole. As Billard found, framing any large element of society as delegitimized, or "othering," leads to misunderstanding.

Future research into election coverage using Hallin's Sphere Theory could be expanded in many ways. The most obvious is to expand the number of news reports included the sample. This could be accomplished by including stories for a longer period of time or increasing the number of media outlets that are studied. In addition, this study could expand the types of cues it measured. For example, this study did not measure the mention of gender. It could more fully explore the mention of race. The coding scheme could be refined to measure how many delegitimizing cues are included in an article. The qualitative study could move on to include a discussion with the political reporters assigned to cover Trump voters to explore the forces that encouraged the framing of Trump voters as deviant. Taken together, studying the impact of deviant framing could lead to improved media coverage of elections that accurately describes the electorate and improves the role of news reporting in the U.S. democracy.

Chapter Five: Local Media Results

This chapter explores the differences between local and national coverage of the Trump voter during the 2016 election. Based on the results of a quantitative and qualitative analysis of media reports produced during the last six weeks of the presidential election of 2016, this study finds there is a difference in how voters were framed in local media as compared to the framing in national media outlets. The results did not present dramatic differences in all areas of study, yet they do support the hypothesis that local journalists may have been more nuanced in their understanding of their communities and less likely to use the deviance model outlined in Hallin's Sphere Theory when covering these voters during the election.

In general, the results suggest that local media adopted similar normative practices when confronted with deviance that national media adopted (or, perhaps that local media took cues from national media). However, local media included delegitimizing cues in the coverage at a lower rate and often balanced these cues with additional information that helped frame Trump voters as a legitimate part of the electorate. These added details, which included such as biographic information, motivations, as well as discussion of issues that the voter cared about, often moved the coverage from Hallin's sphere of deviance to the sphere of legitimate controversy.

This study also found that local media was less likely than the national media to favor political analysts over voters in media reports about the election. The quantitative analysis included a count of source types, defined as political analyst, political academic, party official, pollster or anyone else paid to analyze as compared to voters quoted as sources. There was a large disparity here between local and national results. Local media outlets were far less likely than the national media to use political analysts instead of voters as sources. This is not to

suggest that the political analyst is not a valuable source for election coverage. Rather, this study found that the use of political analysts as a source in a news report often meant that the voice of the voter was minimized and came at the end of a news report. As Mindich (2006) explains and was explored in Chapter 4, the use of the inverted pyramid to rank the importance of facts and sources is normative practice in journalism. This suggests that when voters are placed as the last source of a news report or after other sources, they are considered less important. Local coverage was less likely to rank the voter a source in this manner. (For more on this point and the combined results of this study, please see Chapter 4: Results).

Finally, out of step with the other findings, local media was more likely than the national media to frame the election as offering the voter "no good choice" in the selection of candidates in the U.S. presidential race. This theme was common in both the local and national coverage, but this study found that local outlets were even more likely than larger outlets to suggest that neither Trump nor Clinton were strong candidates.

Local News As an Important Source of Election Information

Local newspapers tend to offer a different style of journalism than national outlets. They are often the source of hyperlocal information that can inform and build a sense of community. A 2019 Pew Research Report on local news outlets described them in this way: "(p)erhaps the most basic function of local journalism is to provide residents with news across a range of topics in a way that helps them live their daily lives and take part in the community."[68] The Pew study found that Americans are divided about their opinion of national news outlets but are united in thinking local news outlets are "doing a good job." The study found that Americans consider

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[68] Pew Research Center, Journalism and Media. (2019, March 26). "For Local News, Americans Embrace Digital but Still Want Strong Community Connection." Retrieved at: https://www.journalism.org/2019/03/26/for-local-news-americans-embrace-digital-but-still-want-strong-community-connection/.

local news outlets overwhelmingly successful at reporting the news accurately, keeping an eye on local political leaders and dealing fairly with all sides. [69]

At the same time, local newspapers and local bureaus of national news outlets are disappearing. According to a comprehensive study by University of North Carolina scholar Penelope Muse Abernathy (2020), the newspaper industry in general is losing outlets: since 2004 more than 2,100 newspapers have closed, including 70 daily papers and 2,000 weekly or non-dailies. Abernathy reported that at end of 2019, the U.S. had lost more than 25 percent of its newspapers in the past 15 years. This has resulted in areas of the country that she termed "news deserts," where no newspaper or credible form of journalism exists. According to Abernathy's study, more than 200 counties in the U.S. have no newspaper or "source of credible and comprehensive information on critical issues" (2020). Abernathy also found that many of the communities where local newspapers have closed were economically depressed and/or isolated from other communities. In addition, the trend seems to have accelerated. Since 2018, more than 300 newspapers have closed, 6,000 journalists employed by newspapers no longer are employed, and print newspaper circulation declined by 5 million (Abernathy).

The effects of these closures are still being measured. Abernathy found that larger media organizations, and therefore society, suffers when the smallest outlets close. The study describes a "news eco-system" where small local newspapers feed stories to the larger city media outlets, with this news often picked up by the largest national circulation newspapers.

"National and state papers have historically relied heavily on journalism done at small local papers to initially report on events and decisions that later become state and national headlines. Hometown papers not only record the history of their communities – the ebb and flow

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[69] Ibid.

of daily life – they can also change the course of history by reporting on a shooting or a local protest. The larger papers then amplify the initial work done by the small newspaper. But as hometown papers disappear – and the state and regional papers lay off veteran journalists and pull back on coverage and circulation in outlying communities – the news ecosystem is imperiled," (Abernathy, p. 13).

Media scholar Michael Schudson and Leonard Downie Jr., former Executive Editor of *The Washington Post*, studied the effect of reduced local media in 2009 and wrote, "(w)hat is under threat is independent *reporting [emphasis in original]* that provides information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge, particularly in the coverage of local affairs."[70] Other studies have found a variety of negative effects stemming from the decline of local journalism. For example, Darr, Hitt and Dunaway (2018) suggest that decreasing number of local news organizations has added to greater polarization in the electorate. They found a decrease in party ticket-splitting, which can indicate a lack of political nuance, in counties where local news organizations had closed. Similarly, Matherly and Greenwood (2020) measured federal corruption charges in districts where newspapers have closed and found a positive correlation between the closure of media organizations and criminal charges of corruption among government workers and elected officials. In other words, without the media watching, corruption flourished. These studies link systemic community problems to the closure of the local media outlet.

In a related study, Mathews (2020) studied the impact of one newspaper, the *Carolina Progress,* and the effect it's closure had on Carolina County, Virginia. Residents of the rural

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[70] Downie, Leonard Jr. and Michael Schudson. (2009, November/December) "The Reconstruction of American Journalism." *Columbia Journalism Review*. Retrieved from: https://archives.cjr.org/reconstruction/the_reconstruction_of_american.php.

community reported increased isolation, decreased sense of community pride, as well as a lack of

information about community events that led to them missing public gatherings. Mathews

reported that residents understood life to be harder without the newspaper. Collectively, these

studies point to the value of local media outlets on the communities they cover.

However, other studies suggest that the closure of small newspapers has a ripple effect

that hurts all media outlets. Hermida (2016) argues that big changes in how Americans, including

the closure of local outlets and the need for residents to look elsewhere for their news has failed

to inform the voter. The gatekeepers of news have been undermined by economic realities and

technology and the result is a "contested, chaotic and circular environment" (p. 75). Proximity to

the voter by news organizations is gone, Hermida argues: "As newsrooms across Middle

America are hollowed out, most new digital media outlets are concentrated along the blue-tinged

coasts of east and west. The result is a media that only sees a wide swathe of voters from 35,000

feet" (p.76).

As an example of Lewis and Carlson's point, Chuck Todd, political director for NBC

news and host of *Meet the Press*, hosted a round table discussion about why the media failed to

recognize the widespread support for Trump immediately following the 2016 election. Todd

highlighted the comments of an editor at *Progressive Farmer*, a publication aimed at rural

Americans. The editor said this: "Every time you heard about these polls, you had heard that

educated white voters were, were going for Clinton, while people, with-- without college degrees

or had no college, supported Trump. I think they took some of these things that were said over

and over throughout the last four, five months of the campaign, also very personally themselves.

That rural America is not uneducated, even though maybe there are fewer people with college degrees than there might be in the metropolitan areas."[71]

Todd's point was that the national media was not only not probing the viewpoints of American voters outside the metropolitan areas, they were affecting the race by their coverage. And they were unaware of this effect because they were removed from these news consumers because national news organizations have cut local bureaus and local news organizations are failing. (For a more in-depth examination of the media's response to the election, please see Chapter Six: Mea Culpa.)

Media scholar Lance Bennett (2016) argues that coverage of Trump supporters in the 2016 election falls into his theory of indexing, defined as the "tendency of mainstream news organizations to index or adjust the range of viewpoints in a story to the dominant positions of those whom the journalists perceive to have enough power to affect the outcome of a situation" (p. 16). Trump supporters were outside the mainstream, so their perspective could be dismissed as unlikely to succeed under indexing theory. Bennett suggests that many in the media fail to understand working-class or middle-class Americans and have "long rendered these folk nearly invisible," (2018, p. 75). Graber and Dunaway (2017) draw parallels between the election of 2016 and the Brexit vote in the U.K. They argue both events served as "a wake-up call" for the media and prompted months of debate about journalism practices within the news media to determine how they "failed to anticipate two major political upsets in their own backyards" (2016, p. 152). The solution, they argue, is greater attention to local coverage, where the voice of the voter is understood in the context of their community.

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[71] For a full transcript of the November 14, 2016 edition of Meet the Press on NBC, please see: https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-november-13-2016-n683211.

Taking this suggestion further, Rosen (2016) argues that journalists were "sucked into" covering Trump's agenda objectively because they did not have their own agenda. That agenda should be a well-developed understanding of the issues important to voters in their home communities. Journalists should have been asking candidates about issues important to voters, Rosen argues, and those issues should come from locally-based reporting on what topics matter to citizens. Rosen argues that an in-depth understanding of the issues that voters want discussed is the only way to properly cover a campaign and fight against a candidate that wants to hijack the debate.

Based on this scholarship, this study explored the following research question (a list of all research questions can be found in Chapter One, Introduction):

R2: Did local journalists cover local Trump supporters in a manner different from national reporters? If so, did this coverage reflect a greater understanding of issues important to the local voter?

That question suggested the following hypothesis:

H3: Local journalists may have been more nuanced in their understanding of their communities and less likely to use the deviance model when covering these voters during the election.

Method

Building on this scholarship, this study compared national and local reporting to determine if either was more likely to employ delegitimizing cues, as defined by Billard. The use of these cues implies a disrespect for the subject being covered or interviewed by the journalist and suggests to the reader that the source is deviant and therefore not reliable. As Billard

demonstrates, the framing of a subject or source by a media representative involves choices in language, details and facts. What is included is often as important as what is not. When choosing to use delegitimizing cues, such as quoting the voter when he or she is insulting other voters or describing a lack of education, the journalist is also choosing not to include facts such as what issues are important to the voter.

This chapter separates the local and national results in this study, including the quantitative and qualitative coverage of Trump voters. (For a discussion of the combined results and a sample of the coding sheet, please see Results, Chapter 4.) To analyze the differences between local and national media, this study identified and then measured the following delegitimizing cues using a coding framework and qualitative analysis in the framing of the Trump voter: support for the candidate of choice is socially unacceptable; the voter lacks a college education; the voter insults other voters or candidates; the voter is described as having unusual habits, clothing or speech; the voter believes in conspiracy theories; the voter's race.

Media reports were identified using a keyword search on Nexis Uni and included three national newspapers: *The New York Times, The Washington Post* and *USA TODAY* and five local Pennsylvania newspapers: *The Philadelphia Inquirer, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Public Opinion (Chambersburg), Lebanon Daily News,* and *The Evening Sun (Hanover).* These reports were produced during the last six weeks of the 2016 election, between September 25 and November 8, 2016.

The sample was small but representative. Of the total 387 reports, 91 were produced in the local Pennsylvania outlets. The majority, 52 news reports, were published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* the largest circulation newspaper in Pennsylvania. Far fewer were published in the other four local newspapers: 19 in the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, 9 in the *Lebanon*

Daily News, 6 in the *Evening Sun* and 5 in *Public Opinion.* The latter three small newspapers were all owned by Gannett in 2016, which also publishes *USA TODAY.* The *Lebanon Daily News* and *Public Opinion* were published daily, while the *Evening Sun* (with a staff of 5) was published three days a week. Each newspaper included in the local study covered a different region of Pennsylvania, with small overlaps.[72] There were 296 national news reports included in this study with 189 published in *The New York Times*, 59 in *The Washington Post* and 48 in *USA TODAY.*

This chapter addresses the difference between local Pennsylvania and national media outlets' coverage of voters during the 2016 election. Chapter 4, Results, gives a fuller description of the delegitimizing cues that were measured in these results. This chapter focuses on the analysis of local coverage.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative results support the qualitative finding that local media was less likely to use some delegitimizing cues than national media. While the numbers of this study are small, the local media was significantly less likely to quote the voter as insulting Clinton or her supporters, describing Trump voters as afraid to express their support for the candidate, and espousing conspiracy theories. Local media was not significantly different from national media in using odd details to describe clothing, habits or speech of the voters or when describing the race of voters. Interestingly, local media were somewhat more likely than national media to describe Trump voters as lacking an education than national media.[73]

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[72] Lebanon Daily News covered the Lebanon Valley, in southeastern PA. Evening Sun covered Hanover and Adams County in central PA. Public Opinion covered the Cumberland Valley in southern PA. The Pittsburg Post-Gazette covered Pittsburg and its suburbs in western PA. The Philadelphia Inquirer covered the city of Philadelphia and its suburbs in eastern PA.

[73] The coding scheme is Appendix A. It can be found at the end of Chapter 4.

Using Billard as a model, this study developed a coding scheme of delegitimizing indicators and found a pattern of six delegitimizing cues in the framing of Trump voters by the local and national media in the coverage of the 2016 election. Those cues have been grouped into the following categories: Insults, Socially Unacceptable, Conspiracy Theories, Odd Descriptors, Uneducated, Rallies as Dangerous. (For a greater exploration of these indicators, please see Chapter 4, Results).

Local coverage differed significantly from national coverage in the framing of voters in three categories: Insults, Socially Unacceptable and Conspiracy Theories. Supporting the hypothesis of this study that local newspapers might offer a more nuanced framing of the voter, the results suggest that local newspapers were much less likely to include a description of Trump voters insulting Hillary Clinton and her supporters, as shy in announcing their support of Trump and espousing conspiracy theories about the election than national news reports were.

Sample Size

The sample size of the local/national comparisons was unexpectedly small. This study started with a strong number of news reports published during the last six weeks of the election in the local Pennsylvania newspapers included in this study: 91 articles were produced by the keyword search. These were coded to determine if they included the voice of the voter and, if so, how were those voters framed. An unexpected result of this study was how few articles *about* the voter also included a description of the voter and/or the voice of the voter. Even though all these stories included the term "voter" or "supporter" and were published in the front section of a newspaper in the last six weeks of the general election of a presidential race, fewer than half the articles included any facts about the voter or an interview with individuals. This was also true of the national news reports. These articles were about the voters but less than half included

interviews with or descriptions of real voters. This fact was a finding in and of itself: the media is writing about the electorate but not interviewing them.

As an operational consideration of this study, though, this finding meant relying on smaller sample sizes. In addition, the coding sheet used in the quantitative design (Appendix A) was designed as a series of cascading questions that produced smaller samples as it moved on. The results allowed this study to fulfill its goal of comparing local and national news to determine whether community news was more nuanced in its coverage of voters. A comparison does not always require large numbers and the qualitative results were rich. However, future research should increase the number of local media included in the study by expanding the number of news outlets included and/or creating a coding sheet that did not eliminate reports as it moved on. For each delegitimizing cue included in the qualitative examination, the number of articles included in the study are included.

Comparison of Delegitimizing Cues

Delegitimizing Cue One: Insults

Results: This study measured how often a Trump voter was quoted as insulting Hillary Clinton or her supporters. This study found that local news reports were less likely than the national news organizations to quote voters as insulting Clinton or her supporters. This category was the area of greatest disparity between national and local coverage: 24.1 percent of local news stories included Trump voters insulting Clinton and her supporters compared to 59.2 of national news reports. (Local news reports: 7 yes/ 22 no. National news reports: 42 yes/ 29 no).

Percentage of News Reports that Described Trump Voters as Insulting Clinton
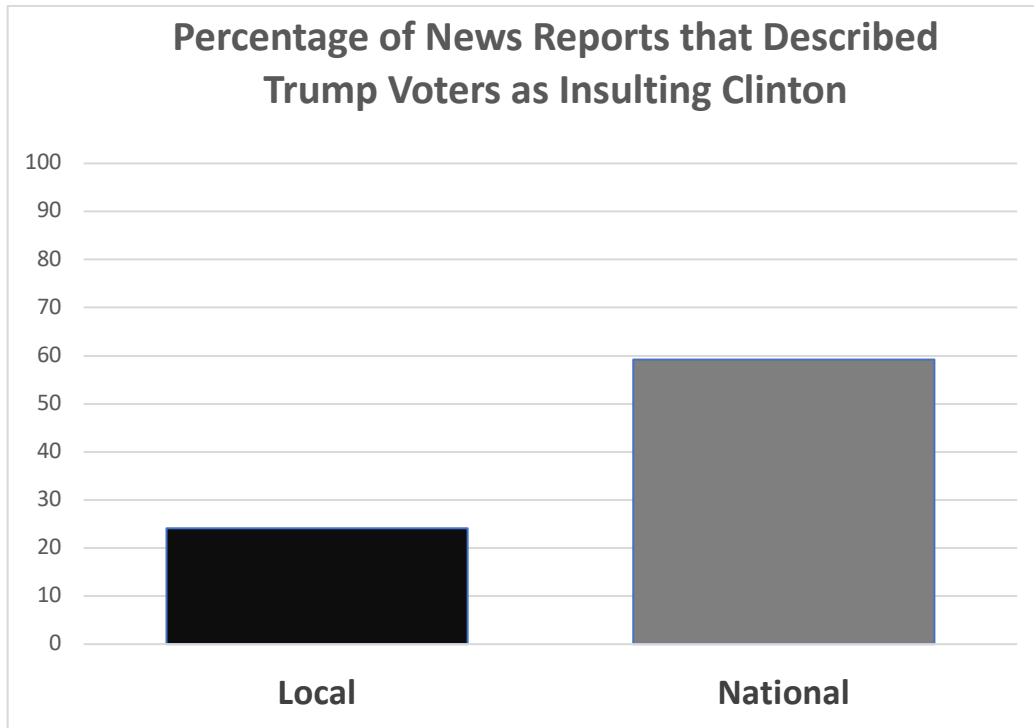
Figure 13

Explanation: Including the voter using an insult is considered a delegitimizing cue because it highlights a negative perspective on the voter. Insults were coded to include strong words such as "liar," "criminal," "rapist" and were not included if the voter was quoted as simply disagreeing or disliked the other candidate. This delegitimizing cue reflects the tendency of the news reports to use the voter as an interesting detail or entertainment within the article rather than as a source of information.

In addition, as found in the combined results reported in Chapter Four, when voters are quoted insulting the candidate or supporters of the other party, it often means that voters are not quoted discussing issues. Consider this coverage of a Trump rally November 7, 2016 that ran in The Philadelphia Inquirer:

"Trump's supporters in attendance were thrilled by the opportunity to see him in person and noticed the local theme in his remarks.

"Based on Trump's speech it was not an accident he chose to come to Gettysburg," John Minton, of Aspers, said.

Betsy Hower, chairwoman of the Adams Republican Committee, wore a white button that read, "I'm a 'deplorable' Trump supporter."

"It blew me out of the water," Hower said of Trump's appearance in Gettysburg. "Never did I think it would happen."

John Lucas, of Perry County, had opportunities to attend larger Trump events closer to where he lives, but wanted to attend the speech in Gettysburg because of its focus on foreign policy.

"I like what I've heard," he said. "Those are the policies I'm looking to see implemented."

The report included the detail of the "deplorable" pin worn by Betsy Hower but did not focus on it. Instead, these three Trump supporters each added a new element to the report -- a response to Trump's localized themes, an enthusiastic response coupled with a sense of excitement about having a national political candidate in town, and the mention of foreign policy as an issue important to the voter. The report was only 693 words but the reporter, Chris Brennan, focused on the response of voters to the content of Trump's speech and gave the article a feel for local voters. (The article actually included one quote from a voter who said he was motivated by Trump's stand on jobs and sanctuary cities.)

Delegitimizing Cue Two: Support for the Candidate of Choice is Socially Unacceptable

Results: Local news media were significantly less likely to use this delegitimizing cue than national media: 13.7 percent of news reports in local media included this cue compared to

24.3 percent of national news reports. (Local news reports: 4 yes/ 25 no. National news reports: 42 yes/ 29 no.)

Explanation: This category measured whether Trump voters were described as reluctant to announce their support for the candidate. The terms "shy" or "squeamish" were sometimes used in the media coverage to describe these types of voters. It is included as a delegitimizing cue because the premise is that supporting Trump was not socially acceptable so voters who did support him hid their support. Including that descriptor in a news report would also serve notice to those unaware of the social implications that supporting Trump was considered deviant in some communities. (For a fuller discussion of this cue, see Chapter 4).

Local reports did not focus on voter's reluctance to announce their support and rarely dedicated much copy to explaining the phenomena. For example, an October 6 report in *The Philadelphia Daily News* focused on how millennials would vote. Using the first person, reporter John Baer interviewed college students at Gettysburg College and Lebanon Valley College. This report included:

"I found many Clinton supporters, some Trump supporters (and assurances that there are many more Trump supporters on both campuses.)"[74]

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[74] Baer, John. (2016, October 6). Meet Some PA Millennial Voters. *The Philadelphia Daily News p.5.*

Percentage of News Reports that Described Trump Voters as Reluctant to Announce their Support
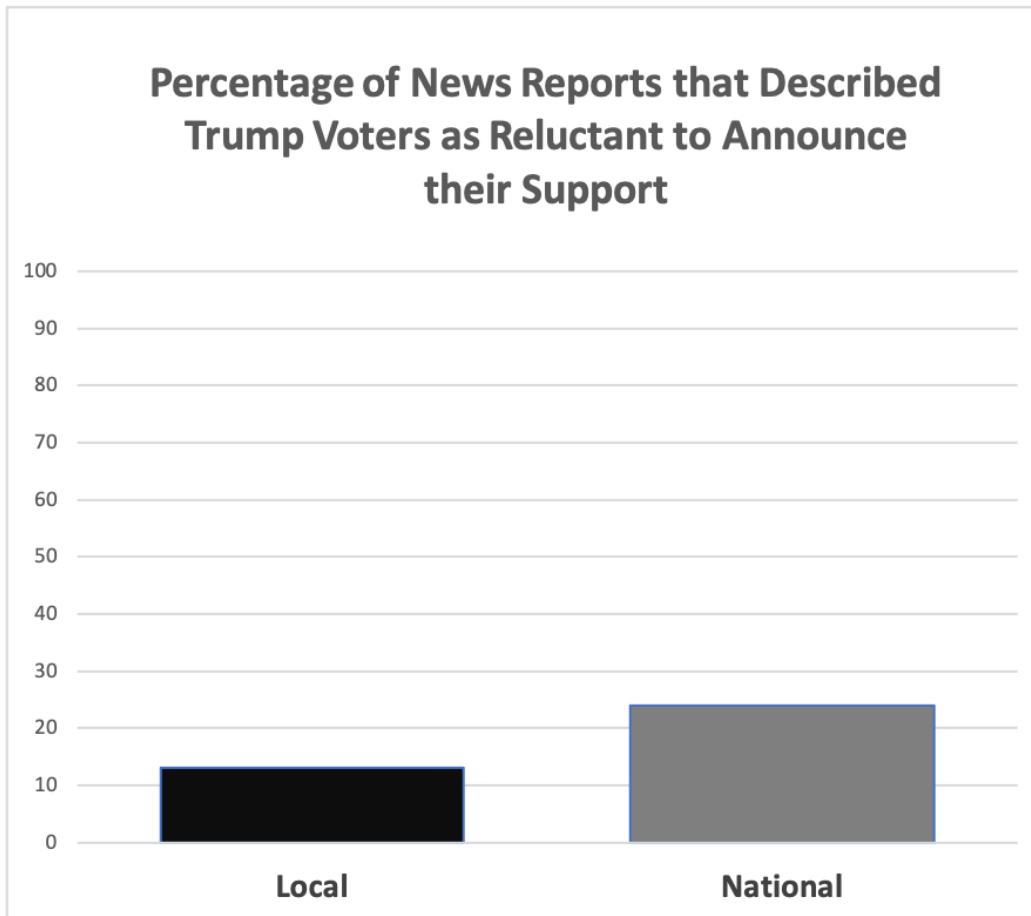
Figure 14

Another report titled "You can split your vote on Nov 8," seemed to be reacting to this phenomenon. While it lacked attribution or even a reason the report was written, the suggestion is that either Republicans did not like Trump, or they should not like him. It read:

"Otherwise loyal Republicans across the nation are expected to opt for someone other than Donald Trump in the Nov. 8 presidential election. Some Democrats, too, may abandon Hillary Clinton." [75]

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[75] Hook, Jim. (2016, October 29) You Can Split Your Vote on Nov. 8. *Public Opinion*. Retrieved from: https://www.publicopiniononline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/10/29/you-can-split-your-vote-nov-8/92887910/

As these reports suggest, local media included the suggestion that Trump supporters were reluctant to announce their support for the candidate. However, local reports did not include this suggestion as often as national reports did, perhaps because it was not as common idea in Pennsylvania. When it was included, it was often a mention or reference rather than the focus of a report.

Delegitimizing Cue Three: Conspiracy Theories

Results: Conspiracy Theories were a part of the 2016 election. Trump regularly threw out ideas and reasons for events that were untrue and not based in fact. Voters often repeated these theories. This study was interested in how often voters were quoted as believing in these theories and whether conspiracy theories were a reason cited by voters for supporting Trump. The implication is that when conspiracy theories are featured regularly in the coverage of voters not only are they more easily dismissed as deviant, but it displaces an examination of issues that voters care about. (Local news reports: 9 yes/ 19 no. National news reports: 28 yes/ 40 no).

Explanation: Some examples of these theories included in the coverage were: Clinton would confiscate guns if elected, the election was rigged to favor Clinton, or Trump supporters would respond violently if their candidate lost. Like the delegitimizing cue of including insults, this cue signaled deviance as well as reflected a choice by the journalist. The combination of highlighting conspiracy theories and ignoring public policy issues important to voters are normative choices that make a strong formula for deviant framing. Local news reports likely than national media to include the delegitimizing cue of conspiracy theories in their coverage of the Trump voter of local media stories included the conspiracy theory cue as opposed to 41.2 percent of national media stories.

Percentage of News Reports that Describe Trump Voters Believing in Conspiracy Theories
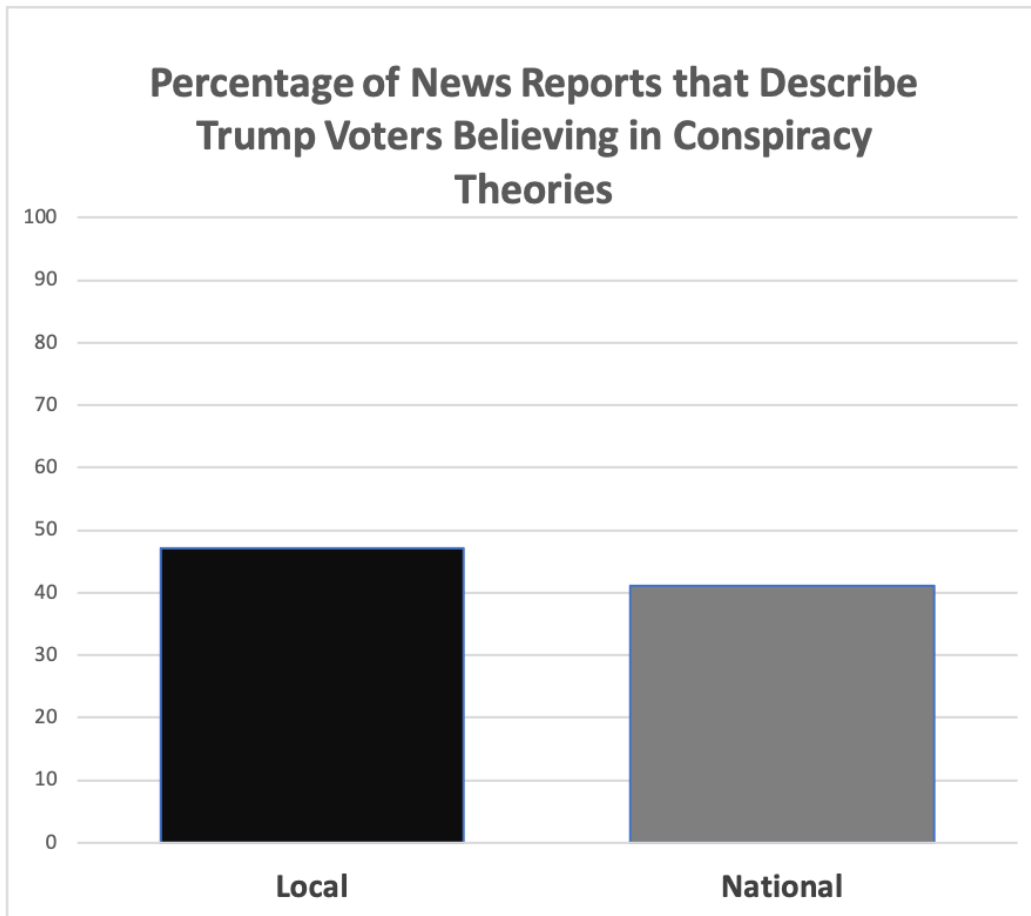
Figure 15

The most repeated conspiracy theory in the local coverage was that the election was rigged. Trump talked about this possibility when visiting Pennsylvania, a great deal and it was echoed in the local coverage. Local coverage often took pains to describe history of voter fraud and how it was remedied, such as this report in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that ran October 21:

"The most notorious voting fraud in recent Philadelphia history involved a different approach, bogus absentee ballots in a 1993 state Senate race. A federal judge threw out all the absentee ballots in that race, ruling that election officials had illegally given them to campaign and party workers to fill out for voters. The Democratic candidate who won that race with 79 percent of the absentee vote was later removed from office."

The report then continued with descriptions by Trump supporters of the potential for fraud:

"Porto won't be watching the polls in Philadelphia during the Nov. 8 general election. She recently moved to Bensalem and so is ineligible to be a poll watcher in the city. But she thinks Trump supporters should show up.

"They could stand outside and just watch who is coming in," Porto said. "They could be looking for those vans who are busing people in. I've been told that happens."[76]

And this report in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*:

"Tom Large, a 71-year-old Vietnam veteran - he was a member of the Air Force's elite Pararescue special-operations unit - expects more twists and turns in the few days left in the campaign.

He's convinced that billionaire liberal donor George Soros owns a company that makes voting machines in 16 states. This alleged conspiracy, spread on several right-wing websites, has been debunked.

"I fear for my country if Hillary wins," Large said. "I truly fear. It's not going to be pretty. You talk to people, and they're scared."[77]

National coverage that included descriptions of conspiracy theories held by voters were more likely to focus on violent reactions to the election if Trump lost. For example, a report in *The New York Times* that ran October 28 titled "Trump Backers See Revolution if Clinton Wins," focused on the belief by some supporters that an armed uprising would follow if Trump lost.[78] While the idea that the election might be "rigged" was a common theme, it was highlighted more often in the local Pennsylvania media than in the national media.

Delegitimizing Cue Four: Unusual Details

Results: Local media were nearly the same in their use of the delegitimizing cues of using odd details to describe voters. 'Unusual details' was coded to include descriptions of odd

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[76] Brennan, Chris (2016, October 21). Trump's 'rigged election' claim resonates with some GOP poll workers in Philly. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Retrieved from: https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/politics/20161022_Trump_s__quot_rigged_election_quot__claim_resonates_with_some_GOP_poll_workers_in_Philly.html.

[77] Fitzgerald, Thomas. (2016, October 22). In Ohio, Trump faithful believe new Clinton emails will lift their man. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Retrieved from: https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/politics/presidential

[78] Parker, Ashley and Nick Corasaniti. (2016, October 28). Trump Backers See Revolution if Clinton Wins. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/us/politics/donald-trump-voters.html.

clothing, behavior or speech by Trump supporters. (Local reports: 6 yes/ 23 no. National news reports: 13 yes/ 53 no).
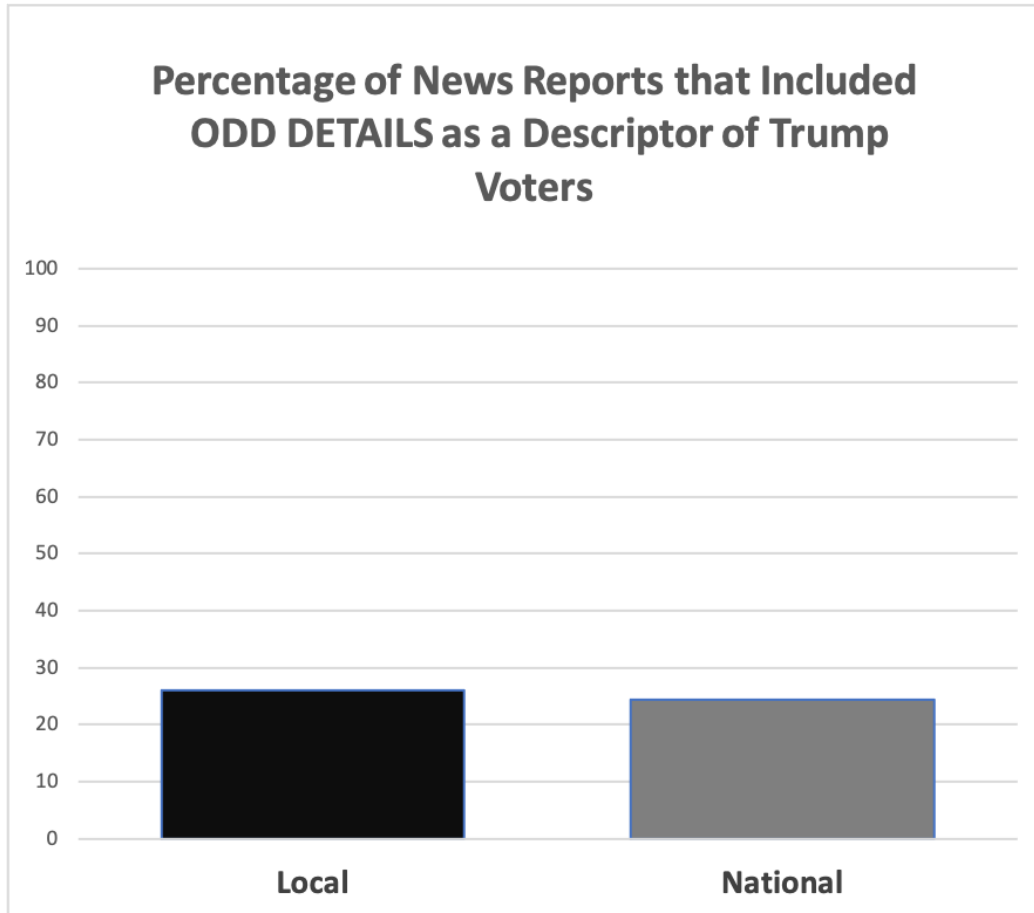
Figure 16

Explanation: Like the delegitimizing cues of insults and conspiracy theories, the inclusion of odd details to describe Trump voters was sometimes balanced out in local reporting by biographical information that served to mitigate the deviant nature of the coverage. Details such as descriptions of costumes or odd clothing was still there but also included was information about the voter that offered balance to the odd details such as a job description or issues that motivated them.

As an example, consider this from an October 7 report in *The Evening Sun*:

"The supporters in attendance were not shy about their opinions and let it show, particularly in their wardrobe. T-shirts with lines like "I am a deplorable" and "Liar, liar, pantsuit on fire," as well as a camouflage hat reading, "Hillary for prison," were among the bold garb."[79]

This passage reads similarly to reports of Trump supporters in national media. The old-fashioned term "garb" was a polite, neutral description of clothing that was most likely worn to gain attention and local reports tended not to focus on this regular feature of the crowds at Trump rallies. The biggest difference with national reports is that *The Evening Sun* article report also included interviews with four Trump supporters, some of whom discussed their reasons for attending including this:

"Those in attendance gave the town hall high marks, and Pence appeared to win over those who supported the ticket for the Trump name.

"I think he is a strong, solid leader," said Rebecca Makdad, of Gettysburg.

A retired member of the Navy, Makdad explained she believed the Trump ticket would "have the backs of the military." [80]

Delegitimizing Cue Five: Lack of Education

Results: This is the one delegitimizing cue that local media was more likely to employ than the national media. When covering Trump voters, local media included a negative descriptor of their education level in nearly 6 percent more of the news reports than national media reports did. (Local news reports: 7 yes/ 22 no. National news reports: 11 yes/ 8 no).

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[79] Levy, Dustin. (2016, October 7). Gov. Mike Pence stumps in Gettysburg following debate. *The Evening Sun.* Retrieved from: https://www.eveningsun.com/story/news/2016/10/06/gov-mike-pence-stumps-gettysburg-after-debate/91616808/.
[80] Ibid.

Percentage of News Reports that Included EDUCATION as a Descriptor of Trump Voters
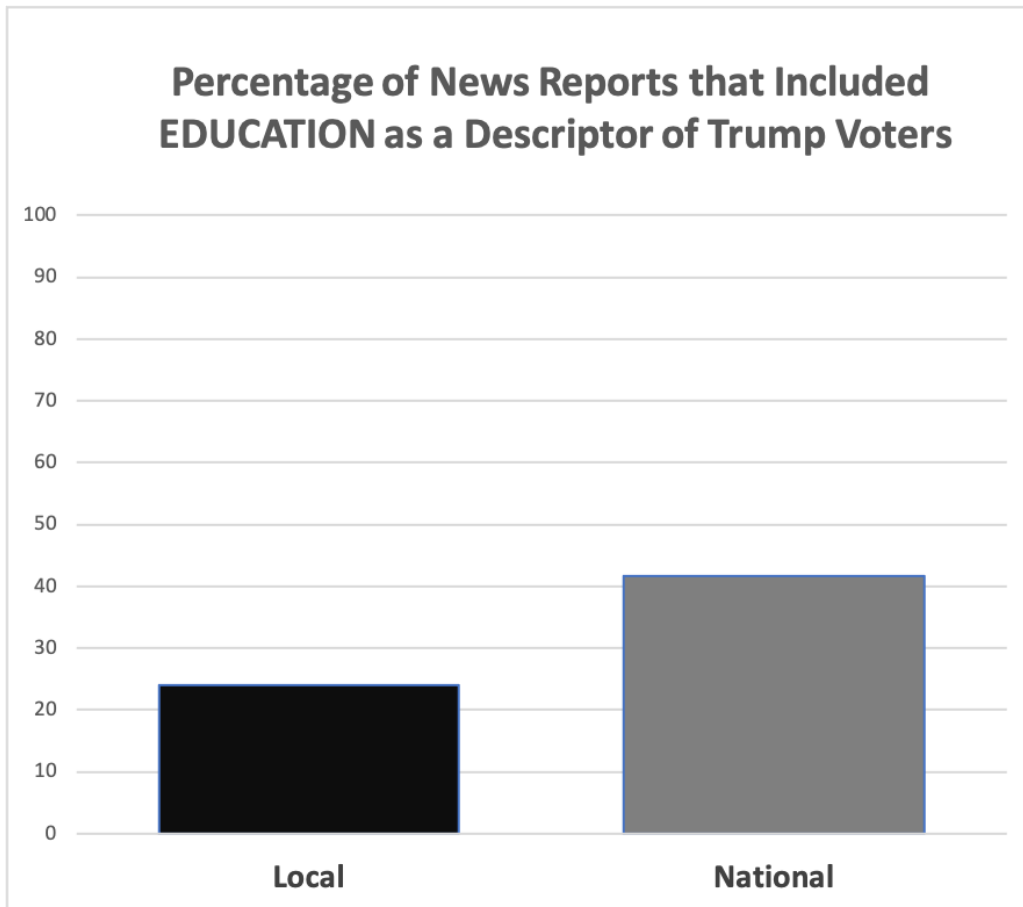
Figure 17

Explanation: Local reports included descriptors such as this in *The Philadelphia*

Inquirer:

"Trump leads among whites with no college degree, 46 percent to 39 percent, as he has throughout the race, but Clinton has the advantage among college-educated white voters, 54 percent to 32 percent."[81]

Or this, from *The Pittsburg Post-Gazette*:

"Ohio, which has picked the national winner in 17 of the past 18 presidential contests, is less of a bellwether than it has been in the past. That's because it has a greater percentage of non-

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[81] Fitzgerald, Thomas. (2016, October 4). After debate, Clinton widens lead over Trump in Pa. *The Philadelphia Inquirer.* Retrieved from:

149

college-educated whites (41 percent) than the country as a whole (33 percent), and that demographic tends to favor Mr. Trump."[82]

Both reports included a negative description of the education of local Trump supporters. The language was similar to the type of framing this delegitimizing cue would receive in national reports and may have been influenced by those reports. It is unclear in this study why this type of delegitimizing cue was more common in local reports than national reports. This is a question for further study. For example, do local papers more generally discuss education levels? Is the education level of residents an area of public concern? This might suggest reasons that local media included this detail more often. A larger sample might disprove this finding. Or perhaps national organizations have impacted the style of coverage at the local newspapers and it has become more recognizable. Many scholars have established that larger, prominent news organizations affect the agenda of smaller news organizations. Harder (2017) found that organizations like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were "highly regarded" and impacted the choices made at other news media. This study did not examine the impact of larger news organization on the smaller, local medium but it suggests an area for future research. (For more on intermedia agenda studies, please see Chapter Two: Literary Review.)

Delegitimizing Cue Six: Race

Results: Local and national news organizations included race as a descriptor of Trump voters in nearly equal percentages. More than 51 percent of national reports and 34 percent of

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[82] Mauriello, Tracie. (2016, October 11). Polls: Swing States Toward Clinton: Democrats Solidifies Prominence in Pa.; Opens Lead in Ohio. *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*. This report was retrieved from a Nexis Uni search, For a similar report see: https://www.post-gazette.com/early-returns/ernational/2016/10/18/Quinnipiac-poll-Clinton-extends-lead-in-Pennsylvania/stories/201610180147

local reports included race as a descriptor of Trump voters.   (Local news reports: 10 yes/ 19 no.

National news reports: 24 yes/ 47 no)
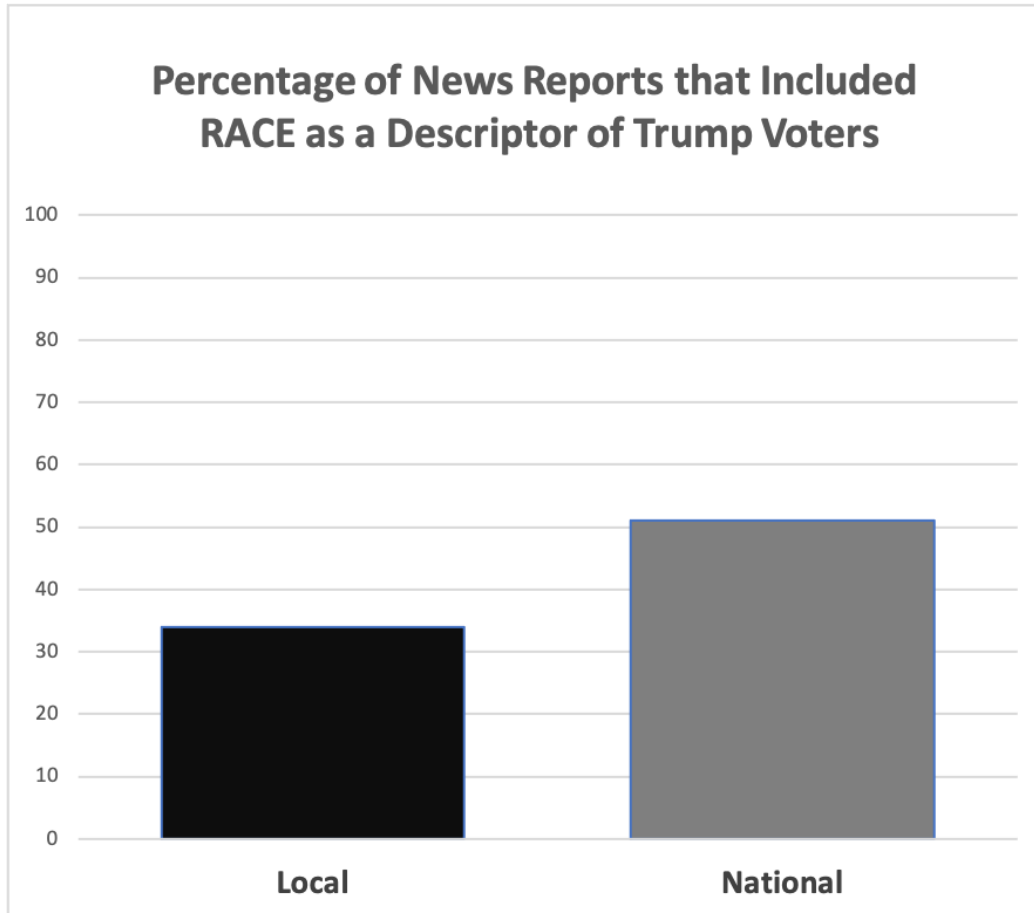
Figure 18

Explanation: As described in Chapter Four, race was a delegitimizing cue in both the

national and local media reports in the description of Trump supporters. Race was coded as a

delegitimizing cue for several reasons. First, the race of Trump voters did not vary much (if at

all) from the race of Republican presidential candidates in the past three elections. The regular

use of this descriptor, however, suggested that the make-up of Trump supporters include more

White voters than in other races. It also ignored the fact that most of Clinton's support came

from White voters, although this is possibly because Clinton also attracted widespread support

from minority voters. Secondly, the race descriptor was often paired with terms such as "angry" or "resentment" to suggest that the Trump voter was motivated by anger about racial divisions. However, little coverage explored this motivation or possible motivation.

Finally, race was considered a delegitimizing cue because several reports – all in national organizations – suggested that Trump supporters accepted the views of racial hate groups. Several news reports focused on members of White supremist organizations or quoted Trump supporters as using racist language without exploring how many Trump supporters shared these views and whether this was a fringe element of the movement or an accepted belief. For these reasons, this study found the descriptor of race to be one of the most powerful delegitimizing cues in the election coverage. (For a deeper discussion of race as a delegitimizing cue, see Chapter Four: Results).

The framing of race in local media was like the framing in national outlets. Consider this language included in a November report int *The Philadelphia Inquirer:*

*"*Polls show white college-educated women backing Clinton by double-digit margins, a voting bloc that could offset turnout by white non-college-educated men for Trump, said William Frey, a demographer and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

An ABC News/Washington Post poll released last week found white college-educated women favored Clinton over Trump 59 percent to 32 percent. In contrast, white college-educated women voted in 2012 for Republican Mitt Romney by a six-point margin, although they have voted Democratic by modest margins in previous elections, Frey said.

"We don't really know yet whether this is just a Trump effect, because of the kinds of signals he's given to women," or whether the white college-educated female vote will become a reliable Democratic voting bloc in the future, along with racial minorities, Frey said."[83]

Compare it to this November report from *The New York Times*:

"There is also a wide class divide: Mrs. Clinton has the support of 48 percent of whites with college degrees -- a constituency that historically votes for a Republican presidential nominee -- while Mr. Trump is backed by 41 percent from the same voters. But Mr. Trump receives 55 percent from whites without college degrees, while Mrs. Clinton captures just 30 percent from that group."[84]

As with the education cue, local and news reports used the race descriptor in similar numbers, with a slightly larger percent in local news reports. It is possible that the inclusion of this cue reflects racial discord in Pennsylvania. Many residents were quoted discussing national issues such as immigration, trade, and the economy from the perspective of race. Trump raised these issues at each of his Pennsylvania rallies. It is also possible that local outlets were simply mirroring practices in national organizations and poll measurements, an indicator of intermedia agenda setting (as discussed above.)

[83] Hanna, Maddie. (2016, November 7). Trump's 'Locker Room' Talk Eclipses Clinton's Historic Moment. *The Philadelphia Inquirer.* Retrieved from https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/polics/20161106_Trump_s__locker_room__talk_eclipses_Clinton_s_historic_moment.html.

[84] Martin, Jonathan, Dalia Sussman and Megan Thee-Brenan. (2016, November 4). In Poll, Voters Express Disgust in U.S. Politics. *The New York Times.* This article was retrieved through a Nexis Uni search. For a similar report, see: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/04/us/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-poll.html.

Politicians as sources

Results: A significant percentage of news reports included professional political analysts as a source in election coverage about voters. National outlets were more likely to include this type of source than local outlets. This study found that nearly 70 percent of the national news reports included in this study used at least one professional political analyst as a source. That compares to 59 percent of local news reports that included professional analysts as sources. (Local news reports: 27 yes/ 19 no. National news reports: 99 yes/ 46 no).
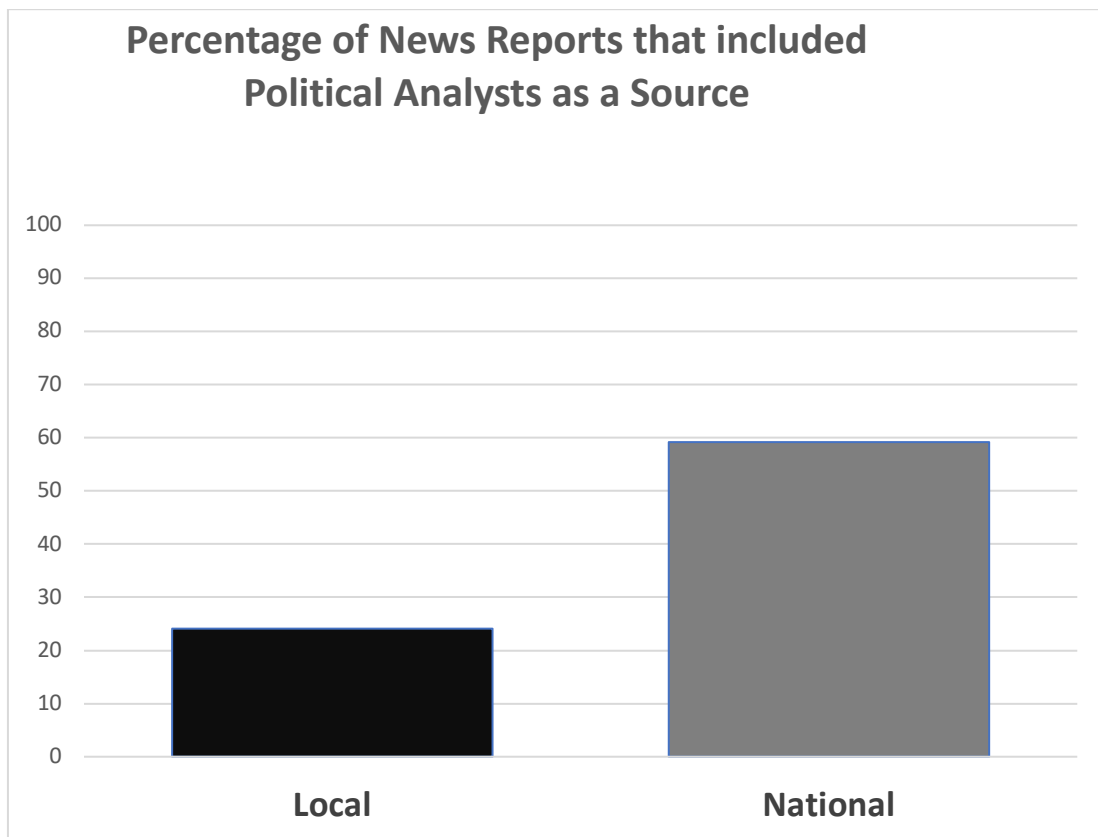
Figure 19

When both professional political observers and voters were included as sources in news reports, national organizations were more likely than local media to include more professional analysts than voters. (Local news reports: yes 16/ no 11. National news reports: 88 yes/ 12 no).
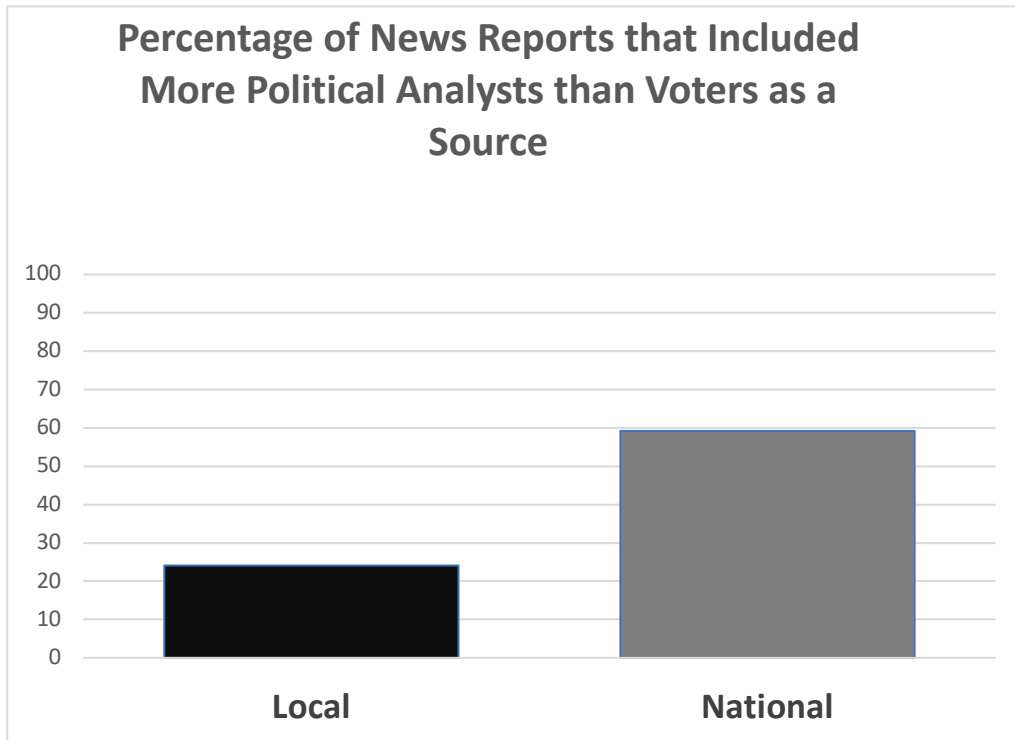
Figure 20

If both types of sources were included in a news article, national news organization were more likely to introduce the professional political observer sooner in the news report than voters. National news organizations placed voters after professional political analysts in 68 percent of the news reports as compared to 58 percent of local news reports. Did voters come after professional news sources: Local news reports-14 yes/10 no. National reports: 48 yes/ 25 no).

Percentage of News Reports that included Voters as a Source AFTER Political Analysts
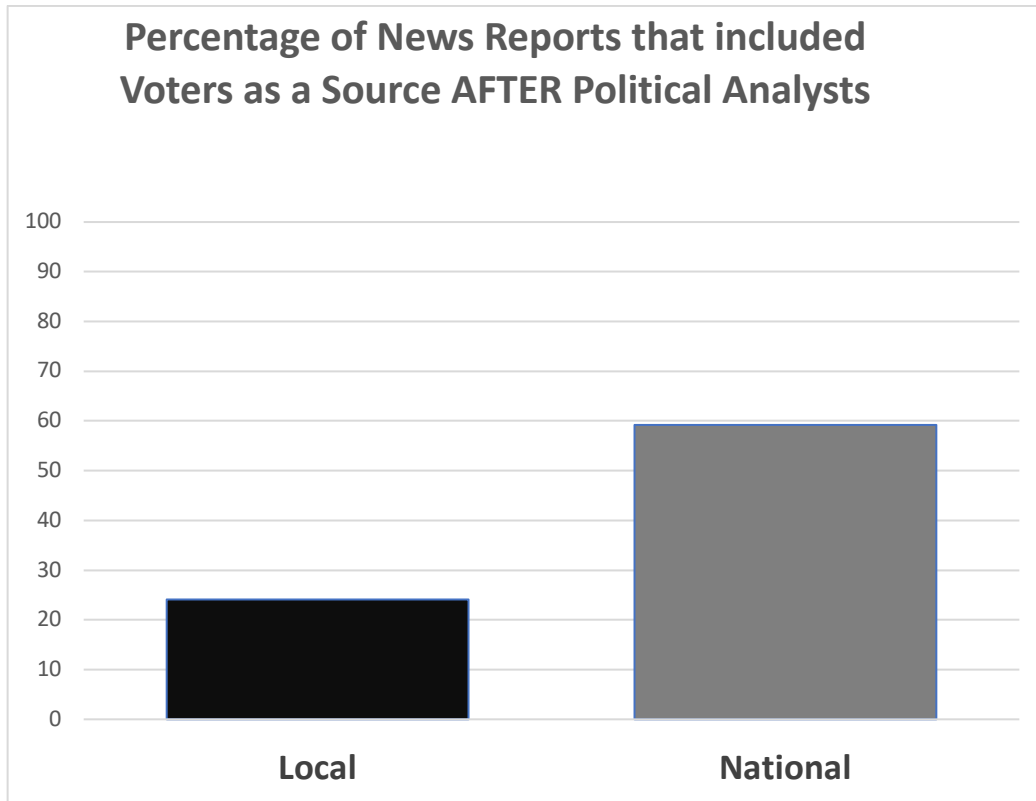
Figure 21

Explanation: Professional political analysts were coded to include pollsters, political scientists, party officials or other professional political observers. In news reports about voters, journalists relied on professional observers more often than voters to explain how the electorate would respond to the candidates. As explained in Chapter Four, the placement of sources in a news reports reflects professional practice that ranks facts and sources according to their importance to the report (Mindich 1998). The lower the fact or source is in an article can mean that it is less important. Comparing national and local practices, national organizations relied on professional analysts in news reports about the voter, included them in numbers greater than voters were used as a source and placed them higher than voters as a source more than local media did. However, both types of media relied on professional political analysts over the voter

as a source. This suggests that the voice of the voter was present more often in local news reports than in national news reports.

Result: National media reports included the suggestion that there was "no good choice" among the two political candidates in the 2016 presidential race at a higher percentage than local media reports did. Nearly 30 percent of the national news reports that described voters also included the suggestion that voters had no good choice in the election, compared to 15 percent of local reports. (Did news reports include the suggestion that the election offered voters no good choice? Local reports: yes 7/ 39 no. National reports: 42 yes/102 no.)

Explanation: The final area of comparison between local and national news reports was the measure of whether the report suggested that neither candidate was a desirable choice in the election. This was measured using language in the report that suggested neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump were strong candidates. This measure was coded to include quotes from voters that suggested that the presidential race offered no good choice or language used by the journalists and unattributed to a source that suggested this.

Examples of this type of language included phrases such as "the election was seen as a 'joke' on campus,"[85] or "In a race between two deeply polarizing candidates,"[86] or "In interviews across the country, whether they're voting for Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, anyone but them or no one at all, Americans almost uniformly say that the politicians are clueless but that the people will eventually do what needs getting done."[87] This type of language was found in both

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[85] Martin, Jonathan. September 30, 2016. Ohio, Long a Bell weather, Is Fading on the Electoral Map. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/30/us/politics/ohio-campaign-trump-clinton.html.
[86] Peters, Jeremy. And Matt Flegenheimer. October 31, 2016. Democrats See a Turnout Edge in Swing States. *The New York Times.*
[87] Hernandez, Arelis R., Michelle Ye Hee Lee, Marc Fisher. November 6, 2016. Standing Divided Today but Bullish on America's Promise for Tomorrow. *The Washington Post*. This article was retrieved through a Nexis Uni search. For a slightly different version, see: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/taking-americas-political-pulse-a-deep-anxiety-sets-in-but-some-optimism-lingers/2016/11/05/a98566d8-a07c-11e6-a44d-cc2898cfab06_story.html.

national and local media reports. However, local media were significantly more likely to use language or quote sources that suggested that the 2016 presidential election offered voters no good choice.

Percentage of News Reports that Suggested the Election Offered No Good Choice
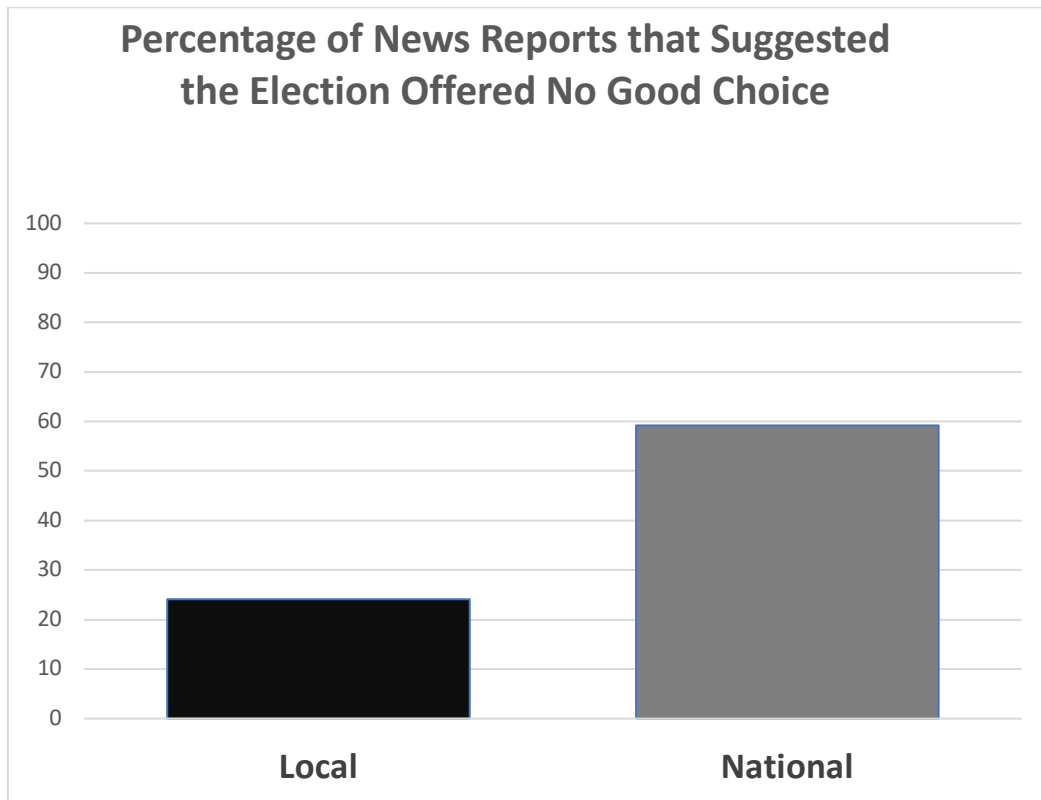
Figure 22

Based on the premise that local media were more in touch with the communities they were covering than national reporters may have been, it is possible that local media were reflecting a disappointment with Clinton as a candidate among voters. Trump was an unusual candidate, plagued by scandal, unafraid to insult his opponents, and suggesting policies outside the mainstream. It is therefore not as surprising that his candidacy was framed in negative terms by the media. Clinton, on the other hand, campaigned in a traditional manner, was a member of the political elite and ran a very traditional-style campaign. If the media coverage was reflecting

public sentiment in framing Clinton's candidacy as "no good choice," this was potentially an important harbinger that she would not perform as well as expected in Pennsylvania during the 2016 election.

Qualitative Results

A qualitative examination of the local reports as compared to national reports yielded greater insights into the different framing of both mediums than the quantitative examination did. One finding was that local reports often contained more details about the community, the voter and the mood of the electorate. These details were often not recognized by the quantitative measure but contributed a great deal to the understanding of the source in the news report. Another difference identified by the qualitative study was the style of the writing in local media. It was often less normatively sophisticated: they expressed shared emotions or using antiquated language, employed the use of the first person, mixed strong opinions of the writer with factual reporting, or relied on cliches or goofy images. For example, consider this lead from an October report published in the news section of the Pittsburg Post-Gazette:

"That giant clunking sound you heard during the presidential debate Wednesday night? It may have been the heads of Pennsylvania Republicans striking their desks when Donald Trump said he would 'keep you in suspense' about whether he would accept the outcome of the Nov. 8 election." [88]

Despite these differences in writing style, the local reports were also often full of details and descriptions that offered a fuller picture of the Pennsylvania electorate. Examined as a body, they painted a picture of communities open to the ideas of Trump because of a depressed

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[88] Potter, Chris. (2016, October 21) Trump Election Remark During Debate Surprises Republicans. Retrieved from: The Pittsburg Post-Gazette. https://www.post-gazette.com/news/politics-state/2016/10/21/Pennsylvania-Republicans-react-to-Trump-s-election-outcome-debate-remarks/stories/201610210127.

economy and a feeling of being ignored in previous elections. The coverage showed two major

cities firmly in support of Clinton, while support in the suburbs was more wavering. Across the

state, there were college campuses interested in the election and small towns excited by

politicians coming to town. The following section provides a deeper exploration of the three

major qualitative findings.

More Biographical Details

Qualitatively, the overall tone of the small newspapers was more polite and respectful to

voters and the candidates than the coverage found in national reports. While many local reports

included delegitimizing cues, they also often explored the reasons that voters supported a

candidate. Unlike Billard, this study found that delegitimizing cues can be balanced out with

legitimizing details. For example, similar to national media outlets, local media reported on the

fact that Trump rallies were rowdy, voters were dressed in costumes or clothing with anti-

Clinton messages and the crowds chanted obnoxious slogans. But local media usually also took

the time to ask voters why they were there and included more biographic information about their

sources (as opposed to information that encouraged an understanding that the voter was deviant).

For example, *The Lebanon Daily News* covered a Trump rally in Hershey, PA on November 5,

2016 this way:

"Those in attendance broke into another frenzy chanting something that they were
already chanting prior to Trump taking the stage. "CNN Sucks!" was the chant."

Then, later in the article:

"Steven Wolfe, a Lebanon resident, was in attendance Friday night for his third Trump rally and
he said there's one particular reason he is a supporter of Trump.
'Based on the fact that the Supreme Court is on the line,' Wolfe said. Having spent six years in
the Army National Guard and another in the Army Reserve, Wolfe said that he took an oath to

protect and follow the Constitution, and that's why he said if Clinton wins, the path of the country could take a turn for the worse."[89]

This is a good example of how local outlets included delegitimizing cues – namely that the use of the word "frenzy," and the inclusion of the anti-media chant including the word "sucks" – but added the interview with a Trump supporter where he explained his reason for being there. This creates a more balanced approach. The local newspapers would have been remiss not to cover the fact that the chanting happened. But the reporter also chose to dig further and presented the reader with voter Steven Wolfe, his driving force in supporting Trump and his background. National outlets, by comparison, often included the chanting or delegitimizing cues but left out the short interview with the voters that explored their support.

Another example of this balance between delegitimizing cues and increased biographical detail includes this report from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* coverage of a Trump rally in Scranton the day before the election:

"Rewarding him at times with deafening roars, the crowd was textbook Trump: Men, women and children in hats proclaiming "Make America Great Again," and toting signs that said "Trump Pence" and "Women for Trump." Waiting for their nominee, the crowd erupted into chants of "U-S-A," "Build the wall!" and "Lock her up!"
"He fills up every place he goes to," said Dan Dwyer, 56, who drove from Lehigh County to attend his fourth Trump rally.
Dwyer, who lives in Macungie and owns an air-duct cleaning business, said he is a registered Democrat who voted for President Obama in 2008.
But, "we need a change in our government so desperately," Dwyer said. "When I saw Donald Trump, I said 'He's it. That's the man right there.'"[90]

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[89] *USA TODAY* and *The New York Times* did not publish coverage of this rally. *The Washington Post* included the fact that Trump would end his day at the Hershey rally but did not quote any voters in the report. See:
Wagner, John, Sean Sullivan and Abby Phillips. (November 5, 2016). In Final Appeals, Focus on Turnout. *The Washington Post.*
[90] Bond, Michaelle. (2016, November 8). In Scranton, Trump predicts 'a great victory.' *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Retrieved from:
https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/politics/presidential/20161108_In_Scranton__Trump_predicts__a_great_vict ory_.

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What made this description of a Trump rally different from many national reports were the mix of delegitimizing and legitimizing details. Describing the rally, reporter Michealle Bond featured chants that included "Lock her up!" which was insulting to Clinton and featured at most rallies, "Build the Wall," which reflected anger at U.S. immigration and support for Trump's policy but also "U-S-A." She highlighted signs that did not include insults or sensationalized language but simply the candidates' names and "Women for Trump." Speaking to a supporter, the report included the unusual fact that voter Dan Dwyer had attended four Trump rallies but also his age, job, hometown, and the fact that he was a registered Democrat who voted for Obama in the previous election. Dwyer's quote does not explain the issues motivating him, but it does offer some explanation for why he was switching parties to vote for Trump. Taken together, the article reads as a neutral, fact-based report that informs the reader of who was at the rally, why they attended and what happened. It also pointed to an unusual, but potentially important, element of the 2016 election in Pennsylvania – the Obama voter turned Trump supporter.

Evidence of widespread Trump support

Another qualitative difference between local and national reports was that local newspapers often included details that suggested Trump's support was locally stronger than the polls were reflecting. This is not to say that local media wrote about this disparity or accurately predicted Trump would carry Pennsylvania in the election results. They did not. It would have taken a sophisticated political analyst to ignore national polls that consistently suggested Clinton would win Pennsylvania. No major news organization suggested Trump would carry Pennsylvania. However, there were often clues in the local reporting that the full range of Trump's support was not reflected in the polls.

An example included a September report in *The Evening Sun* with the headline: "GOP

gains in York, but will it matter?"

> "If recent history holds true, York County will vote for Donald Trump in November and
> Hillary Clinton will enter the White House in January.
> The Republican Party has made steep gains here since the April primary, signing up more
> than four times as many voters as the Democrats."[91]

As scholar Abernathy suggested, this type of reporting could have fed the "news eco-

system" and offered information that paired with other local media reports could have suggested

that Pennsylvania might swing away from Clinton.

Another example is this report in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on Vice President Joe

Biden's visit to a steel mill to support Clinton also suggested Trump support was stronger than

polls suggested:

> "But while the crowd waited for Mr. Biden to get to the union hall, Brandon Urban, 29, a
> grievance manager in the maintenance and machine shop at the U.S. Steel Irvin plant, said in an
> interview that part of his get-out-the-vote effort has been trying to counter some of his own
> fellow steelworkers who say they see Mr. Trump as their candidate, not Ms. Clinton.
> "I've been telling them don't believe the lies he's been putting out. He doesn't support
> union workers," he said. But some steelworkers can't be swayed, he said, and "they tend to think
> Trump is the answer."[92]

Or this interview with the local Republican Party chair in the *Lebanon Daily News:*

> *"*Hillary Clinton's campaign is spending a lot more money than the Donald Trump
> campaign. But if you look at the local effort and the enthusiasm, we given away 3,000 Trump-
> Pence signs. It something no one involved in the party has ever seen. Anyone driving through
> Lebanon County can see the Trump signs out-number the Hillary signs by at least 25-to-1."[93]

And finally, this in *The Pittsburg Post-Gazette*:

> "Mr. Barley, 67, and his wife Joanne, said they were loyal Democrats and union members
> until this year, when they changed their voter registration to Republican to support Mr. Trump.

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[91] Lee, Rick., (2016, September 27). GOP Gains in York, but will it matter? *The Evening Sun*. p.A5.
[92] Hamill, Sean. (November 6, 2016). VP Biden Tries to Counter Trump's Appeal to Working Class Voters.
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Retrieved from: https://www.post-gazette.com/news/politics-nation/2016/11/05/Biden-praises-union-support-of-Clinton-McGinty/stories/201611050166.
[93] Lattimer, John. (November 7, 2016). Lebanon County Election Officials Prepared for Large Turnout. *Lebanon Daily News.* Retrieved from: https://www.ldnews.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/11/06/lebanon-county-election-official-prepared-large-turnout/93159954/.

"I just think the country is headed in the wrong direction, and neither the Democrats or the Republicans are going to fix it," Mr. Barley said. "It's going to take an outsider, like Trump."[94]

These local reports and others suggested that Trump's support in Pennsylvania was much more widespread than the polls and national media were reporting. Hindsight suggests that reading these reports, national outlets could have seen that more on-the-ground reporting might have offered a more complex framing of Pennsylvania voters and even the suggestion that Trump might have carried the state. It might have encouraged the media to question polls such as an October 27 poll by *The New York Times* that had Clinton leading Trump by 7 percentage points in Pennsylvania.[95]

Sense of community

Local newspaper reports also included very community-based features. For example, some news reports included tips on how voters could find transportation to the polls on election day, while many others included the reporters' cell phone numbers at the end of the report. When candidates came to town, the report often included a "star-struck" quality to the coverage that members of the community felt interacting with famous politicians. For example, *Public Opinion* covered Mike Pence's campaign stop on October 6, 2016 in this way:

"Pence autographed a campaign sign for Rita Kline on her birthday. She and her husband, Robert, said they were proud that Pennsylvania was going to play an important role in the 2016 election."

Later in the report:

"Linda Shatzer dropped her scissors and comb and walked outside her hair salon. Some customers followed her.

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[94] Majors, Dan. (2016, October 7). Democrats Engage in 'Happy Talk,' Pence says in Johnstown. *Pittsburg Post-Gazette.* Retrieved from: https://www.post-gazette.com/news/politics-state/2016/10/21/Pennsylvania-Republicans-react-to-Trump-s-election-outcome-debate-remarks/stories/201610210127.

[95] Cohn, Nate, (2016, October 27). Hillary Clinton Leads by 7 Points in Pennsylvania Poll. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/10/27/upshot/pennsylvania-poll.html.

"I want to get a hug, or at least shake his hand," said Betty Bowman, who was getting her hair done. "I wish him luck."

"It's so exciting to have something like this happen in a little town," Shatzer said. [96]

The story concluded with reporter Jim Hook's phone number.

Another report in The Philadelphia Inquirer was headlined, "Trump Wows the Crowd in Bucks County" and included:

"On Monday, a Quinnipiac University poll had Clinton with a 6-point lead- 47 to 41 percent.
But the thousands who turned out Friday seemed unfazed by reports of Trump's grasp on the region slipping.
Hundreds hoisted signs in the air, and Hunter Tirpak, the 2-year-old "Baby Trump" who stole the show at the rally in Wilkes-Barre last week, scurried around on the floor of the club for his third rally for the candidate." [97]

These details are community-building – a shared sense of excitement at the candidate's appearance and details that residents could picture. It offers an example of a newspaper participating in community life that is lost when local newspapers close.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the results of a quantitative and qualitative study of local Pennsylvania media outlets and national outlets to compare coverage of the voter during the 2016 election. Based on the hypothesis that local media might cover voters in a more nuanced manner and less likely to frame the voters as deviant, the study explored whether local and national outlets did frame voters differently. It found that local media did cover voters differently than national outlets did. The evidence is mixed -- not all delegitimizing cues pointed to this

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[96] Hook, Jim. (October 6, 2016) Mike Pence Drops By Local GOP HQ. *Public Opinion*. Retrieved from: https://www.publicopiniononline.com/story/news/local/2016/10/06/mike-pence-drops-local-gop-hq/91683022/.
[97] McCabe, Caitlin. (2016, October 22). Trump Wows the Crowd in Bucks County. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. This article was found through a Nexis Uni search. For a similar version see: https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/politics/presidential/20161022_Trump_wows_the_crowd_in_Newtown__Bucks_County.html.

conclusion -- but weighing the results of the quantitative and qualitative study it is fair to point to the local media as more objective in their coverage of the voter.

What made local reports more objective than national reports was the additional information included about voters that local media often included and national media often left out. Voters were often allowed to explain their support for a candidate and express opinions about issues in local media, described their backgrounds. Delegitimizing cues were present but were balanced by these additional details.

There were some findings that are difficult to explain and it is fair to point out that the sample size was much smaller (particularly outside of content in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, which covers a large city). It is unclear why the local media were more likely to highlight the lack of education of Trump voters, for example. However, most of the quantitative and qualitative evidence points to a local media that offered voters the opportunity to express their opinions and be presented in a more holistic manner than the framing of national reports did. Reading these reports closely, a news consumer could pick up clues that Trump's support was widespread in Pennsylvania, even in traditionally Democratic strongholds.

As local news organizations fold and bureaus of national organizations are consolidated or closed, it is insightful to recognize the contribution of local media to the election process. As Abernathy suggests, local media could and should be a part of the news eco-system. Covering a community, local media often can offer larger organizations an understanding and nuance that can be lacking when outside reporters parachute in. Reading the Pennsylvania media reports from the 2016 election, there are important clues that Trump's support was deeper than polls reflected. Many reports suggested that voters were looking for a candidate from outside the

traditional political offerings and the energy that Trump brought to these communities was exciting to voters.

Future research could expand the number of local media or combine reports produced in several swing states to gather a larger sample. However, the stories analyzed for this project did offer a rich sample of differences between local and national coverage and suggests areas in which larger outlets not linked to local communities could improve election coverage. In addition, this research suggests that the U.S. democratic system is losing a significant resource when smaller outlets close, reduce publication or eliminate a newsroom. This study highlights the key role local media play in the news eco-system and the need to research their value before, as Abernathy puts it, local newspapers are no longer a resource for the voting public.

Chapter Six: Mea Culpa

In the weeks following the 2016 election, the media engaged in a public debate to determine what was wrong with their coverage of the election. Dozens of journalists participated in a spontaneous discussion that began Election Day, during the television coverage of election results, and continued until Inauguration Day. Hundreds of articles and broadcasts were produced in this time period,[98] creating a self-reflective body of content that includes the immediate response of journalists to the question of what was wrong with the media coverage of the election. Most journalists recognized the public debate that followed the election as an important moment of self-reflection about their profession. Dean Baquet, executive editor of *The New York Times*, called the discussion in the weeks following the election a 'mea culpa,' John Cassidy, staff writer at *The New Yorker*, changed it to a 'Media Culpa," Liz Spayd, public editor of *The New York Times* at the time, simply called it a "period of self-reflection." Brian Stelter, anchor of CNN's Reliable Sources, summed up the mood of the media this way: "This was a collective failure – a failure of imagination. In some ways, a mass delusion. And the media contributed to it. So now, it's time for some serious soul searching."[99]

This chapter aims to do several things. It outlines the content of the self-analysis, categorizes the problems and solutions identified by members of the media, and it explains how the media understanding of the events can be understood through the lens of Hallin's Sphere Theory. The media recognized that the coverage of the election did not yield the results they

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[98] As an example of how many media reports were produced focusing on this topic, a Nexis Uni search of news sources using the keywords "media or journalist w/10 fail or miss and election" limited to Election Day 2016-Inaugural Day 2017 resulted in 1,958 results. And the Nexis Uni database is limited in the sources it includes. For example, the Wall Street Journal is not in this database.

[99] Stelter, Brian. (Host). (2016, November 13). CNN Reliable Sources. [Television Program]. New York: CNN. Retrieved from http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1611/13/rs.01.html.

hoped for but there was no clear-cut consensus on why. Sphere theory offers a solution that fits with most of the problems identified during the self-analysis.

This chapter is included in this study because it supports the idea that the media followed normative practices and traditions when confronted with the Trump voter and that was to cover those voters as deviants, a threat to democracy. That type of coverage, however, does not encourage an investigation of those voters to determine what their motivations are, how widespread their beliefs are, and what issues are important to them. This study suggests that many of the points raised in the media reflection support the idea that journalists shifted into the sphere of deviance during the election, away from an examination of voters and the issues they support. Awareness of this practice might lead journalists to include a wider range of voters within the sphere of legitimate controversy, where normative practices encourage a nuanced coverage of voters. It is therefore appropriate for this study to include a summary and analysis of the professional debate that followed the election.

Description of the Post-Election Discussion

This study examines the media discussion that followed the 2016 presidential election and focused on mistakes in the coverage of the electorate. The analysis appeared in a wide variety of mediums: opinion essays, news articles, broadcast discussions, published surveys of journalists, radio call-in shows, and roundtable political discussions on television. It was produced online, in print and on air, as well as in local and national forums. The media debate lasted approximately 73 days. For this study, the debate is defined as starting November 8, 2016, and ending January 20, 2017. These dates were chosen because they reflect the rise and fall of

the spontaneous discussion that started as the results were reported on Election Day 2016.[100] The

discussion naturally fell off once Donald Trump took office and began his first 100 days with a

push for new policy initiatives. Journalists were forced to start covering the fast-paced flow of

news and the professional debate was shut off. The majority of the discussion occurred in the

first week following the election, in fact much of it was produced as election results were rolling

in and the media realized that the prediction that Hillary Clinton would win the presidency was

wrong. However, some of the studies that included the voices of many members of the media

were produced closer to the Inauguration. (For example, Melody Kramer's report published in

December 2016 for Poynter.Org included interviews with 86 different sources asking them what

lessons journalists should take from the election.) So the time period was adjusted to include the

early rush of reports produced after the election and the longer surveys produced weeks after.

It is painful for any profession to publicly debate reasons for failing to meet expectations.

Myers and Russell (2019) identified the only comparable moment as the aftermath of the 1948

presidential election when Truman defeated Dewey. Yet as the debate occurred so spontaneously

and was often framed in emotional language, it is reasonable to suggest that it felt necessary to

the media. For example, headlines of news stories and columns that addressed the media

coverage of the election used words such as "wreckage,"[101] "blew it,"[102] and "unbearable

smugness."[103] *The New York Times* published a letter to the readers from the publisher and editor

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[100] Other scholars defined the dates of this period differently. For example, Wang et. al. (2018) defined the dates as November 9-18, 2018.

[101] Folkenflik, David (2016, November 8) Weary Press Corps Can Celebrate Election's End, Then Survey Wreckage. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from http:// https://www.npr.org/2016/11/08/501033242/weary-press-corps-can-celebrate-election-s-end-then-survey-wreckage.

[102] Jackson, Natalie (2016, November 10) Why HuffPost's Presidential Forecast Didn't See A Donald Trump Win Coming: Here's How We Blew It and What We're Doing to Prevent a Repeat. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/pollster-forecast-donald-trump-wrong_n_5823e1e5e4b0e80b02ceca15.

[103] Rahn, Will (2016, November 10) The Unbearable Smugness of the Press. *CBS NEWS*. Retrieved from: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/commentary-the-unbearable-smugness-of-the-press-presidential-election-2016/

on November 13 saying they were "rededicating ourselves to the fundamental."[104] Martin Baron, *Washington Post* executive editor, gave a commencement address in December 2016 to the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism that focused on the lessons learned from the election coverage. As Wang et. al. (2017) described, members of the media seemed to understand that the future of journalism in a democracy was at stake. "(T)he disconnect between journalists' and editors' perceptions of the American electorate and the reality reflected in the election outcome brought into stark relief the need for the institution of American journalism to look inward, explore the reasons why the news media were so blindsided by this election outcome," wrote Wang et. al. (2017, p. 1244-1245).

The results of this study found a widespread understanding by members of the media that their normative practices in covering an election were inadequate and that change is required to accurately report on the electorate. The starting premise of this discussion was that the media did not cover the 2016 presidential election accurately. "To put it bluntly, the media missed the story. In the end, a huge number of American voters wanted something different. And although these voters shouted and screamed it, most journalists weren't listening. They didn't get it," wrote Margaret Sullivan, the *Washington Post's* media columnist, the morning after the election.[105] Or, as Jim Rutenberg, the media columnist for *The New York Times*, wrote the same day: "It was clear that something was fundamentally broken in journalism, which has been

[104] Sulzberger, Arthur Jr. and Dean Baquet. (2016, November 13) To Our Readers, From the Publisher and Executive Editor. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/13/us/elections/to-our-readers-from-the-publisher-and-executive-editor.html

[105] Sullivan, Margaret (2016, November 9) The Media Didn't Want to Believe Trump Could Win. So They Looked the Other Way. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-media-didnt-want-to-believe-trump-could-win-so-they-looked-the-other-way/2016/11/09/d2ea1436-a623-11e6-8042-f4d111c862d1_story.html876543.

unable to keep up with the anti-establishment mood that is turning the world upside down."[106]

Both perspectives reflect one point the media seemed to agree on: the coverage of the electorate in the 2016 election was flawed. From that premise, many different problems were identified and solutions offered. This study is a summary of those problems and solutions.

Literature Review

The content of the media's self-analysis is worthy of scholarship because it includes many problems and root causes identified by journalists within the profession (outlined below). This self-identified list of what is malfunctioning in U.S. political coverage captures the response of the practitioners themselves. The journalists and editors who covered the campaign examined, very publicly, what they did wrong. It also makes clear that journalists knew something was wrong with their coverage of the 2016 election, in part because the media response was spontaneous and emotional in nature. As Wang et. al. wrote "(t)his sudden, and broadly shared, desire to look inward was spurred by the widely acknowledged failure of most journalists and pundits to anticipate this election outcome" (2018, p. 4). This study adds to the existing literature by studying the content of the debate and summarizing the problems and solutions offered by the media. Finally, it applies Sphere Theory to the variety of problems that were offered and suggests understanding the dissatisfaction of the media through this lens.

Scholarship examining the media response to the 2016 election is relatively limited. For example, Bent, Kelling and Thomas (2020) examined this content to identify which ethical issues were raised in the debate. The study found those issues to be: "failing to exercise

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[106]Rutenberg, Jim (2016, November 8) News Outlets Wonder Where the Predictions Went Wrong. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/business/media/news-outlets-wonder-where-the-predictions-went-wrong.html

independent judgment; failing to provide a representative picture of the electorate; and underestimating new and emerging technologies" (Bent et. al. 2020). Others, like Boydstun and Van Aelst (2018) did not evaluate the content produced in the weeks after the election. Rather, they used the debate as a springboard for additional analysis, interviewing 24 members of the media and asking them why they "were caught off guard in 2016" (Boydstun and Van Aelst, p. 1). Similarly to Bent et. al., their study identified a disconnect between journalists and the electorate as an important reason the media failed to report on the 2016 election accurately. Wang, Napoli and Ma (2017) mined the content to evaluate five levels of analysis that influence media content, as defined by Shoemaker and Reese (2013). They defined the debate as "metajournalistic discourse" and found that the media identified its routines as the most problematic area, including reporting techniques and journalistic value-related issues. Taken together, these studies reflect the importance of this election in understanding the challenge of good journalism and suggest scholarship on this unique moment in time will continue to inform the profession.

Method

This study is a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the content produced during the media debate following the 2016 campaign. The content includes the opinions of political journalists and editors from a wide range of mediums addressing the question of what was wrong with the coverage of the presidential election. It does not include the opinions of journalism scholars, political scientists, pollsters, political analysts or others that were often a part of these debate forums. The reason for limiting the analysis to the opinions of journalists and editors is that this study is focused on the normative practices of the media during the campaign. It was considered more relevant to gather and reflect on the thoughts of the journalists who have

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experience implementing these practices during the often deadline-driven coverage of an election. In addition, this study was limited to the opinions of journalists as opposed to media observers, because the debate reflected a dawning realization for many who covered the election that normative practices are flawed and should be examined and improved. Understanding your own normative practices to be in need of change is a pivotal moment for any profession. This study hoped to capture this moment through the voices of those who practiced journalism.

The content included in this study was identified through an advanced keyword search on Google. It is not intended to be representative of all of the content produced nor all of the opinions expressed. Rather it is a representative sampling of the content in which journalism professionals offered their reflections on the election. The keywords used in this search were "election, media or journalist, fail or miss." Those results were then limited by the "News" filter, a custom range date of November 8, 2016, to January 20, 2017 found under Tools, as well as a regional filter of "United States." That search produced 328 results. Sorted by relevance, this study selected the first reports generated by the search that were produced by a U.S. media organization and included journalists and/or editors offering reasons the media did not predict Trump's victory. In addition to this sample, this study included several reports that included surveys with many different journalists, including transcripts of roundtable discussions and surveys by Poynter.Org. While this was a subjective choice, this content was included because it increased the number of media members included in this survey, greatly expanding the variety of voices that are heard in this study. As a result, this content analysis includes 27 titles and the opinions of 81 journalists or editors speaking out within weeks of the election. After examining the content, seven answers garnered consensus and these were then used as filters through which to discuss the conversation. Once the most common answers were listed, the study tallied which

journalist identified with those answers and extracted quotes from the content that best explained this aspect of journalism identified as a problem area.

Results

The media debate that occurred after the 2016 election was a dynamic discussion happening over time and in many different forums. That meant the problems and answers suggested in this discussion all varied slightly because the question being asked differed slightly. For example, Sara O'Brien of Poynter.Org reported that she asked journalists to answer this question: "How did the media miss the wave of support for Donald Trump?"[107] Politico's Joe Pompeo, Peter Sterne, Hadas Gold and Alex Weprin framed the question as, "What went wrong? How did everyone in the media miss the Trump phenomenon?"[108] Chuck Todd, on NBC's Meet the Press asked, "Well, what the heck just happened, right?"[109] When examining the content produced through the keyword search, this study looked at the question asked of the journalists and determined if it was similar enough to other questions to be included. It is fair to summarize, based on this analysis, that the media was grappling with the same key topic that was often framed slightly differently.

Within the media debate there were several points of consensus, as well as many disagreements. Both agreements and disagreements are outlined below. This study found seven common answers to the generalized question: What was wrong with the election coverage?

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[107] O'Brien, Sara. (2016, November 10) How the Media Missed President Trump and What Comes Next for Journalism. Poynter Institute. Retrieved from https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2016/how-the-media-missed-president-trump-and-what-comes-next-for-journalism/.

[108] Pompeo, Joe, Peter Sterne, Hadas Gold and Alex Weprin. (2016, November 10). What Went Wrong? Eleven Takes from Media Veterans. *Politico.* Retrieved from https://www.politico.com/blogs/on-media/2016/11/what-the-media-missed-editors-executives-and-journalists-weigh-in-231167.

[109] Todd, Chuck. (Host and Political Director). (2016, November 13). *Meet The Press* [Television Program]. Washington, D.C.: NBC. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-november-13-2016-n683211.

Those seven answers were labeled as Reliance on the Polls, Normative Practices, Out of Touch, Unthinkable, Newsroom Diversity, Lack of On-the-Ground Reporting/Budget Cuts, Reduced Local Media. Many journalists identified multiple reasons and those are included in the totals. Each of these "reasons" is an umbrella for a range of perspectives, some contradicting each other. The explanation of each these answers is offered below, including the variety of responses it embodies.

When analyzing the content of the media discussion, it was occasionally unclear which of the seven categories identified by this study it belonged in. Some were obvious, such as "the polls were misleading." Others were more complicated, such as the differences between Unthinkable and Out of Touch. These categories are very similar and in some ways are 'mega' answers compared to the other categories. Both answers describe a media that did not fully understand the mood of the electorate. However, the tone of these two answers is very different. Unthinkable, the most popular answer, included a range of responses that suggested electing Trump was so far outside the expectations of journalists and the society they live in that it was "unthinkable," even when confronted with evidence to the contrary. Whereas Out of Touch, the second most popular answer, is a grouping of answers that suggested that the media did not see or understand the mood of the electorate. This study viewed these two answers as "mega" topics because many of the reasons the media offered for being out of touch or in a society that Trump's election was unthinkable became the other categories in this study: lack of on the ground reporting, lack of newsroom diversity, reduced local media, budget cuts and normative practices.

Chart One shows the seven problems cataloged in this study that were identified by the media and the frequency of that answer. This study included the thoughts of 85 members of the

media (for a list, see Appendix B and C). Some offered more than one answer, so the total number of answers is higher than the total number of journalists included. This graph reflects the following tallies: Unthinkable 24; Out of Touch 23; Reliance on the Polls 18; Lack of Newsroom Diversity 13; Normative Practices 14; Lack of On-the-Ground Reporting 10; and Reduced Local Media 8.
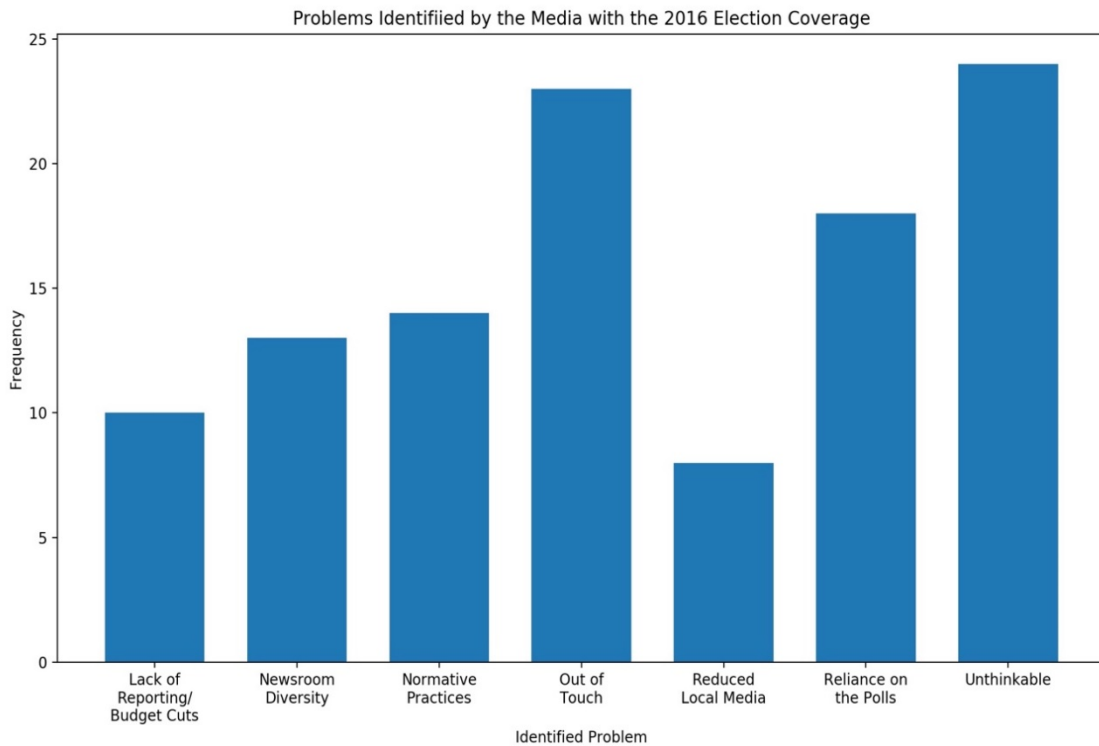
Figure 23

Appendix B is a list of the transcripts, columns, surveys and newspaper articles that were examined for this study. This content included the opinions of 81 members of the media. Appendix C is a chart of these members of the media listed alphabetically and includes the journalists' name, where they worked in 2016, their position, the reasons they cited and where their opinion was found.

The following is an analysis of each of the seven identified problems, including the wide range of answers that were included in each topic.

Problem 1: Reliance on the Polls

The polls were a common topic in the media discussion and often the starting point of discussions. On election night during the televised results coverage, many in the media immediately pointed to the polls when they realized Clinton might lose the election. "I don't know one poll that suggested that Donald Trump was going to have this kind of night," said Jake Tapper, an anchor on CNN. Megyn Kelly at Fox News said "The pollsters were dead wrong." Later in the night, Kelly asked "You tell me if the polling industry is effectively done?"[110] Dylan Byers, a columnist at CNN Money, wrote the day after election that it was misleading to lump all polls as wrong. He identified *FiveThirtyEight* and the USC/Los Angeles Times poll as "outliers" that gave Trump a greater chance of winning that most others. Byers said the danger of relying on polls that get it wrong is that it fuels the growing mistrust that many Americans, especially Republicans, have of the media.[111] Brian Stelter, CNN host of Reliable Sources, said the media takes its cues on election coverage from sources such as the stock market and candidate campaign staff expectations, as well as the polls.[112] Others suggested that the dominant narrative

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[110] Grynbaum, Michael M. (2016, November 9) As Race Tightened, News Anchors Seemed as Stunned as Anyone. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/business/media/media-coverage-election-day.html

[111] Byers, Dylan. (2016, November 9) How Politicians, Pollsters and Media Missed Trump's Groundswell. *CNN Money*. Retrieved from https://money.cnn.com/2016/11/09/media/polling-media-missed-trump/

[112] O'Brien, Sara. (2016, November 10) How the Media Missed President Trump and What Comes Next for Journalism. *Poynter Institute*. Retrieved from https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2016/how-the-media-missed-president-trump-and-what-comes-next-for-journalism/

suggested by polls, that Clinton would win, steered media coverage. Suki Dardarian of *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, said the polls were hard to ignore. "I think I would have to credit the national polling with sending everyone in the wrong direction," Dardarian said.[113] John Cassidy, a contributor to *The New Yorker*, said the effort to keep up with the hundreds of polls produced in the last few weeks of the election stole energy and resources from the coverage of voters and the issues important to them. In addition, Cassidy wrote, the polls were unrepresentative because many of Trump's supporters viewed pollsters as part of the establishment they were voting against and did not participate in polls. Some journalists, like Evan Osnos, staff writer at *The New Yorker,* suggested that polls have to prove to be more accurate or the media should learn to ignore them in the future. Jill Lepore, also a contributor to *The New Yorker*, went further and suggested that government should regulate the creation and explanation of election polling so the media does not misunderstand them again.

Many of those that conducted the polls pushed back at the criticism and did not accept blame for the surprise nature of the election results. Nate Silver, editor of *FiveThirtyEight*, said it is a "myth" that the election "represented some sort of catastrophic failure for the polls." Trump outperformed national polls by one to two percentage points which actually made the polls more accurate than they were in 2012, Silver wrote. The problem was a lack nuance in the analysis and reporting of the polls, he argued. "Overconfidence in Clinton's chances wasn't just because of the polls," Silver wrote. "National journalists usually interpreted conflicting and contradictory information as confirming their prior belief that Clinton would win."[114] Sean Trende, editor of *RealClear Politics*, wrote that even when aggregating polls, the predictions were within an

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[113]Ibid.
[114] Silver, Nate. (2017, January 19). The Real Story of 2016. *FiveThirtyEight*. Retrieved from https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-real-story-of-2016/

acceptable margin of error. Like Silver, Trende said reporters were looking for a confirmation of

what they believed the outcome would be, rather than recognizing that Clinton's lead fell within

the margin of error of nearly every major poll. Trende said journalists "gravitated toward

unreliable approaches such as reading the tea leaves on early voting or putting faith in Big Blue

Walls, while ignoring things like the high number of undecided voters."[115]

Problem Two: Normative Practices

Normative Practices is the title given to the range of answers that identified some aspect

of journalism practice involving reporting and writing as a problem in the 2016 coverage. This

covered a wide range of answers. The most common was the concept of "false equivalency,"

which is based on the practice of objectivity, where both candidates are offered a chance to

explain their perspective. The premise was that when Trump said something untrue on the

campaign trail, failed to explain a policy position, or did not have a policy position on an issue,

and it was then paired with a statement from Hillary Clinton, who expressed a detailed policy

position. Journalists suggested that was unfair to Clinton because Trump was often lying,

exaggerating or using partial truth and this went unacknowledged. "(M)any journalists were

flummoxed at how to cover a campaign in which one of the candidates was demonstrably

unqualified for reasons of experience, temperament and truthfulness," wrote Dan Kennedy, in

USNews.com.[116] In addition, many argued that the dynamic of objectivity designed to create

fairness and neutrality, pushed many journalists to cover the scandal surrounding Clinton's email

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[115] Trende, Sean. (2016, November 12). It Wasn't the Polls That Missed, It Was the Pundits. *RealClear Politics*.
Retrieved from
https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2016/11/12/it_wasnt_the_polls_that_missed_it_was_the_pundits_132333.
html.
[116] Kennedy, Dan (2016, November 6) How the Media Blew the Campaign. *U.S. News & World Report.* Retrieved
from https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2016-11-06/how-the-media-blew-the-2016-campaign.

server as equivalent to the many scandals involving Trump, including the allegation that he had

multiple affairs with pornography film actors and paid them to remain quiet and his admission

caught on tape that he attempted to grope women. Poniewozik, of *The New York Times,* summed

it up this way: "I hope Mr. Trump's asymmetric, weirdly brazen dishonesty has broken

journalists of the bad habits of false equivalency, euphemism and forced balance."[117] Others saw

objectivity as a barrier to standing up to Trump when they identified him making false claims or

exaggerations. Normative practices encourage journalists to simply report Trump's comments

and not investigate or identify them as false. David Folkenflik, a political reporter at *National*

Public Radio, said he saw news organizations struggling "over how to translate basic journalistic

values of fairness, balance and impartiality into coverage of Trump."[118] Still others did not blame

the unique nature of the Trump campaign. They pointed to long-standing practices in journalism

practice. *FiveThirtyEight* Editor Silver said that the media has moved away from fact-based

reporting and this is the real problem in election coverage. Campaign coverage has become a mix

of facts and analysis as well as both explicit and implicit predictions. "Usually, these take the

form of authoritatively worded analytical claims about the race, such as declaring which states

are in play in the Electoral College," Silver wrote.[119]

This general category of "normative practices" also incorporated the idea that journalists

covered Trump because his antics were good for ratings. Some journalists pointed to the

sensationalized nature of Trump's campaign as easy to cover and more interesting than policy

[117] Rutenberg, Jim and Poniesozik, James (2016, November 9) Can The Media Recover From This Election? *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/arts/television/after-this-election-can-the-media-recover.html

[118] Folkenflik, David (2016, November 8) Weary Press Corps Can Celebrate Election's End, Then Survey Wreckage. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from http:// www.npr.org/2016/11/08/501033242/weary-press-corps-can-celebrate-election-s-end-then-survey-wreckage.

[119] Silver, (2017, January 19).

debate. NPR's Folkenflik said Trump, "owned the press"[120] and that the media was willing to cover him so extensively because it was good for ratings. Dan Rather, former CBS news anchor, argued that this gave Trump a clear advantage because of the increased amount of free media journalists gave his campaign over Clinton's campaign. Others, such as CNN's Stelter and political correspondent Greenfield, disagreed and argued that the coverage of Trump met professional standards.

Problem Three: Out of Touch with the Electorate

Problem Three was the most common reason most journalists participating in the debate cited for why they did not predict the election of Donald Trump. Journalists repeatedly said the biggest obstacle to coverage of the 2016 election was that the media does not understand the perspective of voters who are different from the journalist's own perspective. Some journalists pointed to geography and the fact that the majority of the media live and work in New York City and Washington, D.C. During the election results broadcast on MSNBC, anchor Brian Williams said, "when New York and Washington-based journalists either accidently take the wrong turn on GPS and drive into America, drive through America to visit as relative, come back and report 'the place is covered with Trump signs!' They are just amazed to find this." Williams called it Margaret Mead journalism, implying that it was similar to anthropology among a distant and relatively unknown tribe.[121] On the same broadcast, former CBS anchor Rather suggested that the media is still "pretty confined to the Eastern Seaboard." Jim Rutenberg, media critic at *The New York Times,* explained it this way: "Flyover country isn't a place, it's a state of mind -- it's

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[120] Folkenflik (2016, November 8).
[121] Grynbaum, Michael M. (2016, November 9) As Race Tightened, News Anchors Seemed as Stunned as Anyone. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/business/media/media-coverage-election-day.html

in part of Long Island and Queens, much of Staten Island, certain neighborhoods of Miami or even Chicago. And yes -- it largely -- but hardly exclusively -- pertains to working class white people."

Others suggested that the status of journalists has changed over time, that journalism no longer draws from the middle class and this has led to a limited perspective. Andy Alexander, former ombudsman of *The Washington Post,* said the media and their sources live "in an echo chamber where faulty assumptions can be reinforced and amplified." Operating from big cities, most members of the media do not socialize with people who supported Trump, some argued. Joel Christopher, vice-president of news for *USATODAY* Network-Wisconsin, said "(I)f we are introspective and honest, we have to admit that we as journalists probably weren't associating with enough voters across the spectrum."[122] This bubble was usually outlined as innocently forming, not deliberately isolating. "(J)ournalism has become an enclave of the college-educated, inhabited by the sons and daughters of lawyers and professors," wrote Kay Hymowitz, contributing editor at *City Journal*.[123] Living on the coasts, socializing with like-minded people and filling newsrooms with journalists that come from similar backgrounds can lead to a myopia, said journalists such as Dean Baquet, executive editor of *The New York Times,* and Margaret Sullivan, media critic of *The Washington Post*. Similarly, Baron, executive editor at *The Washington Post*, defined the problem as a failure of assumptions based on a lack of understanding about shared values. "It is our job to hear all people. And to listen closely. And to

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[122] O'Brien, Sara. (2016, November 10).
[123] Hymowitz, Kay S. (2016, December 18) How Women in the Media Missed the Women's Vote. *City Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.city-journal.org/html/how-women-media-missed-womens-vote-14906.html.

give the people of America insights into each other. We will have to work harder at that," Baron said. [124]

Problem Four: Unthinkable

This category of answers is closely related to "Out of Touch with the Electorate." The category was labeled "Unthinkable" because it encompasses a range of answers that stated or implied that members of the media dismissed the support of Trump because they could not imagine that others could support him. When coding answers, this study occasionally found it difficult to distinguish Problem 3 (Out of Touch) from this one. The difference was the use of language that described the media as rejecting what they saw or were told. For example, Amy Hollyfield, senior deputy news editor at *The Tampa Bay Times* said: "Don't ignore what the public wants."[125] Her answer implies an action – hearing and choosing not to report on what the voters are saying. James Hohman, national political reporter at *The Washington Post,* called it a "confirmation bias" and said that despite many red flags that Clinton's support was not as strong as imagined, the media tended to value reporting that confirmed their pre-existing idea that Trump would lose.[126]

Many journalists described being unable to imagine Trump as president and assumed the public shared their values. Margaret Sullivan, *The Washington Post* media columnist, summed it up this way: "(F)or many well-educated, socially liberal, city-dwelling journalists, the idea of the

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[124] Baron, Martin. (2016, December 16). Commencement Address at CUNY Graduate School of Journalism. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/pr/wp/2016/12/16/washington-post-executive-editor-martin-baron-delivers-commencement-address-at-the-cuny-graduate-school-of-journalism/
[125] Kramer, Melody (2016, December 7) 86 Pieces of Journalism Wisdom Published in the Month Since the Election. *Poynter Institute*. Retrieved from https://www.poynter.org/tech-tools/2016/86-pieces-of-journalism-wisdom-published-in-the-month-since-the-election/.
[126] Hohmann, James. (2016, November 9). The Daily 202: Why Trump Won – and Why the Media Missed It. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2016/11/09/daily-202-why-trump-won-and-why-the-media-missed-it/5822ea17e9b69b6085905dee/.

intemperate Trump as president -- given his racist, xenophobic, and sexist utterances, and trail of

bad behavior – was unthinkable. Literally unthinkable. So we engaged in our very own year of

magical thinking. It couldn't happen, therefore it wouldn't happen. Until it did."[127] Brian Stelter,

CNN host, said journalists saw the wave of support for Trump but mismeasured it, he said.

"Groupthink. Acela corridor bias, which is a specific subset of liberal media bias. Some wishful

thinking. A failure of imagination. This was a rural roar, and journalists on the coast had a hard

time hearing it," Stelter told Poynter.org.[128] Similarly, Sean Trende, of *RealClear Politics,*

described a homogenous political environment that reinforced its own values. He said the

campaign coverage grew out of a "media environment that made it almost taboo to even suggest

that Donald Trump had a real chance to win."[129] Freelance journalist Chris Arnade wrote many

profiles of Trump voters during the election and his reporting was hailed afterward as an

example of nuanced reporting in *Columbia Journalism Review*. In that interview, Arnade

described a national press corp that reinforced the assumption that Clinton would win. Observing

national reporters travel to "Trump country," Arnade said they "went in with an expectation of

what they would find, and they found it."[130] Using stronger, more detailed language but making a

similar point, Silver identified the "shortcomings in how American politics are covered" to

include: "pervasive groupthink among media elite, an unhealthy obsession with the insider's

view of politics, a lack of analytical rigor, a failure to appreciate uncertainty, a sluggishness to

self-correct when new evidence contradicts pre-existing beliefs, and narrow viewpoint that lacks

perspective from the longer arc of American history." [131]

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[127] O'Brien, Sara. (2016, November 10).
[128] Ibid.
[129] Trende, Sean. (2016, November 12).
[130] Gourarie, Chava. (2016, November 15). Q&A: Chris Arnade on His Year Embedded with Trump Supporters. *Columbia Journalism Review*. Retrieved from :
https://www.cjr.org/covering_the_election/chris_arnade_trump_supporters_america.php.
[131] Silver, Nate (2017, January 19).

Some journalists also pointed to a sense of arrogance in the coverage. Will Rahn, managing director of politics for CBS News Digital, wrote a column titled "The Unbearable Smugness of The Press," published two days after the election. Rahn said journalists mocked Trump voters and rejected their perspectives. "It's a profound failure of empathy in the service of endless posturing," Rahn wrote. He said the majority of the media supported Clinton and believed that "Trump supporters are backward, and that it is our duty to catalogue and ultimately reverse that backwardness." Labeling Trump's victory a product of racism and sexism allows the media to avoid blame, he said. "This is all 'whitelash,' you see. Trump voters are racist and sexist, so there must be more racists and sexists than we realized," Rahn wrote.[132] Put in a milder form, Dean Baquet, Executive Editor of *The New York Times*, said the media failed to understand the depth of anxiety that many Trump voters felt: "I think it's too simplistic to just see them as crazy people or deplorables. There aren't *that* (sic) many deplorables in the United States."[133] Marty Baron, Executive Editor of *The Washington Post*, put it even more delicately. He called for greater fairness when covering voters with different perspectives, with the implication that fairness was lacking at times in the 2016 coverage.

This 'lack of imagination' interfered with the coverage of the Trump voter and contributed to a misunderstanding of the mood of the electorate, some journalists said. For example, Liz Spayd, public editor of *The New York Times*, said coverage of the Trump voters "often amplified the voices of the most hateful." Caricatures of voters do not explain their perspective, Spayd said. The danger, she wrote, is that those stories "drowned out the kind of

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[132] Rahn, Will (2016, November 10) The Unbearable Smugness of the Press. *CBS NEWS*. Retrieved from: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/commentary-the-unbearable-smugness-of-the-press-presidential-election-2016/.
[133] Pompeo, Joe, Peter Sterne, Hadas Gold and Alex Weprin. (2016, November 10). What Went Wrong? Eleven Takes from Media Veterans. *Politico.* Retrieved from https://www.politico.com/blogs/on-media/2016/11/what-the-media-missed-editors-executives-and-journalists-weigh-in-231167.

agenda-free, deep narratives that could have taken *Times* readers deeper into the lives and values

of the people who just elected the next president."[134] Andi McDaniel, senior director of content

and news at WAMU in Washington, D.C., said the media should "listen to the station like a

deplorable" suggesting that media coverage doesn't understand how negatively painting Trump

supporters alienates the audience.[135] From a slightly different perspective, Chuck Todd, political

director and host of NBC's Meet the Press, included part of an interview with a reporter from

Progressive Farmer on his political roundtable talk show. Chris Clayton, the reporter, said that

the media repeatedly stated that educated voters were supporting Clinton, while voters without

college degrees in rural America supported Trump. "(R)ural America is not uneducated, even

though maybe there are fewer people with college degrees," Clayton said. Rural voters took this

"very personally," Clayton said. On the program, Todd said he was "stung" by the interview.[136]

Put another way: Kay S. Hymowitz, a contributor to *City Journal*, criticized young women

reporters for mistaking their support of Clinton as a universal. "They had heads full of academic

theory and millennial angst but little life experience with – and virtually no interest in – military

wives from South Carolina or Walmart managers from Staten Island," Hymowitz wrote.[137]

Without knowledge of the depth of Trump's support, voters may not have realized how

important their votes might have been, argued Katty Kay, the anchor of BBC World News

America. Kay compared the election coverage to the coverage of the Brexit vote in the U.K. She

suggested that many voters might not have voted for Trump if the media had informed them that

[134] Spayd, Liz. (2016, November 9). Want to Know What America's Thinking? Try Asking. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/public-editor/want-to-know-what-americas-thinking-try-asking.html.
[135] Lapin, Andrew. (2016, November 14). Shell Shocked by Trump Win, Public Radio's Politics All-Stars Share Thoughts on Election Coverage. *Current.* Retrieved from https://current.org/2016/11/shell-shocked-by-trump-win-public-radios-politics-all-stars-share-thoughts-on-election-coverage/.
[136] Todd, Chuck. (Host and Political Director). (2016, November 13). *Meet The Press* [Television Program]. Washington, D.C.: NBC. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-november-13-2016-n683211.
[137] Hymowitz, Kay S. (2016, December 18).

the race was close. Instead, she suggested many voters were just issuing a protest and the media missed the danger of this.[138]

Problem Five: Newsroom Diversity

Diversity was defined in different ways during the post-election debate. Many called for greater economic diversity in the newsroom in an effort to understand and represent the electorate better. Ju-Don Marshall Roberts, former managing editor at *The Washington Post*, said that the media often fails at covering "people who feel marginalized." Having reporters of different economic backgrounds would help "to get the 'why' of what is happening in the country," Roberts said. [139] Isaac Lee, Univision chief of news, digital and entertainment, defined it further, "We live in the age of inequality. One of the outcomes of inequality is that we wall ourselves off and resent each other."[140] Baquet, executive editor at *The New York Times,* said that the media must work to understand "the working class voters who feel like the forces of globalization and the rise of technology have left them behind. We need to understand that world better before there is another election."[141] Gawker Media founder Nick Denton put it more bluntly. He said the media is "no longer a national institution, but the representatives of a class."[142]

In addition to economic diversity, some called for other forms of diversity -- such as educational, geographical and political. For example, Diana Marcum, a writer at *Los Angeles Times*, suggested hiring reporters who have not attended college.[143] Raquel Rutledge,

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[138] Todd, Chuck. (2016, November 13).
[139] O'Brien, Sara. (2016, November 10).
[140] Pompeo et. al. (2016, November 11).
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Kramer, Melody. (2016, December 7).

investigative reporter at the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel,* suggested 'bipartisan collaboration' on

news reports.[144] Baron at *The Washington Post* said "The face of America is changing, and that

means that the faces of our newsrooms should change too."[145] Perry Bacon, senior political

reporter for NBC News, agreed by saying the media is not "fluent" in talking about news stories

that are based in race, identity and culture and this contributed to the failure to understand the

Trump voter. Others pointed to the reduced number of bureaus and local newspapers that have

narrowed the perspectives of different regions in the larger media market. Liz Spayd, *The New*

York Times public editor in 2016, suggested that the media needs to find new ways to cover the

"half of America" that often gets ignored. Speaking to her newspaper, she said "the next question

is whether *The Times* is interested in crossing the red line to see what this America wants

next."[146]

Problem Six: Lack of On the Ground Reporting/Budget Cuts

The first part of this answer focuses on the idea that the national media did not cover the

electorate with enough on-the-ground reporting. Many journalists, especially those based in local

media outlets, argued that national reporters covered the election remotely, dropping in for rallies

or big campaign events and as a result they failed to understand the issues motivating Trump

voters. Some, like Chris Arnade, the freelance political reporter who travelled to small towns

during the election, called this "parachute journalism" and said that type of reporting made it

difficult to shed a big city perspective. Phil Boas, editorial page editor of *The Arizona Republic*,

said "the real story is out among people, not inside the campaign bubble."[147] Others like Andrew

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Baron, Martin. (2016, December 16).
[146] Spayd, Liz. (2016, November 9). Want to Know What America's Thinking? Try Asking. *The New York Times*.
https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/public-editor/want-to-know-what-americas-thinking-try-asking.html
[147] Kramer, Melody. (2016, December 7)

McGill, a reporter at *The Atlantic*, said the concentration of jobs in big cities means reporters no longer work their way up through smaller media markets, where they absorb different perspectives. *The Washington Post's* Sullivan, who wrote a great deal about the election, suggested that on-the-ground reporting was never considered an important part of the coverage: "(A)lthough we touched down in the big red states for a few days, or interviewed some coal miners or unemployed autoworkers in the Rust Belt, we didn't take them seriously."[148] This thought was echoed and expanded by Alec MacGillis, political reporter for *ProPublica* who started his career at *The Baltimore Sun:* "The media are so, so far removed from their country. The gaps have gotten so large. The media are all in Washington, D.C. and New York now thanks to the decline of local and metro papers. And the gaps between how those cities and the rest of the country are doing have gotten so much larger in recent years."[149]

Other journalists cited newsroom budget cuts as the reason the media missed Trump's support in the electorate. This is related to the lack of on-the-ground reporting because budget cuts were often cited as the reason there was a lack of travel or investigative reporting. Journalists referred to restricted travel budgets, fewer reporters in the newsroom, greater pressure to produce copy, and the elimination of bureaus as changes that have negatively affected campaign reporting. As Brooke Binokowsi, managing editor of *Snopes.com*, said, "I don't think journalism failed: I think journalism was failed. If they're not given the resources and space they need to do their job, the job won't get done." [150]

Problem Seven: Reduced Local Media

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[148] Sullivan, Margaret. (2016, November 9)
[149] Byers, Dylan. (2016, November 9)
[150] Kramer, Melody. (2016, December 7)

Once again, this answer was closely related to another answer. Many journalists who said the lack of on-the-ground reporting was a problem also pointed to the reduced number of local media outlets. Alex Stonehill, editor of *The Seattle Globalist,* said that national news outlets cannot fill the hole left with the closure of community-based media: "These national outlets are, almost by definition, out of touch with local audiences. But the local newspaper, where readers might have known and trusted a columnist or editorial board is long gone."[151] Another local editor agreed. Mark Jurkowitz, editor of the *Outer Banks Sentinel*, said local media "create those ongoing community conversations" because the reporters and editors are willing to be the driving force behind local discussions. [152]

Freelance reporter Arnade, who spent the election in small towns and cities, said that local reporting often understands the nuances of a community in a manner an outsider never could. During the election, Arnade said, national reporters would travel to smaller cities and "went in with no context, almost like anthropologists going on expedition." He said national newspapers should have written about the frustration of "white working class" communities years before the election. "It crept up on people this year, but it has been out there for years, the sense of a town feeling frustrated and left behind; the loss of town centers; the loss of mills; the loss of factories; the loss of jobs. There just hasn't been continued reporting on what impact that has had on these communities," Arnade said. In addition, Arnade said, the loss of local media outlets means the national media has lost a source of information. Not only did local newspapers serve their towns and cities, but they were read by journalists at the wire services and picked up by national media.[153]

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Kramer, Melody. (2016, November 7).
[153] Gourarie, Chava. (2016, November 15).

This study is included in a larger examination of the media content in the 2016 election for several reasons. First, the post-election discussion by the media confirms the fact that journalists and editors recognized they had failed to accurately report on the electorate. While many reasons were offered for this miss, the media discussion never questioned the fact that something went wrong that resulted in a failure to recognize the mood of the voters. This discussion was often emotional, angry and revealing, which suggests that it was important to these media professionals to understand their mistakes. Second, the problems identified in the post-election discussion support the idea that the media shifted its normative practices when confronted with the Trump voter. No longer was objectivity and fact-based reporting the key. Instead, the Trump voter was an unexpected shock. Each of the seven identified problems suggested by the media rely on the fact that the media did not write about the electorate in a manner that revealed the depth of support for Trump and each of the answers suggest a different reason why they did not. This study suggests that those answers, taken together, show a media that is struggling to understand its role in a nation that is undergoing political change. Hallin posited that moments of political upheaval are often moments when parts of society are labeled deviant, only to become better understood with time. In Hallin's original study, that part of society was war protestors. He found as the war continued and society began to shift away from its early sense of patriotic duty and toward a more critical understanding of the conflict, media coverage of the protestors changed. Journalist shifted their identification of protestors from deviant to acceptable, or from the sphere of deviance to the sphere of legitimate controversy. It suggests that the coverage of voters such as Trump's supporters might also change in the future.

Understanding the election coverage through the lens of Sphere Theory offers an explanation for how and why the media reports did not explore the Trump voter in depth. Sphere theory suggests that the media identified the Trump voter as a threat to democracy, a deviant part of society. This identification encouraged journalists to shift their normative practices. As journalism scholar Carlson suggested just weeks after the election, Trump "struck a nerve" in the media during the election coverage that encouraged them to identify his candidacy as deviant and outside the norm. When covering a deviant event or actor, normative practices shift and that actor or event is considered outside the sphere of legitimacy and in the sphere of deviance where "objectivity is supplanted by shared loathing," Carlson (p. 11) wrote. In other words, journalists aim to call out the threat and no longer cover it with neutrality or balance when confronted with deviance. Carlson cited several moments of irregular press coverage as proof that the media was shifting out of the sphere of legitimate controversy, where normal political debate resides, and into the sphere of deviance in their coverage of Trump. This study suggests that Carlson's observation can also be applied to the coverage of the Trump voter.

Conclusion

Examining the media discussion following the presidential election of 2016 recognizes the importance of the moment for journalism in the U.S. Collectively, the media mostly agreed that they had made a mistake and looked inward for explanations. It was an unusual and candid moment for a profession that has struggled with technological change and economic upheaval. It also highlighted problems within journalism that can and should be addressed to improve future election coverage. The most common problems the media addressed were that they saw the election of Trump as unthinkable and that they are out of touch with the electorate. Fixing those problems can involve changes to normative practices but also changes to personnel, attitudes,

even lifestyles. Those are difficult changes to implement. However, those types of changes might result in a more nuanced approach to reporting and writing about all kinds of voters and an increased appreciation of the media by the electorate. This study suggests that future studies should examine the media's response to this discussion, whether change occurred and/or what obstacles are present to prevent change. It also would be beneficial to talk to many of the journalists and editors featured in this study to more fully understand their answers and explore the different perspectives of local and national media that this study suggests. Finally, this study is a hopeful sign for a profession central to the U.S. democracy and the willingness of the media to air their concerns publicly suggests an openness to change. This study aims to be a helpful part of that process.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This study started with a look back at election night 2016 but it aims to look to the future of election reporting. The election results in 2016 were a self-identified difficult moment in journalism history: a presidential election that caught members of the media by surprise because most failed to recognize the mood of the electorate. That does not happen often and the media responded with a public debate about normative practices that was thoughtful, chagrined and full of promise. Dozens of political journalists called for change in how they covered the voter in order to remain relevant to the democratic process.

As this study is completed, the 2020 U.S. presidential election is coming to a close and the coverage does not suggest much has changed since 2016. Most of the media coverage predicts a Biden landslide and major news outlets appear to once again dismiss the Trump voter as a deviant part of the democratic debate. Some news organizations have made changes in their coverage since 2016. Journalists such as Margaret Sullivan, *The Washington Post* media critic, and Nate Silver, editor in chief of FiveThirtyEight and frequent contributor to *The New York Times*, have written numerous columns during the past four years urging changes to the normative practices of election coverage. Organizations such as *ProPublica* have created election sites that pool the resources of local newspapers.[154] Others have improved or added to

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[154] Electionland is a site dedicated to reporting "voting access, cybersecurity, misinformation and election integrity in the 2020 elections." It provides data and reporting aids to smaller news organizations in exchange for access to local reporters and editors. It can be accessed at https://www.propublica.org/electionland.

their election coverage. *The New York Times* election 2020 page includes links such as How to Vote and Disinformation; *The Washington Post* and *USA TODAY* have election pages with tabs for issues and where candidates stand. *The Washington Post* even adopted a new motto following the 2016 election: "Democracy Dies in Darkness."[155]

Despite this, there is little mention of the voter in the current election coverage but there is a reliance on professional political analysts and an overwhelming theme of the election as a horserace rather than an exploration of issues. As the results of this study found in 2016, today's coverage continues to include few voters as sources and often places them at the end of a news report, offering little more than a colorful addition after the analysis offered by professional political observers. It seems little has changed since Hallin observed in 1989 that "(i)n general the media place a low value on political involvement by ordinary citizens," (p. 196). The same delegitimizing cues that were identified in this study in the 2016 coverage are regularly included in election coverage this year. As an example, consider this paragraph that ran on the online front page of *The New York Times* on October 20, 2020:

> "Mr. Trump retains a few important bastions of support, most notably among white voters without college degrees, who continue to favor him over Mr. Biden by 23 percentage points. But that lead is far narrower than the advantage Mr. Trump held among less-educated whites in 2016, when those voters preferred him over Hillary Clinton by 37 points." [156]

The headline for the news report read: "Voters Prefer Biden Over Trump on Almost All Major Issues, Poll Shows." Despite the mention of voters and issues in the headline, this story only includes two voters as sources, neither of whom address issues or support Trump. The article does not include a description of issues at stake in the election, the debate about how to

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[155] Whether this is a comment on failing to understand the voters or concerns over the Trump administration can be left to the reader to decide.
[156] Burns, Alexander and Jonathan Martin (October 20, 2020)." Voters Prefer Biden Over Trump on Almost All Major Issues, Poll Shows." https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/20/us/politics/biden-trump-times-poll.html

solve them nor why they support their candidate of choice. Finally, it frames Trump voters in a very similar manner as they were framed in 2016, with delegitimizing details such as race and education level. This is just one example, of course, and future research should explore how representative it is of the 2020 election coverage. This study is based on the premise that by understanding the choices in normative practice – language, reporting, sourcing – journalists can improve their election coverage.

Sphere Theory as a Lens

This study aims to help identify why the media missed the mood of the electorate in an effort to suggest improvements in future election coverage. As Chapter Six of this study outlines, the media lacked clarity and agreement on what went wrong with the 2016 election coverage. Despite a debate period that lasted nearly six weeks and included the voices of dozens of members of the media, there was no overarching consensus. The post-election media debate suggested many, sometimes contradictory, reasons offered by journalists for why the coverage failed to understand the voters in 2016.

As working journalists, however, the media's opportunity for inspection was short-lived as Trump was sworn in and deadline demands churned back up. Published contemporaneously with the professional discussion was a collection of essays by scholars that offered their perspectives on the election. One essay, by media scholar Matt Carlson, suggested understanding the coverage of Trump through the lens of Daniel Hallin's Sphere Theory. Carlson identified that normative practices shifted when journalists were confronted with Trump's candidacy. Understanding this shift in practices, from the sphere of legitimate controversy to deviance, adds clarity to the "dilemma" over objectivity that occurred during the election, Carlson wrote. The essay highlighted moments in the 2016 election when journalists publicly questioned whether

Trump should be covered with objectivity, such as Jim Rutenberg's August 9, 2016, front-page

column in *The New York Times*[157] and *The Huffington Post's* editor's note that accompanied

every story on Trump.[158] Carlson identified these moments as the shift from the sphere of

legitimate controversy to the sphere of deviance, as defined by Sphere Theory. In other words,

Carlson argued, the media was struggling with whether to cover Trump using the normative

practice of objectivity and neutrality. Hallin recognized that when confronted with deviance, the

media shifts away from these norms and toward the identification of a threat to democracy.

However, Carlson suggested, this intuitive shift in practice was difficult for many in the media

during a presidential election. "(T)o place the nominee of a major party into the sphere of

deviancy requires a clear-eyed argument and commitment to parting with precedent. It asks

journalists to break with ingrained ways of thinking and acting—a difficult request, even in the

face of Trump's transgressions," wrote Carlson (p. 11). Carlson said that this "difficult request"

was what made covering the election so challenging because journalists instinctively shift

between normative practices without recognizing it. Carlson argued that journalists should

choose how to cover Trump, either as deviant or as legitimate, or risk the same shift of practices

that the media weathered in 2016 in future election coverage.

The Voter

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[157] Jim Rutenberg was the media critic for *The New York Times* in 2016. His column, titled "Trump Is Testing the Norms of Objectivity in Journalism" can be accessed here: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/08/business/balance-fairness-and-a-proudly-provocative-presidential-candidate.html.

[158] As Carlson describes, *The Huffington Post* attached the following editor's note to the bottom of news reports about Donald Trump during the general election in 2016: "Donald Trump regularly incites political violence and is a serial liar, rampant xenophobe, racist, misogynist and birther who has repeatedly pledged to ban all Muslims — 1.6 billion members of an entire religion — from entering the U.S." Prior to the general election, the news site placed all stories about Trump in the entertainment section of the digital newspaper. The day after the election, the Washington editor announced the newspaper would stop the practice. This announcement can be found here: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/note-to-readers-why-were-dropping-our-donald-trump-editors-note_n_5822b734e4b0aac624883e87.

Carlson's understanding that Sphere Theory helps to explain the media coverage of Trump in 2016 was an insight that contributed greatly to this study. The early stage of this study was designed to examine the relationship of voters and the media. Identifying the shifting nature of normative practice for the media when covering Trump as the root cause of difficulty in 2016, Carlson's explanation seemed like the right lens to examine the coverage of voters as well. Therefore, instead of questioning whether Trump belonged in the sphere of deviance as Carlson suggested, this study looked to the millions of voters who supported Trump and how they were covered. If the media was shifting from objectivity to the identification of deviance for Trump, it seemed logical that this practice might spill over into the coverage of voters. For this study, it seemed more important to understand if millions of Americans were framed as deviant by the media than one, strange political candidate.

This study embraces the electorate as a critical part of election coverage, making the assertion that covering Trump voters as deviant contributed to the misunderstanding of the electorate as a whole by the media. Shifting practices to identify Trump voters as outside the sphere of legitimate controversy would not be deemed unprofessional under Sphere Theory. But, this study suggests, it was the wrong choice. Professional practice that worked to inform the public about the size of Trump's support, the issues motivating those voters, and the root reasons for the rise of this cause might have better served democracy. As many scholars have documented, polarization among the electorate had increased since the 2016 election (Faris 2017; Benkler 2018; Druckman and Levendusky 2018). These studies suggest that the views of the opposing political parties are increasingly alarming to Democrats and Republicans. However, this study argues that the media cannot participate in this trend and continue its information

providing role during an election. Framing large segments of the electorate as deviant works to increase polarization and distrust.

In an essay titled "The Vital Role of the Media in a Democracy," published in October 2020, media scholar Michael Schudson argues that the U.S. democratic system needs checks and balances from "the tyranny of the majority," as Alexis de Toqueville[159] famously warned. Schudson writes that "50 percent plus one can be misled. They can be an angry majority, angry enough to strip the other half of the population of civil, political, and social rights."[160] This is why our system is not a pure democracy, he argues: "Of course, in a democracy, numbers matter — and they should, although the founders created the political system that they did because they distrusted numbers and they perfectly despised the multitudes." Despite this, Schudson argues that the media's most important role is to embrace the professional practices of journalism that encourage balanced reporting, "digs for contrary evidence" and reports against assumptions. In an era of disinformation circulated on social media, attacks on journalism, false equivalencies and other threats to the truth, professional journalists should focus on the rules of "their craft," Schudson argues. Responsible journalists "do not subordinate honest reporting to ideological consistency or political advocacy," Schudson wrote. At the risk of paraphrasing a very clear and concise writer, it is fair to say that Schudson is advocating for more investigation of the many elements that make up the U.S. electorate – a similar conclusion that this study suggests.

In a more pessimistic essay on the future of journalism in the U.S. and the U.K, media scholar Barbie Zelizer (2018) makes a similar argument for improved professional practice during an election. Zelizer argues that the British media and the U.S. media have both failed in

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[159] Tocqueville, Alexis de (1838). *Democracy in America*. New York :G. Dearborn & Co.
[160] Schudson, Michael. (2020, October 5). The Vital Role of Journalism in a Liberal Democracy. *The MIT Press Reader* Retrieved from: https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/journalism-in-a-liberal-democracy. NP.

their democratic roles. The misunderstanding by the British press of the public sentiment during the vote over Brexit in the U.K and the U.S. media coverage of Trump's candidacy "makes 2016 and 2017 one of the worst periods in recent memory," Zelizer wrote (2018, p. 150). The problem, Zelizer argues, is that both media systems lost sight of their role in a democracy, which must always include serving the public by providing information about the issues important to voters. Zelizer calls this "not serving and not reflecting" the public (p. 150). She argues that the media systems in both countries, while different in many ways, are similar because they focus on the viewpoints of the elite: "Whether it was the post-industrial towns of Northern England and the poorer parts of Wales or the Rust Belt and so-called flyover zones of the United States, journalism in both countries failed to reflect the public – with its multiple variations, complexities and contradictions," (p.150).

Bennett (2016) used the term "indexing" in a way that parallels what Zelizer (2018) calls "shrinking the imagined public to its smallest possible size" (p.150). Bennett defined indexing as the "tendency of mainstream news organizations to index or adjust the range of viewpoints in a story to the dominant positions of those whom the journalists perceive to have enough power to affect the outcome of a situation" (p.16). They both are describing a media environment that limits the voices and perspectives included in news reports to those who hold power, sometimes described as the political elite. This would include individuals such as elected officials, high-ranking members of the political parties, professional political analysts, pollsters, and government officials. It does not include the voice of the voters. (For a fuller explanation of indexing, please see Chapter Two).

In Hallin's Sphere Theory, indexing would be used to limit the size of the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy. The issues important to those in power and the opinions of elite political

actors define the boundaries of this sphere. Other sources, such as the average citizen voter, are either ignored or relegated to a minor role in the media coverage. Vocal groups that are not recognized by those in power are covered in the sphere of deviance and framed with delegitimizing cues. Hallin described it in this manner: "In political situations where political consensus seems to prevail, journalists tend to act as 'responsible' members of the political establishment, upholding the dominant political perspective and passing on more or less at face value the views of authorities," (1989, p. 10). When a topic becomes more controversial, the media becomes "becomes more adversarial" to those in power but stay "well within" the boundaries of the debate "going on within the political establishment" (p. 10).

Each of these scholars is describing something similar that is at the root of what went wrong in 2016. By focusing on the voices of those in power, this study suggests that the media missed the voices of those who collectively had the power to vote out the establishment. This study measured how often the voters were included as a source in a story and how that measure compared to the voices of professional political analysts. In 82 percent of the stories examined for this study, the news report included more professional political analysts explaining how voters felt rather than the voices of actual voters. In 64 percent of the stories included in this study, professional analysts were quoted before the voters. As explained in Chapter Four, this ranking of sources suggests that the media understood the voice of the voters as some of the least important elements in the report. For Trump voters, this lowly ranking was often also coupled with delegitimizing details that identified these sources as a deviant part of the electorate. Understanding the coverage of voters in this light, it is little wonder that the perspective of the Trump supporter was dismissed by the media and not recognized as a powerful element of the electorate.

According to Sphere Theory, if the media understood Trump voters as deviant, the shift of practices is normative because it is accepted practice to switch reporting styles when confronted with deviance. As Carlson's essay identified about the coverage of Trump, this study suggests that the media should make a "clear-eyed argument and commitment to parting with precedent" (p. 11) when placing nearly half the voting public in the sphere of deviance. In addition, the choice to cover voters as deviant can come with a cost, primarily that the coverage will alarm rather than enlighten readers. The practices associated with legitimate controversy and the sphere of deviance are at odds with one another. Under Sphere Theory, deviant framing forgoes investigation, exploration of motives or ideas and the attempt to create a political conversation, as media scholar James Carey (1997) described. Only when covered as a legitimate part of the democratic debate are political actors, such as voters, fully explored by the media.

Cycle of Delegitimization

This study aimed to contribute to the field of media studies by applying Sphere Theory to the framing of the voters in election coverage. In summary, this study found that the media did shift into the sphere of deviance when covering Trump voters, that voters were quoted less often than political analysts and placed at the end of the news reports, supporting Trump was framed as socially unacceptable and that, in general, the media suggested that the election was not offering voters a good choice with either candidate. The results are not a positive picture of the relationship between voters and the media. The brightest spot in the findings, that the local media offered a more nuanced framing of voters and might suggest a path for national outlets, is diminished by the fact that local newspapers and bureaus are closing at a depressingly rapid clip.

Understanding these findings through the lens of Sphere Theory, the media did not violate normative standards by framing the Trump voter as deviant. But Hallin makes clear that

deviant framing can come at a cost. As Billard demonstrated in his study of newspaper coverage of transgender people, media framing of large segments of society as deviant can be problematic. From a political perspective, the media identification of which elements of the electorate deserve delegitimizing cues can run counter to the ideals of a democracy. In a society that values the vote of each individual, albeit filtered through the Electoral College and subject to Supreme Court decisions, systematic framing of 62.5 million voters who voted for Trump as deviant seems to stretch the idea that deviance is a small segment of society that operates outside the norm.

Deviance as an Attention Seeking Tool

As a candidate for president in the 2016 U.S. election, Trump seemed to encourage deviance. He ignored expected norms of typical political candidates and was plagued by scandals that would have eliminated others in previous election years. He used language that was racist and sexist. His policy suggestions, when they were articulated at all, were outside the mainstream and shocking to many. This study does not suggest that Trump was or was not deviant. That is a different study. This study looks solely at the media coverage of voters who were offered two major party choices in the general election of 2016: Trump or Clinton.

Clearly, many Trump voters did act in a manner that encouraged deviant framing and this may have come from the example of a candidate who garnered significant media coverage for his antics. The media did not invent the strange clothing, the rowdy behavior, the chants and taunts that all were factors of Trump rallies. It is a fact that polls showed that more White, uneducated voters supported Trump than Clinton. Voters did tell the media that they believed in conspiracy theories, insult the other candidates and their supporters, and echo many of Trump's most sensational claims.

In *The Uncensored War*, Hallin describes how early anti-war Vietnam protestors also

acted in a manner that encouraged deviant framing. Hallin described this as a cycle that the

media helps to create and perpetuate. He wrote: "Not being recognized as a part of the normal

political process, the antiwar movement could rarely become news except by playing the deviant

role, usually by "provoking" violence or charges of aiding the enemy. So the factions that played

this role the best were the ones that grew most rapidly, and the movement increasingly defined

itself (sic) according to the deviant role in which it was cast by the media. This is no doubt a

major reason the antiwar movement was hated by most of the public even when the public had

turned away from the war" (p.194). The cycle that Hallin describes begins with political actors

that support a cause. As Bennett (2019) describes in indexing theory[161] and Hallin seems to

support,[162] political actors that are not in power are often ignored by the media. In Hallin's study

these actors were anti-war protestors. In Billard's 2016 study, these actors were the transgender

community and in this study they were Trump supporters. Hallin observed that the next step in

this cycle was that a small portion of the anti-war protestors tried to attract media attention

through behavior that was outside the accepted range of political behavior. For example, Hallin

cites a television news report on a march in the streets of New York City in December 1967 that

featured protestors carrying a flag with the Vietcong symbol. This was considered a provocative

act at a time when American families were sending their sons overseas to fight the Vietcong. As

Hallin explains, the protest garnered the attention the anti-war movement was seeking, but

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[161] Bennett (2016) defines "indexing" as "tendency of mainstream news organizations to index or adjust the range of viewpoints in a story to the dominant positions of those whom the journalists perceive to have enough power to affect the outcome of a situation," (p.16). For a greater exploration of indexing and its relationship to Sphere Theory, please see Chapter Two- Theory.

[162] In a later work, Hallin writes that he views Bennett's definition of indexing to be "now one of the basic conclusions of research on political communication," (p.11). From Hallin, Daniel C. (1994) *We Keep America on Top of the World*. London and New York: Routledge.

triggered a shift in normative practices by the media away from objectivity and toward the identification of deviance.

The following chart demonstrates the cycle Hallin described. It begins and ends with political actors being rejected or ignored by the public and the media. The role of the media in the cycle is to identify deviant elements within a political group and sound the alarm about this group to the public. Understanding this cycle through the lens of Sphere Theory, the media responds to the "acting out" of the political group by understanding the group to be outside the sphere of legitimate controversy and in the sphere of deviance. Therefore, normative practices shift away from objective reporting and towards the identification of something that threatens community norms.

As the chart below demonstrates, political actors can get stuck in the circle of delegitimization. The end result is that they are ignored or rejected by the public and the media until the cycle starts over. Of course, this is not an endless loop. Many factors can break the cycle, including a change in normative practices by the media or a significant shift in public opinion by society. Looking again at the same cycle through Sphere Theory, if the political actors are understood through the lens of legitimate controversy, the media shifts its practices to adopt a neutral tone and objectively report on the political actors, which informs the public.

This study aims to help illuminate some of the practices of the 2016 election coverage with the goal of contributing to a path forward for future elections. As many other scholars have suggested (Aday, Livingston, and Herbert, 2005; Luther and Miller, 2005; Billard, 2016), today's deviant actor is often a part of tomorrow's legitimate debate and news organizations that choose to label parts of society as deviant run a few risks. As Billard found in the exploration of delegitimizing cues of transgender people in newspaper coverage and Luther and Miller and

Hallin in the coverage of war protestors, the media does not lead society away from deviant framing. Rather, it reflects and follows societal cues. And the risk here is that the media's reporting can lag in adapting societal values, which can make news reports irrelevant.

The Cycle of Delegitimization

The cycle proceeds as follows:

- Political Actors are **ignored** or **rejected** by public and media
- Part of the movement acts out to gain attention
- Media coverage **frames** actors as deviant
- Public interest is **stirred** negatively
- Deviant behavior **increases** to gain attention
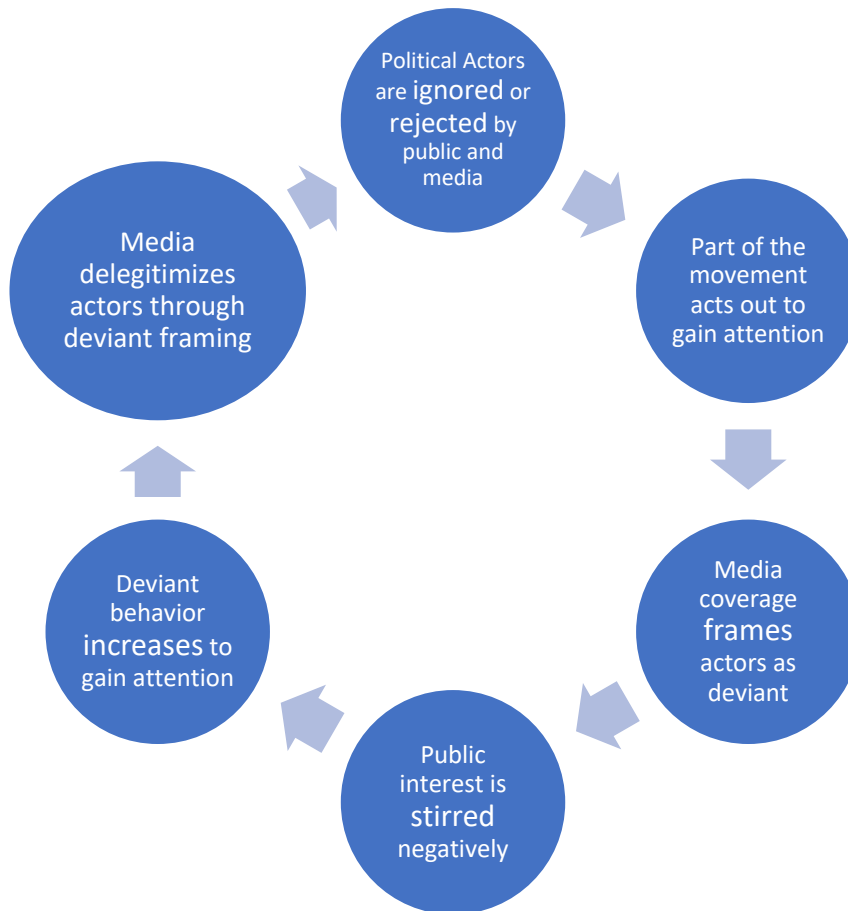- Media delegitimizes actors through deviant framing

Figure 24

In 2016, this study found that framing voters as deviant also cost news organizations the opportunity to explore the issues and motivations that encouraged millions of voters to support

Trump. In news reports where the voters were quoted directly, only 28 percent of those reports mentioned issues that the voter was concerned about. (A qualitative examination of those reports found that these mentions of issues important to the voter were almost never followed by a broader discussion and were limited to one or two words such as "immigration" or "the economy.") Less than 30 percent of the reports quoted the voters as discussing the qualifications or lack of qualifications of the candidate to serve as president. Instead, voters were quoted insulting the other candidate, describing conspiracy theories about the race, and expressing disgust over the process.

Negativity and Polarization

Another conclusion of this study is that media reports of election coverage may contribute to the polarization of the American political system, as other scholars have found. Patterson's comprehensive analysis of the 2016 media coverage concluded that news reports about the election are overwhelmingly negative in tone, part of a pattern that started in the 1980s. Patterson wrote that the media reports "all the ugly stuff they can find and leave it to the voters to decide what to make of it" (p. 19). Coupled with decreased coverage about issues, Patterson's conclusion was that "when journalists turn their eye to society, they highlight the problems and not the success stories. The news creates a seedbed of public anger, misperception, and anxiety— sitting there waiting to be tapped by those who have a stake in directing the public's wrath at government" (2016, p. 19). Similarly, the Pew Research Center published a report the day before the 2016 election that found the American public had grown more polarized along party lines and held increasingly negative views about the candidates of other parties.[163]

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[163] Gramlich, John. (November 7, 2016). America's political divisions in 5 charts. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/07/americas-political-divisions-in-5-charts/.

In this study, the most obvious evidence that the media might contribute to polarization was the difference in the framing of Trump and Clinton voters. This study found that Trump voters were far more likely than Clinton supporters to be framed as deviant. For example, more than 18 percent of news reports described Trump supporters with unusual details such as clothing, habits or language as compared to less than 1 percent of reports that featured Clinton supporters. Nearly 38 percent of news reports described Trump voters as believing in conspiracy theories compared to less than 2 percent of reports that described Clinton voters. More than 20 percent of reports described Trump supporters as reluctant to admit their support for the candidate versus 6 percent of reports that included Clinton supporters. Applying Sphere Theory to these findings, Trump voters were placed in the sphere of deviance while Clinton supporters tended to fall into the sphere of legitimate controversy.

One measure that came out nearly equally between Trump and Clinton voters was the use of insults to describe the other candidates or his/her supporters. In news reports that included Trump voters as a source, 49.5 percent included that source using an insult to describe Clinton or her supporters. That compares closely to 42.3 percent of news reports featuring Clinton supporters who were quoted using an insult about Trump or his supporters. These quotes were often the most colorful part of a news report as they were creative, funny and mean. As a reporter, it must have been very tempting to include them when offered up and ask for them when they were not. They reflect a deep emotional connection to the election and an entertaining element to the news report. Yet, these quotes were often the only opportunity voters were offered to present their views in the article. Inserting a provocative quote instead of a thoughtful reflection, the journalist seems to be trading the short-term success of the article for the long

term civility of political debate and the exploration of what motivated the voters to such harsh language.

Another measure included in the coding scheme was whether the news report suggested in tone or directly that neither candidate was qualified or that the election offered voters "no good choice." The results found that nearly 25 percent of the news reports measured for this study included that suggestion. The democratic process had produced two candidates for election. Millions of voters cast a ballot for each of them. Yet many news reports chose to suggest that both candidates were poor choices. This was one of the most surprising and perhaps disappointing findings of this study in terms of assessing the performance of the media in the 2016 elections.

To develop a coding scheme to measure these delegitimizing cues, this study followed the example of Billard and looked to industry standards and guidelines. One source for this was *The Handbook for Journalists During Elections*[164], published by Reporters Without Borders. This guidebook was developed mostly for members of the media who travel to foreign lands to cover elections. After reading the media comments about election coverage (outlined in Chapter Six), the handbook seemed very appropriate for reporters who often travelled from Washington D.C., or New York City to interior parts of the U.S. as many described this practice as "parachuting" into an unfamiliar land. In the introduction to the guidelines, the editors of the election handbook offered the following basic advice:

"A journalist plays a major part in the expansion and strengthening of democracy and peace, and his or her role is even more important in times of political tension. Sharp powers of observation and analysis are essential. These will enable a journalist to grasp the socio-political complexities of a political moment and the issues at stake. A journalist should make every effort

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[164] Reporters Without Borders for Freedom of Information, (2015 ed.) "Handbook for Journalists During Election." https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/handbook_for_journalists_during_elections.pdf.

to lessen social tensions instead of increasing them – a task in keeping with the profession's fundamental moral standards," (p.7).

This advice, "to lessen social tensions instead of increasing them," was not highlighted in the public debate that members of the media engaged in after the election (and is documented in Chapter Six). Yet this point is perhaps one of the most unintended consequences of deviant framing. Journalists are not creating the social tension, but they are reflecting it, highlighting it, maybe even selling their products by using it. This study found that in 2016 voters in both parties were described as distraught about the possibility of the other candidate winning. Voters were often quoted saying that if the other candidate won they would take up arms, spark violence, start a revolution, leave the country, fall into a deep depression, lose their life's savings and other extreme responses. Not one news report analyzed for this study quoted a voter or political analyst as predicting that after the election the two political parties might work together to solve the problems confronting the nation.

The Role of the Media

One bright spot in the findings of this study was that local coverage seemed to understand local voters in a slightly more nuanced manner than the way they were covered by national organizations. Organizations such as *The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Lebanon Daily News*, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Public Opinion* and *The Evening Sun* included delegitimizing cues such as the lack of education, homogenized race (white), descriptions of unusual clothing but they often balanced this cues by offering the voter more space in their news reports. Local voters sometimes were described in greater detail, including a short biography and issues that they cared about.

Chapter Four highlights many examples of the differences between local and national coverage. One example was report published in *The Lebanon Daily News* on November 5, 2016, describing a Trump rally in Hershey, Pennsylvania. The rally included many of the delegitimizing details included in many local and national reports: crowds chanting insults, supporters dressed in outlandish costumes or t-shirts, and voters expressing concern for the future if Clinton won. Yet this short story took the time to include a few extra sentences in the interviews with local voters. The report featured a voter named Steven Wolfe, who was attending his third Trump rally. Wolfe is described was quoted as believing that the "country would take a turn for the worse" if Clinton were elected. But, as outlined in Chapter Four, it also quotes Wolfe as stating that he supported Trump because he considered the appointment of Supreme Court nominees as the most pressing issue facing the country. The article goes on to include a description of Wolfe as an Army veteran, serving a dozen years in active duty and the Army Reserves, who values his oath to uphold the U.S. Constitution. These small details that could have been left out or framed differently offered a more complete picture of the voter and a degree of respect for his position. In the language of Sphere Theory, it worked to move the coverage away from deviance and toward the sphere of legitimate controversy.

A few of the most interesting local articles read like the narrative of a conversation – one voter and his or her description followed by a different voter and slightly different view from locations such as local restaurants and beauty parlors. In addition, there was also often a sense of pride in location. When politicians came to town, the citizens were often described as excited that their community was garnering attention. This greater focus on individuals and a recognized sense of community delivered a more nuanced picture of local voters.

This is not to overly praise local coverage or ignore the shortcomings that smaller budgets and staffs often produce. Local media produced far fewer reports than national outlets, their reports were often shorter and the style was often not as readable as national reports. Yet this study found a qualitative difference that suggested a greater respect for the differences within a community – a lesson that could help national coverage. In addition, local media often included details that suggested national polls were inaccurately measuring local support for Trump and Clinton. Reading through these reports after the election, there were clues that Trump would carry Pennsylvania: local Democratic party chairs stating they were worried, record requests for Trump lawn signs from Republican headquarters, persistent long lines for Trump rallies, as well as union workers who supported Clinton stating they had a hard time convincing fellow workers to vote Democratic. In sum, local media still seem to have much to contribute to the democratic process and are a valuable resource for both readers and national media outlets.

In a very different era, media scholar James Carey (1991) suggested that the most important role for the media was the facilitation of a conversation about the issues facing the country in an election. "Republics require conversation, often cacophonous conversation, for they should be noisy places," Carey wrote in an essay titled "*A Republic, If You Can Keep It*." Carey argues that the role of the media is to inform the public so they can have an educated debate. But, he argued, the conversation must begin with the public. "The 'public' is the God term of the press, the term without which the press does not make any sense," Carey wrote (p. 218, 1997). In Carey's view, the media is not meant to set the agenda. Rather, it is there to listen and then explore issues suggested by the public through professional standards. Carey's suggestion seems like an optimistic solution for an era of heightened negativity and polarization.

When citizens in a democracy can't agree on the identification of the most important issues they are facing, it is difficult to imagine civility in the debate over the solutions.

In hindsight, it was clear that there were some very interesting "conversations" that the media could have facilitated in the 2016 election. For example, according to a report in *The Washington Post,* 209 counties in states across the U.S. voted for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 and then voted for Trump in 2016.[165] A large number of these counties were in states that Hillary Clinton was predicted to win and Trump carried instead. As *The Washington Post* reported, these counties were predominantly white and their residents hold fewer college degrees than other counties in those states. But those facts don't explain what motivated those voters in the past three presidential elections. Identifying them with delegitimizing cues that suggest deviance does little to understand the importance of this large segment of the electorate. Labeling these voters as deviant was a lost opportunity to spark conversation and fight against the divisive nature of the current political environment.

Like Hallin, Carey's observations date from a different political environment yet, they offer insights for future journalism practice. They encourage the media to facilitate discussion and debate among competing political factions rather than encouraging practices that heighten polarization and negativity. Applying Sphere Theory to the study of the coverage of voters in an election offers clarity about the daily choices journalists make when preparing news reports and the effects those choices can have. Recognizing a detail as a delegitimizing cue might discourage the use of a sensational quote by a member of the media despite the fact that the quote is colorful or funny. Identifying the costs of deviant framing – even when confronted with a voter that

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[165] Kevin Uhrmacher, Kevin Schaul and Dan Keating (November 9, 2016). These Former Obama Strongholds Sealed the Election for Trump. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/2016-election/obama-trump-counties/

violates the personal values of a reporter – might encourage the media to offer a deeper investigation of that voter and an exploration of the issues that may or may not motivate them. Understanding the shifting normative practices associated with topics and actors that the media understand to be legitimate -- as opposed to deviant -- might aid the reporter who is confused by the urge to abandon objectivity and sound the alarm.

Moving forward, this study suggests future research into media coverage of the wide range of opinions that make up the U.S. electorate. The relationship between news organizations and the voter is a cornerstone of the election process in the U.S. democracy. This study is optimistic that the relationship can continue to improve and even facilitate changes in the nature of political discussion in the U.S. It suggests that scholarship that illuminates current practices and analyses the effect of these practices on the democratic system will help to improve the role of the media in an election. And with that lofty goal in mind, it urges continued research on the role and practices of media coverage of the voter.

Appendix A: Coding Form

(Conducted via Google Forms)

1. Please identify the newspaper by initials: PI, PP-G, PTR, PO, LNP, LDN, PDN, ES, WP, USAT, NYT.

2. Date of publication: dd/mm

3. First three words of the headline:

4. Does the article describe voters?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

Voter Descriptions

5. Are voters quoted directly?

Mark only one answer.

yes

no

6. Does the voter(s) mention an issue(s) that he/she is concerned about in the election such as health care, the economy, trade, immigration?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

7. Does the voter(s) discuss either candidates' qualifications or lack of qualifications to serve as president?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

8. Are the voters who are quoted identified as either Trump or Clinton supporters?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

If no, skip to question 33

Trump Voters Part 1

9. Are Trump supporters described?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

If no, skip to question 21

10. How many Trump supporters are identified by name? Please type a number.

Trump Voters Part 2

11. Is the education level or lack of education of the voter(s) mentioned?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

12. Are Trump supporters described as out of work, unemployed or lacking a job?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

13. Are Trump supporters identified by a profession such as lawyer, teacher, firefighter?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

14. Please identify what professions are identified in the story and assigned to Trump voters? If none, type n/a.

15. Are Trump supporters identified by race?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

16. If race is identified, please identify which races are associated with Trump supporters? Check all boxes that apply.

White or Caucasian

Black or African American

Hispanic

Non-whites

17. Are Trump voters described or quoted as believing in conspiracy theories such as the election is rigged, that guns will be confiscated, the other party is engaging in fraudulent behavior or some other conspiracy?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

18. Are Trump supporters quoted as insulting the other candidate or candidate supporters? This would include the use of words such as liar, criminal, rapist to describe the candidate and his/her supporters.

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

19. Are Trump supporters described as "shy" or "squeamish" or unwilling to announce their support for the candidate?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

20. Are Trump supporters described using unusual details - such as clothing, habits, expressions?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

Clinton Voters Part 1

21. Are Clinton supporters described?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

If no, skip to question 33

22. How many Clinton supporters are identified by name? Please type a number.

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Clinton Voters Part 2

23. Is the education level or lack of education of the voter(s) mentioned?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

24. Are Clinton supporters described as out of work, unemployed or lacking a job?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

25. Are Clinton supporters described identified as by a profession such as lawyer, teacher, firefighter?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

26. Please identify what professions are identified in the story and assigned to Clinton voters? If none, type n/a.

27. Are Clinton supporters identified by race?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

28. If the race is identified, please choose which races are identified with Clinton supporters? Check all boxes that apply.

White or Caucasian

Black or African American

Hispanic

Non-whites

29. Are Clinton voters described or quoted as believing in conspiracy theories such as the election is rigged, that guns will be confiscated, the other party is engaging in fraudulent behavior or some other conspiracy?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

30. Are Clinton supporters quoted as insulting the other candidate or candidate supporters? This would include the use of words such as liar, criminal, rapist to describe the candidate and his/her supporters.

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

31. Are Clinton supporters described as "shy" or "squeamish" or unwilling to announce their support for the candidate?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

32. Are Clinton supporters described using unusual details - such as clothing, habits, expressions?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

33. Does the article quote politicians, party officials, pollsters or anyone else that professionally observes or participates in politics?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

If no, skip to question 36

34. Are more politicians or professional political observers included in the article than the number of voters who are quoted in the story?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

35. If both types of sources are included in the article, are voters quoted AFTER most of the politicians or professional political observers in the article?

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

36. Does the article imply or state that voters believe that neither candidate is qualified or that there is "no good choice?"

Mark only one answer.

Yes

No

APPENDIX B: SOURCES FOR MEDIA CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Appendix C: Media Chart

Journalist	Media Affiliation	Position	Reason *	Where published (author)
Abramson, Jill	The New York Times	Former Executive Editor	UNTH	Politico (Pompeo et. al.)
Alexander Andy	The Washington Post	Former Ombudsman	POLL, UNTH	Poynter.Org (O'Brien)
Alpert, Lukas I.	The Wall Street Journal	Reporter	POLL	The Wall Street Journal (Flint and Alpert)
Arnade, Chris	Freelance	Reporter	OUT, UNTH, LACK,LOCAL	Colombia Journalism Review
Bacon, Perry	NBC News	Senior Political Reporter	OUT	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Boas, Phil	The Arizona Republic	Editorial Page Editor	UNTH, LACK	Politico (Pompeo et. al.)
Baron, Martin	The Washington Post	Executive Editor	OUT, UNTH, DIVER, LACK	The Washington Post (Baron)

Baquet, Dean	The New York Times	Executive Editor	OUT	Politico (Pompeo et. al.)
Binkowski, Brooke	Snopes.com	Managing Editor	LACK	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Brokaw, Tom	NBC News	Former Anchor	OUT	The New York Times (Grynbaum)
Byers, Dylan	CNN Money	Columnist	OUT	CNN (Byers)
Cassidy, John	The New Yorker	Columnist	POLL	The New Yorker (Cassidy)
Christopher, Joel	USATODAY Network-Wisconsin	Vice President of News	POLL, OUT	Poynter.Org (O'Brien)
Chace, Zoe	National Public Radio	Reporter	POLL, UNTH, DIVER	Current (Lapin)
Clayton, Chris	Progressive Farmer	Editor	UNTH	NBC (Todd)
Dardarian, Suki	The Minneapolis Star Tribune	Managing Editor	POLL	Poynter.Org (O'Brien)
Denton, Nick	Gawker.com	Founder	UNTH	Politico (Pompeo et. al.)
Fallows, James	The Atlantic	National Correspondent	NORM PRAC	Poynter.Org (Kramer)

Folkenflik, David	National Public Radio	Media Critic	NORM PRAC, UNTH	NPR (Folkenflik)
Flint, Joe	The Wall Street Journal	Reporter	POLL	Wall Street Journal (Flint and Alpert)
Garfield, Bob	WNYC	Radio Host	DIVER	Current (Lapin)
Gorman, Teresa	The Local Fix	Editor	LOCAL	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Greenfield, Jeff	CBS, ABC, CNN, PBS	Former Political Correspondent	OUT	CNN (Stelter)
Hemingway, Molly	The Federalist	Senior Editor	UNTH	CNN Reliable Sources (Stelter)
Hewitt, Hugh	Salem Radio Network	Radio Host	OUT	NBC (Todd)
Herrman, John	The New York Times	Correspondent	NORM PRAC	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Hohman, James	The Washington Post	National Political Reporter	OUT	The Washington Post (Hohman)
Hollyfield, Amy	Tampa Bay Times	Senior Deputy News Editor	UNTH	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Hinojosa, Maria	National Public Radio	Host	DIVER	Current (Lapin)
Hymowitz, Kay	City Journal	Contributing Editor	UNTH, DIVER	City Journal (Hymowitz)

Ingram, Matthew	Fortune Magazine	Writer	NORM PRAC	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Jackson, Natalie	Huffington Post	Editor	POLL	HuffPost (Jackson
Jurkowitz, Mark	Outer Banks Sentinel	Owner, Publisher, Editor	LOCAL	Poynter.org (Kramer)
Kay, Katty	BBC News	Lead Anchor	UNTH	NBC (Todd)
Keating, Christopher	Hartfort Courant	Capital Bureau Chief	POLL	Hartford Courant (Keating)
Kelly, Megan	Fox News	Anchor	POLL	The New York Times (Grynbaum)
Kennedy, Dan	U.S News & World Report	Contributor	NORM PRAC	U.S. News& World Report (Kennedy)
Lepore, Jill	The New Yorker	Staff Writer	POLL	Poynter.org (Kramer)
Lee, Isaac	Univision	Chief Content Officer	OUT	Politico (Pompeo et. al.)
Lewis, Helen	New Statesman	Deputy Editor	DIVER	Poynter.org (Kramer)
MacGillis, Alec	ProPubilca	Politics and Government Reporters	LOCAL	CNN Money (Byers)
Marcum, Diana	Los Angeles Times	Wrtiter	DIVER	Poynter.org (Kramer)

March, Williams	Freelance	Florida Political Reporter	UNTH	Poynter.org (Kramer)
McDowell, Andi	WAMU	Senior Director of Content and News	OUT	Current (Lapin)
McGill, Andrew	The Atlantic	Reporter	LACK	Poynter.org (Kramer)
Miller, Katherine	Buzzfeed	Political Editor	DIVER, LACK	Poynter.org (Kramer)
Nangle, Richard	Worcester Sun	political reporter	OUT	Worcester Sun (Nangle)
Oreskes, Micheal	National Public Radio	Senior Vice President of News	LOCAL	Poynter.org (Kramer)
Osnos, Evan	The New Yorker	Staff Writer	POLL	Poynter.org (Kramer)
Palmer, Anna	Politico	Senior Washington Correspondent	POLL, UNTH	Politico (Palmer et. al.) and Poynter.org (Kramer)
Pope, Kyle	Columbia Journalism Review	Editor	NORM PRAC	Poynter.org (Kramer)

Poniewozik, James	The New York Times	Television Critic	NORM PRAC, OUT, DIVER, LACK	The New York Times (Rutenberg and Poniewozik)
Powell, Tracie	AllDigitocracy	Founder	POLL, UNTH, LACK	Poynter.Org (O'Brien)
Rather, Dan	CBS News	Former anchor	NORM PRAC, OUT	NBC (Todd)
Ranshaw, Emily	Texas Tribune	Editor in Chief	OUT	Poynter.org (Kramer)
Rahn, Will	CBS News	Managing Editor Digital Politics	UNTH	CBS News (Rahn)
Rutenburg, Jim	The New York Times	Media Critic	NORM PRAC, OUT, UNTH,	The New York Times (Rutenberg and Poniewozik)
Rutledge, Raquel	Milwalkee Journal-Sentinel	Investigative Journalist	DIVER	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Roberts, JuDon Marshall	Washington Post	Former Managing Editor	DIVER, OUT	Poynter.Org (O'Brien)
Salinas, Maria Elena	Noticiero Univision	Anchor	POLL, NORM PRAC	Politico (Pompeo et. al.)
Sanders, Sam	National Public Radio	Political Reporter	OUT, DIVER	Current

Serwer, Adam	The Atlantic	Senior Editor	NORM PRAC	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Shachtman, Noah	The Daily Beast	Executive Editor	POLL, OUT	Politico (Pompeo et. al.)
Silver, Nate	FiveThirtyEight	Editor	NORM PRAC, UNTH, LACK	FiveThirtyEight (Silver)
Spayd, Liz	The New York Times	Public Editor	UNTH	The New York Times (Spayd)
Stearns, Josh	The Local Fix	Editor	LOCAL	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Stein, Sam	HuffPost	Senior Politics Editor	NORM PRAC	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Stelter, Brian	CNN's Reliable Sources	Host	POLL, UNTH	CNN (Stelter)
Stonehill, Alex	The Seattle Globalist	Editor	LOCAL	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Sullivan, Margaret	The Washington Post	Media Critic	UNTH	The Washington Post (Sullivan) and Poynter.org (O'Brien)
Tapper, Jake	CNN	Anchor	POLL	The New York Times (Grynbaum)
Todd, Chuck	NBC Meet the Press	Host	OUT, LACK	NBC (Todd)

Trende, Sean	RealClear Politics	Senior Political Analyst	OUT	RealClear Politics (Trende)
Vargas, Jose Antonio	EmergingUS	Editor	DIVER	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
vanden Heuvel, Katrina	The Nation	Editor	NORM PRAC, OUT	Politico (Pompeo et. al.)
Willey, Keven Ann	The Dallas Morning News	Editorial Page Editor	UNTH	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Williams, Brian	MSNBC	Anchor	OUT	The New York Times (Grynbaum)
Wolff, Michael	USA TODAY	Writer	OUT	USA TODAY (Wolff)
Wortham, Jenna	The New York Times	Staff Writer	UNTH	Poynter.Org (Kramer)
Young, Jeff	Valley ReSource	Managing Editor	LOCAL	Poynter.Org (Kramer)

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