# In Partisan Media We Trust: Does Incivility Exacerbate Levels of Programmatic and Institutional Media Trust in Partisan Viewers?

By

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# Abstract

Using oppositional media hostility, an extension of hostile media effect (HME), this study explores how perceptions of bias influence individuals' trust in the media when viewing political cable news programming, particularly when the content of the programming is uncivil. I argue that when partisans watch outgroup political cable news programming, they will perceive it as containing higher levels of bias, which will then relate to lower levels of trust in the specific news program and the media as an institution. I also contend that when there is incivility in the program, these effects will be exacerbated. To test this argument, I conducted a survey experiment in which participants were randomly assigned to watch a short video clip from a news program on CNN or Fox News in which the content was either civil or uncivil. The findings demonstrate that although partisans viewing outgroup political cable news programming did indeed have higher levels of bias, which then resulted in lower levels of programmatic and institutional media trust, it did not make a difference whether the content of the program was civil or uncivil. This suggests that while partisanship plays a large role in perceptions of bias and levels of media trust, it is not quite clear how exactly incivility in the media effects the electorate.

*Keywords: Hostile Media Effect; Political Cable News; Partisanship; Bias; Media Trust; Incivility*

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**Chapter I: Introduction**

On September 24, 2019, Rudy Giuliani – personal attorney to President Donald Trump –
appeared on Fox News' *The Ingraham Angle*. During a segment in which the guests were
discussing the whistleblower who set off the series of events that led to an impeachment inquiry,
Giuliani became involved in a heated exchange with liberal radio host Chris Hahn. Giuliani
accused Hahn of committing libel before pointing out that Hahn usually says, "incredibly stupid
things" (Ingraham, 2019). However, it was Giuliani's next response that caused the most stir
amongst the media and public. When Hahn began to argue with Giuliani over libel law, Giuliani
shouted, "Shut up moron! Shut up! Shut up, you don't know what you're talking about! You
don't know what you're talking about, idiot!" over host Laura Ingraham and other panel
members.

This exchange is only one of many instances that the public holds up as proof that
incivility has become increasingly prevalent in the media and American politics. The level of
public dissatisfaction with political discourse is at a distressingly high level. According to data
collected by Pew Research Center (2019), 85 percent of U.S. adults believe that the tone and
nature of political debate in America has grown more negative over the last several years, with
the same percentage believing that it has become less respectful in particular. However, Herbst
(2010) points out that while both citizens and scholars complain about the growing levels of
incivility in our country, history actually proves that there is nothing novel about the current
political environment. In fact, Shea and Sproveri (2012) have found that politics in America have
always been "nasty, mean, hurtful, bitter, and filthy at different levels at different times" (p.
420). Regardless of whether or not the current level of incivility in the political sphere is unique,

one thing is clear: the American public is growing tired of the lack of civility present in political discourse (Maisel, 2012; Stryker, Conway, & Danielson, 2016).

So, the question then becomes, are Americans right? What are the potential normative consequences of mediated political incivility? While there is evidence that incivility increases political engagement (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Papacharissi, 2004), "many people are left with a bad taste in their mouth and ill feelings about their fellow citizens" (Shea & Sproveri, 2012, p. 421). Maisel (2012) posits that it is only a short step between dissatisfaction with the tone of political discourse to dissatisfaction with the entire system of government. In fact, some studies have concluded that uncivil political discourse can result in decreased trust of politicians and politics as a whole (Mutz, 2015; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). If this is true, then it is reasonable to predict that this dissatisfaction will bleed over from political institutions to the messengers themselves – the news media.

Given the democratic implications of prior findings in regard to the effect of "nasty politics" on the electorate, this study aims to extend current research by exploring how televised incivility affects media trust, both in individual sources and media as an institution. This project will use the approach of oppositional media hostility (an extension of the hostile media effect) in generating predictions regarding media trust. Specifically, the project will test whether uncivil content exacerbates partisans' already hostile perceptions of biased, outgroup political cable news programming, and in effect lowers levels of media trust even further.

Although some scholars may argue that examining hostile media effects and incivility in outgroup programming (e.g. programming that is perceived as representing or sympathizing with the opposing party of the viewer) is unnecessary because people are increasingly engaging in partisan selective exposure that curbs the effects of oppositional information (Arceneaux,

Johnson, & Murphy, 2012; Stroud, 2010; Weeks, Lane, Kim, Lee, & Kwak, 2017), this might not always be the case. According to Nelson and Webster (2017) some of the most recognizable and most visited news sites like the New York Times and ABC, as well as the lesser-known partisan news outlets, appear to attract ideologically diverse audiences. In addition, recent research demonstrates that even though it is true that individuals selectively expose themselves to ingroup information, they are not selectively *avoiding* outgroup information (Garrett, 2009; Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013). This research demonstrates that there is outgroup exposure occurring, and, as scholars, it is important to understand what the potential consequences of that exposure looks like, especially when the content is uncivil in nature. The following section will contain a review of the literature relating to the hostile media effect and oppositional media hostility, incivility, and media trust. After that, a moderated mediation model is presented, followed by the method of data collection and analysis.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

*Hostile Media Effect*

Scholars have studied the mass media and its potential consequences on society for decades, but more recent research – including this study – attempts to extend the original ideas by determining if all people really do react in the same way to the same media. So, researchers began to study how the same messages can have dissimilar effects on different people (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). The hostile media effect (HME) is one mass media effect theory that does in fact reject the idea that there are standard effects in favor of the notion that the same mediated content can lead to different behavioral outcomes (Hansen & Kim, 2011).

HME was first identified by Vallone, Ross, and Lepper in a 1985 study regarding media coverage of the Beirut massacre. When pro-Israeli and pro-Arab partisans were shown television

news coverage of the event, the authors found three main effects: both partisan groups 1) rated the same reporting as biased in favor of the opposing group, 2) determined that it would be likely to sway a neutral viewer to the opposing group's side, and 3) judged the program to have been created by producers whose opinions were opposite of their own. Although Perloff (2015) argues that the terms neutral, balanced, and evenhanded are problematic in relation to media "in the sense that news is never perfectly neutral or objective" (p. 705), later studies have found similar results as Vallone et al. (1985) regarding partisans' tendency to see what is considered fair and impartial reporting by neutral observers as biased towards the outgroup (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004).

When defining HME, there is consensus among scholars that the theory describes the process by which individuals judge neutral and objective media coverage of an issue to be biased against their personal opinions and to favor the opposing side (Arpan & Raney, 2003). However, there is some variation as to exactly what identities and opinions a person holds that explain why they are more susceptible to this phenomenon than others (Perloff, 2015). These include – but are not limited to – partisanship (Feldman, 2010; Hansen & Kim, 2011; Sol Hart, Feldman, Leiserowitz, & Maibach, 2015), attitude strength (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther, Miller, & Liebhart, 2009; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Perloff, 2015), and levels of issue involvement (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, & Chia, 2001; Gunther et al., 2009; Hansen & Kim, 2011; Vallone et al., 1985).

Partisanship, however, is most often found to be a strong influence on HME due to its relationship to ingroup identification, particularly when an individual is highly invested in their partisan group and is motivated to see it occupy a greater ideological position (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Hartmann & Tanis, 2013). For example, Democrats and Republicans want to see more

voters support their respective ideologies and have the majority of people agree that the opposing

ideology is inferior. In their original study, Vallone et al. (1985) emphasized group

identification, noting that ''partisans tend to perceive articles that are not totally supportive of

their group's position as not accurate in light of truth and believe the discrepancy between the

mediated account and the unmediated truth to be the intended result of hostile bias on the part of

those responsible'' (p. 584). Essentially, partisans feel that the beliefs of their partisan ingroup

are correct, so when the media portrays the news in a neutral way, they see it as biased because it

is not the clear "truth."

   Vallone et al. (1985) suggested three possible reasons for this hostile bias – different

standards, selective recall, and selective categorization. The different standards explanation

refers to the idea that even when partisans determine information to be neutral, they still consider

the coverage to be biased because the producers give the same weight or credibility to the

outgroup's inferior claims, which they believe to be less accurate than their own (Giner-Sorolla

& Chaiken, 1994; Hansen & Kim, 2011). The researchers proposed that different standards

might occur in part because partisans use biased assimilation to create a more polarized world

that they then place onto the media (Vallone et al., 1985). The second possible reason Vallone et

al. (1985) suggested was selective recall. According to selective recall, instead of perceiving

neutral information as biased, partisans simply recall or pay more attention to unfavorable

content than they do content that is agreeable with their views (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Giner-

Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Hansen & Kim, 2011). Finally, Vallone et al. (1985) proposed

selective categorization, which finds that partisans from opposing groups will remember the

same facts, images, or arguments, but will classify them individually as being more favorable to

rival partisans (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Hansen & Kim, 2011). Of these three

suggestions, research has found the most convincing evidence for selective categorization (Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Schmitt et al., 2004). This could be in part because partisans do not only evaluate media differently, but perceive it differently as well (Vallone et al., 1985), meaning that partisans disagree both about what is true, and whether what is true is actually being reported.

Although the original formulation of HME assumes that news coverage is balanced, this is no longer the case in many media settings (Feldman, 2010). In today's fragmented media environment, cable news programming has, in part, abandoned the norms of balanced reporting in favor of opinionated and ideological news (Peters, 2010). Therefore, scholars have suggested a potential extension of HME to address the new partisan media environment – oppositional media hostility.

*Oppositional Media Hostility*

Based on HME, it is clear that viewers perceive bias even while watching neutral news programming, but it is also true that they are capable of identifying bias in unbalanced reporting, particularly when the news coverage favors the outgroup partisan perspective (Feldman, 2010). So, in an increasingly partisan news media environment in which bias is clear to viewers, and outgroup media is seen in a negative light, it is likely that oppositional media hostility – an extension of HME – will occur (Coe et al., 2008). While it may seem unnecessary to make a distinction between these two theories, scholars believe this extension is needed due to its focus on individuals' dismissal of nonpartisan journalistic norms as long as the programming is favorable towards their partisanship, as well as the way judgements of bias encompass not just individual stories and programming, but the media as an institution (Arceneaux et al., 2012).

According to Taber and Lodge (2006), individuals are likely to resist information that disagrees with their worldview. Oppositional media hostility follows from this starting point because partisan news programs do not just appear to be biased, they actually are – and viewers do not like outgroup news media (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2015). Recent research has suggested the reach of the program and the source of the information itself both play a part in HME (Gunther & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther et al., 2009). When partisan viewers believe that news coverage has the potential to reach and influence a broad audience, they become concerned about misleading information (Gunther et al., 2009). This feeling then results in a "defensive processing mode" in which information that is disagreeable seems even more prevalent, and this can generate the perception of hostile content (Gunther et al., 2009; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). The source the information is coming from can have a similar effect. People are more likely to trust and agree with information from ingroup members, so when partisans view a journalist or reporter to be a member of the outgroup, they tend to believe that the content – particularly less objective content – is biased towards the opposing side (Reid, 2012). This means that when partisans watch programs with sources and coverage that challenge their ideological position, they are more likely to hold perceptions of bias above a baseline level, while watching ingroup media reduces perceptions of bias below the baseline level. Basically, partisans will perceive that shows that match their ideological perspective are less biased than shows that do not (Arceneaux et al., 2012).

Overall, it is clear that the combination of partisans' perceived bias, as well as the source and potential reach of the programming, tends to result in oppositional media hostility. With the proliferation of partisan cable news programming in today's fragmented media environment, the

possibility of viewers experiencing these effects are more likely than ever. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1*: Partisans will perceive media content as being more biased when they encounter outgroup media than when they encounter ingroup media.

*Incivility*

While it is true that oppositional media hostility results from the perception of bias in outgroup programming, this project predicts that it will result from the specific content of the programming as well. Arceneaux et al. (2012), for instance, asked respondents to rate the content of the program they had just watched using semantic differential scales. These scales asked participants to choose whether they felt the show more closely aligned with one of two provided words. One pair of words included in their scale was "friendly or hostile." What they found was that individuals who watched outgroup programming were more likely to view the show as being hostile. However, there was no indication that the content of these programs was in fact objectively hostile. So, this prompts the question, what if they were? Does the presence of hostile or uncivil content in news media exacerbate the effects of oppositional media hostility? In order to answer this question, we must first understand what exactly incivility – and its counterpart civility – is in the context of political communication.

Scholars have long pointed to civility as a key component of a deliberative democracy, assuming "either explicitly or implicitly that civility is required for genuine, successful deliberation" (Stryker et al., 2016, p. 539). Civility can take many forms, ranging from the expectation that politicians will attempt to work together to solve policy problems regardless of their position, to rhetoric that enables people who disagree with each other to maintain functional relationships (Muddiman, Pond-Cobb, & Matson, 2017; Strachan & Wolf, 2012). Regardless of

how people interpret it, civility helps to create normative expectations for others' behavior, as well as regulate the behavior of individuals (Borah, 2013).

While there seems to be general agreement as to what civility looks like and the part it plays in our democracy, there is far less consensus when it comes to its more negative counterpart of incivility – particularly when dealing with political incivility (Muddiman, 2017; Stryker et al., 2016). Political incivility can be described as a relative concept, one that is especially difficult to define because what one person finds uncivil may be seen as acceptable behavior by another (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Herbst, 2010). In addition to individual perceptions, culture, time, and place can also affect what voters perceive as uncivil (Strachan & Wolf, 2012).

Broadly speaking, political incivility is seen as norm-defying behavior within a political setting (Ben-Porath, 2010; Mutz, 2015). The challenge is determining what those norms are (Muddiman, 2017). What seems to be most apparent is that whatever those norms are, incivility involves a lack of "regard for other individuals in the process" (Maisel, 2012, p. 409) and is "intimately tied to our understanding of how social actors should treat one another" (Hill, Capella, & Cho, 2015, p. 815). While some scholars call for incivility to be conceptualized on a continuum that ranges from milder to more severe forms (Borah, 2013; Fridkin & Kenney, 2008), research has found that it is most commonly divided into two distinct concepts – personal-level incivility and public-level incivility (Muddiman, 2017).

Civility is often thought to be related to courtesy, or politeness towards others (Papacharissi, 2004), so it would follow that personal-level incivility focuses on violations of interpersonal politeness norms that have been implicitly agreed upon by society (Maisel, 2012; Muddiman, 2017). Mutz (2015) defines this type of incivility specifically as "communication

that violates the norms of politeness for a given culture" (p. 6) in her work related to televised incivility. According to several studies, these norm violations include instances of name-calling and disrespect between political opponents (Brooks & Geer, 2007), insults and impoliteness (Muddiman, 2017), and hyperbole and vulgarity (Jamieson & Falk, 2000).

Public-level incivility on the other hand, does not focus on interpersonal impoliteness, but rather on violations of deliberative norms and norms that promote the collective good (Coe et al., 2014; Muddiman, 2017). Papacharissi (2004) strongly advocates for this perspective, arguing that focusing on impoliteness as a trait of incivility ignores the democratic value of intense deliberation. Thus, she claims it is only when messages and behaviors infringe upon the group or common good that incivility takes place, because impoliteness otherwise has no lasting consequences for democracy. Norms that "threaten a collective founded on democratic norms" (Papacharissi, 2004, p. 271) include deception and behavior that ends inclusive ongoing deliberation (Stryker et al., 2016), and the lack of compromise or refusal to work with others with opposing viewpoints (Muddiman, 2017).

Consequently, the line between different types of uncivil communication and behavior continues to blur, making it difficult to determine the difference between negativity in political settings that is valid and negativity that crosses the line into violations of politeness and deliberation that damage the democratic political process (Wolf, Strachan, & Shea, 2012). Brooks and Geer (2007), however, explain that the difference between negativity and incivility can be seen in the way that the message is presented. While negative – but civil – messages use straightforward language when criticizing ideas, policies, or even political opponents, uncivil messages will actively demonstrate a lack of respect and go a step beyond what is necessary (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Gervais, 2017; Hill et al., 2015; Su et al., 2018). Therefore, incivility can

be distinguished from negative messages or behaviors through the use of disrespect, hyperbole, and superfluous and inflammatory comments that add no substance to the discussion, which are most closely associated with personal-level incivility (Brooks, 2010; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Gervais, 2015).

Regardless of whether or not scholars are using personal-level, public-level, or a combination of both, research on incivility has grown over the last two decades. As Sobieraj and Berry (2011) point out, it is not because outrageous political speech is new, but because it has never received as much widespread coverage as it does now. For instance, the Wesleyan Media Project (2018) found that 69 percent of political advertisements during the 2018 campaign cycle were negative, which is the largest total number of negative advertisements shown during a general election in the last decade. Due to this increase in negative advertisements, campaign advertising has become the focus of some incivility research (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Fridkin & Kenney, 2004, 2008, 2011; Norton, 2011), while others have chosen to explore the effects of incivility in online discussion spaces (Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2014; Anderson, Yeo, Brossard, Scheufele, & Xenos, 2018; Borah, 2013; Gervais, 2015; Hwang, Kim, & Huh, 2014; Ng & Detenber, 2005; Phillips & Smith, 2004). This study, however, will focus specifically on televised incivility because political cable news programming not only includes the greatest likelihood of oppositional media hostility effects, but of containing high levels of incivility as well.

*Televised Incivility*

In the past few decades, unpackaged, unproduced opinionated news programming has grown tremendously (Meltzer, 2015). News media has shifted from objective and politically neutral reporting to more ideologically driven and opinionated news, and these partisan cable

news programs are attracting audiences that are equivalent to or greater than their neutral counterparts (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011; Suhay, Blackwell, Roche, & Bruggeman, 2015). Thus, as news networks attempt to attract and hold viewers' attention, they progressively use more drama, conflict, and opinionated coverage in their programming (Bennett, 2005). Furthermore, the drama and conflict depicted is often uncivil in nature (Forgette & Morris, 2006; York, 2013). Forgette and Morris (2006) claim that "civility, or a lack thereof, defines the modern political talk show on cable news" (p. 448), with Sobieraj and Berry (2011) calling attention to hosts like Sean Hannity on Fox News and Rachel Maddow on MSNBC who present the news in a more uncivil way than their network news competitors. Between most political discourse on television being uncivil in its tone and television as a dominant source for political discourse, it is reasonable to assume that the public is exposed to more incivility than ever before (Mutz, 2007; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Sydnor, 2019).

Personal-level incivility is particularly prevalent on cable television. According to Muddiman (2017), personal-level incivility is perceived by members of the public as more uncivil than public-level incivility. Unlike some forms of campaign messaging and online communication, television news is widely considered to regularly violate social norms for politeness, particularly face-to-face norms (Mutz, 2007, 2015; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). In face-to-face conversation, controlled emotions are standard. Cable television, however, tends to focus on impoliteness and extreme emotions (Mutz, 2015; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). In fact, Sydnor (2019) found that cable television networks were 10 percent more likely to use uncivil language compared to their network news counterparts. Therefore, due to television's audiovisual components, it not only differentiates itself from other forms of media but becomes especially powerful in portraying personal-level incivility (Mutz, 2015; Sydnor, 2018).

The main visual component that contributes to this portrayal of incivility relates to the way in which these programs are filmed. Mutz (2015) found that close-ups and specific camera angles on television create the feeling of physical closeness between the viewer and the person they are seeing on the screen. This violates commonly held social norms regarding spatial distance, creating what she refers to as "in your face" politics. This illusion of closeness results in viewers reacting to interpersonal norm violations in the same way that they would if the messenger were actually in the room with them (Ben-Porath, 2010; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Mutz (2007) points to political cable news programming then as being doubly "in your face," because not only are the messengers violating the norms in everyday interpersonal interactions, but they are violating spatial norms that are important, particularly when referring to an acquaintance or public figure.

Although "in your face" political discourse can attract and hold the attention of viewers who might normally be less engaged in politics, simply because conflict and incivility can increase levels of arousal, this type of programming does come at a cost (Forgette & Morris, 2006; Mutz, 2015). The combination of close-ups and incivility on television that combine to create "in your face" politics leads to increased polarization and lower evaluations of outgroup viewpoints (Mutz, 2007). Of particular importance to the current study, viewers also perceived messengers with outgroup positions to be more rude, hostile, and agitated, even when both ingroup and outgroup actors were behaving equally uncivilly – confirming that individuals are more likely to punish their ideological opponents when witnessing televised incivility (Mutz, 2015).

It is clear based on prior research that the increase in partisan cable news programming on television makes the occurrence of oppositional media hostility more likely than ever before.

It is also clear that incivility – specifically personal-level incivility – is more likely to be present in partisan cable news programming than ever before. Consequently, understanding how the presence of incivility potentially exacerbates oppositional media hostility effects becomes an important concept to explore. With that question in mind, the following contingent moderating hypothesis (Holbert & Park, 2019) is proposed:

*H2*: When participants are exposed to outgroup media, they will perceive uncivil content as significantly more biased than civil content. However, when participants are exposed to ingroup media, uncivil content will not significantly affect perceptions of bias.

*Media Trust*

Although previous scholars have studied how HME effects political talk (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Hwang, Pan, & Sun, 2008), diversity of political talk (Barnidge, Sayre, & Rojas, 2015), and advocacy and activism behaviors (Choi, Park, & Chang, 2011; Feldman, Hart, Leiserowitz, Maibach, & Roser-Renouf, 2017), other potential effects of oppositional media hostility continue to be of normative concern. When individuals watched outgroup programming, it polarized their view of the sources and resulted in negative reactions related to the content of the program – specifically, attitudes toward the material and the informativeness of segments (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013; Arceneaux et al., 2012). Work by Gunther and Liebhart (2006) also determined that the source of a message contributes to hostile perceptions of the information, which can ultimately influence trust of specific media programming and sources. So, while to date, oppositional media hostility research has largely focused on how negative perceptions of outgroup media can lead to selective exposure, the present study pushes this line of research further by exploring whether perceptions of bias are related to decreased media trust.

While negative perceptions of outgroup programming can affect programmatic trust –

trust in a specific television news program – it can also affect trust in the news media in general

(Arceneaux et al., 2012). According to Uslaner (2002), media trust falls under the larger category

of institutional trust, and when individuals experience what they perceive as unfairness on the

part of an institution, they are more likely to be less trusting of that institution in the future. Since

institutional media plays such a large role in our democratic society (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013),

losing public trust can have major consequences on the functionality of our political system.

Based on these findings, the concerns scholars have regarding the effects of oppositional media

hostility are legitimate and should be further explored. In order to do this, there must first be a

clear understanding of what media trust is and what the factors are that contribute to it.

Fukuyama (1995) describes trust as regular, honest, and cooperative behavior that is

expected based on commonly shared norms. This trust is shared between two groups – the trustor

and the trustee. In the case of partisan news, the trustor is the viewer and the trustee is the news

organization, with viewers standing the most to lose in the relationship because they experience

the most uncertainty and vulnerability in regards to knowing the intentions of partisan news

media (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013). Consequently, when the viewers do lose, they tend to feel media

indignation or distrust, which results from an individual seeing that the news media does not live

up to normative principles that they believe they should adhere to (Hwang, Pan, & Sun, 2008).

One such normative principle that dictates the trustworthiness of the media is credibility.

Although some scholarship has focused on credibility and trustworthiness as distinct concepts,

more recent research on the perceptions of news media has studied credibility as one of the

factors of trust, with some other factors being accuracy and fairness (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003;

Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). Rotter (1967) defined trust as "an expectancy held by an individual or

group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual can be relied upon" (p. 651). Meaning, one of the ideas that trust is based upon is the certainty that individuals can consistently believe the information they are receiving from the media – this is credibility (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Thus, when the norm of credibility is not met, viewers begin to question whether or not the programming is trustworthy (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013).

It becomes important then to understand how bias fits into the trust and credibility relationship, especially when the three concepts are so interrelated. Some previous researchers have actually used bias in their measurement of credibility (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Thorson, Vraga, & Ekdale, 2010). In the current study, however, the two variables will be measured separately to reflect the conceptual difference between considering news content to be biased against a party or issue and trusting that media content. Therefore, perceived bias can be seen as influencing levels of programmatic and institutional media trust.

Media effects such as oppositional media hostility that involve partisanship are strong predictors of trust in the media and can have very real consequences regarding people's beliefs and behaviors (Lee, 2010; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). Meaning, fully understanding the effects of oppositional media hostility on media trust, both at a programmatic and institutional level, is a worthwhile effort for scholars to make. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H3a*: Higher perceptions of bias towards news programming will result in lower levels of programmatic media trust.

*H3b*: Higher perceptions of bias towards news programming will result in lower levels of institutional media trust.

*Oppositional Incivility and Media Trust: Moderated Mediation Models*

This final section ties the hypotheses raised above into two moderated mediation models, linking exposure to partisan, uncivil media content to programmatic media trust (see Figure 1) and institutional media trust (see Figure 2) through perception of media bias.
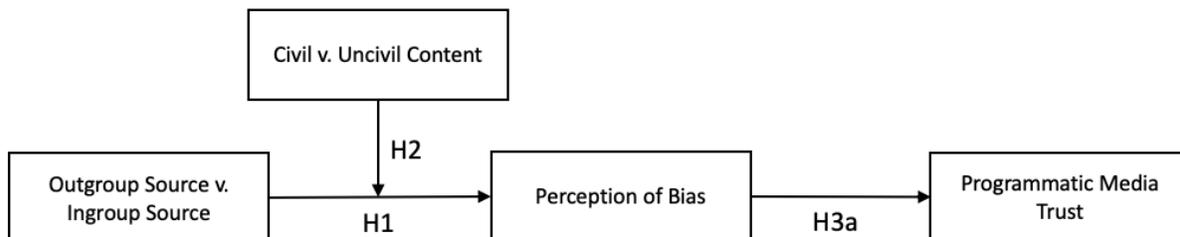


Figure 1. Full theoretical model for programmatic media trust.
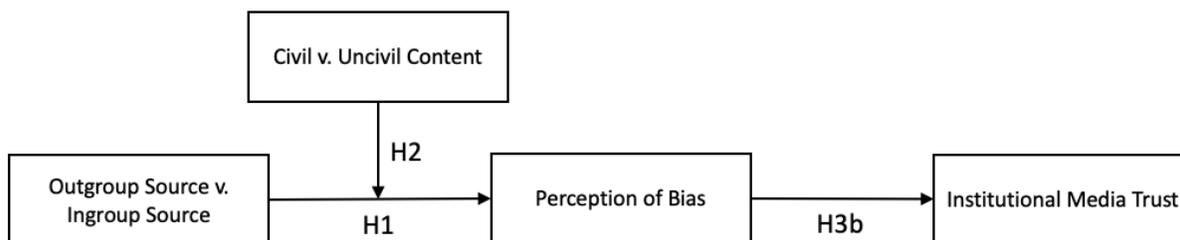


Figure 2. Full theoretical model for institutional media trust.

Prior research has, in separate studies, linked outgroup media content and mediated incivility to decreased trust. Hwang et al. (2008), for instance, argue that perceived partisan bias is "inevitably judged to be a violation of such standards" (p. 78) of credibility that can lead to negative emotional reactions to the media. If this is the case, then it would be reasonable to predict that partisan cable news programming would inherently carry the bias necessary to breed media distrust. In fact, both Tsfati and Cohen (2013) and Hwang et al. (2008) found such results. When partisans watched outgroup programming, they perceived it to be biased and unfair

towards their ingroup, leading to decreased media trust (Hwang et al., 2008; Tsfati & Cohen, 2013).

Similarly, Forgette and Morris (2006) point out that incivility is not only directed at the individuals who appear on political cable news programming, but at the institutions that they represent. Consequently, as more incivility is present during the political discourse surrounding these institutions, the more public support for those institutions will decrease. For example, televised incivility on cable news programming has been shown to lower overall support and trust in the federal government compared to coverage of disagreement that occurs in a more polite manner (Forgette & Morris, 2006; Mutz, 2007; Stryker et al., 2016). While public trust in institutions began declining long before the partisan cable news programming of today's media environment, it is likely to continue to decrease – particularly with the levels of incivility now witnessed on television (Forgette & Morris, 2006). Mutz and Reeves (2005) argue that if the cumulative impact of repeated exposure to incivility is considered, "then low levels of political trust are not surprising" (p. 12). However, not only does uncivil content decrease trust in governmental institutions, but in the institution of media. Anderson et al. (2018) found that online incivility in comment sections not only led to negative perceptions of certain issues, but of the media itself.

As public trust continues to decrease, it puts the very institutions that citizens rely on, and the people they affect, in serious jeopardy (Hetherington, 2005). Which is why it is important to understand *how* partisan media and mediated incivility indirectly influence media distrust. The messengers in partisan cable news programming are not only chosen specially to represent the most polarized positions, they are clearly identified so viewers can easily recognize whether they are one of "us" or one of "them." In addition, through oppositional media hostility, viewers

already perceive their ideological counterparts as not only more biased, but as more hostile (Arceneaux et al., 2012). When the fact that strong partisans are more reactive to incivility than their more moderate counterparts is considered (Muddiman, 2017; Mutz, 2015), it only follows that adding incivility to the already present oppositional media hostility effects should decrease media trust even further – after all, incivility breeds distrust (Mutz, 2015).

Therefore, I propose that the type of programming – that is, uncivil or civil – will moderate the mediated relationship that moves from exposure to ingroup or outgroup partisan cable news coverage to perceptions of media bias to media trust. Specifically:

*H4*: There is a mediated relationship from partisan (ingroup v. outgroup) media exposure to media trust through perceptions of media bias that is moderated by type (civil v. uncivil) of content, such that the indirect effect is significant when the content is uncivil but is not significant when the content is civil.

## Chapter III: Method

*Participants*

Participants ($n$ = 799) were recruited through the crowdsourcing platform Cloud Research during the week of March 5, 2020. Cloud Research is a platform that allows researchers to recruit participants from Amazon MTurk but more easily manage those participants and avoid spam responses (Cloud Research, n.d.). This ability was particularly helpful for this study because it made it possible to recruit participants based on their partisan identification, which created a balanced number of Democrats and Republicans – a key variable used to create the ingroup/outgroup aspect of the experimental conditions. On average, they were 40.99 years old ($SD$ = 13.22) and 57.1% identified as female, 42.3% as male, and 0.4% as nonbinary. Eighty-one point three percent of participants classified themselves as

White/Caucasian, 8.6% as Black or African-American, 6.5% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 2% as Native, 8.9% as Hispanic/Latino, and 1.5% as other. In terms of education, 0.7% have no high school degree, 10.3% have a high school diploma or equivalent, 3% went to technical or vocational school after high school, 18.9% have some college and no degree, 14.5% have a two-year college degree, 34.9% have a four-year college degree, 4% went to graduate or professional school but received no degree, and 13.6% have a graduate or professional degree. Participants also reported their partisan identity, with 44.9% identifying as Democratic, 44.9% as Republican, 9.4% as Independent, and 0.8% as other. After completing the study, participants received $0.75 in compensation.

*Procedure*

Participants, first, indicated their favorability and familiarity toward multiple political issues and figures. Next, they answered distractor questions in order to avoid priming partisan political thoughts that may have been prompted by the list of political figures. After answering the distractor questions, participants viewed one of four randomly assigned experimental treatments that included either a civil or uncivil news clip produced by an ingroup or outgroup cable news talk show. Once participants watched the news clip, as a manipulation check, participants indicated what news organization produced the clip that they saw and what they thought that organization's partisan leaning is. Next, they were asked to evaluate the level of bias they perceived in the clip, the level of incivility they perceived in the clip, and the levels of trust they have in the news organization that produced the clip and the news media as an institution. Finally, they were asked to answer questions regarding their partisan identification and political ideology, media use, and demographics before ending the survey. Those who completed the

study were compensated $0.75 through the Amazon MTurk platform.[1] The questionnaire for the

study is included in Appendix A.

*Stimuli*

For this study, a 2 (civil/uncivil) x 2 (ingroup/outgroup) experimental design was used.

All participants viewed an approximately two to four-minute-long video clip of a news segment

covering the United States' relationship with Ukraine. Real video clips that aired on CNN or Fox

News were chosen for this study, as opposed to researcher-created ones, not only because

previous studies have used real political news coverage as stimuli for experiments and

experimental surveys (Mutz, 2015; Sydnor, 2019), but also because these clips are reflective of

actual instances of media coverage that participants could be exposed to in their daily lives. In

addition, not only was the topic similar for both the ingroup and outgroup video clips, but the

political actors for the two sources were held relatively consistent. Specifically, three of the four

political actors that appeared in the two Fox News video clips were present in the civil and

uncivil conditions, both political actors that appeared in the two CNN video clips were present in

the civil and uncivil conditions, and one political actor was present in three of the four total video

clips. This was done by using different portions of the same segment of a political program to

create the civil and uncivil clips. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions that varied

on the following factors.

First, the video clip contained either civil or uncivil content regarding the United States'

relationship with Ukraine. In the civil video clip, although the political actors disagreed with

each other, they did not resort to previously mentioned tactics of incivility like insults and

impoliteness (Muddiman, 2017) or hyperbole and vulgarity (Jamieson & Falk, 2000) as frequently. Instead, the messages were more straight-forward, often avoiding attacks directed at the political actors themselves (Brooks & Geer, 2007). On the other hand, the uncivil clip contained more instances of insults, hyperbole, and direct attacks, going beyond what was necessary to make a political actor's point (Su et al., 2018). Some of these instances included telling other actors that they say, "incredibly stupid things," calling them a "moron" and telling them to "shut up," and accusing another actor of being a "sellout."

Second, the source of the video clip was either from the ingroup or outgroup of a participant's partisan identity. Based on studies by Iyengar and Hahn (2009) and Turner (2007), CNN represented the liberal source while Fox News represented the conservative source. If a respondent was recruited by MTurk as a Democrat, a clip from CNN would be the participant's ingroup, while a clip from Fox News would be the outgroup. If a respondent was recruited by MTurk as a Republican, a clip from Fox News would be the participant's ingroup, while a clip from CNN would be the outgroup.

Links to the video clips are included in Appendix B.

*Dependent Variable Measures*

*Perceived Bias*. After participants saw the civil or uncivil news clip from either an ingroup or outgroup news program, they were asked several questions. First, to measure perceived bias, participants responded to three items (see also Feldman, 2010). They were asked to report their perception of bias in the news clip by evaluating whether they believed the news program was "strongly biased against," "strictly neutral," or "strongly biased in favor" of the ideologies of the political party they most identify with. This item was measured on a scale from -5 to 5 and reverse coded. Two other items were also used to measure perceived bias, with one

asking participants to rate the percentage of the news program that was favorable toward the ideologies of the political party they most identify with on a scale of 0% to 100%, and the other asking them to rate the percentage that was unfavorable toward the ideologies of their political party using the same scale. The favorability item was reverse coded before both items were converted to a -5 to 5 scale so that if reliable, they could be averaged with the first measure to form a single bias scale in which higher numbers represented higher levels of bias (*Cronbach's* α = 0.93, *M* = 0.92, *SD* = 2.69).

*Media Trust*. Next, participants answered a series of items based on Thorson et al.'s (2010) study to measure media trust at the programmatic and institutional level. To measure programmatic media trust, participants responded to two statements about the specific news program: "I trust the information I found in the news program I just watched" and "The news program I just watched presented information in a balanced way," (*Pearson's r* = 0.80, *p* < .001; *M* = 3.52, *SD* = 2.96). To measure institutional media trust, participants responded to two similar statements that emphasized mainstream media content: "I trust the information I find in the mainstream news media" and "Most mainstream news media present information in a balanced way," (*Pearson's r* = 0.82, *p* < .001; *M* = 3.42, *SD* = 2.60). Both measures were on a scale from 0 as "strongly disagree" to 10 as "strongly agree."

*Covariate Measures*

Since previous research demonstrates that perceptions of bias, incivility, and media trust do not necessarily occur without influence from various demographic and motivational forces, several variables were controlled for in the model. The first set of variables related to participants' political knowledge and predispositions. First, familiarity with impeachment and U.S. and Ukraine relations (*M* = 3.93, *SD* = 0.83), as well as participants' favorability towards

different liberal (*Cronbach's* α = 0.79, *M* = 2.70, *SD* = 1.28) and conservative (*Cronbach's* α = 0.87, *M* = 2.56, *SD* = 1.28) political figures (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003), were measured on a scale from 1 as "very unfamiliar/unfavorable" to 5 as "very familiar/favorable." Self-reported political identification and ideology were the second and third variables controlled for in the model (Peterson & Kagalwala, 2019; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). The first item asked participants to identify themselves as either a "Democrat," "Republican," "Independent," or "Other." When used in the model with all participants the item was dummy coded as 1 as "Democrat" and 2 as "Other," but was dropped from the models containing only Democratic and Republican participants because partisanship is already taken into account without the variable. The second item asked them to indicate their political ideology on a scale from 0 as "very liberal" to 10 as "very conservative" (*M* = 4.94, *SD* = 3.31).

The next variable was associated with participants' media use (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). They were asked to select how many political news programs they watch regularly out of a total of nine liberal (*M* = 0.82, *SD* = 1.11) and conservative (*M* = 0.50, *SD* = 0.81) programs (Dilliplane, Goldman, & Mutz, 2013). Political interest was also used as a control variable (Tsfati & Capella, 2003), with participants indicating whether they follow what is going on in government and public affairs "most of the time," "some of the time," "only now and then," or "hardly at all" (*M* = 1.81, *SD* = 0.68). Finally, a variable regarding conflict avoidance was used (Sydnor, 2019). The measure asked participants to rate several statements related to different aspects of arguments (e.g. "I hate arguments," "I find conflicts exciting") on a scale from 1 as "strongly disagree" to 5 as "strongly agree" (*Cronbach's* α = 0.82, *M* = 3.36, *SD* = 0.88).

*Manipulation Check*

Four questions were used as a manipulation check. Participants were first asked to recognize what news organization produced the news clip that they watched (e.g. CNN or Fox News), and then identify what political party (e.g. Democratic Party or Republican Party) that news organization most aligned with. A significant chi-squared test, $\chi^2(df = 1) = 467.22$, $p < .001$, indicated that participants in the CNN condition were significantly more likely than participants in the Fox News condition to remember that the source was CNN, and vice versa. Similarly, a significant chi-squared test, $\chi^2(df = 1) = 379.96$, $p < .001$, indicated that the participants in the CNN condition were significantly more likely than participants in the Fox News condition to report that the news organization aligned with the Democratic party and vice versa.

Participants were also asked to rate their perception of incivility in the news program using two measures from Mutz's (2015) study. The first measure included a 5-point semantic differential scale in which participants indicated their overall impression of the discussion and disagreement in the program as being closer to one of two words from several pairs of words (emotional/unemotional, quarrelsome/cooperative, hostile/friendly, rude/polite, agitated/calm, sarcastic/earnest). The items were then recoded so that incivility is represented by higher scores. The second measure asked participants to report whether they found the overall tone of the program to be "extremely friendly and warm," "mostly calm, polite and civil," "a mix of polite disagreement and some heated interactions," or "mostly heated interactions." The items in the two measures were then standardized and averaged to form a single incivility scale (*Cronbach's* $\alpha = 0.81$, $M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.92$). A significant t-test, $t(797) = -13.21$, $p < .001$, using the civil/uncivil condition as the independent variable and incivility as the dependent variable

indicated that participants viewing uncivil content were significantly more likely to perceive incivility than those viewing civil content.

*Analysis*

The data were analyzed using Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro for SPSS. This macro allows researchers to easily test moderated and mediated effects, like those hypothesized in this project. The analyses are based on OLS regression models, which allowed for testing of H1 through H3 (see Appendix C for the OLS regression coefficients testing the models overviewed in the main text). H4 was tested using Model 7, using the ingroup/outgroup media exposure condition as the predictor variable, the civil/uncivil content as the moderator variable, and perceptions of bias as the mediator variable. Two separate models were run, one with programmatic media trust as the outcome variable (Model 1) and a second with institutional media trust as the outcome variable (Model 2).

## Chapter IV: Results

First, to address H1, which states that partisans will perceive media content as being more biased when they encounter outgroup media than when they encounter ingroup media, I turn to the OLS regression model produced by PROCESS that predicts perceptions of bias. The analysis revealed that partisans' viewing of outgroup media significantly predicts higher perceptions of bias compared to their viewing of ingroup media, $b = 2.84$, $SE = 0.22$, $p < .01$ (see, for more statistical details, Table C1 in Appendix C). Therefore, H1 is supported.

An OLS regression model produced by PROCESS was again used to attend to H2, which predicts that when participants are exposed to outgroup media, they will perceive uncivil content as significantly more biased than civil content, while on the other hand, when participants are exposed to ingroup media, uncivil content will not significantly affect perceptions of bias. The

interaction effect between the ingroup/outgroup media and civil/uncivil clip indicated that uncivil content from outgroup or ingroup media does not significantly moderate perceptions of bias, $b = 0.45$, $SE = 0.31$, $p > .05$, which means H2 was not supported (see, for more statistical details, Table C1 in Appendix C).

Using the same analysis as H1 and H2, H3a and H3b address the relationship between perceptions of bias and media trust. Specifically, H3a states that higher perceptions of bias towards news programming will result in lower levels of programmatic trust (Model 1), while H3b predicts that higher perceptions of bias towards news programming will result in lower levels of institutional media trust (Model 2). The OLS regression models produced by PROCESS demonstrated that, when viewers have higher perceptions of bias towards news programming, they do have significantly lower levels of programmatic trust, $b = -0.49$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .01$ (see, for more statistical details, Table C1 in Appendix C). In addition, higher perceptions of bias towards news programming also relates to significantly lower levels of institutional trust, $b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .05$ (see, for more statistical details, Table C2 in Appendix C). Thus, both H3a and H3b are supported.

Finally, I tested H4, which asserts that there is a mediated relationship from partisan (outgroup v. ingroup) media exposure to media trust through perceptions of media bias that is moderated by type (civil v. uncivil) of content, such that the indirect effect is significant when the content is uncivil but is not significant when the content is civil. I ran two moderated mediation models in PROCESS, one predicting programmatic media trust (see Table 1, Model 1) and one predicting institutional media trust (see Table 1, Model 2). I turn first to the programmatic media trust model (see Table 1, Model 1). The partisan group condition had a significant indirect effect on programmatic media trust through perceptions of media bias for

both the civil and uncivil condition. That is, when participants watched a news program from the outgroup, it resulted in higher perceptions of bias, which then led to a decrease in programmatic media trust. The index of moderated mediation indicated that the civility or incivility of a segment did not moderate the indirect effect, meaning when partisans watched outgroup programming, uncivil content did not increase perceptions of bias compared to civil content, and therefore, did not lead to a stronger effect on levels of programmatic media trust.

I turn next to the institutional media trust model (see Table 1, Model 2). The partisan group condition had a significant indirect effect on institutional media trust through perceptions of media bias for both the civil and uncivil condition. That is, when participants watched a news program from the outgroup, it resulted in higher perceptions of bias, which then led to a decrease in institutional media trust. The index of moderated mediation indicated that the civility or incivility of a segment did not moderate the indirect effect, meaning when partisans watched outgroup programming, uncivil content did not increase perceptions of bias compared to civil content, and therefore, did not lead to a stronger effect on levels of institutional media trust.

Table 1. Indirect Effects on Media Trust – All Participants with Covariates

| | | Model 1: Programmatic Trust | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95% Confidence Interval |
| *Direct Effect* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.68** | **0.19** | **(-2.0573, -1.3096)** |
| *Civil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.40** | **0.16** | **(-1.7267, -1.1009)** |
| *Uncivil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.62** | **0.18** | **(-1.9910, -1.2888)** |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.22 | 0.15 | (-0.5252, 0.0696) |

| | | Model 2: Institutional Trust | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95 % Confidence Interval |
| *Direct Effect* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-0.36** | **0.18** | **(-0.7174, -0.0018)** |
| *Civil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-0.33** | **0.11** | **(-0.5481, -0.1217)** |
| *Uncivil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-0.38** | **0.13** | **(-0.6371, -0.1402)** |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.05 | 0.04 | (-0.1482, 0.0169) |

Notes. Significant indirect paths are bolded.

As a set of robustness checks, I re-ran these models again with only MTurk-identified Democrats and again only with MTurk-identified Republicans to determine if the results were consistent across partisan identification. In the programmatic media trust model containing only Democrats, the partisan group condition had a significant indirect effect on programmatic media trust through perceptions of media bias for both the civil and uncivil condition (see Table 2, Model 1). That is, when MTurk-identified Democrats watched a news program from the outgroup, it resulted in higher perceptions of bias, which then led to a decrease in programmatic trust. The index of moderated mediation indicated that the civility or incivility of a segment did not moderate the indirect effect, meaning when Democrats watched outgroup programming, uncivil content did not increase perceptions of bias compared to civil content, and therefore, did not lead to a stronger effect on levels of programmatic media trust.

For the institutional media trust model containing only Democrats, the partisan group condition did not have a significant indirect effect on institutional media trust through perceptions of media bias for both the civil and uncivil condition (see Table 2, Model 2). That is, when participants watched a news program from the outgroup, it did not result in higher perceptions of bias, which then did not lead to a decrease in institutional media trust. The index of moderated mediation indicated that the civility or incivility of a segment did not moderate the indirect effect, meaning when Democrats watched outgroup programming, uncivil content did not increase perceptions of bias compared to civil content, and therefore, did not lead to a stronger effect on levels of institutional media trust.

Table 2. Indirect Effects on Media Trust – Democratic Participants with Covariates

| | | Model 1: Programmatic Trust | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95% Confidence Interval |
| **Direct Effect** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.85** | **0.26** | **(-2.3669, -1.3282)** |
| **Civil** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.10** | **0.20** | **(-1.5219, -0.7483)** |
| **Uncivil** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.39** | **0.23** | **(-1.8607, -0.9649)** |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.29 | 0.20 | (-0.6833, 0.0886) |

| | | Model 2: Institutional Trust | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95 % Confidence Interval |
| **Direct Effect** | Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Institutional Trust (Y) | -0.40 | 0.26 | (-0.9111, 0.1150) |
| Civil | Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y) | -0.01 | 0.14 | (-0.2837, 0.2670) |
| Uncivil | Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y) | -0.01 | 0.17 | (-0.3586, 0.3253) |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.00 | 0.04 | (-0.1053, 0.0836) |

Notes. Significant indirect paths are bolded. OLS regression coefficients are presented in Tables C3 and C4 in Appendix C.

Similarly to the results of the MTurk-identified Democratic model, the model containing only Republican participants revealed that the partisan group condition had a significant indirect effect on programmatic media trust through perceptions of media bias for both the civil and uncivil condition (see Table 3, Model 1). That is, when MTurk-identified Republicans watched a news program from the outgroup, it resulted in higher perceptions of bias, which then led to a decrease in programmatic trust. The index of moderated mediation indicated that the civility or incivility of a segment did not moderate the indirect effect, meaning when Republicans watched outgroup programming, uncivil content did not increase perceptions of bias compared to civil content, and therefore, did not lead to a stronger effect on levels of programmatic media trust.

Finally, unlike the Democrats-only model, the model containing only MTurk-identified Republican participants revealed that the partisan group condition had a significant indirect effect on institutional media trust through perceptions of media bias for both the civil and uncivil condition (see Table 3, Model 2). That is, when Republican participants watched a news program from the outgroup, it resulted in higher perceptions of bias, which then led to a decrease in institutional media trust. The index of moderated mediation indicated that the civility or incivility of a segment did not moderate the indirect effect, meaning when Republicans watched outgroup programming, uncivil content did not increase perceptions of bias compared to civil content, and therefore, did not lead to a stronger effect on levels of institutional media trust.

Table 3. Indirect Effects on Media Trust – Republican Participants with Covariates

**Model 1: Programmatic Trust**

| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95% Confidence Interval |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Direct Effect* | Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Programmatic Trust (Y) | -1.44 | 0.28 | (-1.9808, -0.8928) |
| *Civil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.69** | **0.25** | **(-2.2045, -1.2162)** |
| *Uncivil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.80** | **0.25** | **(-2.3084, -1.3293)** |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.11 | 0.23 | (-0.5739, 0.3544) |

**Model 2: Institutional Trust**

| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95 % Confidence Interval |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Direct Effect* | Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Institutional Trust (Y) | -0.26 | 0.25 | (-0.7447, 0.2304) |
| *Civil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-0.59** | **0.17** | **(-0.9469, -0.2919)** |
| *Uncivil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-0.63** | **0.18** | **(-1.0017, -0.3117)** |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.04 | 0.09 | (-0.2212, 0.1218) |

Notes. Significant indirect paths are bolded. OLS regression coefficients are presented in Tables C5 and C6 in Appendix C.

These results reveal that H4 was partially supported, as there was a mediated relationship from partisan media exposure to programmatic and institutional (although not for the Democrat-only model) media trust through perceptions of media bias that is moderated by the type of content. However, the indirect effect was significant both when the content was civil and uncivil, even though it was predicted that this effect would only be significant when the content was uncivil.

**Chapter V: Discussion**

While it might be true that Americans are growing tired of a lack of civility in political media and discourse (Maisel, 2012), the findings in this study indicate that being weary of incivility and actually being affected by it might be two different things. Overall, the evidence quite clearly points to the idea that, while partisans' perceptions of bias in outgroup political news programming play a considerable role in lowering levels of programmatic and institutional media trust, incivility does not – even when controlling for outside variables that could potentially have an effect. Therefore, this research provides both advancements and questions to consider in regard to the different theories and concepts studied.

First, the results demonstrated the significance of partisanship – or more specifically, ingroup and outgroup dynamics – on perceptions of bias in political news programming. The fact that participants perceived higher levels of bias when watching outgroup media programming as compared to ingroup media programming just further supports previous research on HME and oppositional media hostility (Arceneaux et al., 2012; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005; Vallone et al., 1985). Given then the prevalence of both partisanship and partisan cable news programming in today's society, these theories continue to be of great importance – particularly oppositional media

hostility, which emphasizes the idea that although the electorate can identify bias in both ingroup and outgroup programming, they will only be bothered by it if they disagree.

Unlike perceptions of bias, the evidence related to incivility does not so clearly follow prior research. As both a moderator between partisanship and perceptions of bias and as a moderator in the full moderated mediation model, incivility did not significantly predict higher perceptions of bias, and, subsequently, did not result in lower levels of programmatic and institutional media trust. This was surprising not only because viewers perceive outgroup actors in news programming to be more rude, hostile, and agitated – even when both ingroup and outgroup messengers behave uncivilly – but also because of televised media's ability to more powerfully portray personal-level incivility (Mutz, 2015). So, it is interesting to consider why these video clips which contained clear instances of personal-level incivility committed by outgroup actors on outgroup political news programming did not lead to findings similar to those in previous research.

One potential reason this study may not have found significant differences between the civil and uncivil conditions is that these conditions were not manipulated strongly enough. While there were more obvious instances of incivility in the uncivil conditions, the civil conditions were not totally lacking in incivility. In all of the video clips, the news programs were utilizing one-on-one or group discussions that could naturally lend themselves to interruption or slightly raised voices, which in some cases can be interpreted as rude or uncivil. However, a manipulation check indicated that the uncivil clips were perceived as significantly more uncivil than the civil clips, no matter the network (Fox News or CNN). This suggests that the experiment, while not comparing totally civil to totally uncivil clips, did manage to compare more uncivil to less uncivil content. Another potential reason for why there were not significant

differences between the civil and uncivil conditions is that although personal-level incivility is perceived as more uncivil than public-level incivility (Muddiman, 2017), it has become so common in political cable news programming (Forgette & Morris, 2006) that perhaps viewers are becoming desensitized to its effects. However, this and other reasons for why incivility did not significantly affect perceptions of bias should be explored in future research in order to make more conclusive claims.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that perceptions of bias mediate the relationship between both ingroup and outgroup partisans and programmatic and institutional media trust. Thus, when outgroup members watch outgroup media, it does result in higher perceptions of bias towards the news program, and lead to lower levels of programmatic and institutional media trust in the model with all participants. This result does not just support previous work, but also builds upon it in two ways. First, other than a few studies like Tsfati and Cohen's (2005), most HME research looks more closely at specific media programs and issues, as opposed to the media as a whole. This extension is important because, as Tsfati and Cohen (2013) point out, media as an institution is a major contributor to our democratic society, and negative perceptions or distrust of this institution can detrimentally impact our political system. Second, as previously mentioned, bias is frequently used as a measurement within trust or credibility instead of as a separate concept (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Thorson et al., 2010). Therefore, the inclusion of a separate institutional media trust variable and bias measurement in this study – as well as the findings that support their use – begins to tease out the different ways in which individuals' partisanship affects their perception of political news media. This is a significant addition to previous research because, as partisanship continues to grow in prevalence, a clearer

understanding of these effects will help scholars better determine how political news media can avoid the negative perceptions and be most effective in improving our political system.

However, it is important to note that while these findings were consistent in the model with all participants, both when controlling and not controlling for other variables like media use and political interest,[2] there was a difference between MTurk-identified Democratic and Republican participants. While the Republican participants had significantly lower levels of trust in both programmatic and institutional media – which again was the case for when all participants were tested together – the Democratic participants only had significantly less trust in programmatic media, but not in institutional media. It seems this difference is most likely due to Democrats' higher levels of trust in the media in general. According to a Gallup poll, Americans who identify as Democrats have consistently had more trust in the news media compared to Republicans, with the recent gap in trust being as large as 54 percentage points (Brenan, 2019). Nevertheless, further research would need to be conducted to be sure.

The differences between some of the findings and previous research, specifically the effect of incivility, and discrepancies among Democrats' and Republicans' trust in media, does lead to limitations that should be considered. The first and most clear limitation of this study would be the videos selected for the experimental stimuli. Since there was a desire to make the incivility in the videos as realistic as possible – as well as a budget restriction and instances of similar work that used actual video footage (Sydnor, 2019) – experimental control of the video content was reduced. This was made even more challenging by the fact that in order to eliminate outside influences, the political actors and general messaging had to remain fairly similar, and further limited the selection of the already available clips online. Therefore, future research could

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[2] The numerical results of the models without covariates are included in Appendix D.

focus on finding videos with more distinct differences in the level of incivility, or if budget allows, create original video content.

A second limitation of this study was the participant sample. Although it was large in size and evenly distributed between individuals who identify as either Democratic or Republican, over 80 percent of the participants were Caucasian. Previous research by Sydnor (2019) demonstrates that there can be differences in perceptions of incivility between individuals of different races, thus, a more racially diverse sample should be addressed in future research.

Another limitation of this study was that the conditions only used one video clip as opposed to multiple video clips over time, which could better measure the long-term effects of perceived bias and incivility on institutional media trust. However, there were effects on institutional media trust even after one 2-4-minute video clip, so future research using longitudinal studies could focus not only on institutional media trust, but other variables as well – perhaps behavioral outcomes. Other future research in this area could also look at additional psychological variables that might moderate the relationship between ingroup and outgroup partisanship, perceptions of bias, and programmatic and institutional media trust.

Regardless of the limitations, the results from this study have theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the foremost implication is that HME's assumption that partisanship plays a major role in individuals' hostile perceptions of bias in media programming continues to hold true, even when other potentially confounding variables are present (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Hartmann & Tanis, 2013; Vallone et al., 1985). Most interesting though is the robust finding that incivility did not appear to exacerbate this effect in any way. The project, therefore, contributes to the frequent debate regarding what incivility truly looks like in a real-life media environment,

and whether or not researchers can replicate it in a consistently theoretical way (Borah, 2013; Fridkin & Kenney, 2008; Wolf et al., 2012).

Practically, the findings create concern in two different ways. The first is that as the electorate becomes more and more polarized, it is more and more likely that individuals will distrust both specific media programs as well as media as an institution. If this does happen, it will be exceedingly difficult for members of the press to overcome not only who they are reaching, but also who believes in what they are saying. The second practical implication is that although Americans decry the amount of incivility in our media (Maisel, 2012), they do not seem to be more affected by it than they are by civility. If individuals are not processing the two in a way that changes their perception of bias or trust in the media, then calls for more civility might not have any affect – meaning, that simply changing the way political actors speak to each other will not solve the problems in our political discourse that some think it will. So, once again, are Americans right? Is the incivility created by political journalists and elites what is making us so unhappy with American media and politics? It would seem that, for now, the answer is no – and based on the effect of partisanship on perceptions of bias and media trust – the problem just might be us.

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## Appendix A

## Questionnaire

**Information Statement**

**Key Information**:
- Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary
- Your participation will take 10 minutes.
- You will be asked to do the following procedures: watch a short video clip and complete a questionnaire. More detailed information on the procedures can be found below.
- You could experience some discomfort when watching the short video clip or completing the questionnaire, but no more discomfort than you would experience in your engaging with political conversation and media in everyday life.
- Your participation may not benefit you directly but will help us gain a better understanding of political news messaging and its effects.
- Your alternative to participating in this research study is not to participate.

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand how individuals evaluate political cable news programming. This will entail your completion of a questionnaire that includes the viewing of a video. Your participation is expected to take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The content of the questions and videos should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your engaging with political conversation and media in everyday life.

Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of political news messaging and its effects. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings.

No personally identifiable information will be collected.

It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your response.

You will be paid $0.75 through MTurk for your participation in this study.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completion of the questionnaire indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research

participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email irb@ku.edu.

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Only those age 18 or older are eligible to participate in this study. Are you 18 years of age or older?
1. Yes
2. No

**Pre-Test**

**Familiarity and Favorability Evaluations**

Please indicate your familiarity with each of the following topics (0 = *very unfamiliar* to 5 = *very familiar*):
1. Impeachment
2. U.S. and Ukraine Relations

Please indicate your favorability of each of the following people (0 = *very unfavorably* to 5 = *very favorably*):
1. Rudy Giuliani
2. Nancy Pelosi
3. Donald Trump
4. Mitch McConnell
5. Joe Biden

**Distractor**

Please identify which word best describes each of the following individuals (*Journalist*, *Celebrity*, *Athlete*):
1. Kim Kardashian
2. Diane Sawyer
3. Tom Brady
4. Hoda Kotb

Please match each of the following names with the correct image:
1. George Washington
2. Abraham Lincoln
3. John F. Kennedy
4. Ronald Reagan

**Exposure to Television Clip**

On the next page, you will see a video clip from a televised news program. Please turn up your audio and press play. Watch the full video clip before moving on to the rest of the survey. If you are using a phone or other type of mobile device, please turn the device horizontally to see the whole video.

**Manipulation Checks**

Did you have any technical difficulties with the video?
1. Yes
2. No

What television network hosted the news program you just watched?
1. Fox News
2. CNN

What political party do you think the television network that hosted the news program you just watched most identifies with?
1. Republican Party
2. Democratic Party

**Post-Test Items**

**Program Content Evaluations**

Please indicate the ideology of the media program you just watched (0 = *very liberal* to 5 = *neutral* to 10 = *very conservative*).

Was the news program you just watched strictly neutral, or was it biased in favor or against the

political party you most identify with (-5 = *strongly biased against*, 0 = *strictly neutral*, and 5 = *strongly biased in favor*)?

Please rate the percentage of the news program that was favorable toward the ideology of the political party you most identify with (0% = *very unfavorable* to 100% = *very favorable*).

Please rate the percentage of the news program that was unfavorable toward the ideology of the political party you most identify with (0% = *very favorable* to 100% = *very unfavorable*).

Please indicate which word from each pair you feel best describes the overall discussion and disagreement on this program.
1. Emotional 1 2 3 4 5 Unemotional
2. Quarrelsome 1 2 3 4 5 Cooperative
3. Hostile 1 2 3 4 5 Friendly
4. Rude 1 2 3 4 5 Polite
5. Agitated 1 2 3 4 5 Calm
6. Sarcastic 1 2 3 4 5 Earnest

Overall, the tone of this program was:
1. Extremely friendly and warm
2. Mostly calm, polite, and civil
3. A mix of polite disagreement and some heated interactions
4. Mostly heated interactions

In general, I have trust in the news program I just watched (0 = *strongly disagree* to 10 = *strongly agree*).

The news program I just watched presented information in a balanced way (0 = *strongly disagree* to 10 = *strongly agree*).

In general, I have trust in the American news media (0 = *strongly disagree* to 10 = *strongly agree*).

Most mainstream news media present information in a balanced way (0 = *strongly disagree* to 10 = *strongly agree*).

**Partisan Identification**

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a(n):
1. Democrat
2. Republican
3. Independent
4. Other (please specify) _____

Please indicate your political ideology (0 = *very liberal* to 5 = *neutral* to 10 = *very conservative*).

**Demographics, Media Use, and Individual Characteristics**

Please select the media outlets you would most prefer using when seeking information on news and politics:
1. Fox News, Breitbart News, The Wall Street Journal, The Rush Limbaugh Show
2. MSNBC, Slate News, The New York Times, The Stephanie Miller Show
3. ABC, Politico, USA Today, NPR

Which of the following political news programs do you watch regularly on television? Please check any that you watch at least once a month.
1. CNN Newsroom
2. Anderson Cooper 360
3. Cuomo Prime Time
4. Morning Joe
5. All in with Chris Hayes
6. The Rachel Maddow Show
7. Tucker Carlson Tonight
8. Hannity
9. Fox & Friends
10. Other (please specify) _____

Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs:
1. Most of the time
2. Some of the time
3. Only now and then
4. Hardly at all

Please read each of the following statements carefully. Select whether you Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Somewhat Agree, or Strongly Agree with each of the following statements.
1. I hate arguments
2. I find conflicts exciting
3. I enjoy challenging the opinions of others
4. Arguments don't bother me
5. I feel upset after an argument

Are you:
1. Male
2. Female
3. Nonbinary
4. Another identification (please specify)

What is the last grade or class you completed in school?
1. Grade 8 or lower
2. Some high school, no diploma

3. High school diploma or equivalent
4. Technical or vocational school after high school
5. Some college, no degree
6. Associate's or two-year college degree
7. Four-year college degree
8. Graduate or professional school after college, no degree
9. Graduate or professional degree

Are you of Hispanic or Latino descent?
1. Yes
2. No

What is your race?
1. Asian or Pacific Islander
2. Black or African-American
3. Native
4. White or Caucasian
5. Other (please specify) _____

What was your household income last year?
1. Under $30,000
2. $30,000 to $50,000
3. $50,001 to $75,000
4. Above $75,000

What is your age?

**Random MTurk Code**

To receive payment through MTurk.com, copy the following code into the MTurk HIT. We will use this code to verify your participation in the survey before approving payment.

Paste the following code into MTurk: {random code}

Thanks for completing this study.

Please click the arrow key below to ensure that your responses are recorded.

**Appendix B**

**Experimental Stimuli**

Using video editing software, I shortened the clips from the links listed below down to 2-4 minutes each. Although I have files of the videos, I have provided the link to each video and time period to watch so that you are all able to view the experimental stimuli.

**Civil CNN**: *7:20-9:50* – (*Video 2*) http://chriscuomo.com/2019/09/rudy-giuliani-on-september-19-2019/

**Uncivil CNN**: *4:23-8:15* – (*Video 1*) http://chriscuomo.com/2019/09/rudy-giuliani-on-september-19-2019/

**Civil Fox**: *1:20-4:55* – https://www.msn.com/en-us/video/news/chris-hahn-calls-out-rudy-giulianis-evidence-on-biden-and-ukraine-for-being-libelous/vp-AAHN7v1

**Uncivil Fox**: *4:55-8:23* – https://www.msn.com/en-us/video/news/chris-hahn-calls-out-rudy-giulianis-evidence-on-biden-and-ukraine-for-being-libelous/vp-AAHN7v1

# Appendix C

## Ordinary Least Squares Regression Model Coefficients for Models in Main Text

Table C1. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Table 1, Model 1 (All Participants)

| Antecedent | Consequent | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | *M* (*Perceived Bias*) | | | *Y* (*Programmatic Trust*) | | |
| | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| *X* (*Ingroup/Outgroup*) | 2.84 | 0.22 | .00 | -1.68 | 0.19 | .00 |
| *M* (*Perceived Bias*) | --- | --- | --- | -0.49 | 0.04 | .00 |
| *W* (*Civil/Uncivil*) | -0.07 | 0.22 | .76 | --- | --- | --- |
| *M* x *W* | 0.45 | 0.31 | .14 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.51 | 0.82 | .53 | 3.11 | 0.82 | .00 |
| Liberal Media | -0.15 | 0.08 | .05 | 0.12 | 0.08 | .12 |
| Conservative Media | 0.14 | 0.12 | .26 | 0.33 | 0.12 | .01 |
| Political Identification | -0.27 | 0.25 | .28 | -0.25 | 0.25 | .32 |
| Political Ideology | -0.08 | 0.04 | .06 | 0.03 | 0.04 | .49 |
| Issue Familiarity | 0.12 | 0.11 | .26 | 0.18 | 0.11 | .10 |
| Rep. Favorability | 0.08 | 0.10 | .42 | 0.28 | 0.10 | .00 |
| Dem. Favorability | -0.21 | 0.09 | .02 | 0.31 | 0.09 | .00 |
| Conflict Avoidance | 0.30 | 0.09 | .00 | -0.16 | 0.09 | .08 |
| Political Interest | -0.19 | 0.11 | .09 | -0.01 | 0.11 | .93 |

$$R^2 = 0.36 \qquad\qquad R^2 = 0.46$$
$$F(12, 781) = 36.11, p < .001 \qquad F(11, 782) = 61.54, p < .001$$

Table C2. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Table 1, Model 2 (All Participants)

| | Consequent | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | M (*Perceived Bias*) | | | Y (*Institutional Trust*) | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| X (*Ingroup/Outgroup*) | 2.84 | 0.22 | .00 | -0.36 | 0.18 | .05 |
| M (*Perceived Bias*) | --- | --- | --- | -0.12 | 0.03 | .00 |
| W (*Civil/Uncivil*) | -0.07 | 0.22 | .76 | --- | --- | --- |
| M x W | 0.45 | 0.31 | .14 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.51 | 0.82 | .53 | 0.38 | 0.78 | .62 |
| Liberal Media | -0.15 | 0.08 | .05 | 0.15 | 0.07 | .04 |
| Conservative Media | 0.14 | 0.12 | .26 | -0.08 | 0.12 | .51 |
| Political Identification | -0.27 | 0.25 | .28 | 0.04 | 0.24 | .88 |
| Political Ideology | -0.08 | 0.04 | .06 | 0.03 | 0.04 | .49 |
| Issue Familiarity | 0.12 | 0.11 | .26 | 0.14 | 0.10 | .17 |
| Rep. Favorability | 0.08 | 0.10 | .42 | 0.03 | 0.09 | .78 |
| Dem. Favorability | -0.21 | 0.09 | .02 | 1.13 | 0.08 | .00 |
| Conflict Avoidance | 0.30 | 0.09 | .00 | -0.03 | 0.09 | .74 |
| Political Interest | -0.19 | 0.11 | .09 | -0.28 | 0.11 | .01 |

$R^2 = 0.36$        $R^2 = 0.37$

$F(12, 781) = 36.11, p < .001$        $F(11, 782) = 41.17, p < .001$

Table C3. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Table 2, Model 1 (Democratic Participants)

| | Consequent | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | *M* (*Perceived Bias*) | | | *Y* (*Programmatic Trust*) | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| *X* (*Ingroup/Outgroup*) | 2.48 | 0.31 | .00 | -1.85 | 0.26 | .00 |
| *M* (*Perceived Bias*) | --- | --- | --- | -0.44 | 0.05 | .00 |
| *W* (*Civil/Uncivil*) | -0.18 | 0.31 | .55 | --- | --- | --- |
| *M* x *W* | 0.65 | 0.44 | .14 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.75 | 1.05 | .48 | 3.39 | 1.06 | .00 |
| Liberal Media | -0.12 | 0.09 | .19 | 0.12 | 0.09 | .20 |
| Conservative Media | -0.18 | 0.34 | .60 | 1.09 | 0.35 | .00 |
| Political Ideology | -0.14 | 0.06 | .01 | 0.05 | 0.06 | .39 |
| Issue Familiarity | 0.11 | 0.16 | .49 | -0.05 | 0.17 | .77 |
| Rep. Favorability | -0.31 | 0.14 | .02 | 0.12 | 0.14 | .38 |
| Dem. Favorability | 0.14 | 0.12 | .24 | 0.46 | 0.12 | .00 |
| Conflict Avoidance | 0.11 | 0.13 | .41 | -0.19 | 0.13 | .14 |
| Political Interest | -0.03 | 0.17 | .87 | 0.02 | 0.17 | .90 |
| | $R^2 = 0.35$ | | | $R^2 = 0.47$ | | |
| | $F(11, 385) = 19.23, p < .001$ | | | $F(10, 386) = 34.00, p < .001$ | | |

Table C4. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Table 2, Model 2 (Democratic Participants)

|  | | Consequent | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | M (*Perceived Bias*) | | | Y (*Institutional Trust*) | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| X (*Ingroup/Outgroup*) | 2.48 | 0.31 | .00 | -0.40 | 0.26 | .13 |
| M (*Perceived Bias*) | --- | --- | --- | -0.00 | 0.05 | .93 |
| W (*Civil/Uncivil*) | -0.18 | 0.31 | .55 | --- | --- | --- |
| M x W | 0.65 | 0.44 | .14 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.75 | 1.05 | .48 | -0.21 | 1.04 | .84 |
| Liberal Media | -0.12 | 0.09 | .19 | 0.06 | 0.09 | .53 |
| Conservative Media | -0.18 | 0.34 | .60 | 0.91 | 0.34 | .01 |
| Political Ideology | -0.14 | 0.06 | .01 | 0.11 | 0.06 | .06 |
| Issue Familiarity | 0.11 | 0.16 | .49 | 0.11 | 0.16 | .51 |
| Rep. Favorability | -0.31 | 0.14 | .02 | 0.10 | 0.14 | .44 |
| Dem. Favorability | 0.14 | 0.12 | .24 | 1.18 | 0.12 | .00 |
| Conflict Avoidance | 0.11 | 0.13 | .41 | 0.07 | 0.13 | .57 |
| Political Interest | -0.03 | 0.17 | .87 | -0.37 | 0.17 | .03 |

$R^2 = 0.35$

$F(11, 385) = 19.23, p < .001$

$R^2 = 0.28$

$F(10, 386) = 14.73, p < .001$

Table C5. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Table 3, Model 1 (Republican Participants)

| | Consequent | | | | | |
| Antecedent | M (*Perceived Bias*) | | | Y (*Programmatic Trust*) | | |
| | Coeff. | SE | p | Coeff. | SE | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| X (*Ingroup/Outgroup*) | 3.11 | 0.30 | .00 | -1.44 | 0.28 | .00 |
| M (*Perceived Bias*) | --- | --- | --- | -0.55 | 0.05 | .00 |
| W (*Civil/Uncivil*) | -0.05 | 0.30 | .87 | --- | --- | --- |
| M x W | 0.20 | 0.43 | .64 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -2.27 | 1.10 | .04 | 2.61 | 1.14 | .02 |
| Liberal Media | -0.01 | 0.15 | .95 | 0.08 | 0.16 | .60 |
| Conservative Media | 0.03 | 0.13 | .84 | 0.19 | 0.14 | .17 |
| Political Ideology | -0.06 | 0.07 | .33 | -0.02 | 0.07 | .73 |
| Issue Familiarity | -0.02 | 0.14 | .90 | 0.31 | 0.15 | .04 |
| Rep. Favorability | 0.47 | 0.14 | .00 | 0.34 | 0.15 | .03 |
| Dem. Favorability | -0.35 | 0.13 | .01 | 0.20 | 0.14 | .15 |
| Conflict Avoidance | 0.41 | 0.12 | .00 | -0.14 | 0.13 | .27 |
| Political Interest | -0.06 | 0.15 | .71 | -0.05 | 0.16 | .73 |

$R^2 = 0.42$
$F(11, 385) = 25.24, p < .001$

$R^2 = 0.48$
$F(10, 386) = 35.03, p < .001$

Table C6. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Table 3, Model 2 Republican Participants

| | Consequent | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M (*Perceived Bias*) | | | Y (*Institutional Trust*) | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| X (*Ingroup/Outgroup*) | 3.11 | 0.30 | .00 | -0.26 | 0.25 | .30 |
| M (*Perceived Bias*) | --- | --- | --- | -0.19 | 0.05 | .00 |
| W (*Civil/Uncivil*) | -0.05 | 0.30 | .87 | --- | --- | --- |
| M x W | 0.20 | 0.43 | .64 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -2.27 | 1.10 | .04 | 2.57 | 1.02 | .01 |
| Liberal Media | -0.01 | 0.15 | .95 | 0.30 | 0.14 | .04 |
| Conservative Media | 0.03 | 0.13 | .84 | -0.15 | 0.12 | .23 |
| Political Ideology | -0.06 | 0.07 | .33 | -0.09 | 0.06 | .15 |
| Issue Familiarity | -0.02 | 0.14 | .90 | 0.15 | 0.13 | .25 |
| Rep. Favorability | 0.47 | 0.14 | .00 | -0.09 | 0.14 | .49 |
| Dem. Favorability | -0.35 | 0.13 | .01 | 0.87 | 0.12 | .00 |
| Conflict Avoidance | 0.41 | 0.12 | .00 | -0.11 | 0.12 | .34 |
| Political Interest | -0.06 | 0.15 | .71 | -0.33 | 0.14 | .02 |

$$R^2 = 0.42 \qquad\qquad R^2 = 0.33$$
$$F(11, 385) = 25.24, p < .001 \qquad F(10, 386) = 18.68, p < .001$$

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# Appendix D

# Models Without Covariates

Table D1. Indirect Effects on Media Trust – All Participants without Covariates

| | | Model 1: Programmatic Trust | | | Model 2: Institutional Trust | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95% Confidence Interval | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95 % Confidence Interval |
| *Direct Effect* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.66** | **0.19** | **(-2.0333, -1.2760)** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | -0.15 | 0.22 | (-0.5789, 0.2832) |
| *Civil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.37** | **0.16** | **(-1.6947, -1.0705)** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-0.45** | **0.12** | **(-0.6967, -0.2158)** |
| *Uncivil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.63** | **0.18** | **(-2.0069, -1.2838)** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-0.53** | **0.14** | **(-0.8273, -0.2525)** |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.26 | 0.16 | (-0.5787, 0.0411) | | -0.09 | 0.06 | (-0.2107, 0.0136) |

Notes. Significant indirect paths are bolded.

Table D2. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for All Participants without Covariates

|  | Consequent | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | *M (Perceived Bias)* | | | *Y (Programmatic Trust)* | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| *X (Ingroup/Outgroup)* | 2.77 | 0.22 | .00 | -1.65 | 0.19 | .00 |
| *M (Perceived Bias)* | --- | --- | --- | -0.49 | 0.04 | .00 |
| *W (Civil/Uncivil)* | -0.08 | 0.22 | .72 | --- | --- | --- |
| *M* x *W* | 0.52 | 0.31 | .09 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.57 | 0.16 | .00 | 4.81 | 0.12 | .00 |
|  | $R^2 = 0.32$ | | | $R^2 = 0.42$ | | |
|  | $F(3, 795) = 125.72, p < .001$ | | | $F(2, 796) = 291.08, p < .001$ | | |

Table D3. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for All Participants without Covariates

ALL

|  | Consequent | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | *M (Perceived Bias)* | | | *Y (Institutional Trust)* | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| *X (Ingroup/Outgroup)* | 2.77 | 0.22 | .00 | -0.15 | 0.22 | .51 |
| *M (Perceived Bias)* | --- | --- | --- | -0.16 | 0.04 | .00 |
| *W (Civil/Uncivil)* | -0.08 | 0.22 | .72 | --- | --- | --- |
| *M* x *W* | 0.52 | 0.31 | .10 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.57 | 0.16 | .00 | 3.65 | 0.13 | .00 |
|  | $R^2 = 0.32$ | | | $R^2 = 0.03$ | | |
|  | $F(3, 795) = 125.72, p < .001$ | | | $F(2, 796) = 14.25, p < .001$ | | |

Table D4. Indirect Effects on Media Trust – Democratic Participants without Covariates

| | | Model 1: Programmatic Trust | | | Model 2: Institutional Trust | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95% Confidence Interval | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95 % Confidence Interval |
| **Direct Effect** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** / Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Institutional Trust (Y) | **-1.87** | **0.27** | **(-2.3979, -1.3376)** | -0.45 | 0.30 | (-1.0368, 0.1302) |
| **Civil** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** / Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y) | **-1.11** | **0.20** | **(-1.5124, -0.7384)** | -0.06 | 0.15 | (-0.2257, 0.3492) |
| **Uncivil** | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** / Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y) | **-1.48** | **0.26** | **(-2.0323, -1.0118)** | -0.08 | 0.20 | (-0.3043, 0.4664) |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.37 | 0.22 | (-0.8536, 0.0193) | 0.02 | 0.06 | (-0.0880, 0.1450) |

Notes. Significant indirect paths are bolded.

Table D5. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Democratic Participants without Covariates

|  | Consequent | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | *M (Perceived Bias)* | | | *Y (Programmatic Trust)* | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| *X (Ingroup/Outgroup)* | 2.42 | 0.32 | .00 | -1.87 | 0.27 | .00 |
| *M (Perceived Bias)* | --- | --- | --- | -0.46 | 0.05 | .00 |
| *W (Civil/Uncivil)* | -0.15 | 0.32 | .63 | --- | --- | --- |
| *M* x *W* | 0.81 | 0.45 | .07 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.54 | 0.22 | .02 | 4.84 | 0.16 | .00 |

$$R^2 = 0.29 \qquad\qquad R^2 = 0.41$$
$$F(3, 396) = 54.16, p <.001 \qquad F(2, 397) = 137.26, p <.001$$

Table D6. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Democratic Participants without Covariates

|  | Consequent | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | *M (Perceived Bias)* | | | *Y (Institutional Trust)* | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| *X (Ingroup/Outgroup)* | 2.42 | 0.32 | .00 | -0.45 | 0.30 | .13 |
| *M (Perceived Bias)* | --- | --- | --- | 0.02 | 0.06 | .68 |
| *W (Civil/Uncivil)* | -0.15 | 0.32 | .63 | --- | --- | --- |
| *M* x *W* | 0.81 | 0.45 | .07 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.54 | 0.22 | .02 | 4.58 | 0.18 | .00 |

$$R^2 = 0.29 \qquad\qquad R^2 = 0.01$$
$$F(3, 396) = 54.16, p <.001 \qquad F(2, 397) = 1.28, p >.05$$

Table D7. Indirect Effects on Media Trust – Republican Participants without Covariates

**Model 1: Programmatic Trust**

| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95% Confidence Interval |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Direct Effect* | Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Programmatic Trust | -1.41 | 0.28 | (-1.9512, -0.8617) |
| *Civil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.67** | **0.25** | **(-2.1756, -1.2005)** |
| *Uncivil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Programmatic Trust (Y)** | **-1.80** | **0.25** | **(-2.3186, -1.3271)** |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.14 | 0.23 | (-0.6023, 0.3162) |

**Model 2: Institutional Trust**

| | | Effect Coefficient | Bootstrapped S.E. | 95 % Confidence Interval |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Direct Effect* | Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Institutional Trust (Y) | 0.14 | 0.27 | (-0.4029, 0.6754) |
| *Civil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-0.97** | **0.19** | **(-1.3671, -0.6195)** |
| *Uncivil* | **Ingroup/Outgroup (X) → Bias Perceptions (M) → Institutional Trust (Y)** | **-1.05** | **0.20** | **(-1.4671, -0.6707)** |
| *Index of moderated mediation* | | -0.08 | 0.14 | (-0.3644, 0.1900) |

Notes. Significant indirect paths are bolded.

Table D8. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Republican Participants without Covariates

| | Consequent | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M (Perceived Bias)* | | | *Y (Programmatic Trust)* | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| *X (Ingroup/Outgroup)* | 3.11 | 0.31 | .00 | -1.41 | 0.28 | .00 |
| *M (Perceived Bias)* | --- | --- | --- | -0.54 | 0.05 | .00 |
| *W (Civil/Uncivil)* | -0.00 | 0.31 | .99 | --- | --- | --- |
| *M* x *W* | 0.26 | 0.44 | .56 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.59 | 0.22 | .01 | 4.76 | 0.16 | .00 |
| | $R^2 = 0.36$ | | | $R^2 = 0.44$ | | |
| | $F(3, 395) = 73.00, p < .001$ | | | $F(2, 396) = 154.76, p < .001$ | | |

Table D9. OLS Regression Model Coefficients for Republican Participants without Covariates

| | Consequent | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M (Perceived Bias)* | | | *Y (Institutional Trust)* | | |
| Antecedent | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* | Coeff. | *SE* | *p* |
| *X (Ingroup/Outgroup)* | 3.11 | 0.31 | .00 | 0.14 | 0.27 | .62 |
| *M (Perceived Bias)* | --- | --- | --- | -0.31 | 0.05 | .00 |
| *W (Civil/Uncivil)* | -0.00 | 0.31 | .99 | --- | --- | --- |
| *M* x *W* | 0.26 | 0.44 | .56 | --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | -0.59 | 0.22 | .01 | 2.73 | 0.16 | .00 |
| | $R^2 = 0.36$ | | | $R^2 = 0.12$ | | |
| | $F(3, 395) = 73.00, p < .001$ | | | $F(2, 396) = 26.97, p < .001$ | | |