Who Gets Covered? Ideological Extremity and News Coverage of Members of the U.S. Congress, 1993 to 2013

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Abstract

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

Keywords

political communication, polarization, gatekeeping, news reporting

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

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

If journalists are systematically more likely to choose to cover those who speak the most stridently on the Congressional floor, they are likely to quote ideological extremists who tend to speak in intense, partisan terms (Morris, 2001). This is important because, as Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) have shown, individuals respond to competing frames by preferring to endorse the argument coming from the person's favored political party when the media present a polarized political environment, while the same arguments, in a moderate political environment, nudge people to favor the stronger argument, regardless of the argument's source. Thus, whether journalists are more likely to quote moderate or extremist lawmakers could affect whether citizens are more likely to accept the best arguments, as compared with partisan arguments, to solve problems. In addition, the choice of who to cover could influence the public's perceptions of polarization itself—something that can foster polarization in the public (Wagner, 2007b).

Significance of Study

We combine a measure of individual lawmakers' ideology and a variety of professional, contextual, and demographic information of House and Senate members with how often those same lawmakers appear in political news coverage in the *New York Times* (*NYT*), the *NBC Nightly News*, and the *CBS Evening News*. We show that the news media systematically favor extreme voices over moderate ones in the House of Representatives. We find clear evidence of this relationship even when controlling for a variety of factors that are likely to affect news coverage of Congress. However, while we show evidence of a positive, bivariate relationship between ideological extremity and coverage for senators, the effect diminishes considerably or disappears outright when controlling for other relevant factors.

In an era of increased partisan polarization at the elite level, extreme politicians are good fits for modern journalistic norms of judging newsworthiness. This calls into question traditional explanations of gatekeeping as relying on a value of moderation (Gans, 1979). Our study implies that journalistic values of objectivity need not be met by reflecting a narrow range of moderate elite views; rather, the objectivity norm can be met via an accurate accounting of extreme views—positions that are an accurate

reflection of the widening "left-right" divide in Washington, D.C. (Carmines, 2011). This is especially important because as the ideological distance between the parties widens, the public tends to become more polarized (Hetherington, 2001). Finally, a focus on extremists may reflect beliefs that covering more strident views would be seen as more exciting to media audiences from a market perspective of news production (Hamilton, 2005).

Literature Review

How Journalists Approach News Coverage

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

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

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

In American politics, the structure of the two-party system makes it easy for journalists to report objectively, as journalists can index debate between the two parties, even if many of the partisan sources themselves hold extreme views (Hershey, 1999; Wagner, 2007b). Morris (2001) showed that the most ideologically intense MCs were the most likely to engage in the process of giving "minute speeches," the kind of public addresses from which television reporters could capture sound bites from C-SPAN. What is more, these representatives used dramatic, extreme rhetoric when speaking. Moderate MCs are less likely to promote partisan messages they disagree with, potentially ceding even more airtime to more extreme representatives who are more likely to promote partisan messages (Sellers, 2010).

Whose views should we expect to make the news in what is both a changing information environment and an increasingly polarized political one? Traditionally, scholars have noted that journalists favor powerful elected officials such as those who are members of the party leadership or chair important committees in congress (Squire, 1988; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980). Other work has specifically focused on the Senate, arguing that senators receive more coverage as they are more prestigious sources than members of the House because they serve longer and have more individual control over floor debates (Fogarty, 2013; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007).

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

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

However, while extremity is a dominant factor with respect to predicting contemporary news coverage of interest groups, there are other factors unique to lawmakers that we must consider when predicting which MCs will make the news. First, MCs in leadership positions play important roles in determining political strategy, publicly expressing that strategy and cajoling members to fall in line. As such, they occupy positions of greater influence and import and should be more likely to garner media attention (Lipinski & Neddenriep, 2004). Second, the longer a member has served in Congress, she or he has had more time to take a multitude of public positions, develop relationships with journalists, and experience growth in individual power. Third, not only is there a gender gap in the number of female lawmakers strolling the halls of Congress, but the news media have also been shown to systematically seek out congressmen for comment more than congresswomen (Zoch & Turk, 1998). Fourth, the actual effort lawmakers engage in, by giving speeches and/or introducing legislation, to win coverage, affects reporters' willingness to include those MCs in political stories (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980).

Finally, and we believe most importantly, the chamber in which the federal lawmaker serves could affect the type of lawmaker who is more likely to get covered. Kuklinski and Sigelman (1992) found that, ideologically, extreme senators were more

likely to get television news coverage than moderates, but they did not control for the efforts senators make to earn news attention (see Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980). Moreover, members of the U.S. House of Representatives are traditionally more polarized than members of the U.S. Senate (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006). The rules of the Senate filibuster make moderate senators more newsworthy than moderate House members because a moderate senator is more likely than an extreme senator to be able to stop a filibuster in a sharply divided Senate. The median House member does not have a similar level of power. Thus, extremists in the House should be more likely to get attention than extremists in the Senate.

Hypotheses

We are seeking to answer the question, "What factors predict the likelihood of a member of Congress being covered in news coverage of a political issue?" Our theoretical argument, based on a review of the extant literature, has shown that coverage should most likely be given to lawmakers who serve in party leadership structures, serve as committee chairs, are in the opposite party of the president, and are men. We move beyond the existing literature by arguing that—for members of the House of Representatives—a crucial, but untested, factor may matter more: whether the lawmaker is an ideological extremist. Thus, we seek to test our major hypothesis, listed below, across several specifications to understand the robustness of our results.

> **H1:** Members of the House of Representatives in either major party who are more ideologically extreme than their party's average member will be more likely to be included in news coverage as compared with ideological moderates.

We expect the same in a bivariate relationship for senators, but when controlling for the factors discussed above, we expect the ideological extremity effect to disappear.

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

> **H2a:** MCs who are members of the party leadership are more likely to be included in news coverage than other lawmakers.
> **H2b:** MCs who chair committees are more likely to be included in news coverage than other lawmakers.
> **H3:** MCs who are in the same political party as the president will be less likely to be included in news coverage than MCs in the opposite party.
> **H4:** U.S. Senators will be included in more news stories than U.S. House members.

Data and Research Design

To test whether journalists are more likely to give attention to lawmakers who are more ideologically extreme, we compare an estimate of individual lawmaker ideology

with the volume of attention received by lawmakers in the *NYT* from the 103rd Congress to the 112th Congress. We chose the "national paper of record," rather than an incomplete sampling method attempting to represent a broader media ecology, because the *NYT* is an agenda-setter for other news media (Reese & Danielian, 1989). As such, the *Times* serves as a reasonable proxy for the kind of coverage other news organizations might be expected to provide (see Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). Furthermore, in the Web 2.0 era, the *NYT* has maintained its agenda-setting role, even within blog networks that continue to follow *Times* coverage on many (but not all) issues (Meraz, 2009). Thus, even in the 21st-century media environment, there is evidence that what appears in the *NYT* is likely to appear more broadly throughout the media ecology.

We capture coverage in the *Times* by making use of the *New York Times Linked Open Data Application Program Interface (API)* (accessible at http://data.nytimes. com), as well as data on individual legislators' committee membership, place in the Congressional leadership structure, party, and gender. The API collects the article abstracts of *NYT* articles. Article abstracts only mention the most important elements of an article, so if an MC is mentioned in an abstract, she or he was not an afterthought in a story, but rather, the MC was an important part of it (Baumgartner, De Boef, & Boydstun, 2008). Our use of the *NYT* API should be thought of as a data set that contains significant mentions of a lawmaker in news coverage but not as a comprehensive measure of how often lawmakers were directly quoted.

Because we use simple keyword searches to extract articles from the *NYT* API (using MCs' first and last names), we follow the advice of Lacy, Watson, Riffe, and Lovejoy (2015) in assessing both the precision and recall of our resulting articles. A simple random sample of articles (300) pulled from the API were hand-coded for whether MCs searched for were mentioned (or not) in the article. We first computed the precision of the search (*relevant articles/total articles pulled*), which was 89.7% in the *NYT* sample. Because we did not sample from the *NYT* archive, but rather pulled all hits through the API, we have no reason to believe that the recall rate is substantially lower than 1.0 (e.g., the keyword search did not likely miss many articles, see Lacy et al., 2015).

As some lawmakers may make more of an effort to earn news media attention than others, we also measure "attention-seeking" behavior of MCs by counting the number of (200+ word) floor speeches given in each legislative session (see Weaver & Wilhoit, 1980).

To test the robustness of our findings across different platforms of the mainstream news media, we also conduct analyses of broadcast news coverage on the *NBC Nightly News* and *CBS Evening News*. Jerit and Barabas (2008) argued that television news viewing can decrease knowledge gaps among news users who have a harder time benefiting from newspaper coverage. Thus, including television networks in our analysis allows us to draw deeper implications regarding the reach of our findings. If television outlets cover more extreme MCs in a manner similar to that of the *NYT*, it increases the likelihood that more citizens will be introduced to and understand the views of extreme

lawmakers, making polarization more likely (Wagner, 2007b). It also helps serve to buttress our argument that the *Times* is an agenda-setter for the news media more generally.

We use CBS and NBC but not ABC in our analysis. Jerit (2009) noted that when used in concert with print sources, CBS provides a "representative view of information that was appearing" in media around the country (p. 76). However, we chose to include one additional network to CBS as "the Eye" was generally the lowest rated network during the time period we analyze. We chose NBC, in part, because the Tyndall Reports available for the years we analyze suggest that NBC's issue agenda was often a bit different than those of CBS and ABC. Moreover, Groeling's (2008) analysis shows differential behavior between NBC and the other networks in terms of coverage of presidential approval polls. As it turns out, the two networks were not different in terms of the amount of attention they paid to extreme lawmakers, but including both in our analyses adds to the robustness of our findings.

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

The *NYT's Article Search API*, which interfaces with headlines and article abstracts, was then recursively searched using a *Python* script for each member's first and last names[1] in the time spanning January 1 of the first Congressional session and December 31 of the second session, with the resulting counts pulled. Each member's resulting Congress-article count results were then merged into the *Nominate* data set. In all, we pulled article counts for 4,863 MCs-legislators (3,972 House, 891 Senate), with a resulting total of 242,030 articles (107,875 House, 134,155 Senate). To capture the effect of the amount of previous coverage given to each legislator, we conducted a similar API search, but restricted to the fourth quarter leading in to each term (e.g., the previous quarter for the 112th Congress would span October 1-December 31, 2010). We do not include the results that include this variable in our models as the results are consistent with the findings we present.

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

We coded for whether MCs had chaired standing committees in either chamber, whether they were a member of the party leadership, and their gender using Stewart and Woon's (2011) House and Senate committee assignment data. Dummy variables were created for whether MCs were part of either the majority or minority party's leadership or chair of a standing committee for each Congressional session, as well as for the gender of each MC. We also created dummy variables for whether legislators' party controlled each chamber and whether the president's party matched the MC's own for each term. Finally, we created a variable measuring each legislator's time in office (in Congressional sessions).

To measure attention-seeking behavior of Congressional members, we culled floor speech data from the *Sunlight Foundation's Open Congress API*, which offers every floor statement for the Congresses we analyze. To avoid brief statements of procedural nature that were clearly not attempts to stoke media coverage (e.g., yielding time), we counted only those statements on the floor of each chamber that were composed of 200 or more words.

We are most interested in the effect of ideological extremity (irrespective of the direction of that ideology) on news media attention, so we use the absolute value of the *DW-NOMINATE 1* measure from Poole and Rosenthal's data set. Because our dependent variable consists of the number of articles covering each legislator over the 103rd to 112th Congresses, our dependent variable is count distributed. As such, we make use of negative binomial regression in the subsequent analyses. One concern with count data is a preponderance of zeros in analyses; our House data netted 231 legislator-Congress pairings with zero article counts (~6% of the sample), while the Senate data netted 13 legislator-Congress pairings with zero article counts (~2% of the sample). Thus, the low number of observations with no articles in the *NYT* does not appear to be inflated, so straight negative binomial regression was deemed appropriate for our analyses.

Results

Table 1 presents our results for the House of Representatives. We begin by directly testing the influence of House member extremity on article counts in the *NYT*, shown in Table 1, Model 1.[2] For the House, ideological extremity had a positive and significant bivariate relationship ($b = 0.904$, $p < .01$) on media coverage; the predicted number of articles referencing moderate legislators (*Ideological Extremity* = 0) was 19.24,[3] while extreme legislators (*Ideological Extremity* = 1.0) in the House were predicted to receive 47.52 articles.

Of course, ideological extremity may not explain news attention as well as MC's own attention-seeking behavior. In Model 2, we introduce variables measuring the number of floor speeches given by each member of the House during each session and legislator characteristics, including the number of sessions they served in office, whether they were members of (either party's) leadership, chaired a committee, were female, whether each member's party controlled the House chamber (*party control* = 1), whether they shared the president's party (*presidential party* = 1), and interactions

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

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Extremity	0.904** (0.121)	1.123** (0.116)	0.581** (0.223)
Floor speeches		0.001** (0.0003)	0.001** (0.0003)
Party leadership		2.468** (0.114)	2.427** (0.130)
Committee chair		0.490** (0.096)	0.426** (0.093)
Female		−0.139* (0.055)	−0.165** (0.055)
Terms in office		0.058** (0.005)	0.058** (0.005)
Chamber control		0.132** (0.044)	0.078 (0.044)
Shared party		−0.284** (0.096)	−0.396** (0.098)
Control × Shared		−0.122 (0.110)	0.010 (0.112)
Congress			0.012 (0.018)
Congress × Extremity			0.063 (0.037)
Intercept	2.957** (0.061)	2.234** (0.064)	2.349** (0.104)
χ^2	55.10**	1,534.13**	1,538.07**
N	4,488	4,424	4,424

*$p < .05$, two-tailed. **$p < .01$.

between the two. We interact these variables because of theoretical expectations that members of Congress will be more likely to receive media attention when in the minority, with especially large effects when they are in the minority in their chamber and not in the president's party at the same time (Cook, 1996, but see Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1982). The coefficient estimates are shown in Model 2 of Table 1, with the marginal effects plotted in Figure 1.

Once again, House members' extremity continued to positively and significantly correlate with their level of media coverage ($b = 1.123$, $p < .01$), even after controlling for floor speeches, leadership status, committee chairs, gender, and minority status. Notably, the substantive importance of the ideological extremity results does not diminish across model specifications. In Model 2, extreme members of the House were predicted to receive coverage in 28.7 articles, 3 times the number of their centrist counterparts (9.34). The effect of floor speeches was positive and significant ($b = 0.001$, $p < .01$). Being a member of House leadership ($b = 2.468$, $p < .01$) or chairing a standing committee ($b = 0.490$, $p < .05$) was likewise associated with 100.83 and 5.9 article increases, respectively. Female House members were again associated with lower media coverage ($b = −0.139$, $p < .05$), with 1.21 fewer article mentions for women, on average.

There was a significant and positive main effect for legislators' party controlling the House ($b = 0.132$, $p < .01$), as well as a significant, negative effect for members sharing the president's partisan affiliation ($b = −0.284$, $p < .01$). Members of the controlling party could be expected to receive 1.32 more articles than those in the minority, while those in the president's party received 2.31 fewer articles, on average. Rejecting **H3**, there was no significant interactive effect between sharing the president's party and controlling the House chamber ($b = −0.122$, $p > .05$).
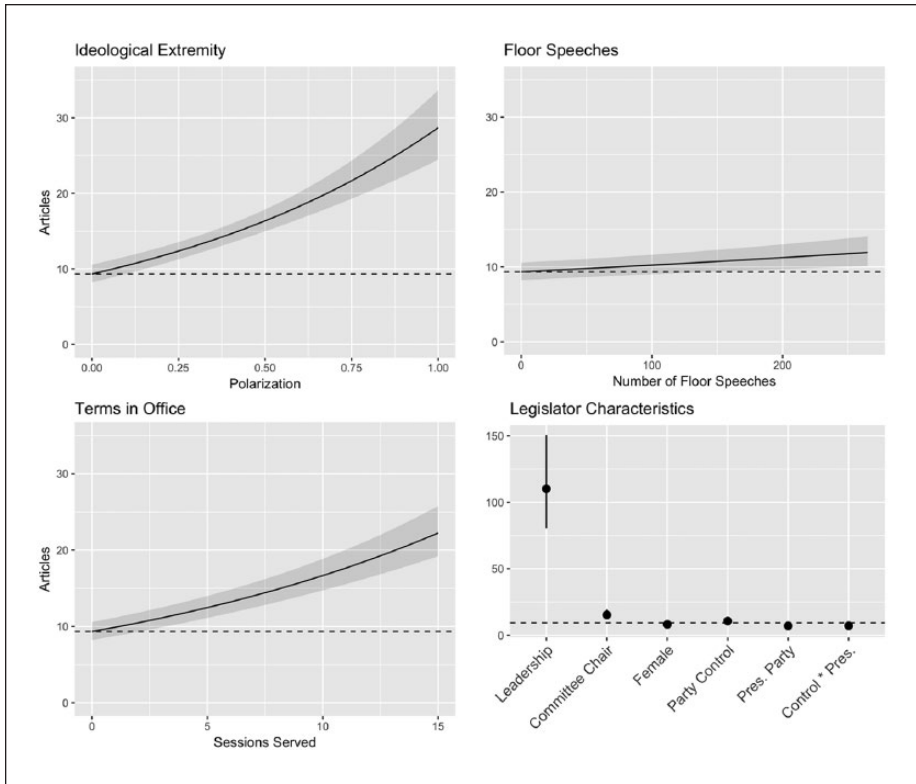
Figure 1. Predictors of House members' *New York Times* coverage.

Model 3 of Table 1 conditions ideological extremity on the Congressional session by means of an interactive relationship. It makes sense theoretically to account for Congressional sessions, as the time period covered in this research saw a dramatic rise in polarization in both the lower and upper chambers (Carmines, 2011; McCarty et al., 2006). All of the previous controls used in the prior model continued to exhibit similar effects in both direction and magnitude (though the *p* value for *Chamber Control* rises above the .05 level).

The main effect of our primary variable of interest—extremity—also continued to have a positive and significant effect on article count ($b = 0.581$, $p < .01$), though the magnitude of its independent effect dropped from previous models, with extreme legislators receiving 10.3 more article mentions than moderate legislators. However, conditioning the effect of extremity on the Congressional session demonstrated a positive multiplicative effect between the two variables ($b = 0.063$, $p < .10$), though only at the less conservative $p < .10$ level. This means that as with each unit increase in Congressional session—which doubles as a measure of an increasingly polarized House according to the chamber polarization data maintained by Poole and

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

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

*p < .05, two-tailed. **p < .01.

Rosenthal—the effect of extremity has gone up; for example, in the 103rd Congress, an ideologically extreme House member is predicted to receive around 20 more articles than a moderate House member. However, an ideologically extreme member of the House in the 112th Congress—a much more polarized body—could be expected to receive around 40 more articles than a moderate member. **H2a** and **H2b** were also confirmed, as being members of the party leadership and committee chairs were both positively correlated with appearing in more news articles.

We next orient our analysis to the effect of member extremism on newspaper coverage of the U.S. Senate, shown in Table 2. As we predicted, we found a significant and positive bivariate effect between ideological extremism and media coverage for senators (b = 1.036, p < .01), with the predicted number of articles for centrist senators at 101.49 while extreme senators had a predicted article count of 286. This initial analysis supports **H1** (extreme MCs get more coverage) and **H4** (senators receive more coverage than representatives). Unlike the House models, **H2a** and **H2b** (party leadership and committee chairs receive more coverage), was not different from zero. However, **H3** received support as the interaction of sharing the party of the president and being in the majority party in the legislature had a significant, negative relationship with coverage.

Model 2 includes the individual legislator characteristics as well as our political context variables. The model coefficients are shown in Model 2 of Table 2 and effect predictions are plotted in Figure 2. The effect of ideological extremity was positive and significant (b = 0.606, p < .01), with extreme senators receiving 48.73 more articles than their moderate counterparts. The effect of floor speeches continued to be significant, albeit small (b = 0.002, p < .01). Senate leadership (b = −0.178, p > .05)
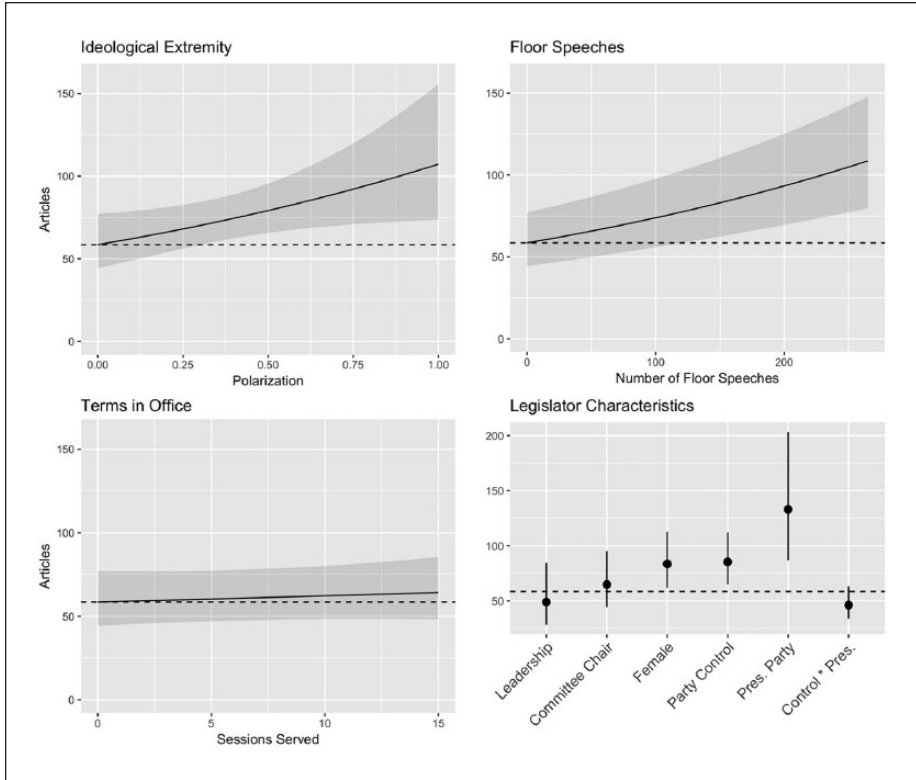
Figure 2. Predictors of Senate members' *New York Times* coverage.

and chairing a committee ($b = 0.104$, $p > .05$) continued to be nonsignificant. The effect of gender on coverage persisted ($b = 0.357$, $p < .01$), with women in the Senate receiving 25.10 more article mentions than males, while terms in office was again not significantly related to article count ($b = 0.006$, $p > .05$).

When accounting for political context in Model 2, both chamber control ($b = 0.378$, $p < .01$) and sharing the president's party ($b = 0.821$, $p < .01$) was positive and significant; additionally, interacting the two produced a negative effect ($b = -1.434$, $p < .01$). While controlling the Senate and sharing the president's party was associated with an independent increase of 26.87 and 74.46 articles, respectively, members whose party controlled the chamber *and* who shared the president's party received fewer articles (46.24), on average, than members who controlled the chamber but didn't share partisanship (85.40), members who shared presidential partisanship but were in the out-party (132), and members in the out-party who did not share the president's partisanship (58.5).

As with the House, Model 3 brings in the effect of ideological extremity as conditioned by Congressional session/increasing level of polarization in the senate chamber.

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

	House—Model 5	Senate—Model 5
Ideological extremity	2.294** (0.608)	1.093 (1.076)
Floor speeches	−0.003 (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)
Party leadership	1.968** (0.441)	−1.091 (1.449)
Committee chair	0.812 (0.471)	−1.870** (0.599)
Female	0.345 (0.290)	−0.348 (0.522)
Terms in office	0.126** (0.022)	0.098* (0.042)
Intercept	−1.654** (0.432)	−0.574 (0.618)
χ^2	89.444**	30.945**
N	565	89

Note. Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Contextual variables retained their direction and significance; however, as we expected, the effect of extremity on article counts again drops from significance ($b = 0.048$, $p > .05$). Moreover, there was no significant interactive effect between extremity and Congressional session, unlike our House models ($b = 0.069$, $p > .05$), though Congressional sessions themselves did have a positive and significant (albeit small) effect on article counts ($b = 0.083$, $p < .05$).

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

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

There was no effect of floor speeches in predicting House members' coverage by network news stations. Party leadership, however, was positive and significant ($b = 1.968$,

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

	House—*NYT*	House network	Senate—*NYT*	Senate network
Extremity	−0.064 (0.689)	0.737 (1.271)	−0.287 (1.227)	−4.025 (2.302)
Floor speeches	−0.0001 (0.0009)	−0.003 (0.002)	0.004** (0.001)	0.005** (0.002)
Party leadership	1.606** (0.252)	1.840** (0.438)	−0.577 (0.816)	−1.126 (1.405)
Committee chair	1.116** (0.279)	0.782 (0.496)	0.099 (0.324)	−1.331* (0.660)
Female	0.356* (0.160)	0.355 (0.290)	0.269 (0.258)	−0.123 (0.505)
Terms in office	0.086** (0.013)	0.125** (0.024)	0.020 (0.023)	0.099* (0.043)
Republican	−1.659** (0.483)	−2.195* (0.926)	0.062 (0.605)	−1.553 (1.101)
Republican × Extremity	2.565** (0.881)	3.367* (1.651)	0.952 (1.435)	5.858* (2.658)
Intercept	2.950** (0.298)	−0.892 (0.561)	3.881** (0.442)	0.606 (0.814)
χ^2	220.74**	95.69**	36.86**	31.44**
N	565	565	89	89

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. *NYT* = *The New York Times.*
*p < .05. **p < .01.

$p < .01$), with members of leadership receiving 1.2 more articles than nonleadership members. Committee chairs also received more coverage, though at a lower threshold of significance ($b = 0.812$, $p < .10$), while there was no difference in coverage of female members as compared with males. Finally, the number of terms in office was positive and significant ($b = 0.126$, $p < .01$).

The Senate model of network news coverage tells a different story. Our primary variable of interest, ideological extremism, was not significantly related to coverage by the two networks ($b = 1.093$, $p > .05$). Floor speeches, our measure of attention-seeking, were significant ($b = 0.005$, $p < .05$), with each additional floor speech associated with a very modest increase of 0.002 in broadcast news reports. Floor speeches are guaranteed video sound bites, which likely contribute to the effect of this variable on television news coverage. Interestingly, committee chairs tended to receive less coverage than noncommittee chairs ($b = -1.870$, $p < .01$), and no difference existed between males and females, unlike the *NYT* Senate models. Finally, the number of terms in office was positively and significantly related to broadcast news coverage ($b = 0.098$, $p < .05$), with each additional term served associated with 0.05 more broadcast mentions.

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

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

Discussion

Our analysis makes several contributions to our understanding of the news media's role in a democratic society. First, the results suggest that moderation may not be an enduring news value; rather, moderation's value may vary given the political context of the time. The increasing diversity of the information environment coupled with a dramatic growth in polarization among federal lawmakers has resulted in extreme MCs receiving more news coverage than their moderate counterparts. This is especially true in the House of Representatives, where the most extreme representatives earn more than 3 times the coverage of their moderate colleagues.

Our findings regarding senators were mixed. Senators receive far more coverage than House members on average, but extreme senators are only more likely to receive increased news coverage under simple model specifications in the *NYT* data and not at all in network television coverage.

The growth of partisan polarization in Congress (McCarty et al., 2006), people's reaction to it (Wagner, 2007a), and the increasing diversity of the information environment (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008) have animated our examination of moderatism in news coverage (McCluskey & Kim, 2012). Clearly, the *NYT*, still considered the most important American media outlet, is not following the value of moderation in its coverage of Congress. Neither are broadcast television outlets.

Studies of the American news media's coverage of politics often focus on elections, especially in an era of the "permanent campaign." Given that national news generally focuses less on specific House and Senate races than local media do, we did not take account of election-based coverage in our analysis. As moderate lawmakers may be more electorally vulnerable, our hypothesis tests are conservative as moderate lawmakers would be receiving "extra" election-based coverage in our data, potentially muting the extremity effect.

Second, we show the importance of understanding the different incentives facing reporters when covering members of the House as compared with the Senate, especially in eras of polarization—times when the filibuster becomes part of "standard operating procedure" for the Senate's minority party. News organizations and their reporters appear sensitive to the ways in which the different rules of the Senate and the House affect the relative power lawmakers have and reflect those sensitivities in their reporting.

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

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

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

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

Third, lawmakers strategically attack the media, diminishing the trust that Americans have for the media (Ladd, 2012). Baughman's (1989) historical examination of powerful Americans' responses to their experiences with the "third-person" effect helps to explain actions they took to restrict press freedom and influence public

opinion. Understanding how elites respond to news coverage can help explain what leaders thought about "if not how the mass media affected them, how they believed the mass media touched others," (Baughman, 1989, p. 18).

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

Our research design highlights the benefits of programmatically searching text to analyze. The process is more extendable than traditional content analysis techniques. Adding sources to analyze in this way is low cost and allows research on media coverage to proceed more quickly. A benefit of conducting a search via Python, or other scripting languages, is the ability to systematically and efficiently parse through a large volume of text. While human-based searches are better for deriving meaning from the texts, programmatically doing so allows a level of text searching not possible with human coders.

While we use three different news sources in our analyses, the analyses that extend beyond one congressional session are limited to one source of news. The *NYT* is commonly seen as an agenda-setter for the rest of the news media (Boydstun, 2013), but it is merely one major outlet that covers political news. Far more people watch network television news than read the *Grey Lady*. While our print results are consistent with the data from CBS and NBC, future work should examine television coverage over time. While Meraz (2009) shows that the *Times* still acts as an agenda-setter for web-based media outlets, future studies should include cable, web-based, and social media news sources to provide a more comprehensive picture of the information environment.

Our analysis is also silent on lawmakers' strategic decisions to promote messages (Sellers, 2010) and specific issue coverage, such as journalists' coverage of issues parties "own" (Hayes, 2010). Our measure of legislator activity shows the results of those strategic decisions. Depending upon whether an MC supports her or his party's position on an issue and/or whether the issue in question is controversial or salient in an MC's district or state, a lawmaker's availability to be covered might be skewed by atypical silence or talkativeness.

Finally, we suggest that future work should examine whether our models apply to other Western democracies. Differences in both party and institutional structure provide scholars opportunities to test the institutional elements of our argument against the lawmaker extremity elements of our argument across a variety of democratic

governance structures. Moreover, the mix of a cultural backlash against progressive legislative programs and the growth of economic insecurity fostering the rise of rightwing populism in Europe (Inglehart & Norris, 2016) has given rise to charismatic legislators who tend to hold more extreme views than many of their counterparts in government.

Conclusion

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

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Notes

1. Search queries were constructed by requiring first and last names to appear concurrently through the use of the "First Last"   ~1 query style.
2. We were initially concerned that candidates for the presidency in either the House or the Senate (e.g., Paul Ryan in 2012, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Joe Biden in 2008) would dramatically skew the number of articles and resulting models. However, neither dropping these cases nor controlling for them substantially or substantively changed our model results, so we leave these cases in each analysis.
3. Predicted article counts obtained by exponentiating the model point predictions.

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