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Perceptions of the Media and the Public and their Effects on Political Participation in Colombia

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Abstract

This study investigates whether perceptions of the media and the public are related to political participation in Colombia. Communication researchers have built a large body of literature on hostile media perceptions and the projection effect, respectively. This study links these perceptual effects with each other and with political participation. Analyzing survey data from a representative sample of Colombian adults in urban areas, we show a direct relationship between hostile media perceptions and participation, but no direct relationship between projection and participation. Hostile media perceptions and projection are negatively related. Results suggest that perceived media bias attenuates projection, but increases political engagement.

KEYWORDS: hostile media perceptions, hostile media effect, projection effect, political participation, political engagement, political talk, Colombia

INTRODUCTION

Perceptions of what other people think can influence our own behavior. Research has shown that people assume others think as they do (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977), suggesting that they “project” explanations for their own behavior onto others. Media are one of the primary lenses through which people form images of the public; and perceptions of media bias can shape perceptions of public opinion (Gunther & Chia, 2001), motivate people to engage in politics (Ho et al., 2011; Rojas, 2010), or affect people’s willingness to express their opinions (Hwang, Pan, & Sun, 2008; Wei, Chia, & Lo, 2011). While some research examines perceived media bias and political participation (Ho et al., 2011), it has not yet examined how perceptions of media and the public relate to political behavior at the same time. This study fills that gap in the literature, investigating these relationships in a representative sample of Colombian adults.

CONCEPTS AND THEORY

Hostile Media

Hostile media perceptions (or, HMP) are occurrences in which people perceive media as biased against their particular viewpoint. They belong to a family of perceptual and cognitive biases relating to pre-existing beliefs and attitudes (Allport, 1954; Campbell, 1967; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Ross & Lepper, 1980; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). For example, the initial HMP study found that both pro-Arab and pro-Israeli student groups thought a neutral news report about the Beirut massacre was biased against their side (Vallone et al., 1985). Later research replicated these findings

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(Perloff, 1989) and tested HMP about different issues (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994).

The HMP literature has demonstrated both an absolute effect, which measures perceived hostility against “neutral” media (Vallone et al., 1985), and a relative effect that accounts for news media’s ideological slant (Coe et al., 2008; Gunther & Christen, 2002; Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, & Chia, 2001). Perceived media bias results from selective categorization processes where people misclassify arguments (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004), probably triggered by perceived reach of the media (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004) or group membership salience (Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois, 2007; Reid, 2012).

While HMP were initially conceptualized as reactions to a particular story or stimulus (Vallone et al., 1985), others have examined HMP about the media system (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Goldman & Mutz, 2011; Gunther et al., 2001; Ho et al., 2011; Reid, 2012; Rojas, 2010; Wojcieszak, 2009). Measured at this level, survey responses capture people’s perceptions of the media as a social institution. Recent scholarship supports the idea that people make judgments about the mainstream media as monolithic institution. Ladd (2012) shows how survey responses using different terms (e.g., the “media” versus the “press”) are very similar across survey samples. Further, mean scores on attitudinal measures about the media are consistent across samples. This evidence suggests that, despite the recent proliferation of alternative and partisan news media, people maintain a clear conceptualization and relatively stable attitudes about “the media” as a social institution.

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Most evidence suggests that HMP happen among the most politically involved (Gunther, Miller, & Liebhart, 2009). Many HMP studies recruit strong partisans in the hopes they will observe larger effects. For example, Vallone and colleagues (1985) recruited from Arab and Israeli student groups for a study about the Arab – Israeli conflict. Likewise, Gunther and colleagues recruited from activist groups and scientists for studies about genetically-modified food (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004) and primate research (Gunther & Chia, 2001). While some research shows that HMP also happens to non-partisans (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994), most research suggests either that the highly involved are more likely to experience HMP (Gunther et al., 2009) or that group membership salience can trigger them (Ariyanto et al., 2007; Reid, 2012). Wojcieszak (2009) found a positive relationship between ideological extremity and HMP in Colombia, and we expect a similar relationship in this sample (see Figure 1 for hypothetical model). We also expect news media exposure — an indicator of political involvement (Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997) — to be positively related to HMP.

H1: Ideological extremity will be positively related to hostile media perceptions.

H2: News media exposure will be positively related to hostile media perceptions.

Projection

Projection refers to the perception that others hold similar positions to your own. The social psychology literature developed the idea as part of the false consensus effect, where people see their own behavior as relatively common and alternative behaviors as relatively less common (Ross et al., 1977). The name “false consensus” implies that these

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perceptions are wrong. Yet, few studies examine their accuracy (Chia & Lee, 2008; Christen & Gunther, 2003; Wojcieszak & Price, 2009), instead studying relative differences between perceptions of groups. The literature has therefore come to distinguish perceptions from their accuracy (Mullen & Hu, 1988; Wojcieszak, 2008; Wojcieszak & Price, 2009).

Marks and Miller (1987) describe four theoretical explanations for projection. The first suggests that projection results from selective affiliation with like-minded people. People have a “biased sample” of the public because they affiliate with others who are similar to themselves. The second theory proposes a self-reference process in which people focus attention on their own opinions when answering questions about others. Third, the logical processing explanation proposes that people think others are “similarly rational beings who are similarly affected by situational forces and therefore hold similar views” (Christen & Gunther, 2003, p. 415). Fourth, motivational factors such as the self-esteem maintenance, confidence, and social support could affect projection. The literature supports all four theories, but favors the selective affiliation and logical processing explanations (Christen & Gunther, 2003; Marks & Miller, 1987).

Marks and Miller (1987) describe several approaches to projection measurement. The “assumed similarity” approach measures projection as the absolute difference between an individual’s position and his or her perceptions of others (Marks & Miller, 1982; Marks, Miller, & Maruyana, 1981), typically referencing a specific group and an issue. For example, Christen and Gunther (2003) ask about “the opinions of your friends” and “the

opinions of most other Americans” for four social issues. Other studies have taken a more general approach, assessing perceived self – public ideological difference (Wojcieszak & Rojas, 2011; Wojcieszak, 2009). This study uses a similar projection measurement based on political ideology.

Important individual level factors include attitude extremity, attitude importance, and ideological extremity. According to the self-reference explanation, there should be a positive relationship between these variables and projection because involved or extreme people are more likely to think about themselves when estimating public opinion (Fabrigar & Krosnick, 1995; Krosnick, 1989). But empirical tests have been inconsistent. Whereas some studies show a positive relationship between projection and political involvement (Martinez, 1988), other studies show mixed or inconsistent relationships with attitude extremity or importance (Christen & Gunther, 2003; Fabrigar & Krosnick, 1995), as well as ideological extremity (Wojcieszak, 2008). Evidence from Colombia shows a negative relationship between ideological extremity and projection (Wojcieszak & Rojas, 2011; Wojcieszak, 2009), but this evidence is limited.

RQ1: What is the relationship between ideological extremity and projection?

Important communication factors include exposure to dissimilar media and perceived media bias. Research shows that personal opinion and perceived media bias have counterbalancing influences on perceived public opinion (Gunther & Chia, 2001; Gunther & Christen, 2002; Gunther et al., 2001). People in the U.S. think the public

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shares their opinion about controversial issues, but they also think that media coverage is hostile (Gunther & Chia, 2001). Because people perceive that hostile media content will influence the public (Gunther, 1998; Gunther & Chia, 2001), HMP and projection act as competing influences on perceived public opinion. These studies imply that HMP and projection are negatively related, and research from Colombia supports this claim (Wojcieszak & Rojas, 2011).

H3: Hostile media perceptions will be negatively related to projection.

Political Talk

Political talk is informal political conversation in every day social settings (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002; Eveland, Morey, & Hutchens, 2011; Mutz, 2006), in contrast to formal deliberation, which emphasizes tolerance and discussion civility (Habermas, 1989; Rojas, Shah, Cho, Schmierbach, Keum, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2005). Some scholars have treated political talk as political participation (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Others have considered it a predictor of participation (McClurg, 2006; Mutz, 2006; Rojas, 2008), or a variable that mediates communication's influence on other political behaviors (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Shah et al., 2007). Political talk can affect political attitudes and preferences (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1987). It also helps people integrate political information (Shah et al., 2007), thereby facilitating political learning (Eveland, 2004) and political identity formation or clarification (Walsh, 2004).

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The corrective action hypothesis (Rojas, 2010; Sun, Shen, & Pan, 2008) suggests that people perceiving media as biased attempt to “correct” those “wrongs” through political expression, an idea that has received empirical support (Hwang, Pan, & Sun, 2008; Wei, Chia, & Lo, 2011). HMP relates to a variety of expressive behaviors (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Eveland & Shah, 2003). For example, Eveland and Shah (2003) found that discussion with like-minded people predicts HMP in the U.S., while Wojcieszak (2009) shows that political talk diversity positively predicts HMP in Colombia. These findings make two opposite conclusions seem plausible, indicating a need for further investigation. Other studies have treated political talk as an outcome of HMP, arguing that perceptions influence discussion diversity (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014). Some research has shown that perceived self – media difference is associated with online political discussion (Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, Gil de Zúñiga, & Shah, 2006), while other research shows that HMP has an indirect effect on political discussion (Hwang et al., 2008).

The literature conflicts about how perceived media bias and political talk are related. Recognizing the possibility that interpersonal network structures might be antecedents of HMP, we argue that other dimensions of talk — including the diversity a person experiences in conversation — go beyond a network’s structural characteristics and more closely describe behavior. Political talk diversity is related to network structure, but exposure to disagreement results from active anticipation of encounters with others (Green, Visser, & Tetlock, 2000; Mutz, 2006). Assuming that talk diversity is behavioral

rather than socio-structural, the corrective action logic may apply; it suggests that HMP should relate positively to talk diversity.

H4: Hostile media perceptions will be positively related to political talk diversity.

While political talk diversity might follow from perceived media bias, the projection literature suggests it is integral in forming perceptions of the public. If people affiliate with like-minded others, their “sample” of the public is biased, and perceptions of similarity with others may be salient (Christen & Gunther, 2003; Marks & Miller, 1987). Therefore, political talk diversity should attenuate projection, and this claim has received some empirical support. Wojcieszak and Price (2009) show that social network diversity attenuates false consensus about gun rights, and Wojcieszak and Rojas (2011) show a similar relationship in Colombia.

H5: Political talk diversity will be negatively related to projection.

Political Participation

Political participation is behavior that “affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond” (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 37), which implies a broad range of activities. Research has long focused on voting (Brady & McNulty, 2011; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1980; Plutzer, 2002), campaign activities (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992), political events (Sears & Valentino, 1997), and

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other direct interactions with the government (Mettler, 2002; Soss, 1999). Other research has examined political activism (McAdam, 1986) or civic and community activities (Putnam, 2000). Recently, scholars have noted that new forms of participation have emerged (Bennett, 2008; Dalton, 2008), and that new media use relates to both online (Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga, & Shah, 2010) and offline participation (Lim, 2012, Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012; Xenos & Moy, 2007). While we recognize that political participation refers to diverse activities, this study examines participatory acts that require physical presence and interaction with other people, such as protests or city council meetings. We focus on these acts not because online expression and behavior doesn't matter, but rather because offline activities often require more time and energy and therefore provide a conservative test of perceptual effects on political engagement.

The communication literature has long established a positive relationship between attention to news media and political participation, controlling for variables like political partisanship, involvement, ideological extremity, or attitude strength (McLeod et al., 1999; Shah et al., 2007). This relationship probably exists because news media information helps people learn about politics (Eveland, 2001) and helps people integrate political ideas into cognitive schemas (Cho et al., 2009). Perceived media bias may also be important when it comes to assessing the media's influence on political participation. Research shows that perceived media bias can contribute to resistance of government authority (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005) or feelings of alienation from public affairs (Tsfati, 2007), depending on the context. By extension, HMP could contribute to a spiral of silence effect (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) or to corrective action (Rojas, 2010). While these

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studies examine attitudes and expression, less research has examined political participation directly. The existing research suggests that the relationship between HMP and participation differs according to levels of measurement (Ho et al., 2011). Ho and colleagues (2011) show that general perceived media bias measures relate negatively to participation, but that issue-specific measures relate positively. In general, prior information about these relationships is limited and mixed.

RQ2: What is the relationship between hostile media perceptions and political participation?

Some research has linked the projection effect to voting or perceptions related to voting. For example, analysis of British exit poll data shows evidence of small projection effects on vote choice, even while considering the direct influence of opinion polls (McAllister & Studlar, 1991). Other studies examining candidate perceptions show a projection effect on perceptions of candidate positions beyond party cue influence (Conover & Feldman, 1989), possibly because people overestimate the degree to which their favored candidate agrees with their positions (Conover & Feldman, 1982). However, evidence of projection effects on voting is limited and mixed. Some studies show no projection effects on candidate perceptions (Krosnick, 1990). Moreover, relatively few studies examine political participation itself, opting instead to examine perceptions or preferences related to participation. Finally, little research has examined the link between projection and non-electoral political participation.

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RQ3: What is the relationship between projection and political participation?

Empirical evidence about political talk diversity and political participation is also mixed. Some research shows a negative relationship between “cross-cutting” talk and participation (Mutz, 2006). Diversity in political talk makes us more aware of social cross-pressures and more ambivalent about our own attitudes, both of which make us less likely to participate in politics. However, other studies show a positive relationship between these variables (Ikeda & Boase, 2011), or a relationship conditioned by social context (McClurg, 2006).

RQ4: What is the relationship between political talk diversity and political participation?

METHODS

The study uses data collected between July 29 and August 20, 2010 in 10 cities in Colombia by major universities in the U.S. and in Colombia as part of an ongoing, biennial communication and political attitudes survey. Colombia witnessed a decline in trust in the federal government and democratic processes after decades of political and drug-related violence, but recently efforts to promote transparency and responsiveness in local government are on the rise in urban areas (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009). Most of Colombia’s population (76% of 44.5 million inhabitants) lives in urban areas, and the survey represents this urban population. A multi-step, stratified sample procedure was used to randomly select households based on city size and census data. City blocks were then randomly selected according to housing districts and household energy use. Then,

individual households were randomly selected within each block. Finally, the adult in each household who most recently celebrated a birthday was contacted. Surveys were administered in person, and up to three visits to each household were made to increase participation in the survey. A local professional polling firm, Deproyectos Limitada, collected the data and 1,064 completed responses were obtained for a response rate of 85%.

Endogenous Variables

Political Participation

The political participation variable is an additive scale based on five separate yes-or-no questions reflecting various types of political involvement. Questions ask whether, in the past year, respondents volunteered for a political party or attended a rally, city meeting, city council meeting, or protest ($\alpha = .70$, $M = .55$, $SD = 1.05$).

Hostile Media Perceptions

The hostile media perceptions variable was computed by taking the absolute value of the difference between respondents' own ideologies (measured on an 11-point scale where 0 = Left, 5 = Center, and 10 = Right) and their estimates of the ideology of the media (measured on a similar scale; see Figure 2). Higher values on the scale indicate greater perceived ideological distance between the self and the media. The resulting scale has a mean of 1.57 ($SD = 1.98$). Given a range of 11, this mean is relatively small; however, a one sample t-test shows that it is statistically different from zero ($t(1004) = 24.55$, $p <$

.001). Further, more than half (54%) of the sample experienced some hostile media perceptions.

Projection Effect

The projection variable was constructed in similar fashion, computing the absolute value of the difference between respondents' ideologies (see above) and their estimates of the ideology of the public (measured on an 11-point scale; see Figure 2). The resulting scale was then reversed so that higher values indicate smaller distances between the self and the public (i.e., projection). The final variable has a mean of 8.66 (which is statistically different from zero with $t(1009) = 149.00, p < .001$) and a standard deviation of 1.83.

Political Talk Diversity

Finally, the political talk diversity variable was constructed along the same lines as a similar variable used in the study by Wojcieszak (2009). Respondents were asked three separate questions, all on 5-point scales (1 = Never, 5 = Very Frequently), gauging how often they speak with people on the left, with people on the right, and with people of a different social class from their own. If a respondent rated their own political ideology as being to the left of center, their answers concerning how often they spoke with people of the left were re-coded as zero, and likewise for people who labeled themselves as being to the right. People who rated themselves as centrists had no responses re-coded. The three resulting scales were then averaged to compute a single score, and the mean and standard deviation of the final variable are 1.46 and 1.17.

Exogenous Variables

Ideological Extremity

As describe above, political ideology was measured using an 11-point scale (0 = Left, 5 = Center, 10 = Right; see Figure 2). Colombia is, in general, a center – right country in terms of political ideology. In this sample, the mean ideology is 6.32 ($SD = 2.38$). About half of the sample (48.8%) indicated their ideology is in the exact center (5). The ideological extremity variable was constructed by folding this scale so that higher values indicate more extreme ideologies. The mean of the final variable is 1.95 ($SD = 1.74$).

News Media Exposure

News media exposure was measured in terms of frequency of exposure (0 = Never, 5 = Very Frequently). Ten survey items asked about exposure to national, regional, or local news on television and in newspapers, as well as political talk shows, news magazines, televised election debates, and political ads. These items were combined into a single additive index ranging from 0 to 50 ($\alpha = .75$, $M = 27.30$, $SD = 9.65$).

Control Variables

The analysis controls for strength of partisanship, political interest, and political knowledge. The strength of partisanship variable was created using a single survey item that asked respondents to rate the strength of their political party identification (1 = Strong, 2 = Not that Strong). Respondents did not answer this question if they responded “none” to the preceding survey item that asked them to identify with a party (the item included five named political parties, plus “other”). Those who answered “none” to that

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question received a score of 0 on the strength of partisanship variable, while those who named a party and moved on to the next question received values of .05 for an answer of “not that strong,” and 1 for an answer of “strong.” This method results in a 3-point strength of partisanship scale (1 = Strong, .5 = Not that Strong, 0 = Non-Partisan). Non-partisans represent the mode (39.2%). Another 32.7% are weak partisans, while 28.1% are strong partisans. The political interest variable averages scores on three survey items asking about respondents’ interest in local or regional, national, and international politics (0 = None, 5 = A lot). The final variable has a mean of 2.23 ($SD = 1.62$, $\alpha = .92$). The political knowledge variable sums respondents’ scores on 10 factual knowledge questions about national and world politics and current affairs (1 = Correct, 0 = Incorrect or Don’t Know). The final variable ranges from 0 to 10 and has a mean of 3.63 ($SD = 2.10$).

The analysis controls also controls for age, gender, education, and socio-economic status. The average respondent is 41.63 years old, and 51.7% were female. Education was measured on an 8-point scale ranging from “none” to “post-graduate,” and including “incomplete” options for “primary school,” “secondary school,” and “university” ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.48$). Socio-economic status was measured with a proxy: the Colombian household energy rating system, which ranges from one to six ($M = 2.88$; $SD = 1.07$) and measures the energy consumption of the household.

Analysis

Path analysis was used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. The political participation variable was regressed on the control variables, and the residuals

were then saved as a new dependent variable. This variable was entered along with the other endogenous and exogenous variables into R for analysis (see Table 1 for the correlation matrix used in analysis).¹ Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation was used to derive path coefficients. Cases that had missing values for variables used in the analysis were dropped, leaving 843 cases.²

RESULTS

Figure 3 shows the standardized results of the analysis. The model is a good fit to the data, with no significant difference between the observed and fitted covariance matrices ($\chi^2(4) = 7.765, p = .101$). The comparative model fit indices (GFI = .997, CFI = .995) are greater than .96, while the error-based model fit indices (RMSEA = .033, $p = .217$; SRMR = .016) are less than .06. Both index sets indicate good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Given these omnibus results, we examined the relationships outlined in hypotheses and research questions.³

The first hypothesis (H1) predicted that ideological extremity would be positively related to HMP, and the model supports this prediction ($\gamma_1 = .263, p < .001$). In Colombia, people with extreme ideologies are more likely to perceive media bias. The results also support our expectation (H2) that news media exposure would be positively associated with HMP ($\gamma_2 = .104, p < .01$). People who are exposed to more news are more likely to perceive media bias.⁴ These relationships explain about 6% of the variance in HMP ($R^2 = .064$).

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The first research question (RQ1) asked how ideological extremity relates to projection. Results show no direct relationship ($\gamma_3 = .010, n.s.$). However, HMP is negatively related to projection ($\beta_1 = -.672, p < .001$), and ideological extremity is indirectly related to projection through HMP ($\gamma_1\beta_1 = -.159, p < .001$). Together, these findings support H3, showing that Colombians who perceive media bias do not perceive self – public similarity. They also suggest that HMP mediates the relationship between ideological extremity and projection.⁵ The final predictor of projection is political talk diversity, and this relationship is null in these data ($\beta_3 = .017, n.s.$). This result leads us to reject H5, and does not support the selective affiliation explanation for projection. These variables explain almost 45% projection's variance ($R^2 = .446$).

H4 predicted that HMP would be positively related to political talk diversity. The results support this prediction ($\beta_2 = .079, p < .05$), providing further evidence that people seek out the other side in discussions to “correct” perceived wrongs (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Rojas, 2010).⁶ News media exposure also relates positively to political talk diversity ($\gamma_4 = .381, p < .001$). These variables explain almost 16% of political talk diversity's variance ($R^2 = .157$).

Research questions 2 and 3 asked how HMP and projection relate to political participation. The analysis shows that HMP is directly and positively related to political participation ($\beta_4 = .163, p < .001$), but projection is not directly related ($\beta_5 = .008, n.s.$). People who perceive media bias are more likely to participate in politics; however, perceived self – public similarity is not related to participation. Rather, HMP accounts for

explained variance in both projection and participation. Finally, our analysis shows a positive relationship (RQ4) between political talk diversity and political participation ($\beta_6 = .152, p < .001$), indicating that people who have more diverse discussions participate in politics more frequently. These variables explain 5% of the variance in political participation ($R^2 = .052$).

DISCUSSION

This study examines how HMP and projection relate to each other and to political participation. The negative relationship between HMP and projection is consistent with previous evidence that personal opinion and perceived media bias have counteracting effects on perceived public opinion (Christen & Gunther, 2003; Gunther & Chia, 2001; Gunther & Christen, 2002; Gunther et al., 2001), as well as with recent research showing a negative relationship between projection and exposure to ideologically dissimilar news media (Wojcieszak & Rojas, 2011). People believe that they react to hostile media content — a situational factor — in a critical manner; but they also believe that others are more vulnerable to its influence — a dispositional factor (Christen & Gunther, 2003). Therefore, perceived media bias reduces perceived self – public similarity.

This study shows no direct relationship between ideological extremity and projection when HMP is included in the model. Although recent research from Colombia shows a negative relationship between ideological extremity and projection (Rojas, 2010), this relationship may be mediated through HMP. Mediation implies a time-ordered process, and this study only examines cross-sectional observations. Given this caveat, these data

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show that more extreme people think media are more biased against them, facilitating their belief that the public is less like themselves. These results support the logical information processing explanation for projection over the self-reference explanation. Ideological extremity contributes to perceived media bias, which attenuates projection through causal attribution (Christen & Gunther, 2003).

According to the selective affiliation explanation for projection (Christen & Gunther, 2003; Marks & Miller, 1987), people have a biased “sample” of public opinion because they associate with like-minded others. Political talk diversity and projection should therefore be negatively related, but our study shows no such relationship. This null finding is probably caused by the fact that HMP explains much of the variance in both variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that, in these data, perceived media bias outweighs interpersonal networks.

This study also establishes positive relationships between HMP and two behavioral outcomes: political talk diversity and political participation. The relationship with talk diversity is consistent with the corrective action hypothesis (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Rojas, 2010). When people perceive media as hostile toward their view, they are more likely to seek out diverse discussions to correct perceived wrongs. This conclusion also comes with a caveat about causal order. Some studies have treated talk diversity as a predictor of HMP (Eveland & Shah, 2003), while others have treated it as an outcome (Hwang et al., 2008). This study cannot make claims about causal processes, but it does establish relationships that are consistent with theoretical predictions (Rojas, 2010; Sun et

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al., 2008). Furthermore, this study extends the literature by linking HMP to political engagement that communicates directly to the government. While past research has examined political discussion and interaction among citizens (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Rojas, 2010), this study shows direct relationships with political behaviors like protesting or attending a city council meeting. Meanwhile, projection and participation are not directly related, offering further evidence of the strength of HMP's relationship with participation. Potentially, HMP encourage participation because people want to influence social institutions. However, we cannot make claims about causal order because the political participation measurement asks about behavior in the last 12 months. While our model fits with pre-existing theories of perception and behavior, this analysis merely establishes cross-sectional relationships.

Results also show a positive relationship between political talk diversity and political participation, a subject on which previous research conflicts. Mutz (2006) shows a negative relationship in the U.S., while Ikeda and Boase (2011) show a positive relationship in Japan. Others show a relationship conditional on local context (McClurg, 2006). The results of this study could be a product of Colombia's political context. Perhaps Colombians have grown wary of violence, and have embraced discussion as a way to reengage with public affairs.

Finally, the results show a positive relationship between news media exposure and HMP. These findings conflict with recent findings showing a negative relationship between exposure to public opinion polls and perceived poll hostility in the U.S. (Wei & Lo,

2013). One reason for the difference could be that news and opinion polls have different effects on perceptions of the public. Mutz (1998) outlines two different processes for effects of public opinion in polls and the effects of public experience through news exemplars. Another reason for the difference could be the study contexts. While Wei & Lo (2013) studied a southern state in the U.S., where news media have grown more partisan (Stroud, 2011), this study examines Colombia, where news media are perceived as relatively centrist.

This study faces the typical limitations of cross-sectional survey research. As previously noted, we cannot derive causal inferences from the model. Rather, we have examined relationships at a single point in time. Further limitations stem from measurement. Because our HMP and projection measurements follow the example of specific studies that conceptualize these variables in terms of ideological distance (Rojas, 2010; Wojcieszak, 2009; Wojcieszak & Rojas, 2011), the results are best interpreted within that literature. Additionally, the results are best interpreted as consistent with studies that use generalized HMP and projection measures (Gunther & Christen, 2003; Rojas, 2010; Wojcieszak & Rojas, 2011). These results generalize to the Colombian population, but not necessarily to other populations. Respondents excluded ($n = 221$) from the analysis are more likely to be female, older, and less knowledgeable about politics.

Despite its limitations, this study makes a substantial contribution to theories linking political perception and behavior. Previous studies have examined HMP and willingness to engage in political discussion (Hwang et al., 2008) or political participation (Ho et al.,

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2011), while other studies have linked HMP and projection (Gunther & Chia, 2001). But until now, research had not examined the influence of both HMP and projection on political participation. This study shows a positive relationship between HMP and political participation, but no direct relationship between projection and participation. These findings may serve as a foundation for future research examining the link between political perception and behavior.

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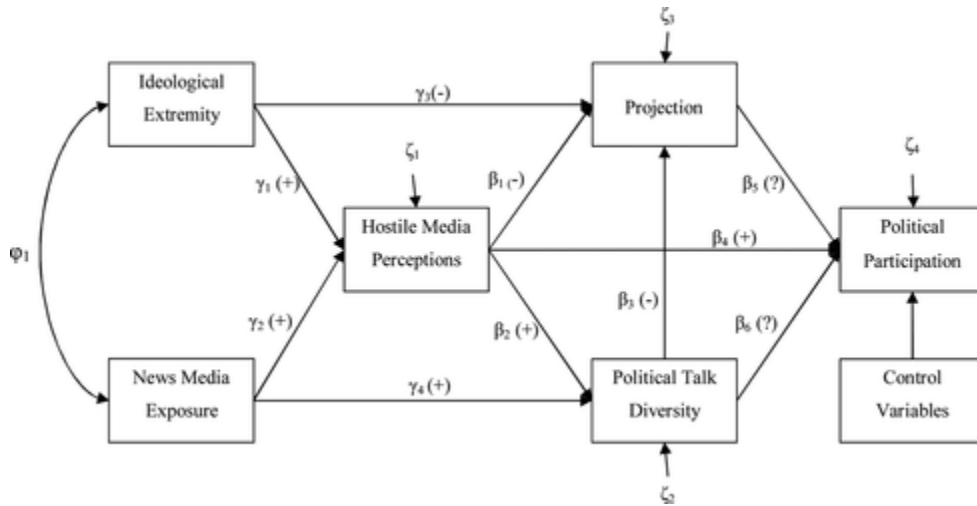
Table 1 Correlation matrix of endogenous and exogenous variables in the analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Ideological Extremity	1.000					
2. News Media Exposure	-.060	1.000				
3. Hostile Media Perceptions	.230	.090	1.000			
4. Political Talk Diversity	-.030	.388	.113	1.000		
5. Projection	-.146	-.002	-.667	-.059	1.000	
6. Political Participation (Residual)	.033	.119	.175	.170	-.110	1.000

Note. Cell entries are Pearson's correlation coefficients.

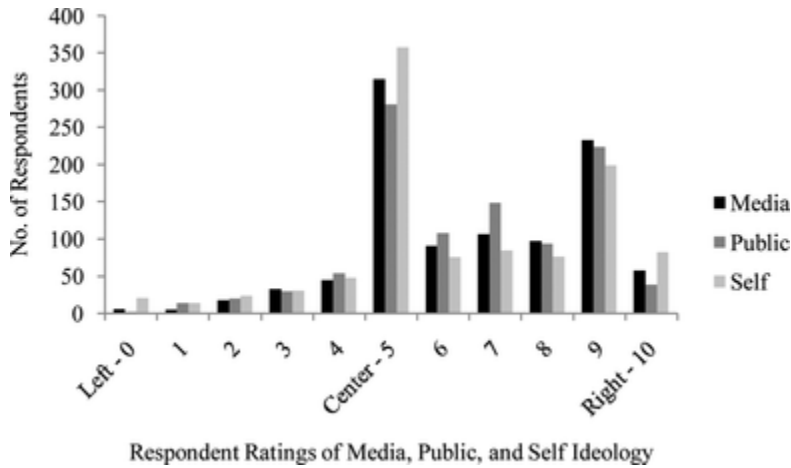
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Figure 1. Hypothetical path model showing predicted relationships among endogenous and exogenous variables.



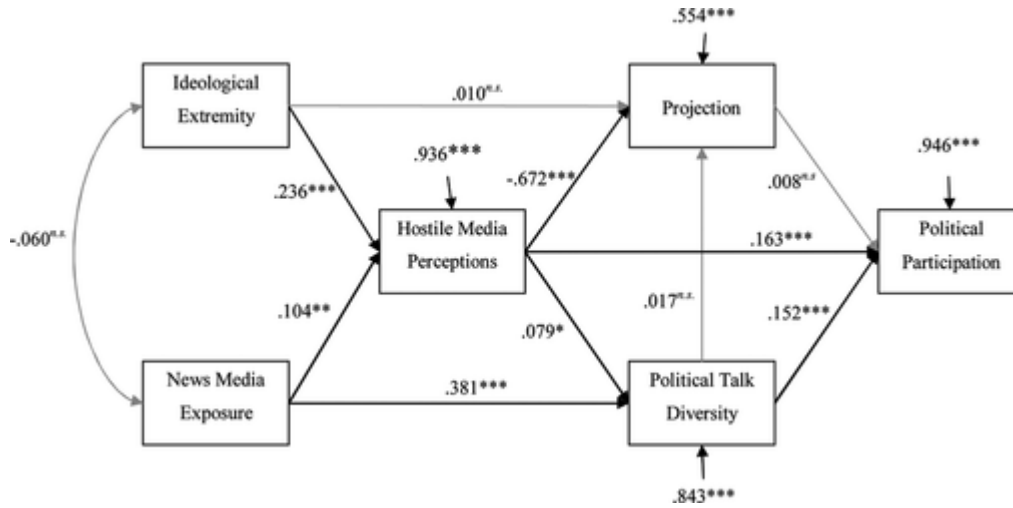
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Figure 2. Distribution of responses for perceived media ideology, perceived public ideology, and self ideology. The Pearson's correlation coefficients between the variables are as follows: $r_{\text{media} - \text{public}} = .688$, $r_{\text{self} - \text{media}} = .411$, $r_{\text{self} - \text{public}} = .486$. All coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .001$).



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Figure 3. Results of path analysis. Standardized maximum likelihood estimates are reported. N = 843. Significance levels for two-tailed tests are reported as follows: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, *n.s.* $p > .05$. Minimum fit function $\chi^2(4) = 7.765, p = .101$; GFI = .997; CFI = .995; RMSEA = .033, $p = .217$; SRMR = .016.



NOTES

¹ We also fit a model that includes a persuasive press inference (PPI) variable. Results show that while this model was a good empirical fit ($\chi^2(6) = 9.274, p = .159$; GFI = .997; CFI = .996; RMSEA = .025, $p = .900$; SRMR = .016), it does not perform substantially better than the reported model, and the PPI variable was not significantly related to any endogenous variable except for HMP. We opted to report the results for the more parsimonious model.

² We performed a statistical comparison between included and excluded cases. Results show that excluded respondents are more likely to be female, tend to be older, and score lower on the political knowledge scale.

³ We fit a null model without the path between HMP and political participation. The model is not a good empirical fit ($\chi^2(5) = 20.706, p = .001$) and is less efficient than the reported model (AIC = 22723.716, AIC_{null} = 22734.657).

⁴ We tested an alternative model that reverses the causal order between news media exposure and HMP (see Wei & Lo, 2013), treating the latter as an antecedent and the former as an intervening variable. Results show that the model is a poor fit to the data ($\chi^2(4) = 493.569, p < .001$).

⁵ A null model without the relationship between HMP and projection was fit, and results show a negative relationship between ideological extremity and projection ($\gamma = -.136, p < .001$).

⁶ We tested an alternative model that reverses the causal order between HMP and political talk diversity (Eveland & Shah, 2003). Once again, results show a poor model fit ($\chi^2(5) = 160.120, p < .001$).