

ABSTRACT

Angry Conservatives?: Levels of Incivility across Conservative Ideology

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Past research examining incivility within media discourse has consistently found conservative discourse to have elevated levels of incivility in comparison to liberals. The present study provides more nuance on this understanding, by looking at differences within conservative media. Using 330 articles from across the conservative media landscape, the following research examines the presence of differences between more traditional republicans, populists, and libertarians. Differences across these three ideologies are found, as well as differences based on topics covered. This research indicates that a deeper dive into political differences within groups may provide insights in norms of incivility.

Angry Conservatives?: Levels of Incivility across Conservative Ideology

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents, who supported me on my winding road to this small success. I would also like to thank my fellow graduate cohort mates, without whom I would have never been able to grow as a researcher or a person.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Incivility on the Right

On January 6th, a physical manifestation of the incivility which has been steadily increasing within American political discourse took place. The very notion of “Stop the Steal” is the sort of conspiratorial denomination of the political opposition was just the latest of a ratcheting up of political discourse, not only by politicians, but also the political class more generally, from radio hosts, writers, TV personalities, to the bloggers across the internet. The examples on the leadup to the events on the 6th are too numerous to list here, but perhaps the most galling was of former New York Mayor, Rudy Giuliani, who called for a “trial by combat” (Pilkington, 2021).

Regretfully, this rhetorical call was then taken outside of the rhetorical space and into the physical plane, as hundreds of protesters from the “Stop the Steal” protest, stormed the capitol, a historic event which is without precedent in modern American history. As noted by linguist Janet McIntosh, both Trump and his supporters used apocalyptic language in the buildup to January 6th, using language, which was filled with incivility, both from politicians and their more extreme supporters (Bencks, 2021). This incivility, though incredibly common, is also unpopular amongst the broader American population.

This is clearly the case, as polling has shown that a significant majority of the population (75%) feel our political discourse is at a crisis point when it comes to

incivility (KRC Research, 2013). Another poll, by Pew, found that 85% of respondents believe that the political debate has become more negative (Pew, 2019). Whether political discourse has gotten more incivil is up for debate (Sapiro, 1999), but the perception of incivility being an issue is certainly the case, and the belief amongst the average citizens that it is a problem.

Given this belief, it is perhaps worth analyzing how some media outlets use or refrain from using incivil language. When considering written media, we do not know if incivility is the same across political ideology, topic covered, politician discussed, or type of outlet. This project analyzes five different media outlets across three different conservative political ideological groups to better understand how these different factors may influence incivility within written media. Different topics, the ideology of the outlet, as well as the type of outlet show a discernable influence on use of incivil language in Conservative media.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The Role of Incivility within Politics

Civil discourse has been viewed as fundamental to democratic discourse throughout history, from the Athenian forum to modern times (Papacharissi, 2004 ; Sapiro, 1999). Civility within discourse is fundamentally a set of norms which are designed to foster public decency and mutual understanding while discussing differences which can be difficult to overcome. It is defined by Sobieraj and Berry (2011) as “political argumentation characterized by speakers who present themselves as reasonable and courteous, treating even those with whom they disagree as though they and their ideas are worthy of respect”. Incivil discourse by its nature is meant to restrict the is deliberation (Kingwell, 1995). The insults, belittling, and mockery make it difficult if not impossible to clarify differences, agreements, and points where compromise can arise. This incivility is more than simple impoliteness, but a disrespecting of democratic norms through the demonization of political opposition (Masullo et al., 2019).

What is incivil discourse? The literature has many definitions of incivil discourse, and as Herbst notes, this concept is “very much in the eye of the beholder” (2010). Part of this is because of its contextual nature, in different periods and regional contexts, there is a significant difference in what is considered civil and incivil. Coe et al., describe it as featuring “an unnecessary disrespectful tone toward the discussion forum, its participants, or it’s topics” (2014), while Brooks and Geer (2007) consider anything that is

inflammatory and superfluous as incivil. As is noted by Coe et al, the fundamental issue with incivility is that it doesn't add "anything of substance to the discussion" (2014), but is simply meant to insult, offend, and degrade the target of the discourse.

This paper will primarily rely on the definitions used by Sobieraj and Berry (2011), who break incivility down to thirteen categories which are applicable across different mediums of discourse as well as several summary variables which are meant to gauge overall incivility in a piece. Understandably, some types of incivility, like emotional displays, are more applicable to radio or television as opposed to the written word. Another example of this is verbal sparring, which connotes aggressive argumentation, which requires two people arguing with each other in a rude way, which would not take place in an op-ed or blog, as these types of discourse do not have sparring taking place within the text.

Similarly, what is considered incivil is contextual based on the moment in time as well as the medium. For example, some terminology has evolved in its meaning over time, and as such, an insult from a hundred years ago would not pack the same punch it would now, given our different context. The key, according to Brooks and Geer (2007) is that the "incivility requires going an extra step" past conventional discourse and "adding inflammatory comments that add little in the way of substance". Of course, there is still a distance between any concept and its real-world application, and this project has not solicited the writers to ask them if they feel as though they are being incivil.

Additionally, gender and race play a role in who is allowed to be 'civil'. This is also noted by a variety of authors (Chafe, 1981; Clayton, 2010; Zerilli, 2014) who point out that civility has been used as coded language used to exclude groups seeking

inclusion in the American discourse, including women, LGBT members, African Americans, and others. While this is true and should be remembered when looking at incivility as a concept, given the topics at hand, which is blogs and op-eds written at popular publications, we can assume that these people are not being excluded, given the platform which they have to express their opinions.

Effects of Incivil Discourse

The idea that America's pundit class has been irresponsible in its language and has fallen into the proverbial gutter has been well documented within the scholarly literature (i.e. Sobieraj and Berry, 2011; Herbst, 2010; Brooks and Geer, 2007), but the average citizen might wonder, why does this matter? Zaller (1992) has shown that the public follows the lead of elites, and this is shown by much of the literature on incivility (i.e. Mutz 2007; Gervais, 2014)

Televised examples of incivil discourse has consistently been shown by Mutz to cause negative polarization toward your opponents, leading individuals to view political opposition as illegitimate (2007) and to reduce trust in politicians and government more broadly (Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Mutz 2007). Negative polarization has been shown to influence perceptions of political opposition, so that they are seen as extreme and unable to be part of democratic deliberation. The medium of communication seems to be relevant, as Funk (2001) was unable to find statistical effects when incivility between congresspeople was read, unlike Mutz and Reeves (2005). Their use of television as the medium to encounter incivility may hint at why they found a substantial difference between those who viewed a civil debate verses an incivil one.

Exposure to incivil media, in an experimental setting, led participants to believe their online discussant held views more strongly than participants who were exposed to civil online discussion. This convinced them that their discussants' close-mindedness and the broader polarization it represented would make democratic deliberation nearly impossible (Hwang et al. 2014). Additionally, Han and Brazeal (2015) have found that those who read incivil messages were less willing to engage in conversation than those who read civil messages, and that those who read civil messages were more likely to mirror this language in their own responses.

When discussing politics online incivility has been shown to affect emotions, cause mental stress, and affect the perceptions of the parties involved (Anderson et al., 2014; Popan et al., 2019). Popan et al. (2019), additionally found, that incivil discourse in online discussions decreased the likelihood of willingness to see opponents as rational in their argumentation, regardless of the actual strength of argument. Incivility within political media has also been shown to influence distrust broadly across the political sphere, across political actors, institutions, and the political process itself (Borah 2013; Muddiman 2013).

Across disciplines, researchers have noted the effect that incivil discourse has in generating anger in members of the group being degraded, as well as lowering respect for the people making the attacks (Gervais, 2017). Several studies have also been shown that incivil discourse begins a cycle of continuing and escalating incivility (Gervais, 2014; Smith et al. 2010), and that elite incivil discourse may lead the public to perceive more incivility than actually exists (York 2013). Incivil discourse has also been shown to decrease open-mindedness and increase certainty about a reader's beliefs (Borah 2013,

Hwang et al., 2008b). It has also been shown to be detrimental to the perception of credibility in media outlets (Anderson et al., 2018).

However, some studies have indicated that negativity, at least in the headlines of articles, tends to drive readers toward increased engagement (Meffert et al., 2006; Jang & Oh, 2016). This engagement manifests itself in terms of both willingness to participate in the real world and also increased online participation (Borah 2013; Hwang et al., 2008). Borah (2013) found that under experimental settings, when an incivil blogger included a news article within their post, the article was seen as more credible than if it was included in a blog written by a civil blogger. This indicates some potential benefits of incivility within a written context.

Some research (Hwang et al., 2014) found that incivility and the negative emotions which they manifest are positively related to ability to recall the arguments of the other side. This benefit of incivility was not consistent across the literature, as Geer and Brooks (2007) alternatively find exposure incivility increases likelihood of attempting to recall opposing arguments, but does not increase the accuracy of their recollections, which they found is consistent with previous research (Geer and Geer, 2003). This difference may be in part because of the medium in which the incivility is being experienced, with Geer and Geer using radio ads, Geer and Brooks using Television, and Hwang et al. using online discussions.

Incivility within Political Discourse

Incivility is incredibly common, not only in our media, but also within conversations on Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter (Su, et al. 2018 ; Oz, et al.,2018; Nithyanand et al. 2017). There is a growing body of evidence seems to indicate that

incivil discourse is making it increasingly difficult for us to arbitrate legitimate political differences in a way necessary for a democratic society, in part because it changes how we view those who we are deliberating with. Incivil discourse happens across different mediums of communication and is an issue across the political spectrum. Amongst political professionals, Hill et al. (2015), found that Republicans were more likely to ‘go negative’, but there was no difference in incivility, which they define as a higher threshold than going negative, between party advertisements.

, Political incivility is rampant within American talk radio, cable news, newspapers, and blogs. Sobieraj and Berry (2011) note that incivil language is incredibly common, with their research showing that within their sample of the most popular outlets, 90% of political commentary contains incivil language, with 100% of commentary on television and 98.8% of talk radio, which, as noted by Berry and Sobieraj (2011), is dominated by conservative political talk. Additionally, they found that there is an instance of incivil language on TV commentary every 90 seconds and that it is even more frequent on talk radio. Looking historically, they have noted that, at least amongst newspaper columns, there has been a historical rise in incivility relative to major newspaper columns in both 1955 and 1975, in which incivility was “virtually absent”.

There has also been some research indicating that there is not a significant difference between 'traditional media' and the new media, or blogosphere (Leccese and Regan, 2015), but this is disputed by others (Sobieraj and Berry, 2011). Across different sorts of television networks, it has been found that cable news (i.e. Fox or MSNBC) are more incivil than network news (ABC or NBC), and that their viewers reflect that in their

beliefs about politics, as viewers are more likely to believe politics are incivil if they are consuming incivil (network) programming (York, 2013).

It needs to be noted that this incivility has significant variation in terms of targets of its vitriol and variation in terms of different media preferences based on demographic trends. Though perhaps a bit dated, Moy and Pfau (2000) found in their extensive content analysis of political discourse that these variations were significant and meaningful. Two examples of this are that they found that talk radio was particularly negative toward the presidency, while political television programs were often most negative toward congress. They also found that consumption differed by gender, with men preferring talk radio, and women more interested in magazines and written content. There is variation within media both the media landscape as well as its consumption in a complex society and that any description of incivil discourse cannot be simple but must reflect that the media and its consumption are not monolithic.

When considering the content of incivil discourse, there are ideological differences. While liberals are very incivil, across talk radio, television, newspapers, and Reddit, conservatives were more incivil than their liberal counterparts (Sobieraj and Berry, 2011; Nithyanand et al. 2017). Similarly, within political blogs, Brundidge et al. (2014) found that conservative blogs were less willing to acknowledge that other sides of the argument existed, which may lead to increased polarization on policy within conservative circles.

Across both media and social networks, conservatives were significantly more likely to be incivil, and more likely to use moral language in their commentary on political issues (e.g. Sobieraj and Berry, 2011; Dehghani et al., 2014; Sagi and Dehghani,

2014). Sagi and Dehghani (2014) as well as Dehghani et al., (2014) found more moral language used by Republicans in debates surrounding both the U.S. Government shutdown in 2013, and the debates surrounding the ‘9/11 Mosque’, which was proposed to be built in New York.

Sagi and Dehghani (2014) used a latent analysis of tweets which were grouped into ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’ based upon a community detection algorithm which looked at connections between different twitter users to ascertain their political affiliation. They then ran a latent analysis of tweets measuring moral rhetoric with a ‘moral dictionary’, which is based on moral foundations theory. The twenty most popular nodes (accounts) were analyzed and found to be associated with either Democrats or Republicans, and additional hashtags like #foxnews or #aca were twice as likely to be associated with the ‘Republican’ and ‘Democrat’ communities, respectively. When considering the U.S. Federal Shutdown, their analysis showed conservatives were more likely to use moral language generally, as well as much more likely to use language regarding loyalty, fairness, and authority. Liberals were similarly likely to talk about purity and both sides cared about harm, though republicans used terms related to harm slightly more. The authors believe this higher level of moral rhetoric expressed “a higher degree of emotional involvement in the debate” (Sagi and Dehghani, 2014).

This was similarly found in an analysis by Dehghani et al., (2014), who analyzed blogs responses to the ‘Ground Zero Mosque’. Using machine learning technology and a number of computer based qualitative tools, they were able to analyze group identity, moral concerns, and emotional dynamics regarding the responses to the proposed mosque. They found, as is consistent with previous research, conservatives and liberals

use different word and had different emphasis in their moral belief systems. Particularly, conservatives were more likely to use words related to anger, which also correlated with religious language. This research indicated, similarly to previous research mentioned, that there is difference between how liberals and conservatives conceptualize morality and how the utilize moral language. It additionally noted an increase in anger, and its association with an increase in religious terminology.

Studies on the consumers of news stories, as measured by comments on posted articles and on outlets social media sites, have shown contradictory findings in terms of civility and deliberation. Research by Chen (2017) and Chen et al. (2019), found that comments were more incivil on middle of the road news sites, like *NBC News* and *USA Today* as opposed to those on more ideological sites such as *Fox News*, *The New York Times*, or *The Huffington Post*. They additionally found (2019), that much of the incivility and breakdown of democratic norms mirrored Trump's own comments and contained commentary that was incendiary, attacked many protected classes of people, and challenged the veracity of the election results, although their candidate won.

Su et al. (2018), similarly found within Facebook pages that comments on conservative and local news outlets were more incivil than national and liberal Facebook pages, the political dimensions of which are consistent with previous research on conservative media. Within incivil commentary, they also found more extremely incivil comments on conservative and local news outlets. This is explained in part because of the previous research which has indicated that local news readers tend to be conservative, showing consistent incivility amongst conservative news consumers, as research has also

indicated that ideological news tends to be consumed primarily by those who agree with their views (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2011).

Blogs as a Medium

Blogs can be trendsetters for the mainstream news, as Dautrich and Barnes show, 83% of 'elite' journalists reported to using blogs for research (2005). Also, Pew Research (2006) found that blog readers were more likely to discuss politics with family and friends. Together these findings indicate that the arguments being disseminated in this online format are likely to reach the broader public through both other journalists and everyday people having conversations on the topics of the day.

Additionally, they eschew moderation in favor of extreme positions, and their audiences seem to mirror this, as they tend to hold more extreme views than the average consumer of news (Keen, 2007; Utych 2011) and more likely to prefer self-reinforcing news than the average media consumer (Pew research, 2006). Blogs, with their ideological homogeneity, are likely to attract the most polarized portions of their political community, as Stroud found across several mediums of communication (2010). It is reasonable to assume that as such, these polarized outlets will reflect the language, beliefs, and norms of said community.

As Brundidge et al. note, “ideologically aligned blogs have become a prominent political force in the U.S Media landscape” (2014), a prominent force which is understudied in the literature. Suhay (2014) argues that bloggers and commenters connected to traditional media (i.e., Newspapers) were less polarized and more civil than independent and alternative counterparts, perhaps because those within traditional media

outlets have different norms of civility and their readership is less polarized and ideologically homogeneous than those of independent outlets.

Given the democratic nature of online discourse, blogs, and alternative online media can pass traditional gatekeepers and reach audiences not represented in the mainstream, and as such, studying blogs gives us the ability to dive deeper into these groups, so we can better understand their discourse, as well as their levels of civility. Niche blogs, which aim to cultivate smaller, but more loyal, audiences allow us a window into worldviews which we may not understand fully if we study Newspapers or even cable tv, which try to appeal to a broader audience.

It may be useful to bring in the concept of nichepapers. This concept refers to media outlets, primarily newspapers, which, as Umair Haque notes, “have built a profound mastery of tightly defined domain” (2009). This shift was forecasted by some researchers (Bowman and Willis, 2005) who saw this shift as a response to shifting technologies as well as changing business environments. Political blogs and magazines in many ways are a perfect representation of this sort of an outlet, as they focus primarily on political news, adding value based upon their ability to look at the news through their ideological lens and a knowledge of political theory and history which allows the outlets to provide value in two ways. They cover news events which may fall outside of the interest of more generalist outlets, and are able to interpret events and their consequences through an ideological lens which allows them to provide analysis from unique perspectives, creating highly curated content which is specifically targeted toward proponents of their political worldviews.

There is some discussion that media outlets, in a narrowcasting environment can aim at smaller and more ideologically homogeneous audiences, and as such, can risk offending, in part because they only need to maintain a niche audience (Massaro and Stryker, 2012; Sobieraj and Berry, 2011). Because of the internet's seemingly endless reach, as well as the political climate online, this is even more true for online media, where we see many outlets aiming for ideological niches. These narrow casted outlets are places where incivility can thrive in a political climate where attention-grabbing is necessary to maintain market share in a crowded media environment with a relatively low bar for entry.

We know that partisans tend to seek out media which agrees with their political opinions (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2011) across different forms of media. It is reasonable to assume that writers and editors understand this, and as such, would tailor much of their writing, both in style and topic substance, to address these audiences. This is perhaps even more true in our current age, as social media allows the hyper partisan political news consumer to voice their support or displeasure for authors and outlets in real time and with great ease, particularly in comparison to the old method of writing a letter to the editor.

If we grant this, then it can be argued we can very much learn extensively about the audiences of political media through an analysis of outlets. Outlets will act almost like a mirror, being able to show us which audiences respond to incivility, as well as which particular topics raise the blood of conservative political news consumers. Being incivil, or focusing on particular topics, are being consciously done by authors and editors based on what they understand the expectations of their consumers are.

Within this field, the paradigms for research are usually a left vs right analysis or traditional vs alternative comparison for the media (i.e., Sobieraj and Berry, 2011). Most of this research relies on ‘elite media’, i.e., the top bloggers (like Andrew Sullivan) and the most popular media outlets (i.e. New York Times or Fox News). This has meant that many voices have been under analyzed within the literature on online media and that there is not a more nuanced understanding of intergroup dynamics within the coalitions which make up the American political landscape. While some previous research has touched on alternative political news (Rae, 2021) or the social media profiles of rightwing news accounts across liberal democracies (Heft et al., 2019), this is the first research the author is aware of which focuses on non-elite conservative media sphere with an American focus.

The goal of this research project is to better understand the internal conservative dynamics of incivility, focusing on variation based on ideological worldview. To do this, I have included both traditional newspaper columns and blogs which are politically aligned as pro trump, mainstream conservatism, and libertarian. In doing this, I hope to be able to better understand the variation both across written mediums, as well as ideological variation. Understanding this internal variation can help us understand more fully where incivility comes from within the Republican movement. By doing this, we will also focus on popular media outlets which are not previously analyzed within the literature, and in doing so, better understand potential differences more broadly across the online political landscape.

Modern Republicanism

What is conservatism? For the purposes of this paper, mainstream conservatism is defined as the fusion of libertarianism, traditionalism, and anticommunism, as stated by George Nash (2014) in his seminal work *The Conservative Intellectual Tradition Since 1945*. Nash argues that these three intellectual currents were joined together through the leadership of William F. Buckley and Frank Meyer. This merger, called fusionism argued that “the overriding purpose of government was to protect and promote individual liberty, but the supreme purpose of the free individual should be to pursue a life of virtue, unfettered by and unaided by the State.” (Nash, 2016). In fusing these three ideological camps together, Buckley started the modern conservative movement, but was solidified with Reagan, who Nash saw as an “ecumenical figure who continued Buckley’s project of conservative unity” (Burns, 2016).

Jennifer Burns (2004) has shown that while this telling hits on something, the way in which fusionism is explained as a logical and natural connection of disparate ideologies undermines the very real differences. Her particular research focus is on libertarianism, and while she notes that some of its ideas have been adopted, the Nash portrayal fails to include the strong anti-religious and anti-traditional strain which was in a significant focus of thinkers like Ayn Rand, who is one of the libertarianism’s most significant thinkers.

Libertarianism is generally defined as “a political philosophy that advocates only minimal state intervention in the free market and the private lives of citizens” (Merriam Websters). Its modern ideological proponents have been the likes of Ayn Rand and Friedrich Hayek, both emigrant intellectuals who came to America from Europe in the

1950's. Within recent American political history, its primary proponents have been Rand and Ron Paul, a father son duo of elected politicians, from Kentucky and Texas respectively. Libertarianism has played a role in Republican politics since at least 1964, when Barry Goldwater attempted to unite a coalition of civil libertarianism from the west and southern opponents of civil rights through a shared opposition toward the federal government (Miller and Schofield, 2008). This marriage of convenience has maintained in large part because of an ever-increasing federal government.

The 2016 Republican primary and the rise of Donald Trump gave political scientists ample opportunity to reanalyze their prior understanding of Republican politics, and much of this work has been fruitful. There is a consensus amongst the literature on the appeal of Trump as a populist figure (e.g., Carmines et al., 2016; Tucker et al., 2016; Post, 2017; Oliver and Rahn, 2016). This populist tendency can be separated from both 'mainstream conservatism' and libertarianism, in both its rhetoric as well as its policy platform.

As noted by Oliver and Rahn (2016), rhetorically, populism is Manichean, creating a divide between 'the people' and corrupt elites, with the goal of placing 'the people' in their proper place in society. It employs a distinctive style, which is direct and emotional, using a lack a decorum to symbolize the speaker's closeness to the people and rejection of the norms of politics, making the speaker distinct from other politicians (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). They also center their campaigns on anti-elitism, which is shown in part through their rhetorical style, as they draw criticism from the elite, both because of their policies as well as their style, which is often seen as rough or incivil.

The platform is often economically and socially nationalistic (Gerteis and Goolsby, 2005), which is a departure from Fusionism and Libertarianism. This departure occurs on the economic front with both ‘Mainstream Conservatism’ and Libertarianism, as their economic policies are both free markets orientated, with libertarianism being a more extreme stance on free markets than conservatism. Populism can be an amorphous term, it has been used to describe politicians across the political spectrum, including Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primaries. This being said, recent research has shown that Populism as a coalition is a significant force in the electorate.

Qualitative research by Hochschild (2018) has shown that at least within the south, Trump’s populism appealed primarily to older white middle-class folks who see themselves as hard working and self-sufficient but have anxiety about falling out of the middle class as well as losing social standing. Quantitative research on Republican primary voters has indicated that initial support for Trump was in large part motivated by populist sentiments in the primary electorate (Carmines et al., 2016; Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Tucker et al., 2019). On measures of nationalism, mistrust of experts, and anti-elitism, which are commonly used to measure different facets of populism, Donald Trump was unique in his support amongst Republican primary voters who scored high on these measures. When considering anger, social anomie, nativism, conspiracism, and pessimism of their financial situation, Donald Trump supporters were the only ones who on average scored positively across these measures. These two measures indicate that Trump supporters in the primary were uniquely populist relative to the rest of the field, and as Oliver and Rahn (2016) note, Trump’s success was his ability to mobilize and garner support from populist inclined voters.

This was also shown by Carmines et al., 2016, who were able to separate primary voters from both parties into Liberals, Conservatives, Populists, Libertarians, and Moderates based on answers to a variety of cultural and economic issues, using the ANES, a nationally representative election survey. They found that Donald Trump garnered significant support amongst these populists, and that in a divided field this is probably what pushed him over the edge. This was similar to the results of Tucker et al., (2019) who using panel data of primary voters were able to chart Trump's success across the primary season, showing consistently strong success with populists from the beginning, indicating those with this tendency were a strong factor in his rise. They also note that this populist faction may be of increasing importance in the electorate, which is also consistent with other research (Carmines et al., 2016; Oliver and Rahn, 2016).

Populists, Libertarians, and fusionists/mainstream conservatives are of course not an exhaustive list of factions which make up the Republican party, and these factions could themselves be separated across other potential dividing lines. Even so, these three factions, if analyzed independently through the outlets which are designed to cater to them, can perhaps shed light into the civility or lack thereof which they expect, as shown through the outlets which cater to them.

CHAPTER THREE

Theory and Methods

Theoretical Framework

Previous research (York, 2013; Gervais, 2014) has indicated that the public often mirrors the incivility it experiences within the political media. Chen et al. (2019), confirmed this with Trump specifically, noting that online commentators mirrored much of the language of the Trump campaign in their commentary, and that more generally, exposure to elite incivil discourse plays a role in the discourse of non-elites. While Trump, of course, got a significant amount of direct access to voters through his televised campaign speeches as well as advertisements and spokespeople, many of his supporters were likely to also consume media created by Trumpian outlets.

Given the fragmented nature of the political landscape, as well as the polarization of readers of political blog readers (Lawrence et al., 2010), it is reasonable to consider the possibility that to maintain support amongst pro Trump populist voters, that Trump aligned outlets would also mirror this populist discourse and have heightened levels of incivility in their publications. This is theorized because, first, they would have a deep understanding of their audience and the expectations of this highly pro Trump subculture, and additionally because they may personally prefer the sort of populist aesthetic which is noted by Moffitt and Tormey (2014). Also, previous research on voters who supported Donald Trump early within the Republican primary have indicated that his supporters were more motivated by anger and anti-elitism (Oliver and Rahn, 2016). Both of which play into a populist rhetorical style.

In terms of rhetoric, this speech pattern is more emotional, direct, and lacking the sort of decorum that is usually expected in a national political figure. It is by its very design, aimed at being in direct opposition to mainstream of politics in its particular context, which means it is in opposition to the rhetorical styles of previous presidents, most recently George W. Bush and Barack Obama, both of whom would not have been accused of being incivil in their speech.

H1a) Trump aligned outlets will use more incivil language than our other outlets.

Considering our previous first hypothesis, there is an additional note which should be considered on the potential differences between the two pro-Trump outlets. While both are Trump aligned, one is a newspaper and the other, a web blog. This shows we could see a potential difference in incivility, based upon previous research.

Past work has indicated that while newspaper columns are more incivil than in previous generations, they are less incivil than blogs (Sobieraj and Berry, 2011). This fits with much of the previous research on blogs, which note that their audience tends to be more extreme in their views than the average American news consumer (Keen, 2007; Utych 2011) and tended to attract those who were more interested in self-reinforcing news (Pew Research, 2006).

Interestingly, research has found that both commentators and bloggers connected to a traditional news outlet were less incivil than their counterparts who were within the alternative media space (Suhay, 2014). This could very well be due to their connection to a traditional journalistic culture which values civility and moderation more so than upstart online outlets. Additionally, bringing in the nichepaper concept, part of their added value which differentiates them from more mainstream outlets is the sort of emotional

gratification that a reader gets from seeing an author ‘stick it’ to the political opposition, much like the support Trump himself received from people who liked that he ‘owned the libs’ more than a particular policy position. This previous research has not compared a politically aligned blog with a more tabloid style newspaper like the one studied in this project. This provides the opportunity to see if this general difference hold with these particular outlets.

H1b) Our Trump aligned blog will have the most incivility

It is a stereotype that the American news media and the average consumer is not knowledgeable about world affairs, and that the American media does not pay much attention to happenings outside of our domestic borders. This stereotype of the American news consumer has once again been demonstrated with a new report from the Council of Foreign Relations (2019) and research has shown a lack of focus on international news in the American media market (Iyengar et al., 2009).

As has previously been noted by many in this field, much of the incivility we see expressed comes from emotional language and strong feelings related to political disagreements (i.e. Sobieraj and Berry; 2011). To put it simply, the lack of interest and knowledge noted above would lead any observer to question if this lack of interest would limit the amount of emotion that could be mustered to argue about international issues. Incivil language, be it insults, belittling, emotional displays, or character assassinations, often come from a place of anger. Conservative discourse generally, has been shown to use more words related to anger (Dehghani et al., 2014) and more incivil terminology (Sobieraj and Berry, 2011; Su et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2019).

Also, Republican primary voters, more educated, more likely to be white, and more likely to be male (Kamarck and Podkul, 2018), much like consumers of political blogs generally, and given our previously documented political polarization amongst blog readers (Lawrence et al., 2010), we can assume a similarity between Republican primary voters and conservative blog readers. As noted by Oliver and Rahn (2016), voters in the most recent Republican primary were much more nativistic than their democratic counterparts, leading one to consider perhaps this lack of knowledge or interest would be heightened amongst these readers, given their nativism. With all of this considered, it is reasonable to hypothesize that articles focused on domestic political issues will garner more incivility than internationally focused articles, as lack of strong feeling about the topic would probably lead to a lack of general incivility.

H2a) Articles focused domestically will be correlated with political incivility and pieces which have an International focus will alternatively have a correlation to political civility.

When once again considering the topics covered by the pieces, something worth considering is are particular topics more likely to lead to an increase in incivility amongst our right leaning commentators? Research on the ‘culture war’ hypothesis coined by James David Hunter has certainly been mixed, with many researchers arguing there is minimal evidence of it amongst the broader American populace (i.e., Fiorina et al., 2005) and others saying that polarization is understated on many issues (Laymen and Carsey, 2002; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2005). While this argument is far from over, polarization has been shown to exist amongst blog readers (Lawrence et al., 2010) as well as amongst the top quartile of politically engaged voters (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2005).

Both papers (Laymen and Carsey, 2002; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2005) note that this polarization is strong along traditional culture war issues involving identity (Gay Marriage), race (social spending), and morality (abortion) amongst those strongest party identifiers. Our ‘Culture War’ variable, which will be explained at length in the coding section, is a 2020 update on the culture war issues which have shifted with the recent legal acceptance of gay marriage across the country, as well as other cultural shifts.

Religious liberty is separately coded because it was a unique discreet topic amongst the articles which were coded and focused on the idea that as civil rights for minority groups like LGBT people as well as governmental restrictions increased because of COVID-19, that the rights of religious communities are under threat due to increased government intrusion into the practices of religious organizations. Given the prevalence of religious language in conservative discourse, as well as the fact that religious language has previously been correlated to language with anger (Dehghani et al., 2014)

H2b) Culture War Issues and Religious Liberty will be statistically significant and positively related to incivility.

Given the polarization which has been discussed at length previously, as well as the populist language, it would be reasonable to assume that these two factors would play a role in the levels of incivility used while discussing our polarizing populist, Donald Trump. This assumption is probable for two reasons.

Firstly, outlets covering Trump which are not amenable to his populist brand of politics (Mainstream Conservatives or Libertarians), could be sparked to outrage and incivility by his violation of traditional political norms, which is consistent amongst populists generally (i.e., Moffitt and Tormey, 2013), and Trump specifically (Oliver and

Rahn, 2016). This spark could elicit language which would otherwise be uncommon amongst these sorts of political commentators.

Secondly, previously mirroring effects have been noted between politicians and citizens, who once they hear incivil discourse are more likely to repeat that language and style (York, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Chen et al., 2019). This mirroring effect could theoretically be stronger amongst Trumpian outlets which are directly discussing the man himself. This mirroring effect which is consistently found amongst the general public could also be explained by political media, which could be the sort of filter from which the public gets the arguments and rhetorical style to mirror from. Additionally, given this was coded toward the end of the Trump presidency, many of the pieces coded from outlets which were Trump aligned were defenses of his policies and arguments for the continuation of his presidency. This tense political climate, with a democratic primary and gearing up toward the general election would provide ample opportunity for contrast and defense of Trump.

H3) Discussions of Donald Trump will, because of his uniquely polarizing place within the American political landscape, will be statistically significantly more likely to engender the sort of rage and anger which would cause incivil discourse.

Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, based on a variety of economic and social positions, are generally considered as the two most left leaning politicians in the democratic primary amongst the public and commentators (Broockman and Kalla, 2020). This is very much a self-styled, conscious choice, with Bernie Sanders often referring to himself as a ‘Democratic Socialist’, and Elizabeth Warren, who describes herself as a

progressive and has styled herself as such throughout her career in the Senate (Mayhead, 2018).

While any single policy may align with some segment of the conservative movement, their full portfolio of positions would be anathema to the political desires of conservatives generally. Their leftward positions provided the strongest contrast with eventual winner, Joe Biden. This perfect foil would be likely to engender the sort of anger which would be manifested within incivil language. This seems particularly likely given the inclusion of ideological extremizing language and misrepresentative exaggeration as two variables which try to capture political language which mischaracterizes their opponents by overstating their positions. This could be more easily done with those who are more ideologically different than yourself, which is certainly the case between these two politicians and the commentators in this study.

H4) Pieces which focus on Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren will have increased levels of incivility

Sample Selection

Posts from five blogs and online op-ed pages which are broadly understood as conservative within an American political context were selected. These outlets are *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Review*, *Reason*, *The New York Post*, and *The Federalist*. These outlets were selected because of their different political perspectives as well as the fact that they are different kinds of media outlets.

For the purposes of this paper, mainstream conservatism is defined as the fusion of libertarianism, traditionalism, and anticommunism, as stated by George Nash in his seminal work *The Conservative Intellectual Tradition Since 1945*. As previously noted,

Nash argues that these three strains of thought were joined together through the leadership of William F. Buckley. This fusionism argued that “the overriding purpose of government was to protect and promote individual liberty, but the supreme purpose of the free individual should be to pursue a life of virtue, unfettered by and unaided by the State.” (Nash, 2016).

The Wall Street Journal, a highly popular business orientated newspaper in America, was selected to represent mainstream conservatively aligned op-ed pages. It is a primarily business orientated newspaper with a rich history and strong conservative orientation within its op-ed pages. Its editorial page has a number of writers connected with past republican presidential administrations, such as Peggy Noonan, former speechwriter for both Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Another example would be William McGurn, a former speechwriter for George W. Bush. It also has a number of writers from center right think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, the Hudson Institute, and the Council on Foreign Relations, who lend intellectual heft to the op-ed pages.

Their editorial board describes themselves as speaking for:

Free markets and free people, the principles, if you will, marked in the watershed year of 1776 by Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence and Adam Smith's “Wealth of Nations.” So, over the past century and into the next, the Journal stands for free trade and sound money; against confiscatory taxation and the ukases of kings and other collectivists; and for individual autonomy against dictators, bullies and even the tempers of momentary majorities. (WSJ, 2021).

This statement with its focus on free trade, individual liberty, with its focus on the historical legacies of Thomas Jefferson and Adam Smith, when combined with the examples of op-ed writers, demonstrates a strong conservative bend. Unsurprising for a newspaper named after the financial capital of the world, the *Wall Street Journal*

combines a laissez faire economic policy with a commitment to an ideological legacy of small c conservatism which historically can be traced from the likes of Smith and Jefferson, up to Reagan and both Bush Presidencies, and is kept alive and well intellectually by center right think tanks, whose writers and researchers often contribute editorials to the newspaper.

Similarly, *National Review* is a magazine and online publication which has “defined the modern conservative movement” since its founding in 1955 by conservative intellectual William F. Buckley Jr. and represents mainstream conservatism which is not expressly aligned with the pro trump wing of the Republican party. This is consistent with its historical position as the arbitrator of what is ‘respectable conservatism’. National Review, through founder William F. Buckley’s denouncement of the John Birch Society (Hemmer, 2016) as well as segregationist George Wallace (Lowndes, 2016) defined what was within bounds for mainstream conservatism. The modern example of this attempt at boundary setting was their April 2015 issue titled *Against Trump*. This edition uniformly opposed the primary campaign of Donald Trump and featured a variety of right-wing thinkers and media personalities discussing the potential damage a Trump presidency could do to conservatism and America. It demonstrated a clear break between mainstream conservatism and the sort of populism which Trump represents (Lowndes, 2016).

Both National Review and Wall Street Journal represent mainstream conservatism. The Wall Street Journal has a number of authors who were significant players in prior Republican administrations and currently work within the intellectual milieu of conservative think tanks. Additionally, both NR and WSJ have writers who

have worked for both media outlets, like William McGurn, who is former NR Washington Bureau Chief. Of course, these similarities do not mean they move lockstep on every issue, as the WSJ has, for example, been generally more pro-immigration than National Review and other conservative outlets (Rutenberg and Hulse, 2007). This can in part be explained by a pro-business orientation which supports both high skill and low skill immigration for increased productivity as well as a reduction in labor costs.

Libertarianism is a political philosophy that generally advocates minimal state intervention in the free market and the private lives of citizens. Its philosophical proponents have been the likes of Ayn Rand and Friedrich Hayek. Within recent American political history, its primary proponents have been Rand and Ron Paul, a father son duo of elected politicians, from Texas and Kentucky respectively, who have both ran for President in Republican primaries, showing their connection to Republican politics. As previously noted, libertarianism has been a consistent strand of modern conservative, but also seen as outside of the mainstream, in part because of its social policies, which are anathema to traditionalists and religious conservatives.

Reason is the leading libertarian magazine and website, which provides news and opinion from a libertarian perspective. It is ran by the Reason Foundation, a nonprofit think tank which “advances a free society by developing, applying, and promoting libertarian principles, including individual liberty, free markets, and the rule of law” (<https://reason.org/about-reason-foundation/>). Reason.com, where all the posts were selected, also produces video and podcast content, and boasts 5 million visits a month (2.5 million unique visits) as well as a print distribution of 47,000 for its monthly magazine and 92,000 total distribution if digital copies are included.

Past contributors to Reason have included a who's who of libertarian economists, thinkers, and politicians. Examples of these include, but are not limited to, Milton Friedman, Murray Rothbard, Thomas Sowell, Walter Block, Rand Paul, and Ron Paul. Libertarianism, which is recognized as a distinct and important trend in American conservatism, was selected to provide a third perspective between the pro trump and more traditional conservative perspective.

To represent a Trump aligned blog within conservatism, we have selected *The Federalist*, which is a conservative online outlet founded in 2013 by Ben Domenech and Sean Davis. It is a strongly pro-trump outlet, which has received criticism for publishing allegations of large-scale fraud in the 2020 election as well as conspiracy theories regarding the Coronavirus pandemic (Hagle, 2020; Peters, 2020; Eggers et al., 2021). It has not been studied within academic circles, but mainstream media, as shown above, has been doing a significant amount of work looking at the role *The Federalist* has played within the conservative media landscape.

Lastly, as our pro Trump newspaper, we have *The New York Post*. It is a conservative daily tabloid news publication from New York City, which was founded in 1801, and is the fourth most circulated paper in America and owned by the Murdoch family. It has a strong conservative bend in its coverage and endorsed Donald Trump in the 2016 Republican primary as well as in the 2020 presidential elections. In particular, the 2016 endorsement was on April 14th, and was a uniquely critical endorsement as the primary field had narrowed to the final three candidates, Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and John Kasich. It has the largest circulation out of any newspaper which endorsed Donald Trump by a wide margin, and as such was his most significant newspaper endorsement.

Additionally, like the *WSJ*, it is based in New York, and was a natural selection to compare to the *WSJ*.

Posts and op-eds will be coded from based on two randomly selected days each month from October 2019 to August 2020. Three pieces from each blog and three op-eds were selected to be coded, with posts from either the day before or day after selected if three were not available on the randomly selected day. By selecting posts which are on the same day across different outlets, the likelihood that similar political topics are being discussed across the different outlets is increased, and we eliminate some of the variability which could happen based upon the different hot button news items on different days.

This allows us to better understand both what each outlet is more likely to discuss. Additionally, by randomly selecting these posts within these individual days, we also are more likely to have author variation within each outlet, which will allow us to better understand content within each outlet, and not be biased by a single author who is more incivil than other writers within the publication. This is also helped by a large sample of 330 analyzed posts.

Coding System

In coding methodology, this work leaned heavily on the work of Sobieraj and Berry (2011), who categorized incivil language into thirteen different unique variables which cover the different likely types of incivility. These thirteen definitions are explained in length in the appendix, and were designed to be applicable across TV, Radio, and the written word. Because this coding system was designed to work across

medium, it should not have to be modified significantly, though the authors do note the type of incivility differs depending on the different medium of communication. The researcher coded the 330 pieces over the course of a month, with each previous day's cases being reviewed prior to new coding, to help ensure consistency across multiple days of coding.

Consistent with Sobieraj and Berry (2011), each single 'chunk will have up to six different uses of incivility coded, as to limit potential outliers biasing our study. A chunk is defined by Sobieraj and Berry (2011), as "a contiguous block of text between any two of the following: the beginning or ending of a paragraph or section, in text advertisement (as seen on some blogs) a line break\space, or a segue\subject change".

Of particular focus of discussion are the Total cases of incivility, Overall amount of outrage, overall tone, and pieces without any outrage. Total cases of incivility a break from the coding of Sobieraj and Berry in this section (2011) and is a variable which is simply the total number of examples of incivility in a given article, coded by adding each individual case of incivility together. Overall amount of outrage from Sobieraj and Berry and is coded 0-4 and is designed to measure the total amount of outrage, from none (0), to more than 2/3rds of the content (4). Overall tone is similar to Overall amount, as it is also coded as 0-4 and is consistent with the previous research. It is coded from broadly conventional in its speech (0), to the article contains very intense outrage, and best described as very emotional as opposed to traditional reasoned content (4). Lastly, no outrage is also a break from the coding system of Sobieraj and Berry and is a dummy coded variable in which pieces which have no outrageous or incivil language are coded as 1, and any articles with an example are coded as 0. This is designed to primarily measure

if there is variation between outlets or topics in terms of what is more likely to elicit conventional speech.

As well as coding incivility, the different themes which are at discussed in these individual posts were coded. Themes were drawn in part through keywords which were used at the bottom of pieces on *Reason*, *The Federalist*, and *The NYPost*, which are used to allow better online searchability. The WSJ and National Review did not have keywords available on their posts, and as such, these were coded by the researcher based upon the primary themes of the pieces in question. This focus on keywords allowed us to dummy code a variety of different topics, which allow us to better understand if particular topics play a role in incivility.

The topics which were dummy coded break into three categories, general topic, specific theme focus, and specific person focus. For general topic, posts were coded as 1 if they were related to domestic policy or domestic political commentary, and 0 if they did not. An example of something which would not be coded as domestic was an op-ed which focused on baseball, as though a sport in America, it did not fit either criteria listed above, unless somehow political discussion was included within the article. Alternatively, if articles focused primarily on international affairs or an international issue, they were coded 1, and 0 if not. An example would be coverage of Brexit, which in our sample took place in three of our outlets (NR, Federalist, Reason).

In terms of specific topics, we coded similarly above for articles related to Covid, Religious Liberty, the Democratic Primary, and Culture War Issues. All were dummy coded 0 to 1, based on if the articles discussed these topics at length. Culture War Issues is a catch all term, used to code articles which focus on BLM, #Metoo, Cancel Culture,

and gender identity/ transgenderism. These are being lumped together as a sort of new culture war category, similarly to the work of James Davison Hunter (1991), who discussed the interlinking of abortion, women's rights, gay rights, and several other issues which together formed the battle lines for the culture war in the 1990's.

As well as topics, it is particularly important to look and see if people inspired incivility and outrage. As such, we dummy coded articles for Joe Biden, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump. Unsurprisingly, amongst these politicians, Joe Biden and Donald Trump were the most common topics of conversation, with 36 and 58 pieces in which they were a substantial focus. Amongst other political figures, only Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren were commonly discussed enough to be coded.

Finally, we have a number of control variables. All pieces were coded based on length, month published, author type, and order coded. Length was coded concurrent with the previous research, going from less than 250 words (1), to 750 – 999 words (4), to more than 1500 words (7). This was then used as a continuous variable in the statistical analysis seen below. Articles were coded based upon the month they were coded, so we could see if incivility increased as the general election came nearer. Author type was coded 0-3, with 0 being male authors, 1 being female authors, 2 being multiple authors, and 3 being posts done by an Editorial Board. Finally, the order coded is controlled through PDFNumber, which was designed to see if there was any inherent bias in the coder based on the order in which the articles were coded.

The goal of this project is to study differences in themes of discussion, and in usage of incivil language within the media landscape of the political right. By including both newspapers and alternative online media, we will be able to study differences

between more traditional media and their online variants. This will allow us to test previous findings which have been mixed on if differences between traditional op-eds and online blogs exist in terms of incivility (Sobieraj and Berry, 2011; Leccese and Regan, 2015).

Additionally, with different types of media outlets, which target different audiences, we can see if any variation of right leaning commentary uses more incivil language in their arguments. This allows us to see potential differences between libertarian (Reason), mainstream conservative (WSJ and National Review), and more Trumpian outlets (The New York Post and The Federalist). This is unique in the literature, as previous research focuses on a left to right political paradigm, or an alternative media to traditional media comparison. This gives us the opportunity to study in group difference, providing a new lens in how consider incivility.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Understanding our Sample

First, we should address the descriptive statistics of the dataset. One thing of note is that most of the authors are male, though the NYPost has nearly half of its op-eds written by the Editorial Board. The Federalist is an additional outlier, with a third of their pieces being written by women. In terms of length, The Federalist consistently had long pieces, with almost a third of the articles being over 1,000 words. National Review has the shortest pieces, with over 60% of their pieces being under 500 words.

Table One. Descriptive Statistics of Sample

Variables	Outlet				
	(Con News)	(Con Blog)	(Trump News)	(Trump Blog)	(Libertarian Blog)
Author Type					
Male	50	57	31	43	52
Female	9	9	4	22	12
Multiple Authors	5	0	0	1	2
Editorial Board	2	0	31	0	0
Length (in words)					
Less than 250	0	18	10	4	2
250-499	12	23	15	7	13
500-749	30	13	34	15	19
750-999	15	8	2	20	18
1000-1249	5	2	4	6	7
1250-1499	0	1	0	7	3
More than 1500	2	1	1	7	4
Pieces coded	66	66	66	66	66

Considering the different types of outrage, we see some variation in terms of both the total volume as well as particular types of language used. In terms of

volume, more trump aligned outlets are clearly more likely to use outrageous language. In particular, *The Federalist* used more than three times the outrageous language of the *Wall Street Journal*. Trump aligned outlets are also more likely to use several types of outrageous language, including insulting language (both), mockery (both), Misrepresentative exaggeration (Federalist), and name calling (NYPost). Reason, a libertarian affiliated news blog which also has a magazine (not coded), was similar to Trumpian outlets in obscene language and also had its fair share of insulting language. Amongst our mainstream conservative outlets, it is interesting that the *WSJ* was very likely to use ideologically extreme language, often referring to democrats as ‘radical’ and ‘socialists’.

National Review was less likely than our trump adjacent outlets to use a variety of examples of outrageous language, but were willing to use mockery, belittling, name calling, and insulting language at a rather significant rate, particularly with their uses of belittling closer to Trumpian outlets in terms of frequency. If we analyze the pieces in full, we can see that mainstream conservative outlets are much more likely to be conventional than our Trumpian outlets, with our libertarian group being only slightly less conventional than our mainstream outlets. Additionally, on the moderate intensity of tone, the second highest amount of outrage possible, we see in our pro trump blog leads in tonal intensity, followed by our pro trump newspaper, the NYPost. These trends continue in terms of overall amount of outrage, average amount of outrageous language per piece, and pieces without outrage.

Table Two. Descriptive Statistics of Topics

Topics Covered	Outlet					Total
	(Con News)	(Con Blog)	(Trump News)	(Trump Blog)	(Libertarian Blog)	
Domestic	56	52	63	59	60	290
International	15	10	8	8	10	51
Trump	7	15	10	12	14	58
Covid	14	10	19	16	14	73
Culture War	8	4	10	19	7	48
Religious Liberty	1	3	0	3	6	13
Democratic Primary	3	10	6	7	7	33
Joe Biden	5	9	7	9	6	36
Bernie Sanders	4	7	5	6	2	24
Elizabeth Warren	2	3	7	3	2	17

When considering the topics covered in our outlets, there a number of interesting differences worth mentioning. We see an overwhelming focus on domestic politics primarily, though the WSJ is an outlier in terms of international coverage. Whenq21 considering particular politicians, Elizabeth Warren is more than twice as likely to be covered by the NYPost than any other outlet. The National Review was most likely to cover the democratic primary generally, as well as most likely to cover Donald Trump. ‘Culture War Issues’ a catch all term to cover negative coverage of BLM, Cancel Culture, and #MeToo, was primarily covered by The Federalist. In terms of specific topics, Covid was the most covered topic, followed by Donald Trump and Culture War Issues.

Table Three. Descriptive Statistics of
Outrage

Type of Outrage		Outlet			
		(Con News)	(Con Blog)	(Populist News)	(Populist Blog)
Misrepresentative Exaggeration	13	10	19	47	7
Insulting Language	6	11	25	28	16
Name Calling	8	14	22	19	9
Character Assassination	1	0	3	1	1
Mockery	1	10	21	15	10
Conflagration	1	1	3	17	2
Ideological Extreme Language	12	2	9	17	6
Slippery Slope	1	0	2	6	1
Belittling	3	9	10	6	3
Obscene Language	0	1	5	2	5
Total Outrageous Language	46	58	119	158	60
Overall Tone					
Mostly Conventional	62	58	30	32	55
Light Intensity	3	7	31	22	11

(continued)

Type of Outrage	(Con News)	(Con Blog)	(Populist News)	(Populist Blog)	(Con News)
Overall Amount of Outrage					
None	55	48	29	32	47
1/3 Classified	11	18	34	26	19
1/3 to 2/3	0	0	2	7	0
more than 2/3	0	0	1	1	0
Total Outrage Examples	46	58	120	159	61
Mode (Examples in Mode)	1	1	1	3,4	1
Average In Pieces with Outrage	2.3	2.23	5.27	4.18	1.91
No Outrage Pieces	46	40	23	28	34

Differences in Total Cases of Outrage

Looking at table four, we see the regression effects for total cases of outrage per written piece. We control for the month the article was published, the order it was coded in, as well as the length and authorship type. Looking at our first regression, length is significant, indicating, unsurprisingly, that as the piece increases in length, we have a likely increase in the total amount of incivility in the piece. The type of author, the month, and the order in which the piece is coded are not significant across all models.

Table Four. Total Cases of Outrage

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5
Month	0.0373 (0.0332)	0.0518 (0.0330)	0.0459 (0.0334)	0.0406 (0.0339)	0.0517 (0.0334)
PDFNumber	.057612 -0.0458 (0.124)	.0798928 -0.0464 (0.122)	.0709076 0.0049 (0.123)	.0626248 -0.0149 (0.124)	.0797909 0.00659 (0.122)
Length	-.0182744 0.374*** (0.0971)	-.0184782 0.370*** (0.0964)	.0019524 0.372*** (0.0957)	-.0059424 0.357*** (0.0958)	.0026285 0.357*** (0.0934)
Author Type					
Female	-.0061975 1.124 (1.292)	.008366 1.014 (1.316)	-.0115841 1.298 (1.323)	.006941 1.081 (1.252)	.0077421 1.183 (1.304)
Multiple Authors	0.0844173 -0.630 (0.426)	.0761441 -0.541 (0.432)	0.0974256 -0.697 (0.445)	.0811673 -0.625 (0.438)	.0887963 -0.634 (0.456)
Editorial Board	-.0922268	-.0792485	-0.1020197	-.0916079	-.0929082
Type of Outlet					
Conservative Blog	0.582* (0.286)	0.642* (0.284)	0.575* (0.283)	0.465 (0.282)	0.583* (0.288)
Pro Trump News	.1137428 1.707*** (0.423)	.1253659 1.555*** (0.434)	.1122163 1.712*** (0.428)	.0908001 1.665*** (0.430)	.1138284 1.604*** (0.442)
Pro Trump Blog	.3334041 1.501*** (0.413)	.3036071 1.441*** (0.409)	.3343588 1.283** (0.404)	.3251846 1.433*** (0.410)	.3132758 1.234** (0.396)
Libertarian	.2931752 0.142 (0.242)	.281469 0.0759 (0.248)	.2506311 0.0987 (0.243)	.2798306 0.122 (0.244)	.2410322 0.0712 (0.251)
Specific Topic					
COVID			-0.252 (0.252)		-0.253 (0.249)
Culture War Issues			-0.0510648 1.165** (0.384)		-0.0513448 1.104** (0.381)
Democratic Primary			.2005859 0.545 (0.407)		.1900441 0.0769 (0.491)
Religious Liberty			.0798725 0.470 (0.512)		.0112677 0.362 (0.539)
			.0446011		.0343391

(continued)

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5
General Topics					
Domestic		1.076*** (0.211)			0.828*** (0.221)
		.1714488			.1320003
International		0.0516 (0.237)			0.125 (0.246)
		.009104			.0220984
Politicians Discussed					
Warren				-0.0565 (0.590)	-0.153 (0.579)
				-.0060934	-.0165007
Sanders				0.925 (0.618)	0.766 (0.608)
				.1172537	.0971458
Trump				0.445 (0.305)	0.397 (0.309)
				0.0826213	.0738423
Biden				0.0570 (0.380)	0.00242 (0.389)
				0.0086701	.0003687
Constant	-0.727 (0.486)	-1.728*** (0.504)	-0.999* (0.475)	-0.863* (0.478)	-1.782*** (0.492)
Observations	330	330	330	330	330
R-squared	0.186	0.213	0.236	0.206	0.266

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Considering our first and second regressions, we see the role that outlets and general topic plays. In comparison to our reference group (Conservative News), we see that Pro Trump outlets are much more likely to have more cases of outrage, including when we consider the general topic. Our mainstream conservative blog (NR) is also significant, though only at the .05 level, in comparison to the .001 level for the Trump aligned outlets. These findings hold across both the first and second models. In terms of the relative effects, we see that in comparison to our Conservative blog, Pro Trump News and blogs are nearly three times as substantial in terms of effect size. Looking at the effects in model one, our Pro Trump news outlet has the largest standardized effect at .3334, followed by our Pro Trump blog at .2932 and then our Conservative blog at a much smaller .1138. These results generally hold across model two as well. Additionally,

the general topic matters, as when looking at model two, we see a large and statistically significant effect for articles which cover domestic politics, with a standardized coefficient of .1715 and significance at the .001 level. Articles which cover international topics are not significant in terms of effect.

When looking at our third model, we included the topics of Covid, Culture War Issues, the Democratic Primary, and Religious Liberty, to see the role that specific topics play. Across our control variables results remain largely the same with length being highly significant and positively correlated with an increase in cases of incivility. When looking at our outlets, statistical significance remains the same for our Conservative blog (*National Review*) and our Pro Trump newspaper (*NYPOST*). The Trump aligned blog (*The Federalist*) had a slight decrease in significance from the .001 level to the .01 level. The overall effect also decreased slightly, though it is still substantially larger than any non-Trump aligned publication. While relative effects change slightly, they are still broadly the same across all the outlets.

When considering our different specific topics, pieces addressing Covid, Religious Liberty, and the Democratic Primary were not statistically significant in the effect they had on total amount of outrage in an article. The Culture War category was significant at the .01 level, and had a standardized effect of .2006, indicating that played nearly double the role in total amount of outrage in a piece then did being published by our Conservative blog. This significance, when controlling for the outlet as well as all of our other control variables, seems to strongly indicate that Culture War issues are uniquely salient in increasing the total amount of outrage in a given piece.

Our fourth model included national politicians who were covered by all the outlets. None of the politicians included (Trump, Biden, Sanders, and Warren) had any significant effect. Results were broadly similar when considering our control variables and outlets. The only change in this model was that when controlling for politicians, our Conservative blog lost significance and our Pro Trump blog increased its significance to the .001 level. Relative effect sizes did not change significantly.

Our final model included all our variables, and statistical effects were similar to previous individual model tests. Our only statistically significant control variable remained length, and all our outlets which had previously been significant remained so, though our Pro Trump blog reduced its significance from .001 to .01. National Review, which was insignificant in model four, but had been significant in all other models, was again significant at the .05 level. In terms of relative effect sizes, the order of the effect size remained the same with our Conservative blog remaining the smallest at .1138, and both Pro Trump outlets having more than double the effect, at .2410 for the Pro Trump Blog and .3133 for the Pro Trump Newspaper. When considering general and specific topics, both a Domestic focus and a focus on the Culture War were statistically correlated to increases in total cases of outrage, with both being significant at the .01 level, and a Domestic focus having a smaller relative effect size of .1320, while the focus on the Culture War had an effect size of .1900. The R Squared for our final model is .266, which shows that we can explain over 26% of the variance in total instances of outrage with our final model.

These results showed that even when controlling for length, month, author type, and topic covered, we see a significant difference between our Trump aligned outlets and

the other conservative media outlets. While National Review is also significant and positive in relation to our reference group, the effects are consistently more than double for our Pro Trump blog and nearly triple for the Pro Trump news outlet. The modern-day culture war around gender (transgenderism, #Metoo), race (BLM, statue debate), and cancel culture is particularly powerful, as shown in the large and significant effect which on total cases of outrage, particularly in comparison to the other topics covered. A bit surprisingly, the people being covered did not have an effect on total number of cases of outrage, though a focus on domestic politics stirred the spirits more so than international affairs.

Overall Amounts of Outrage

When looking at the overall amount of outrage in each piece, we have a number of interesting findings, as seen in table five, which shows the results of our regression. In model one, we see similar results of previous tables terms of the role which length plays. As the article increases in size, we expect to see an increase in terms of overall amount of outrage. In terms of authors, none of the different kinds of authorship were significant. When considering our outlets, we see significant and substantial results for our Conservative blog, Pro Trump news, and Pro Trump blog. Both Trumpian outlets are significant at the .001 level, with the Trump news outlet having the largest effect, at .3608, which was the largest standardized coefficient in the model. This was followed by our Pro Trump blog, which had a very substantial effect at .3160, which was the second largest standardized coefficient. Comparatively, our Conservative Blog was statistically significant at the .05 level, but had a standardized coefficient of .1401, indicating less

than half the effect of either of the previously mentioned outlets in increasing the overall amount of outrage.

When considering model two, we added general topics discussed, domestic or international affairs. Similar to our previous analysis, length is highly significant and substantial, at the .001 level of statistical significance and a standardized coefficient of .2025, meaning it has a larger effect than say, being published in our Conservative blog. Our outlets do not change substantially in terms of effect, though our Conservative blog is now significant at the .01 level as opposed to the .05 level previously reported.

Focusing on Domestic issues was significant at the .001 level with a standardized coefficient of .1313, indicating that while the effect is strong statistically, its effect size is still smaller than all our significant outlet effects as well as our control variable length, in terms of increasing the overall amount of outrage.

Table 5. Overall Amount of Outrage

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5
Month	-0.0157 (0.00955)	-0.0137 (0.00972)	-0.0154 (0.0100)	-0.0146 (0.00976)	-0.0143 (0.0103)
PDFNumber	-.0862861 (0.0367)	-.0753774 (0.0362)	-.0846693 (0.0371)	-.0804545 (0.0375)	-.0787853 (0.0374)
Length	-.0556589 0.0822*** (0.0241)	-.0545916 0.0804*** (0.0242)	-.0306897 0.0835*** (0.0240)	-.0430361 0.0789*** (0.0241)	-.0273807 0.0809*** (0.0242)
	.2070995	.2025079	.2103636	.1989352	.2039973
Author Type					
Female	-0.0533 (0.0793)	-0.0251 (0.0794)	-0.0479 (0.0784)	-0.0297 (0.0805)	-0.00582 (0.0806)
Multiple Authors	-.0348087 (0.289)	-.0163515 (0.296)	-.031268 (0.292)	-.0193752 (0.283)	-.0038 (0.296)
Editorial Board	.0767701 (0.139)	.0655422 (0.140)	.0842056 (0.142)	.0788264 (0.143)	.0770746 (0.144)
Type of Outlet					
Conservative Blog	.0037753 0.201* (0.0793)	.017625 0.205** (0.0790)	.0017756 0.206* (0.0810)	.0074471 0.180* (0.0799)	.0151751 0.207* (0.0828)
Pro Trump News	.1401083 0.519*** (0.102)	.1428802 0.472*** (0.104)	.1434338 0.509*** (0.104)	.1254445 0.503*** (0.105)	.1442215 0.467*** (0.107)
Pro Trump Blog	.3608044 0.454*** (0.104)	0.3282602 0.429*** (0.103)	.3538959 0.408*** (0.104)	.3498839 0.438*** (0.104)	.3246833 0.388*** (0.104)
Libertarian	.3160094 (0.0748)	.2986394 (0.0746)	.2833937 (0.0753)	.3042939 (0.0738)	.2694907 (0.0755)
Specific Topic					
COVID			-0.0132 (0.0723)		-0.0285 (0.0746)
Culture War Issues			-.0094953 0.247* (0.101)		-.0205541 0.215* (0.102)
Democratic Primary			.1512845 (0.107)		.131858 (0.131)
			.0778638		.0165661

(continued)

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5
Religious Liberty			-0.109 (0.117)		-0.142 (0.119)
			-.0369011		-.048127
General Topics					
Domestic		0.231*** (0.0589)			0.193** (0.0645)
		.1312964			.1093752
International		-0.0796 (0.0630)			-0.0684 (0.0669)
		-.0500447			-0.0430046
Politicians Discussed					
Warren				0.0731 (0.173)	0.0601 (0.168)
				.0280828	.0230991
Sanders				0.0728 (0.157)	0.0280 (0.163)
				.0328443	.0126512
Trump				0.0596 (0.0846)	0.0340 (0.0884)
				.0394465	.022475
Biden				0.121 (0.119)	0.102 (0.119)
				.0657023	.055316
Constant	0.0544 (0.129)	-0.133 (0.139)	-0.0218 (0.129)	0.0147 (0.129)	-0.179 (0.139)
Observations	330	330	330	330	330
R-squared	0.164	0.186	0.194	0.176	0.214

Standard errors in parentheses
Beta Coefficients in Third row
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

When introducing specific topics in model three, we see that Culture War issues are statistically significant at the .05 level with a standardized coefficient of .1512. This effect is larger than the effect of being written in our Conservative blog and indicates that when controlling for outlets publishing the pieces, as well as length, author type, month coded, and order coded, that amongst specific topics the Culture War was most salient in increasing the overall amount of outrage.

Our fourth model introduces politicians discussed. None of the people discussed were statistically significant in increasing the amount of outrage, and additionally, none

of the other significant results substantially changed. The final model, which includes all our variables, is similar to our previous models. Length and domestic focus are still significant, as are the Trump aligned outlets and our Conservative blog. No single individual politician is significant, and author type once again plays no statistical role. In terms of specific topic, even when including both politicians and general issue focus, Culture War issues remain significant at the .05 level.

The consistency of our significance across models shows the robustness of these results and reiterated the importance of the outlet, as well as the importance of the culture war specifically and a domestic focus more generally on overall levels of outrage in a given piece. Our R Squared in this final model is .214, which indicates we can explain about 21% of the variance with this model, in comparison with our first R Squared, which was a more modest .164, indicating it only explains 16% of the variance.

Overall Tone of Pieces

Our final OLS Regression table, table six, focuses on the overall tone of the pieces coded. As previously noted in the methods section, this variable addresses the tone of the piece, measuring the intensity of the outrage on a 0-4 scale, from conventional political speech to speech which is very intense in its outrage, and has is mainly emotional as opposed to reasoned.

Consistent with our previous models, first we see that month of publication and the order it was coded in were not significant. Length is significant and remains so across all models, though this statistical significance reduces from .01 in the first model to .05 in all remaining models. Author type plays no statistically significant role. When introducing

the outlets into the analysis, we see that consistent with previous analysis, Trump friendly outlets have a strongly significant (.001) and substantial effect on the overall tone of pieces, with similar relative effect between the Post and the Federalist.

Models two and three introduce topics broadly and more specifically. We see in model two that a domestic focus is significant (.001) and substantial in terms of increase in tonal incivility, though its effect size (.1333) is smaller than any significant outlet

Table Six. Overall Tone

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5
Month	-0.00452 (0.00977)	-0.00131 (0.00970)	-0.00439 (0.00979)	-0.00507 (0.00997)	-0.00317 (0.00974)
PDFNumber	-.0245137 (0.0351)	-.0071046 (0.0348)	-.0238528 (0.0344)	-.0275191 (0.0350)	-.0172316 (0.0341)
Length	-.0009129 (0.0233)	-.0010875 (0.0233)	.016318 (0.0220)	.0014368 (0.0237)	.0114924 (0.0226)
Author Type					
Female	-.0188673 (0.0838)	-.0076374 (0.0827)	-.0244762 (0.0831)	-.0097625 (0.0853)	-.0156071 (0.0838)
Multiple Authors	0.235 (0.183)	0.211 (0.189)	0.280 (0.182)	0.242 (0.180)	0.259 (0.182)
Editorial Board	.0621526 (0.139)	0.055783 (0.140)	.0739955 (0.144)	.0637969 (0.143)	.0684077 (0.147)
Type of Outlet					
Conservative Blog	0.12 (0.0698)	0.133 (0.0713)	0.118 (0.0648)	0.105 (0.0707)	0.123 (0.0680)
Pro Trump News	0.0820599 (0.114)	.09118 (0.117)	.0809892 (0.118)	.0722007 (0.118)	.0846566 (0.125)
Pro Trump Blog	.42722 (0.103)	.4041748 (0.103)	.4193533 (0.0999)	.4387689 (0.103)	.4216908 (0.0995)
Libertarian	.41514 (0.0625)	.4061467 (0.0638)	.3690086 (0.0609)	.4076355 (0.0625)	.3650103 (0.0625)
Specific Topic					
COVID			-0.000721 (0.0685)		-0.0108 (0.0696)
			-0.0005134		-0.0077229

Table 6 (continued)

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5
Culture War Issues			0.342** (0.113)		0.329** (0.114)
			.2068677		.1990263
Democratic Primary			0.177 (0.111)		0.143 (0.155)
			.0910993		.073811
Religious Liberty			0.167 (0.150)		0.154 (0.156)
			.0557091		.0513872
General Topics					
Domestic		0.238*** (0.0562)			0.176*** (0.0585)
		.1333373			.0985361
International		0.0126 (0.0715)			0.0418 (0.0702)
		.0078315			.0259573
Politicians Discussed					
Warren				-0.230 (0.163)	-0.273 (0.164)
				-.087443	-.1037679
Sanders				0.304* (0.167)	0.203 (0.182)
				.1356397	.0904719
Trump				0.0281 (0.0820)	0.0380 (0.0843)
				.0183405	.0248084
Biden				0.00938 (0.102)	-0.0174 (0.107)
				.0050212	-.0092918
Constant	-0.0666 (0.127)	-0.288* (0.136)	-0.140 (0.121)	-0.0830 (0.127)	-0.298* (0.132)
Observations	330	330	330	330	330
R-squared	0.222	0.238	0.269	0.235	0.287

Standard errors in parentheses

Beta Coefficients in Third row

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

effect size. Effects in terms of outlets are similar in models two and three, with strong significance (.001) and substantial effect across both models. Model Three introduces specific topics, and we see that similar to previous findings reported here, that Culture War issues are the only statistically significant specific topic, with a significance at the .01 level, and a substantial relative effect of .2069, which is larger than a domestic focus generally and the length of the piece.

Model four introduces politicians often discussed across all of these different pieces. None of these politicians are significant in terms overall tone, though their introduction seems to increase the relative effects of both Pro Trump outlets, as well as the effect of length. Model five, similar to previous models in this work, shows that the politicians covered in the pieces do not have a statistically significant effect on the tonal incivility. In terms of topics covered, Culture War issues is significant at the .01 level, and a Domestic issues focus is significant at the .001. Discussions about Culture War issues have twice the relative effect (.1990) as a general focus on Domestic issues (.0985). When considering types of outlets, the story remains broadly the same, though there is a larger gap between the relative effects of Pro Trump news and Pro Trump blogs on overall tone. This model has the largest R squared, at .287, which indicates that we can explain almost thirty percent of the variance with our analysis.

Cases Without any Outrage

Our final analysis is a binominal logistic regression which looks at in what instances do we have cases of pieces without any outrageous language. Our models are consistent with the previous models to allow for comparison across different analyses. Considering model one and our control variables, Length continues to play a role, as we

Table Seven. Cases Without any Outrage

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5
Month	0.9415 (0.0357)	0.9175* (0.0366)	0.9327 (0.0386)	0.9369 (0.0363)	0.9053* (0.0402)
PDFnumber	1.0056 (0.1460)	0.9965 (0.151)	0.9509 (0.1422)	0.9578 (0.1420)	0.9149 (0.1441)
Length	0.6767*** (0.0668)	0.6590*** (0.0684)	0.6662*** (0.0664)	0.6980*** (0.0696)	0.6595*** (0.0704)
Author Type					
Female	1.5957 (0.5233)	1.4272 (0.4858)	1.5957 (0.5313)	1.4692 (0.4891)	1.3770 (0.4859)
Multiple Authors	1.6144 (1.4545)	1.8497 (1.6815)	1.4205 (1.2784)	1.8451 (1.7278)	1.7780 (1.6749)
Editorial Board	0.7295 (0.3765)	0.5881 (0.3120)	0.7638 (0.4024)	0.6785 (0.3549)	0.6042 (.3296)
Type of Outlet					
Conservative Blog	0.4780 (0.1894)	0.4001* (0.1678)	0.4600 (0.1875)	0.5443 (0.2214)	0.4043 * (0.1791)
Pro Trump News	0.2102*** (0.0941)	0.2467** (0.1128)	0.1985*** (0.0916)	0.2359** (0.1075)	0.2458** (0.1174)
Pro Trump Blog	0.3672** (0.1425)	0.3708* (0.1490)	0.4126* (0.1644)	0.3895* (0.153)	0.4142* (0.1722)
Libertarian	0.4373* (0.1659)	0.4452** (0.1755)	0.4184** (0.1623)	0.4657* (0.1796)	0.4338* (0.1777)
Specific Topics					
COVID			1.2520 (0.4023)		1.4341 (0.4900)
Culture War Issues			0.4268* (0.1610)		0.4921 (0.1943)
Democratic Primary			0.6880 (0.2802)		0.9229 (0.5280)
Religious Liberty			1.5715 (1.040)		1.8936 (1.2849)
General Topics					
Domestic		0.1334*** (0.0682)			0.1450*** (0.0781)
International		1.0283 (0.3743)			1.0201 (0.3825)
Politicians Discussed					
Warren				0.4663 (0.3141)	0.5091 (0.3507)
Sanders				1.4494 (0.8759)	1.7878 (1.2440)
Trump				0.5333 (0.1765)	0.6953 (0.2430)

(continued)

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5
Biden				0.5567 (0.2540)	0.6510 (0.3115)
Constant	11.1724*** (6.3820)	91.4668*** (77.4997)	15.2463*** (9.0670)	13.0722*** (7.6703)	119.4375*** (105.9499)
Pseudo R Squared	0.098	0.146	0.117	0.114	0.170
Observations	330	330	330	330	330

Standard errors in parentheses

see that as the length of articles increase, we continue to see a decrease in likelihood of no incivil language. Author type was not significant within our first model. In comparison to our reference group (Conservative News), we see statistical reduced likelihood of having a piece without outrage across several of our different outlets. In comparison to Conservative News, Pro Trump populist news has nearly a two in ten chance of having a piece without outrage, with a statistical significance at the .001 level, all other variables held constant. Pro Trump populist blogs have a slightly larger likelihood of having no cases of outrage at thirty-seven in one hundred cases, with a statistical significance at the .01 level.

Our last statistically significant outlet finding was for Libertarian pieces, which were about forty-four in one hundred chance of having a case of a piece without outrage, with a statistical significance of .05. These results indicate a reduced likelihood of having civil discourse within written pieces across both all three of the outliers within Conservatism, both types of Populist outlets, as well as our Libertarian outlet. This indicates that being something other than mainstream conservative seemed to have a larger effect than the type of outlet, and that this effect exists even when controlling for length, author type, the month it was published, and the order it was coded in.

For model two, we see that domestic politics is highly correlated with a drop in likelihood of civility, at the highest level of statistical significance, .001. Interestingly, in this model we see a role in terms of the month the article was written in, which seems to show an increase in likelihood of incivility as we progressed closer to the general election, though the effect was very small. We also see that the outlet importance changed slightly, as our Conservative blog *National Review* gained statistical significance at the .05 level, indicating that they had about a reduced likelihood of having a civil piece by about 60%, placing it as more likely to have incivility than our libertarian blog, but still far less likely than our two Trump aligned outlets.

Model three introduces specific topics covered, and we see no effect in terms of most topics covered on likelihood of having civil discourse. The one notable exception to this was our Culture War variable, which indicated a near 57% reduction in the odds of having a civil piece when this topic is discussed, with a significance at the .05 level. This is interesting to note, as we are controlling for amongst other things, the outlet in which this topic is presented, indicating this lack of incivility exists across multiple outlets.

This introduction of topics covered leads to a decrease in significance that our Conservative News outlet has in terms of likelihood of being civil in its written pieces. Across our other outlets, we see no other changes in statistical significance, but we do see a substantial reduction in likelihood of civility, with more than an 80% likelihood of not having civility, when controlling for specific topics covered as well as our previously controlled variables. When considering our control variables, we see a decrease in the statistical significance of the month the article was published while significance of the length stayed largely unchanged.

Model four introduces politicians discussed, and we see once again that the politicians in question covered are not significant in terms of pieces which talk about them including incivil discourse. This did decrease the statistical significance for one of our outlets, reducing the significance of the NYPost, our Pro Trump news outlet, from a significance of .001 to .01. It also reduced the likelihood of incivility for both our Libertarian and the aforementioned Pro Trump news outlet, but increased it slightly for our Pro Trump blog.

In our final model, we include everything, and see that the type of outlet writing the piece still has a very consistent effect. Considering our controls, both length and month are significant, indicating that we were less likely to have civil discourse as we got closer to the Presidential election, and as the length of articles increased. In particular, length had a rather strong statistical effect at the .001 level. When considering outlets, all of our outlets remain significant, indicating the importance of the outlet publishing the articles on the likelihood of incivility, with all of the outlets significant at the .05 level, with the exception of our pro Trump news, which has both the largest effect and most statistical significance, at the .01 level. Additionally, when looking at the effects, we see that interestingly, the Conservative blog *National Review* had the second largest effect, with an almost 60% reduced odds of publishing a piece without any incivility, though this is not hugely different than our Libertarian or Pro Trump blog, which had around 57% and 59%, respectively. The general focus on Domestic topics also is strongly significant at the .001 level, and over 85% less likely to contain no incivility, in comparison to pieces which didn't focus on domestic issues.

We see across these models a consistent significance in what increases the likelihood of an article or blog post with incivil language. Unsurprisingly, the longer a piece goes, the more likely it is to have incivil. The type of author in question is insignificant across all the models in this analysis. Consistently, in terms of significance and effect size, we see that the outlet in question plays a large role, with consistency for both our Trumpian outlets and our libertarian outlet across all the models. Our Conservative Blog also is significant at points and seems to indicate the difference between blogging and more traditional op-eds in norms around incivility, given the reference group was a Conservative news outlet (*WSJ*). Domestic coverage is similarly strongly consistent and indicates that incivility is much more likely to occur in pieces written about domestic political issues. Culture War Issues was significant in one of the two models and had a rather large effect. It's falling out of significance in our final model may be in part due to the fact that these cultural touchstones are most often attacked when considering domestic politics, which may have led to the drop in significance. In terms of overall model effect, we see a general increase from nine percent explained variance in model one to nearly seventeen percent of the explained variance within the final model.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusion

What do these Results Show?

These results show that within conservative media, we can see consistent results across the different measures of incivility. Across all the different analysis which were discussed, the type of outlet, the length, and the discussion of domestic politics consistently increased the likelihood of incivility being used. This is the case in overall tone, overall outrageous language, total cases of outrageous language, and likelihood of a piece having any outrageous language. In terms of tone, overall outrage, and total cumulative cases, we see that trump aligned outlets are much more likely to have a harsh tone, have outrageous language as a significant portion of their written piece, and are likely to have more total examples of outrage.

Within conservative media, this outrage is aimed domestically and on domestic political issues. Across almost all models, domestic focus is an indicator of likelihood of incivil language. Interestingly, when controlling for the topic or the politician being discussed, this remained consistent. This shows that domestic politics generally seem to be what causes these levels of outrage, as opposed to particular people, and opposed to most topics. The one notable exception to that is what I have termed 'Culture War Issues'. This new culture war is clearly a cause for consternation amongst the outlets studied. This is demonstrated in part by the effect it has on increasing examples of outrage per written piece, shown in regression table one, as well as in the effect on

overall tone, as shown in table three. Interestingly, it does not appear in table six, discussing the likelihood of a case having no outrage.

In terms of our first hypotheses, there is clear evidence for the idea that Trump aligned outlets are more likely to use the sort of language which Trump used during his time in the political realm. This was partially supported through our descriptive statistics, which showed an increased likelihood of insulting language, name calling, and mockery for both our pro trump newspaper and blog. Interestingly, belittling and obscenity, consistent themes of Trumpian language, were not more likely to be used by these outlets, so our descriptive support is only partial. Our statistical analysis shows throughout the consistency of Trump aligned outlets to be more incivil. We do not have support for the Trump aligned blog being the most incivil, as it consistently had smaller standardized effects than Trump aligned Newspaper, and as such, the second portion of the hypothesis must be rejected.

Our second hypotheses would be that the domestic topics covered would increase the likelihood of outrage, as would specific topics like ‘Culture War Issues’ and religious liberty. This was the case for domestic politics generally, as we see a significant effect across all our different kinds of analysis. Interestingly, many of the other specific topics showed no effect in this analysis. The democratic primary, religious liberty, and COVID-19 were in no way related to an increase or decrease in likelihood of incivil discourse, total cases of incivil discourse, or any tonal changes. This was surprising, as the seriousness of COVID-19 could lead to more serious discussion of the topic, leading to a decrease in incivil language. Also, religious

liberty could be thought to be more likely to lead to the sort of heated debates in which incivility is more likely to occur. This last topic could be suffering from a small sample size issue, with only 13 cases, we are much more unlikely to see a type two error.

Culture War Issues was significant and substantial across three different analyses. This indicates at least partial support for the idea that the domestic topic covered could play a role in the level of outrage, with a particular focus on new culture war issues causing high levels of consternation, regardless of controlling for the outlet in which it is discussed. It was most often discussed in trump aligned outlets, but the significance when controlling for outlet in question shows a strong reason to believe the topic is divisive across conservative media.

Our third hypothesis, that discussions of Donald Trump would lead to an increase in incivility, was unfounded. In no analysis was discussion of the Trump presidency or Trump the person significant in terms of the effect on incivility. This was interesting, given the strong emotions Trump evokes across both supporters and detractors. One of the outlets in this piece, National Review, dedicated an entire issue (not coded) to arguments against Donald Trump in the republican primary. While it was reasonable to think that this sort of animosity, or defenses against this animosity, might expose themselves in increases in incivility, it was not the case. This may be because blogs were less likely to engage with blogs from other political orientations (Hargittai et al., 2007), meaning there was an echo chamber in which they did not feel the need to defend the former president, or that their affinity

for Trump lessened the coarseness of their language. Regardless of why, we can say with certainty that the topic of Donald Trump does not increase incivility.

Lastly, the democratic primary and democratic politicians played no role in terms of increasing or decreasing levels of incivility. Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden, and the democratic primary generally played no role. This may be in part due to small sample size, as only 17 pieces discussed Elizabeth Warren and 24 pieces discussed Bernie Sanders. These small sample sizes for substantial discussion of these candidates increase the likelihood of a type two error. This being said, there was not significance for the Democratic Primary or Joe Biden, both of which were more often discussed. This could be perhaps because many of the articles which included these politicians addressed the ‘horse race’ of the primary or general election as opposed to particular primaries, or that these politicians are seen as similarly unliked by the authors, and as such, none is uniquely deserving of increased incivility.

Limitations, Implications and Future Research

While this project has a rather large sample size of 330 articles, it is taken within a rather short time frame of under a year, as America quickly approached the general election. This means that we cannot look at the effects that Donald Trump in particular had on political discourse amongst these outlets relative to previous political administrations. We also cannot tell the relationship between incivility and Trump alignment. Did the outlets support Trump so strongly because of similar rhetorical style, or did they modify their outlets understanding of civility in response to the way in which Trump communicated? We cannot speak to this given the limited scope of our analysis. We also do not know if these incivility levels

would be different in a non-election year, or a year in which the parties were reversed in terms of incumbency of the White House.

This project also, through its unique selection of outlets, is both its strength as well as its weakness. These are a relatively small selection of blogs and op-eds which speak to a small spectrum of potential political ideological commitments. This research does not address outlets which are, as an example, expressly religious and conservative like *First Things*, or neoconservative outlets like *Commentary*. Because of this we cannot speak to the full range of incivility across the conservative ideological spectrum, though this does show that a more extensive survey has potential.

This research strongly indicates that when studying political discourse, internal variation amongst conservative media exists along with in the already well studied variation across the political spectrum. Both Trumpian outlets (The Federalist and NYPost) have not previously been discussed by those who look at political incivility, and this has two potential ramifications. First, as these outlets showed that incivility is more common amongst pro-Trump/ Populist outlets, the potential exists that in analyzing across a left right paradigm we might be missing where the incivility is really coming from, and that it is itself inconsistent within the right. Secondly, the lack of analysis of these outlets perhaps has led to an under documenting of incivility in the political discourse. Focusing on smaller and more ideologically niche outlets in addition to the more elite blogs and magazines which have previously been studied may show that incivility is strongly correlated with certain ideological positions. For a politics which is seemingly strongly connected to

personal connections, it was worth noting and a bit surprising that there was not difference based on the politicians being covered by the pieces, as the politicians being discussed did not change the level of incivility.

An analysis like this has not been done on liberal leaning outlets, and this could be quite fruitful. A consistent theme throughout the 2016 democratic primary, which made a small resurgence in 2020 was the stereotype of the ‘Bernie Bro’. An analysis of blogs and magazines which are more socialist in orientation would give us the potential to understand if there is a difference in elite media supporters of this ideological orientation as opposed to other factions of the democratic party. Future research should consider looking for in group variation amongst liberal and conservative outlets, as well as consider broadening the outlets which they consider for their research, which will allow us not only to better understand incivility, but also the different topics discussed across the political spectrum.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Codebook Descriptions

Sobieraj, S., & Berry, J. M. (2011). From incivility to outrage: Political discourse in blogs, talk radio, and cable news. *Political Communication*, 28(1), Appendix

Insulting Language: This variable is intended to measure whether the author or speaker uses insulting language in reference to a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization, or their behaviors, planned behaviors, policies, or views. For example, “asinine” in reference to a person or group’s behavior is insulting language, but if the person or group is called “asinine,” this is reserved for the “name-calling” variable.

Name Calling: This is a measurement of whether the author or speaker engages in name calling in reference to a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization. Affectionate, light-hearted teasing is not included. Rather, name-calling language is characterized by words and contexts that make the subject look foolish, inept, hypocritical, deceitful, or dangerous.

Emotional Display: This variable captures audio and/or visual emotional displays in reference to a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization (or their behaviors, planned behaviors, policies, or views). In printed text, such as that in blog posts or on Web pages, it is unlikely to appear often but would most likely be communicated through “shouting” via the deliberate use of uppercase letters, multiple exclamation points, enlarged text, and so on. Emotional display is about the form of expression. See “emotional language” for emotional content, although the two will often present concurrently.

Emotional Language: This variable is intended to measure instances where the author or speaker engages in verbal or written expressions of emotion in reference to a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization. Emotion words related to anger, fear, and sadness are key indicators. Emotional language is about the literal content of what is said or written, rather than how it is communicated.

Verbal Fighting/Sparring: This is aggressive jousting between speakers. In radio and television, it may take the form of dismissive interruptions or rude exchanges between guests and callers or between hosts and guests/callers characterized by a lack of civility.

Character Assassination: Does the author or speaker attempt to damage the reputation of a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization by slander or misrepresentation of their views, motives, or behaviors? In politics, questioning the veracity of a statement is common and should not be confused with character assassination, which is more extreme. Saying someone was not honest in a reply to a journalist is not character assassination, but saying that someone is a liar who cannot be trusted does constitute character assassination. These are ad hominem attacks.

Misrepresentative Exaggeration: This documents whether the author or speaker engages in very dramatic negative exaggeration in reference to the behaviors, planned behaviors, policies, or views of a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization, such that it significantly misrepresents or obscures the truth.

Mockery: This variable was designed to measure whether the author or speaker makes fun of the behaviors, planned behaviors, policies, or views of a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization to make the subject look bad or to rally others in criticism of the subject. Affectionate, light-hearted teasing

is not included. Instead, the focus centers on humor that is used to make the subject look foolish, inept, hypocritical, deceitful, or dangerous. It might also come in the form of a physical impersonation intended to make others laugh at the expense of the subject (think Tina Fey).

Conflagration: Coding for this variable records attempts to escalate nonscandals into scandals. The key trait is speech that overstates or dramatizes the importance or implications of minor gaffes, oversights, or improprieties. By nonscandal we refer to an episode, event, or trend that a learned, dispassionate observer would not consider significant or scandalous.

Ideologically Extremizing Language: The reference here is to extremist language used to critically describe a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization or their behaviors, planned behaviors, policies, or views. Usually the descriptive language will be used as an implicit slur rather than as simple description.

Slippery Slope: This is intended to capture fatalistic arguments suggesting that some behavior, policy, or decision is a small step that will inevitably pave the way for much more extreme behaviors, policies, or decisions.

Belittling: When an author or speaker belittles or demeans a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization (or their behaviors, planned behaviors, policies, or views), this is labeled “belittling.” This may be done in the context of mockery or exaggeration.

Obscene Language: This gauges use of obscene language in reference to a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization (or their behaviors, planned behaviors, policies, or views). Here we mean words that are not used on network television (as a general rule), not simply insulting words. If the obscene language is used concretely to name-call, this falls under the “name-calling” category

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