Media and Intraparty Ideological Movements:
How Fox News Built the Tea Party[*]

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Abstract

Does media influence operate primarily on low-information swing voters, or can it also affect party activists who shape intraparty ideological factions? We examine Fox News' role in the rise of the Tea Party movement within the Republican Party, leveraging differences in its channel positions across cable systems to isolate exogenous variation in exposure to the channel (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017). In early 2009, Fox News did not noticeably boost Tea Party rally sizes. But later in the 2009-2010 cycle, exposure to the channel significantly increased campaign fundraising and primary election vote shares for Tea Party candidates compared to other Republican candidates. These findings dovetail with content analysis demonstrating pro-Tea Party slant on Fox News that emerged only in 2010. The Tea Party movement benefited from the backing of a powerful media outlet—a rare advantage among insurgent movements—which enabled it to rapidly move from the fringe to the center of the Republican Party.

What are the limits on the electoral power of mass media? Existing research primarily examines party vote shares (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007; Gentzkow et al. 2011; Chiang and Knight 2011; Enikolopov et al. 2011; Ash et al. 2022), which implies that media exert the greatest impact on voters who are close to indifferent between parties, with limited influence over committed partisans. Consumers' taste for like-minded news constrains electorally-minded media owners: more extreme slant may increase an outlet's impact on its audience, but alienate moderates whose votes might be swayed, blunting or even reversing the electoral effect of the increased slant (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017; Grossman et al. 2022). Mass polarization and a shrinking mass of swing voters further narrow the margin for media persuasion in general elections (Smidt 2017). A media outlet cannot increase its favored party's vote share — i.e., cannot have "media power" in the Prat (2018) sense — if its audience votes for that party with near certainty at baseline.

We challenge the notion that the electoral power of media is confined to voters with weak ex-ante partisan attachments, and that outlets therefore must reach significant numbers of centrist voters to be electorally consequential. Much of the power of ideological media, we contend, lies in shaping intra-party contests. Partisan affiliation, an otherwise powerful cue, loses its signaling value in intra-party factional contests. And relative to established parties, the public possesses less knowledge or crystallized prior beliefs about intraparty movements' policy platforms and candidate characteristics, especially in their earlier stages. These factors amplify the marginal persuasive effect of media slant (Adena et al. 2015; Broockman and Kalla 2023a,b; Hill 2017). Furthermore, mass polarization and partisan sorting in media consumption, which constrain media power in general elections, do not diminish the salience of intraparty media influence.

We also highlight the media as an important and yet underexamined component of Extended Party Networks (Bawn et al. 2012). While horse-race coverage has been known to shape public perceptions of primary election candidates' viability (Cohen et al. 2008; Hall and James M. Snyder 2015), to what extent media outlets can strategically influence intra-party factional competition is an open question. Departing from past research's primary focus on partisan seat shares, we examine media outlets' ability to advance ideologically aligned intra-party movements through

favorable coverage and ultimately to help movement-affiliated candidates secure party nominations. Such transformative effects of media slant on party organizations and platforms are especially salient in the United States, where parties have relatively open nomination processes that are prone to outside influences, and insurgent political movements succeed by capturing established parties rather than by forming long-shot third parties (Lee 2020).

To examine the impact of media slant on intraparty ideological factions, we focus on the Tea Party movement, which transformed the Republican Party in the United States beginning in 2009 (Blum 2020; Gervais and Morris 2018; Kabaservice 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). We first analyze broadcast transcripts of the Fox News Channel (hereafter FNC), CNN, and MSNBC, and establish that relative to competing outlets, FNC's movement coverage during 2009-10 exhibited a pro-Tea Party slant in airtime, topical emphasis (Roberts et al. 2019), and issue framing (Gentzkow et al. 2019), especially during the primary election season. We show that these across-channel differences are not explained simply by FNC's Republican lean.

Next, we examine the impact of FNC viewership on different facets of public support for the Tea Party movement during 2009-2010, using exogenous variation in exposure to the channel due to differences in FNC's cable channel positions across zip codes (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017). We show that FNC was unlikely to have been decisive at the earliest stages of the grassroots-led Tea Party movement. Specifically, incidental exposure to the channel did not noticeably boost attendance of Tea Party rallies in April 2009.[1]

However, once the movement had transitioned into an electoral faction in the 2009-2010 election season, FNC was instrumental in Tea Party candidates' success in fundraising and at the polls. Exogenous exposure to FNC increased itemized campaign contributions to Tea Party candidates but had no detectable effect on campaign giving to non-Tea Party Republican candidates. It further rallied primary voters for Tea Party candidates at the expense of mainstream Republicans, ultimately helping Tea Party candidates secure Republican Party nominations.

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[1]See Madestam et al. (2013) for evidence on the electoral impact of these rallies.

In sum, while FNC did not initiate the Tea Party, it threw its weight behind the faction at a key moment in its development from a protest movement to an electoral one. The backing of a pre-built media organ with near-universal reach among party activists — an advantage that few other protest movements can claim — was a crucial mediator of the Tea Party's ascent from fringe group to wielder of the levers of power within one of the United States' two major parties.

How Intraparty Movements Transform U.S. Politics

While a global surge in political extremism has propelled the growth of radical parties in many countries, the United States' two-party system, coupled with its comparatively open party nomination processes, means similar ideological movements must capture established political parties for formal representation and legislative influence (Lee 2020). Successful intra-party ideological movements can intensify elite polarization and legislative gridlock, reshape electoral competition, and instigate political realignment (Izzo 2023; Groenendyk et al. 2020; McCarty et al. 2013; Mian et al. 2014; Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Snyder and Ting 2002).

The modern Tea Party movement, a right-wing faction of the Republican Party, gained national prominence in 2009 following a conservative backlash against President Barack Obama, post-crisis government intervention, and seemingly out-of-touch Republican elites (Blum 2020; Gervais and Morris 2018; Kabaservice 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). The movement's success in the 2010 midterm elections accelerated the Republican Party's rightward shift: most of the 47 newly-elected Tea Party Republicans were more conservative than even the most right-leaning prior members of the House GOP caucus (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). The Tea Party Movement subsequently waged a "civil war" in Congress (Blum 2020; Kabaservice 2012), aggressively advancing conservative economic agenda, including a government shutdown to block funding for the Affordable Care Act, over party leaders' objections (Rosenthal 2013). They also ousted former Speaker John Boehner, branding him a "Republican In Name Only" (Rosenthal and Trost 2012). The Tea Party Movement's success ultimately paved

the way for the rise of Donald Trump (Blum 2020; Gervais and Morris 2018), and exemplifies how ideological factions can wage insurgencies within established parties by ousting moderate co-partisan incumbents and transforming party platforms through agenda control (Blum 2020; Boatright 2013; Kabaservice 2012; Lee 2020; Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

Strategic Media Promotion of Intraparty Ideological Movements

Qualitative accounts attribute the Tea Party Movement's rapid ascent partly to favorable coverage by the Fox News Channel (FNC), a prominent conservative-leaning American cable news outlet (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013; Rafail and McCarthy 2018; Peck 2019). Unlike competing outlets, FNC increased the visibility and the perceived viability of the movement by promoting Tea Party rallies scheduled on Tax Day (April 15th) six weeks in advance and offering a friendly platform for Tea Party candidates to gain name recognition among likely voters and campaign donors (Rafail and McCarthy 2018; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Furthermore, FNC influenced public discourse on Tea Party candidates' campaign agenda (Schroeder and Stone 2015) by devoting significant airtime to key issues like health care, taxes, and immigration, advocating for the Tea Party's positions in a potential effort to sway viewers (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Rosenthal and Trost 2012; Rafail and McCarthy 2018). Additionally, FNC delicately portrayed the Tea Party's association with the Republican Party. While movement activists initially touted their independence from party elites (Skocpol and Williamson 2012), echoing anti-establishment sentiments resonating among Republican voters (Lee 2020; Parker and Barreto 2013), FNC similarly presented Tea Party candidates as "real Americans" representing grassroots conservatives better than existing GOP leadership (Rafail and McCarthy 2018; Peck 2019). Despite this, FNC underscored that the movement's lasting legacy rested on returning the Republican Party to its conservative roots rather than forming a third party, implying that Tea Party candidates were the rightful nominees for the Republican Party (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Rafail and McCarthy 2018; Peck 2019).

Strategically promoting intraparty ideological movements may help for-profit media outlets boost viewership (Pasley 2002). By endorsing such movements, media outlets can undermine viewers' trust in mainstream party leaders, discrediting other party-aligned media and thereby softening the market competition they face Pasley (2002); Szeidl and Szucs (2022); Wang (2021). This rationale aligns with the reported belief of then-FNC Chairman and CEO Roger Ailes that supporting the Tea Party Movement could attract white working-class viewers disenchanted with the Bush Administration following the 2008 Great Recession (Peck 2019; Peters 2022).

Media outlets may also choose to favor specific intraparty movements to advance shared ideological goals, making them an integral though under-examined component of Extend Party Networks (Bawn et al. 2012). Evidence from Martin and Yurukoglu (2017) suggests that the existence of such non-market goals is plausible for FNC: the channel's slant is more consistent with maximizing political influence than maximizing ratings. The Tea Party movement's goal to reshape the Republican Party resonated with key FNC personnell. Roger Ailes reportedly preferred Sarah Palin, a favorite of the Tea Party movement, over John McCain for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination (Peters 2022). Endorsement by Glenn Beck, a popular FNC host, was critical in the first successful Republican primary-election upset by a Tea Party candidate (Peters 2022). Sean Hannity, another prominent FNC personality, initially planned to attend a Tea Party rally and only canceled under pressure to maintain FNC's journalistic integrity (Peters 2022).

Why Media Matter in Intraparty Ideological Movements

While FNC is widely perceived to have influenced the Tea Party's rise (Rafail and McCarthy 2018; Peck 2019), direct evidence linking FNC viewership to movement support is limited. Skocpol and Williamson (2012) detail FNC's role as a national platform for movement activists and affiliated candidates, and Parker and Barreto (2013) find an overlap between self-reported movement sympathizers and individuals relying on FNC as their primary news source. However, these observations do not conclusively demonstrate FNC's impact on support for the Tea Party and might

instead simply reflect ideological sorting among political news consumers (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010; Prior 2013).

Our analysis of FNC's impact on the Tea Party movement builds upon two strands of literature. First, it addresses the ongoing debate on the degree to which partisan media polarize the American public, with existing studies predominantly situated in interparty competition (Chiang and Knight 2011; DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007; Gentzkow et al. 2011; Prior 2013; Martin and Yurukoglu 2017; Levy 2021). Second, our focus on the Tea Party aligns with a growing body of research highlighting the crucial role of allied media in the rise of radical parties in comparative contexts (Enikolopov et al. 2011; Adena et al. 2015; Peisakhin and Rozenas 2018; Zhuravskaya et al. 2020; Guriev et al. 2021; Grossman et al. 2022).

Our study illuminates the behavioral underpinnings of media's political influence. From a Bayesian inference perspective, political media consumption generates more pronounced attitudinal shifts when the public lacks prior knowledge, crystallized beliefs, or useful cues about specific political parties, candidates, or movements of interest (Adena et al. 2015; Broockman and Kalla 2023a,b; Hill 2017; Zhuravskaya et al. 2020). Despite the lack of systematic quantitative studies on how media slant shapes popular support for intraparty ideological factions in the United States, we contend that these settings are precisely where media effects could be significant. We examine the Tea Party movement during its early stages in the 2009-10 election cycle, when many affiliated candidates were non-incumbents (Blum 2020; Gervais and Morris 2018; Kabaservice 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). The movement's strategy of contesting Republican nominations meant that partisan labels—an otherwise powerful cue—could not differentiate Tea Party candidates from competing co-partisan competitors in media coverage or at the polls (Blum 2020; Gervais and Morris 2018; Kabaservice 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). These attributes set our study apart from past research primarily focused on media influence over support for mature parties (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007; Guriev et al. 2021; Grossman et al. 2022; Martin and Yurukoglu 2017; Wang 2021).

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This paper also expands the theoretical scope of media power in politics beyond interparty competition. While scholars have extensively examined political elites', activists', and campaign donors' influence over the "invisible primaries" (Bawn et al. 2012; Cohen et al. 2008), the media's role is often overlooked except for its impact on candidates' perceived viability through horserace coverage (Cohen et al. 2008; Hall and James M. Snyder 2015). Contributing to the Extended Party Networks theory (Bawn et al. 2012), we not only empirically examine FNC's pro-Tea Party slant, but also demonstrate its influence on movement support through various stages—from rallies to campaign contributions to primary election outcomes. While FNC viewership may enhance affinity for the Tea Party movement, how such attitudinal shifts translate into mobilization depends on the modes of political participation. FNC's impact on primary voting may be the most likely given voting's relatively low resource demands (Brady et al. 1995). In contrast, FNC's ability to boost campaign contributions for Tea Party candidates might be more contingent on viewers' wealth (Li 2023; Brady et al. 1995). Moreover, protests notoriously demand significant time investments and collective organizing skills, hindering any potential impact FNC had on Tea Party rally attendance (Brady et al. 1995). Our empirical analyses largely substantiate these variations in the effects of FNC exposure across modes of Tea Party movement support.

Data Collection

We use a variety of data sources in our empirical analysis. Detailed notes and explanation of data collection and processing are in Online Appendix A; we provide a summary here. First, to measure news content, we use full transcripts from the Lexis-Nexis database, covering all regularly scheduled programs on FNC, CNN, or MSNBC during 2009-2010. To gauge exposure to and consumption of cable news, we use data on channel availability and channel position at the zip-code level in 2009-2010 from the Nielsen FOCUS database, and county-level ratings from the Nielsen Local TV (NLTV) database. Second, we collect zip code-level itemized contributions for 1980-2010 from the Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections (DIME) (Bonica 2019).

These include individual-level contributions to 173 Tea Party candidates, following Skocpol and Williamson (2012)'s definition (see Online Appendix A), and 1,192 non-Tea Party Republican candidates. Finally, we collect precinct-level vote totals from state secretaries of state and county election boards for congressional primary elections in 2009-2010, and aggregate them to the zip code level using shape files provided by the Harvard Election Data Archive (Ansolabehere et al. 2014). We are able to compile both precinct vote and geospatial data for 74 Tea Party candidates across 16 states.

Content Analysis of Major Cable News Outlets

We conducted several analyses of Tea Party Movement coverage from FNC, CNN, and MSNBC. First, we quantify the relative airtime devoted to Tea Party versus mainstream Republican candidates across cable channels, illuminating differences in the scale of the platform for Tea Party candidates to present issues and make arguments to voters. Second, we compare the time allotted to topics emphasized by Tea Party versus mainstream Republican candidates by channel over time, assessing the congruence between cable news agenda and the Tea Party's platform. Lastly, we examine similarity in framing between channels and Tea Party candidates by measuring the channels' use of phrases distinctive to Tea Party versus mainstream speakers over time.

Airtime   To test whether FNC gave disproportionate airtime (relative to CNN and MSNBC) to Tea Party candidates in 2009-2010, we identify Congressional candidates in that election cycle who appeared in the broadcast transcripts, matching by name.[2] We then calculate the fraction of words spoken on air by Tea Party and mainstream Republican candidates by channel and month.

Figure 1a displays month-to-month variation in the fraction of total words spoken on air by Tea Party candidates for CNN, FNC, and MSNBC during 2009-2010. The time allocated to Tea Party candidates on all channels rose over time as the movement gained momentum, but FNC

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[2]Lexis-Nexis transcripts identify the speaker, typically with enough contextual information for disambiguation. We matched these speakers to candidate names in DIME (Bonica 2019).

(a) Tea Party Candidates
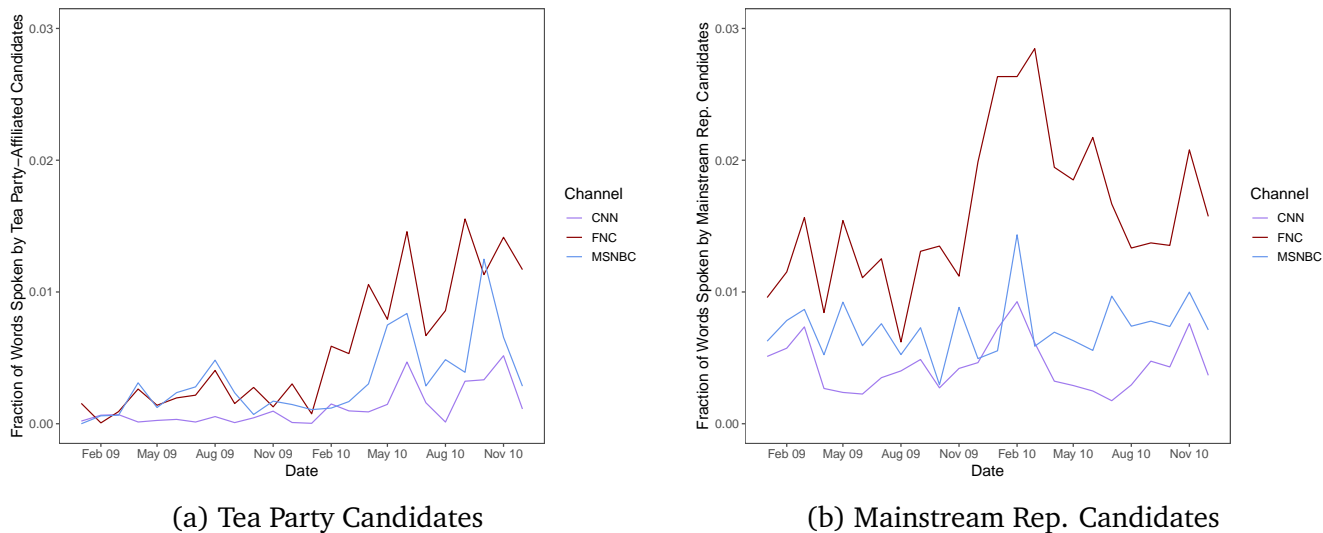
(b) Mainstream Rep. Candidates

Figure 1: Fraction of words in broadcast transcripts by channel-month spoken by Tea Party vs. mainstream Congressional Republican candidates.

both increased its coverage earlier and reached a higher peak. The ratio of Tea Party candidates' airtime on FNC to MSNBC nearly always exceeded 2:1 except in October 2010, in the most intense period of the 2010 general election. Figure 1b shows the corresponding plot for mainstream (non-Tea Party) Republican candidates, who consistently enjoyed more airtime on FNC than on other channels, including in the final election months. This timing difference suggests that FNC gave prominent airtime to Tea Party candidates during the Republican primaries, then backed off during general elections (when there may have been concerns about hard-edged conservatives alienating the general electorate). MSNBC may have allotted more time to Tea Party candidates at the height of the general election season for precisely the same reason.

News Topics   To examine how the issue agendas presented on each channel echoed those emphasized by Tea Party candidates, we fit a structural topic model (STM) (Roberts et al. 2019) to the transcript data, using speaker affiliations (Tea Party, Republican, or Democratic), channel indicators, and transcript month indicators as covariates. We set the dummy variable for Republican affiliation to equal to one for all Republican speakers, such that the coefficient on the Tea Party dummy captures topics which are unusually highly emphasized by Tea Party speakers relative to all Republicans. We use spectral initialization to automatically choose the number of topics,

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yielding a model with 52 distinct topics. We then identify topics for which the STM Tea Party coefficient had an estimated t-statistic greater than 2, as these topics were more prominent in Tea Party candidates' appearances relative to other cable news content.

Table 1 shows the topics with high weight in the speech of Tea Party candidates according to our STM model, which broadly align with qualitative accounts of the Tea Party's agenda. Consistent with cable news' general focus on "horse race" coverage, the most distinctive topics in Tea Party television appearances relates to the Nevada Senate Campaign (in which Tea Party-endorsed Sharron Angle won a highly contested Republican primary and unsuccessfully challenged then-Majority Leader Harry Reid) and more generally Tea Party candidates' election prospects in 2010. But among the substantive topics, the one most distinctively associated with Tea Party candidates focuses on enforcement of immigration laws. Others pertain to political correctness regarding race, the Supreme Court (particularly former President Barack Obama's nominations of Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan), and Islam. For comparison, Table 2 displays the topics emphasized in all Republican appearances. Comparison of the two shows that Tea Party candidates focused on topics that were distinct from those emphasized by mainstream Republicans, such as taxes and government spending, unemployment, healthcare, and congressional politics.

Figure 2 visualizes the relative weight of Tea Party-focused issues in both candidate appearances (top panel) and in cable news coverage (bottom panel). Immigration enforcement is clearly a dominant topic for Tea Party candidates appearing on television, compared to Democrats and mainstream Republicans. The gap in emphasis is particularly notable in 2009 to early 2010. Interestingly, there is minimal discussion of this topic on any of the cable channels (outside of Tea Party candidate appearances) throughout 2009. During the 2010 primary season, however, FNC devoted substantially more coverage to this topic than the other two channels, with coverage weight peaking in August of 2010 before declining back near the level of CNN / MSNBC in September. On the other topics, FNC also emphasized taxes and spending relative to the other channels, but this topic was highlighted across Republican candidate appearances and was less distinctive to the Tea Party. Coverage of the Tea Party as an electoral phenomenon was high and

rising over the period on FNC, but MSNBC exhibited similar patterns in this kind of coverage. It was on immigration that FNC's coverage most aligned with the Tea Party agenda, and where its timing coincided with the Tea Party's insurgency in the Republican primaries.

Figure B.1 in the Online Appendix shows the corresponding plots for topics emphasized by all Republican candidates. Notably, FNC was no more aligned with general Republican agenda than was MSNBC. We conclude that FNC devoted special attention to the Tea Party's key issue priorities.

Framing Finally, we compare the language used by Tea Party candidates to that used in the channels' news coverage. We begin by identifying phrases that indicate movement affiliations following Gentzkow et al. (2019). We fit penalized logistic regression models of phrase usage on party and faction membership in speech by Congressional candidates in 2009-2010 appearing on any of the three cable channels.[3] Gentzkow et al. (2019)'s method fits separate "inverse" Poisson regressions of phrase usage on candidate affiliations for each phrase, taking the form:

$$f_{ijt}(\mathbf{x}_{jt}) \sim Poisson(exp[\mu_i + \alpha_j + \beta_i' \mathbf{x}_{jt}]) \tag{1}$$

$\mathbf{x}_{jt}$ are covariates associated with speaker j in period t, including indicator for Republican Party affiliation, an indicator for Tea Party affiliation, and month indicators from January 2009 to December 2010. μ_i is an intercept capturing the overall usage of phrase i. α_j is a speaker fixed effect. Finally, β_i is a phrase-specific vector of coefficients. The intercepts and month dummies are unpenalized, but the Republican and Tea Party coefficients have an associated L1 (LASSO) penalty that shrinks these towards zero.[4]

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[3]We identify segments attributable to 386 distinct candidates, and 3433 distinct channel-month-candidate combinations in the transcripts.

[4]This corrects for small-sample bias from the many very infrequent phrases that by chance may have high correlation with candidate affiliations.

Table 1: Topics emphasized in Tea Party candidate appearances on cable TV.

Topic	Label	Estimate	t-stat	Top Words
24	NV Senate Campaign	0.024	12.484	paul, nevada, messag, sharron, rand, harri, kentucki
4	Tea Party Election Prospects	0.013	4.501	voter, tea, parti, midterm, candid, primari, incumb
64	Immigration Enforcement	0.010	3.975	immigr, arizona, illeg, law, brewer, alien, citizenship
12	Racism / Political Correctness	0.010	5.795	black, apolog, racist, african-american, racism, stupid, racial
17	Supreme Court	0.010	4.809	sotomayor, court, sonia, kagan, suprem, judici, judg
25	Religion (Islam)	0.009	3.654	mosqu, religion, church, pastor, muslim, cathol, imam

Table 2: Topics emphasized in Republican candidate appearances on cable TV.

Topic	Label	Estimate	t-stat	Top Words
15	Taxes / Budget / Stimulus	0.059	31.952	tax, stimulus, deficit, spend, budget, cut, trillion
65	(Un)employment	0.044	32.310	need, opportun, forward, togeth, futur, work, applaus
59	Legislative Process	0.024	26.290	bill, legisl, pass, reconcili, provis, vote, veto
40	House Politics	0.020	28.325	pelosi, rangel, speaker, nanci, congress, stupak, congressman
7	Healthcare	0.020	14.983	insur, health, care, option, medicar, reform, uninsur
23	Senate Politics	0.010	9.157	senat, compromis, bipartisan, lieberman, mcconnel, filibust, bipartisanship

We use the estimated coefficients on the Tea Party and Republican dummies for each phrase to construct Tea Party and Republican scores for any sample of text.[5] Taddy (2013) shows that this score is a sufficient statistic for the full matrix of phrase frequencies. Hence, we can then fit a bivariate "forward" regression of the party labels on the scores.[6] We can use the forward regression to project probabilities of party or faction membership for speakers, such as the non-candidate guests and hosts on the cable channels who have unknown affiliations. The top panel of Figure 3 shows the predicted probability that all other text in the cable transcripts from a given month was produced by a Tea Party speaker; the bottom panel shows the same predicted probability for a mainstream Republican speaker. Figure 3a shows that FNC's language consistently aligned more closely with Tea Party rhetoric (which equation 1 distinguishes from mainstream Republican rhetoric) than did CNN and MSNBC. The relative magnitude of the difference in estimated Tea Party language scores is comparable to that between FNC and the other two channels in the mainstream Republican score (Figure 3b). In other words, FNC not only exhibited a pro-Republican slant but also specifically championed Tea Party talking points.

## Research Design for Testing FNC Impact on Movement Support

How did FNC's pro-Tea Party slant affect the movement's rise during 2009-2010? Since consumers' taste for like-minded political news may confound the association between FNC ratings and support for the Tea Party (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010; Prior 2013), we use a research design first established in Martin and Yurukoglu (2017), which uses the ordinal position of FNC on the local cable system as an instrument for FNC viewership.

Martin and Yurukoglu (2017) establish that FNC's cable channel positions 1) strongly predict FNC viewership among wired cable TV subscribers (relevance) and 2) do not predict viewership among satellite TV subscribers, who see a single, nationwide ordering on their set-top boxes that does not vary across municipalities (exclusion). Furthermore, cable channel positions are
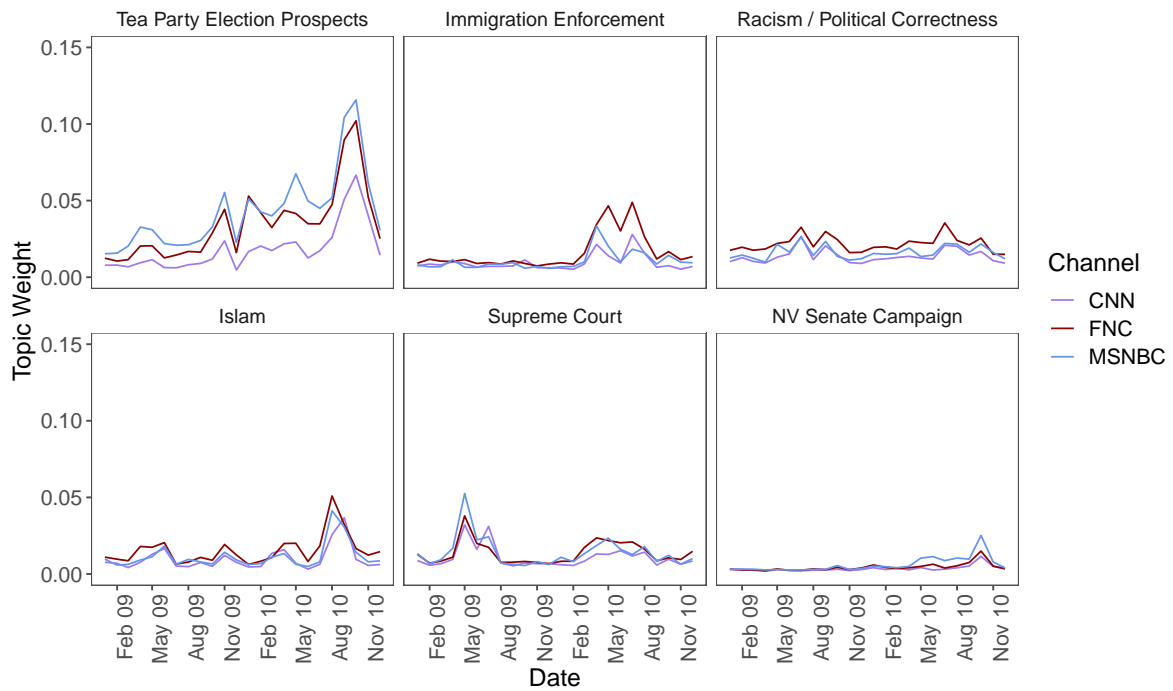
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[5]Due to the L1 penalty, these coefficients are sparse, with most phrases contributing exactly zero to the score.
[6]We use a logit form for this regression.
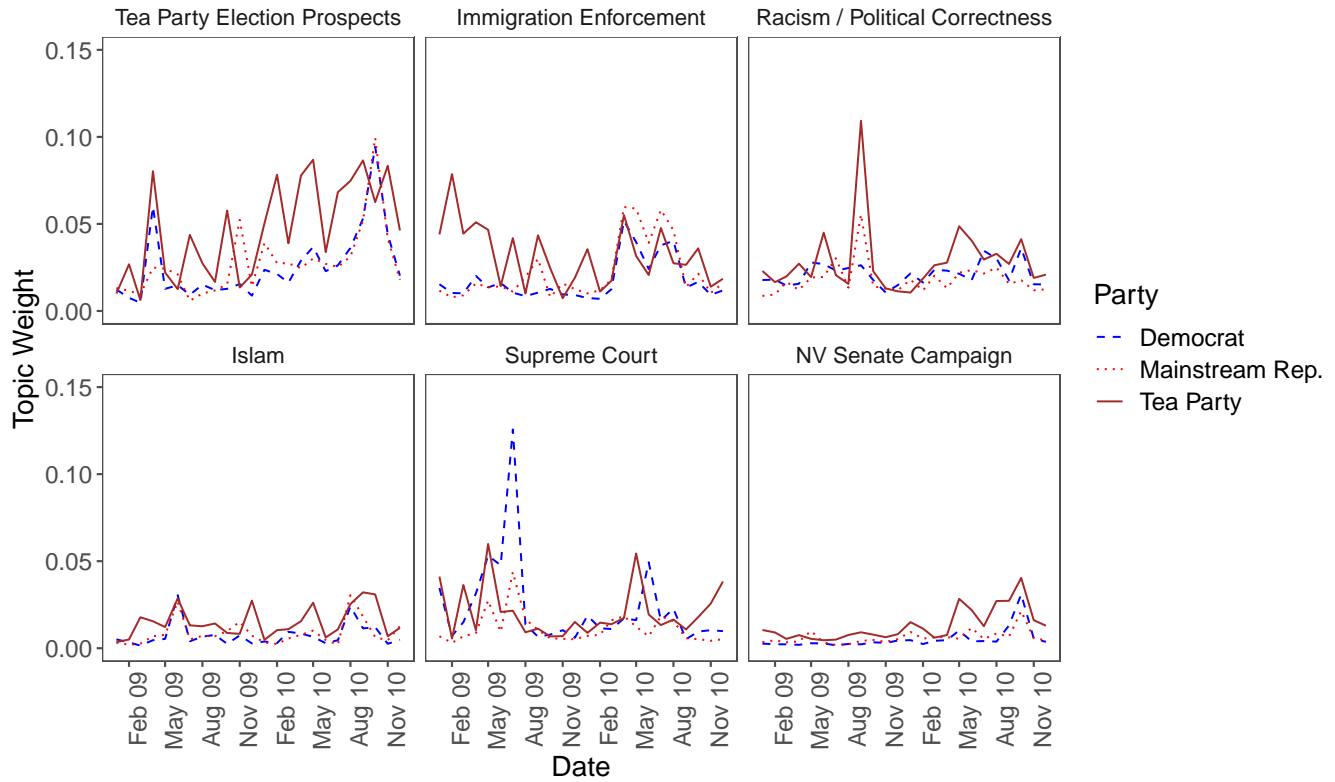
(a) Candidate Appearances

(b) All Other Content

Figure 2: Estimated topic weights of Tea-Party emphasized topics, in candidate appearances (top) and all other cable content (bottom).
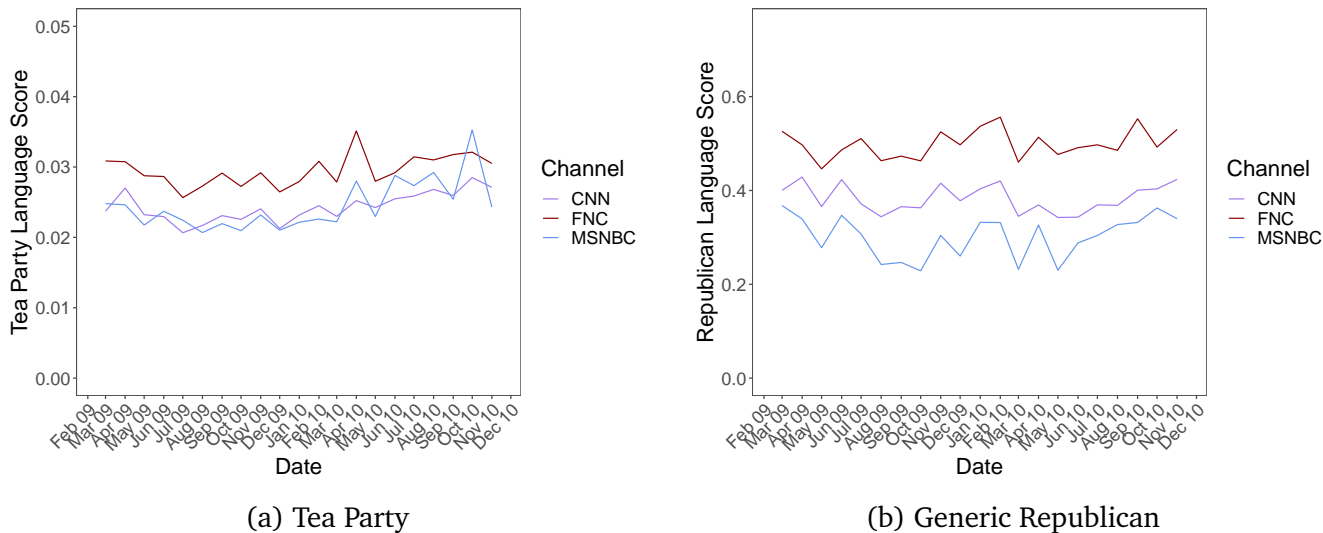
Figure 3: Predicted probability of being a Tea Party (top) and mainstream Republican (bottom) candidate, based on Gentzkow et al. (2019) method applied to cable news transcripts. The training data is text spoken by Congressional candidates appearing on the cable channels, and test data is all other text in the transcripts.

uncorrelated with political behavior prior to FNC's entry in 1996. The instrument works because when TV viewers switch channels (e.g., because a commercial block has begun), they tend to sequentially search away from the current channel. This has the effect of increasing the odds of incidental exposure to a cable news channel, the closer it is in the channel order to more popular non-news channels. For historical reasons, the most popular cable channels[7] are usually positioned near the the bottom of the order. In combination with sequential-search behavior, this pattern generates higher average FNC viewership when its position on a cable system is lower.

For our purposes, the key question is whether FNC's cable channel positions can affect viewers who are potential demonstrators, donors, or Republican Congressional primary election voters, who likely have stronger-than-average preferences over news sources. If the "compliers" for this instrument were all politically disengaged non-participants indifferent over the political slant of their news sources, channel positions might not induce any variation in our outcomes of interest.

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[7]Including entertainment- and sports-focused outlets like ESPN, Discovery or TLC as well as broadcast networks like ABC or CBS.

We think that exposure to FNC among even politically engaged citizens *is* likely affected by channel position. First, channel positions are very stable over time[8] and hence position variation induces a long-term cumulative effect on total FNC viewing in the local area. It is not necessary that the viewing of any specific individual be directly affected, since, as Druckman et al. (2018) show, a "two-step flow" of information from cable TV sources can and does spread through social networks. Those who live in a place with FNC in low position are therefore likely to have greater indirect exposure to FNC content, even if their own viewing is unaffected. Second, we report in Online Appendix C that the first stage is quite homogeneous across demographic groups,[9] except for the most conservative and the oldest viewers, implying those groups are relatively under-represented among the compliers. Third, Online Appendix C also shows that channel position affects not just the extensive (watch or not) margin, but also the intensive (how many hours to watch) margin of viewing. Thus, the instrument can affect the "dosage" received even by those who would already be watching regardless of channel position.

Tea Party Rallies

We first examine FNC's role in one of the Tea Party's earliest milestones: nationwide Tax Day rallies on April 15th, 2009. Prior accounts of the movement often emphasize that, unlike other cable news outlets, FNC reported on these rallies weeks in advance, which may have helped them overcome coordination problems (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Rafail and McCarthy 2018). We test for possible effects in both causal directions, as it is conceivable that both FNC increased rally turnout, and exposure to Tea Party rallies stimulated subsequent interest in news with a conservative slant.

We first estimate the effect of exogenous exposure to FNC on Tea Party rally sizes on Tax Day of 2009 from the following regression:

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[8]Martin and Yurukoglu (2017) estimate a year-to-year autocorrelation coefficient of 0.98.

[9]This analysis uses individual-level viewing data from the GfK-MRI Survey of the American Consumer (2001-2009), comparing the strength of channel position in predicting FNC viewing across viewer attributes.

$$RallySize_c = \beta_{FNC}p_c^{FNC} + \beta_{MSNBC}p_c^{MSNBC} + \lambda RainRally_c + \mathbf{X}_c\Gamma + \epsilon_c \qquad (2)$$

$RallySize_c$ represents the size of the largest Tea Party rally held in county c in 2009 as a percentage of county population, as collected by Madestam et al. (2013).[10] p_c^{FNC} is the FNC channel position on the system with the largest number of subscribers in county c. Aggregation to county level is necessary here since Tea Party rallies were recorded at the county level. Since higher FNC cable channel positions predict lower FNC viewership, we hypothesize $\beta_{FNC} < 0$ insofar as FNC increased viewers' propensities to attend the Tea Party rallies on Tax Day in 2009.

p_c^{MSNBC} similarly represents the channel position of MSNBC on the system with the largest number of subscribers in county c. This controls for countervailing media bias from a left-leaning channel. Since rainfall noticeably reduced turnout for Tea Party rallies (Madestam et al. 2013), $RainRally_c$ controls for whether or not it rained on Tax Day in 2009 by county. Finally, $\mathbf{X}_c$ denotes control variables that mirror those in Madestam et al. (2013). In the baseline specification, these include counties' population deciles, region fixed effects, deciles of counties' prior probabilities of raining on Tax Day, and county-level cable system characteristics. We also incorporate county demographic composition from the 2010 Census. In the most rigorous specification we add county electoral outcomes in the 2006 House elections and the 2008 presidential elections.

Table 3 reports estimation results with different sets of control variables, weighting by county population to account for heteroscedasticity. Following Madestam et al. (2013), standard errors are clustered by state. Weighted FNC channel position by county has no statistically significant effect on the size of the largest Tax Day rally as a fraction of the county population. This challenges existing notions of FNC's role in mobilizing grassroots support for Tea Party rallies in 2009 (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Given the time-consuming nature of protests (Brady et al. 1995), incidental exposure to FNC need not translate into higher rally attendance, especially among marginal FNC viewers in our research design who are more likely to be younger, working-

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[10]Madestam et al. (2013) includes three sources of attendance data for each county. We calculate $RallySize_c$ based on the mean value across these three sources divided by county population.

Table 3: Effect of Exposure to Fox News On Tea Party Rally Size

	% Tea Party Rally Attendance		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Constant	0.007	2.40***	2.52***
	(0.059)	(0.700)	(0.795)
FNC Channel Pos.	0.0009	0.0005	0.0006
	(0.0009)	(0.0008)	(0.0008)
MSNBC Channel Pos.	0.0005	0.0002	0.0002
	(0.0008)	(0.0006)	(0.0006)
Rain on 4/15	-0.069***	-0.078***	-0.084***
	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.022)
Cable System Controls	✓	✓	✓
County Demographics		✓	✓
2008 and 2006 Voting			✓
Rain Prob. Decile FEs	✓	✓	✓
Population Decile FEs	✓	✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,656	2,656	2,656
R^2	0.07	0.15	0.16

age adult viewers (See Table C.3 in the Online Appendix), in contrast to the prototypical Tea Party protesters who were retirees or otherwise stayed at home often (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Additionally, although FNC may have raised awareness of upcoming Tea Party rallies, prospective participants might have relied more on local online Tea Party Facebook groups (rather than the national FNC) to find out the time and place of their local rallies (Rosenthal and Trost 2012). Finally, since we cannot detect the source of rally attendees from zip codes within a county, our aggregation may mask a larger effect than we can measure in the county-level data.

We also conjecture potential reverse impact: greater Tea Party rally attendance may have boosted subsequent FNC viewership, since salient events attract viewers to tune in to politically congenial news coverage (Kim and Kim 2021). If true, this could explain the remarkable durability of the Tea Party protests' influence on US politics: that rallies provided the initial entry point into consumption of conservative media.[11] We test this conjecture in the following regression:

$$PostRallyRatings_c^{FNC} = \alpha RallySize_c + \mathbf{X}_c\Gamma + \epsilon_c \tag{3}$$

$PostRallyRatings_c^{FNC}$ measures the average FNC rating in county c between April 1 and July 31, 2010, covering the primary election season in that year. The treatment variable is Madestam et al. (2013)'s measure of Tea Party rally size in county c. We include different combinations of control variables $\mathbf{X}_c$ that include cable channel positions and cable system characteristics, pre-April 2009 ratings of FNC in the same county, and the other controls included in Table 3. If Tea Party rallies stimulated greater interest in FNC, we would expect $\alpha > 0$. However, residents in counties that saw a higher Tea Party rally turnout may also have a greater baseline taste for FNC. To estimate the causal effect of Tea Party rallies on subsequent FNC viewership, we follow Madestam et al. (2013) and instrument rally sizes with rainfall on Tax Day in each county.

Table 4 reports OLS estimates based on equation 3. We cluster standard errors by state and weight observations by county population. Variation in 2009 Tea Party rally attendance is strongly

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[11]Madestam et al. (2013) report that rain on Tax Day 2009 reduced Republican vote shares in the November 2010 elections by a full percentage point, a year and a half after the rallies.

Table 4: Effects of Tea Party Rally Size on Subsequent FNC Ratings (OLS)

| | Fox News Rating, Summer 2010 | | | | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Constant	0.856***	0.601***	0.315**	-0.023	1.27
	(0.096)	(0.094)	(0.142)	(0.673)	(0.808)
% Tea Party Rally Attendance	0.123***	0.108**	0.111**	0.074	0.065
	(0.046)	(0.045)	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.048)
Pre-April 2009 Rating		0.087***	0.088***	0.071***	0.062***
		(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Cable System Controls			✓	✓	✓
Cable Positions			✓	✓	✓
County Demographics				✓	✓
2008 and 2006 Voting					✓
Rain Prob. Decile FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Population Decile FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,687	2,687	2,616	2,616	2,616
R^2	0.11	0.16	0.17	0.20	0.22

correlated with primary-season FNC ratings, even when conditioning on the obvious confounder of pre-rally FNC ratings. However, the estimate declines and falls below conventional significance levels when additional county-level controls are added. An analysis using Madestam et al.'s (2013) strategy that instruments for rally attendance with rainfall on 4/15 yields similarly large but imprecisely estimated positive coefficients; see Table D.1 in the Online Appendix. The evidence for rallies' effects in converting local participants or observers into FNC viewers is thus suggestive but inconclusive.

Campaign Contributions

While FNC appears to have limited impact in earlier stages of the Tea Party movement, it could still rally electoral support for Tea Party candidates once they had formally entered the 2010 midterm

elections. To estimate the effect of incidental exposure to FNC on campaign contributions to Tea Party candidates in the 2009-2010 election cycle, we estimate the following regression:

$$Contrib_z^{TeaParty} = \beta_{FNC}p_z^{FNC} + \beta_{MSNBC}p_z^{MSNBC} + \mathbf{X}_z\Gamma + \epsilon_z \tag{4}$$

$Contrib_z^{TeaParty}$ summarizes itemized campaign contributions from donors residing in zip code z to Tea Party candidates in 2009-2010, aggregated as total dollar amount.[12] p_z^{FNC} and p_z^{MSNBC} are the channel positions of FNC and MSNBC on the largest cable system in zip code z in 2009. We expect $\beta_{FNC} < 0$ if FNC increased viewers' willingness to contribute to Tea Party candidate campaigns. $\mathbf{X}_z$ represent zip code-level cable system characteristics and demographic composition as well as state fixed effects. Since we are interested in FNC's impact on campaign giving to Tea Party candidates specifically, we also estimate analogous regressions for itemized contributions to non-Tea Party Congressional Republican candidates for comparison.

Table 5 reports estimation results for zip-code total itemized contributions to Tea Party candidates in dollars in columns (1)-(3), and those to other Congressional Republican candidates in columns (4)-(6). Higher FNC cable channel positions systematically reduced itemized contributions to Tea Party candidates during 2009-2010. Estimates for Congressional Republican candidates zip codes exhibit the same signs but are indistinguishable from zero and much smaller in magnitude. Differences in estimated treatment effects between Tea Party candidates and other Congressional Republican candidates are not uniformly precise across specifications (see Table F.2 in the Online Appendix).[13] Nonetheless, Table 5 suggests that FNC's ability to rally donors for Republican candidates may have been particularly strong for those associated with the Tea Party movement during the 2010 midterm elections. Moreover, FNC-induced fundraising boosts could disproportionately benefit Tea Party candidates since many of them, as non-incumbents, enjoy higher marginal returns from campaign spending (Bonica 2017).

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[12]Online Appendix F reports alternative estimates where the outcome variables aggregate itemized contributions by counts of unique donors. All substantive findings are unchanged.

[13]Also, Tables F.3 and F.4 in the Online Appendix show that FNC channel positions have no effects on itemized contributions to Democratic candidates, suggesting that FNC viewership influenced donors' support for different GOP factions rather than persuading donors to switch parties.

Table 5: FNC Effect on Zip Code-Level Total Itemized Contributions In Dollar Amounts

	Tea Party Candidates			Other Rep. Candidates		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
FNC Channel Pos.	-37.3***	-31.3**	-34.9***	-15.7	-8.75	-7.06
	(13.6)	(13.5)	(11.7)	(33.1)	(33.5)	(29.1)
MSNBC Channel Pos.	8.69	16.9	7.90	-44.6	-26.5	-26.0
	(11.3)	(11.2)	(11.2)	(27.7)	(24.8)	(18.4)
Cable system controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic controls		✓	✓		✓	✓
State FEs			✓			✓
Observations	20,871	20,352	20,334	20,871	20,352	20,334
R^2	0.008	0.08	0.10	0.01	0.10	0.11

FNC's fundraising effect for Tea Party candidates is sizable. Based on column 3 of Table 5, raising FNC's cable channel position by one standard deviation (residualized by congressional district)–13.5–reduces itemized contributions to Tea Party candidates by $470, which is 11.2% of the average zip-code total fundraising for these candidates ($4,187).

We explore the potential mechanisms for such fundraising impact of incidental exposure to FNC by examining how it varies by donor attributes. First, to distinguish between FNC's ability to convert Tea Party supporters into new donors and its persuasion of existing donors to support to the movement, we separately estimate regressions based on equation 4 for new itemized donors (i.e., those who made zero itemized contributions prior to 2009) versus existing ones. Table 6 presents results where contributions are aggregated by dollar. The point estimates for FNC's cable channel position are larger for existing itemized donors, possibly due to existing donors' relatively higher levels of wealth and hence lower barriers to participating in the campaign finance system (Li 2023; Brady et al. 1995), although the differences in estimates are not precise. Hence, both persuasion of existing donors and mobilization of new donors may account for FNC's overall fundraising effect for Tea Party candidates.

Second, we investigate heterogeneity by donor ideology. To infer ideology independently of campaign contributions (or lack thereof) to Tea Party candidates, we focus on existing itemized

Table 6: Zip-Code Itemized Contributions (In Dollar Amounts) to Tea Party Candidates Among Existing vs. New Donors

| | Existing Donors | | | New Donors | | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
FNC Channel Pos.	-28.2**	-25.8**	-28.8***	-7.64***	-7.27***	-7.48***
	(11.2)	(11.5)	(9.86)	(2.88)	(2.78)	(2.41)
MSNBC Channel Pos.	8.89	16.1*	7.58	-1.34	0.404	-1.02
	(9.27)	(9.76)	(9.52)	(2.15)	(2.04)	(2.17)
Cable system controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic controls		✓	✓		✓	✓
State FEs			✓			✓
Observations	21,200	20,641	20,621	21,200	20,641	20,621
R^2	0.006	0.05	0.07	0.01	0.08	0.12

donors' pre-2009 campaign giving histories, and we adopt Hall and Snyder (2013)'s approach to proxy for the ideology of donor i, Ideology_i, as follows:

$$\text{Ideology}_i = \frac{\sum_j \text{NOMINATE}_j \times \text{Contribution}_{ij}}{\sum_j \text{Contribution}_{ij}} \tag{5}$$

j denotes a current or former Member of Congress to whom donor i contributed before 2009. NOMINATE_j is j's DW-NOMINATE score (Poole and Rosenthal 2000). Contribution_{ij} is the sum of pre-2009 itemized contributions from donor i to candidate j.[14] This approach lets us infer the ideologies of 75.6% of existing itemized donors. We separate these estimated ideology scores in two ways: 1) binning all existing donors by their 33th and 67th percentiles (the cut points are $-1, -0.342, 0.289, 1$); and 2) binning existing donors that have made at least one contribution to Republican candidates before 2009 by their 33th and 67th percentiles (the cut points are $-0.691, 0.367, 0.456, 0.965$).

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[14]Our measure of donor ideology is virtually the same whether we include Tea Party Republicans who were incumbents (Pearson correlation of 0.997).

Table 7: Zip-Code Itemized Contributions (In Dollar Amounts) to Tea Party Candidates Across Existing Donors

	Donor Ideology $(-1, -0.342)$			Donor Ideology $(-0.342, 0.289)$			Donor Ideology $(0.289, 1)$		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
FNC Channel Pos.	-0.508	-0.454*	-0.460**	-8.35**	-8.57**	-9.56**	-17.0**	-14.6*	-16.0**
	(0.311)	(0.259)	(0.192)	(3.51)	(3.60)	(4.03)	(8.20)	(8.30)	(7.10)
MSNBC Channel Pos.	-0.252	-0.080	-0.015	0.093	1.51	1.31	9.41	14.3*	6.46
	(0.221)	(0.190)	(0.132)	(3.09)	(3.04)	(3.10)	(7.17)	(7.85)	(7.55)
Cable system controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic controls		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
State FEs			✓			✓			✓
Observations	21,200	20,641	20,621	21,200	20,641	20,621	21,200	20,641	20,621
R^2	0.006	0.04	0.06	0.003	0.02	0.03	0.004	0.03	0.05

Table 8: Zip-Code Itemized Contributions (In Dollar Amounts) to Tea Party Candidates Across Existing Republican Donors

	Donor Ideology $(-0.691, 0.367)$			Donor Ideology $(0.367, 0.456)$			Donor Ideology $(0.456, 0.965)$		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
FNC Channel Pos.	-11.4**	-11.7**	-13.9***	-7.14*	-6.72*	-6.99*	-7.31*	-5.10	-5.06
	(5.07)	(5.27)	(4.85)	(3.88)	(3.94)	(3.61)	(4.33)	(4.12)	(3.84)
MSNBC Channel Pos.	2.01	4.22	3.97	2.42	3.87	0.257	4.80	7.65	3.51
	(3.94)	(3.89)	(3.83)	(3.70)	(3.71)	(4.28)	(4.24)	(5.16)	(4.09)
Cable system controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic controls		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
State FEs			✓			✓			✓
Observations	21,200	20,641	20,621	21,200	20,641	20,621	21,200	20,641	20,621
R^2	0.005	0.04	0.06	0.002	0.02	0.03	0.001	0.01	0.03

Table 7 estimates treatment effects by donor ideology based on terciles derived from *all* existing donors. The estimated effects for FNC cable channel positions are larger in magnitude for existing donors with medium or high Hall-Snyder ideology scores. We can precisely distinguish estimates for donors in the first versus second terciles, although not for the second versus third terciles. FNC appears to have primarily influenced moderate right-leaning donors' decisions to contribute to Tea Party candidates, while left-leaning donors remained unpersuaded.

Tables 8 estimates treatment effects by ideology tercile among existing donors who *previously gave to Republican candidates*. FNC effects are larger among existing Republican-leaning itemized donors with relatively low or medium Hall-Snyder ideology scores, suggesting that FNC might have been particularly effective in shifting these donors' ideological preference rightward, although it might also reflect the underrepresentation of staunch conservatives among marginal FNC viewers induced by variation in FNC's cable channel positions (see Table C.3 in the Online Appendix). Regardless, estimates across ideology terciles are not statistically distinct.

Primary Voting

Finally, to test whether incidental exposure to FNC increased voting for Tea Party candidates vis-a-vis other Congressional Republican candidates in primary contests in 2010, we focus on those primary elections that involved Tea Party candidates and estimate the following regression:

$$PrimaryVoteShare_z^{TeaParty} = \beta_{FNC}p_z^{FNC} + \beta_{MSNBC}p_z^{MSNBC} + \eta_d + \mathbf{X}_z\Gamma + \epsilon_z \qquad (6)$$

$PrimaryVoteShare_z^{TeaParty}$ is the vote share received by the Tea Party candidate on the ballot in zip code z in the 2010 primary election for the House of Representatives. While we collect primary vote shares by precinct, we aggregate them to the zip code level based on precinct-zip code geographic overlaps so as to match our zip code-level measure of cable channel positions, p_z^{FNC} and p_z^{MSNBC} respectively for FNC and MSNBC. Once again, since higher channel positions reduce viewership, we expect $\beta_{FNC} < 0$ insofar as exogenous exposure to FNC enhanced Tea Party

candidates' electoral performance in House Republican primaries in 2010. We control for η_d, a fixed effect for each congressional district d, to ensure that β_{FNC} is identified from within-district FNC channel position variation. Consequently, our estimated treatment effect $\hat{\beta}_{FNC}$ is unaffected by any potential endogenous entry of Tea Party candidates across congressional districts.[15] $\mathbf{X}_z$ captures zip code-level cable system characteristics and demographic controls.

Table 9 reports estimation results; we cluster standard errors by cable systems and weight observations based on total votes cast to account for heteroscedasticity. Tea Party candidates received significantly lower vote shares in the 2010 House primary elections in zip codes with higher FNC cable channel positions, implying that voters with greater FNC exposure supported Tea Party candidates at higher rates in these primaries. Since we include congressional district fixed effects, these findings are driven by within-district exogenous variation in FNC viewership rather than differences in candidate pools across races.

Table 9: FNC Effects on Precinct-Level Primary Vote Shares for Tea Party Candidates

| | Tea Party Cand. Vote Share | | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)
FNC Channel Pos.	-0.002***	-0.002**	-0.002***
	(0.0006)	(0.0007)	(0.0007)
MSNBC Channel Pos.	0.0005	0.0004	0.0003
	(0.0003)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Cable system controls		✓	✓
Demographic controls			✓
District FEs	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,071	3,071	3,063
R^2	0.75	0.76	0.77

These effects are not only precise but also sizable. Based on column 3 of Table 9, increasing FNC's cable channel position by one standard deviation (residualized by congressional district) would reduce Tea Party candidates' primary vote shares by 0.0194, which would have costed the nominations of a number of Tea Party candidates such as Dan Benishek, Jeff Duncan, Blake Farenthold, John Willoughby, and Glen Urquhart (Our Campaigns 2010).

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[15]Online Appendix E finds no evidence of such endogenous entry.

In Online Appendix G, we also examine FNC's effect on primary turnout. A key challenge here is that we do not have precinct- or zip code- level data on the numbers of eligible voters for primary elections. Instead, we proxy for actual zip-code turnout rates by dividing total primary-election votes cast by the number of adult residents in the 2010 Census. Table G.1 in the Online Appendix reports the estimation results using the same control variables as in equation 6; we cluster standard error by cable system and weight observations by the number of age-eligible residents to account for heteroscedasticity. The estimates for FNC's cable channel positions are indistinguishable from zero, though we hesitate to draw firm conclusions as our proxies for turnout rates likely have significant measure errors in the absence of the true denominators.

Discussion

Despite extensive research on media bias and partisan polarization (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007; Gentzkow et al. 2011; Chiang and Knight 2011; Martin and Yurukoglu 2017; Ash et al. 2022), little is known about how media slant shapes intraparty ideological movements in the United States. This paper examines the role of the Fox News Channel (FNC), a prominent conservative news outlet, in the rise of the Tea Party movement within the Republican Party over the past decade (Blum 2020; Gervais and Morris 2018; Kabaservice 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Our content analysis reveals that, beyond its baseline pro-Republican slant, FNC provided extensive and favorable coverage of the Tea Party during 2009-2010 compared to MSNBC and CNN. We find no firm evidence that FNC mobilized Tea Party rallies in early 2009. However, exposure to FNC significantly rallied both campaign donors and primary voters for Tea Party candidates relative to other Congressional Republican candidates in the 2010 midterm elections. In short, while FNC did not initiate the Tea Party movement, it galvanized electoral support for Tea Party candidates and helped them secure party nominations at a critical juncture of the movement's development.

We examine the political power of media within a context where political messaging holds higher marginal influence (Broockman and Kalla 2023a; Hill 2017). The Tea Party movement during the 2009-10 election cycle, as an emerging GOP faction consisting of a large fraction of new Congressional candidates vying for party nominations (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Blum 2020), provided an intraparty competition setting where the public possessed relatively less prior knowledge and fewer heuristics for candidate evaluation (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013). Our findings show that this relatively low-information setting provided significant room for persuasion and mobilization through FNC's pro-Tea Party coverage. Intraparty ideological movements in the United States may thus represent a particularly prominent domain of media influence in mass politics.

This paper also underscores that the media's political reach extends beyond influencing general elections. While prior research on Extended Party Networks has predominantly focused on other prominent sources of outside influences in party nominations in the United States, such as activists and campaign donors, our study reveals that media outlets may strategically promote specific intraparty ideological movements, influencing the future trajectory of established political parties. Unlike past research on media influence over party vote shares, this paper shows that media slant can fundamentally transform party platforms and democratic representation by helping to determine winners and losers among competing intraparty movements.

Future research can further illuminate media influence in intraparty ideological factions in several ways. First, linking individual-level exposure to FNC with attitudes towards the Tea Party movement could disentangle such potential (and non-exclusive) mechanisms as the channel's impact on movement visibility, shifting viewers' policy preferences to align with Tea Party agenda, or shaping perceived associations between the movement and the Republican Party. Second, researchers could explore symmetric effects on the left, such as whether MSNBC contributed to the success of the Progressive Caucus within the Democratic Party. Third, given increasing competition among right-wing outlets in traditional mass media in the United States (Peters 2022)

and the rapid expansion of social media (Fujiwara et al. 2023; Melnikov 2022), it is imperative to understand how media impact on intraparty ideological conflicts has evolved over time.

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