

**“CNN Can Kiss My As\$”:  
A Novel Description of Hyperpartisan U.S. News Consumers**

ANDREA LORENZ<sup>1</sup>  
Kent State University, USA

CAROLYN E. SCHMITT, SHANNON C. MCGREGOR, DANIEL  
MALMER  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA

News consumption in the United States is polarized and fragmented, with an abundance of partisan news publications appealing to political identities on both the left and the right. Yet, there is an abundance of hyperpartisan news on the right, the content of which has been shown to be harmful to democracy. This study captures one of the most comprehensive pictures to date of the U.S. Americans who consume far-right media and makes connections between such media use and the state of American democracy. After a lengthy data-cleaning process, we analyzed open-ended survey responses from a nationally representative sample of more than 10,000 U.S. American adults, finding that nearly ten percent self-report at least one far-right news outlet as a primary news source. Furthermore, significantly more

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Andrea Lorenz: [arlorenz@kent.edu](mailto:arlorenz@kent.edu)  
Carolyn E. Schmitt: [cschmitt1@unc.edu](mailto:cschmitt1@unc.edu)  
Shannon McGregor: [shannonmcg@unc.edu](mailto:shannonmcg@unc.edu)  
Daniel Malmer: [malmer@unc.edu](mailto:malmer@unc.edu)  
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U.S. Americans report consuming far-right and moderate-right news outlets than counterparts on the left. We then examined the characteristics of this small but significant group, given the current political climate in the United States, finding that far-right news consumers are overwhelmingly white, male, Republican, Christian, and without a college degree. This study reinforces previous findings that patterns in hyperpartisan media usage demonstrate growing extremism in the U.S., and that it is deeply rooted in identity.

*Keywords: hyperpartisan news, far-right news, partisan media, extremism, polarization, authoritarianism*

This study looks at the Americans who consume conservative partisan news outlets and captures the scope and range of the demand for these outlets to better understand the country's political climate through hyperpartisan news. News consumption in the United States is polarized and fragmented, with partisan news publications appealing to political identities on both the left and the right (Groeling, 2013), and in various forms: online, in print, on television, and on the radio (Berry & Sobieraj, 2014; Stroud, 2010; Young, 2020). This high-choice media "ecosystem," however, is not symmetrically polarized: Partisan news outlets on the right far outnumber those on the left (Benkler et al., 2018; Heft et al., 2020). Corresponding to the asymmetric supply is what appears to be an asymmetric demand that also favors the right. Hardcore partisans consume more partisan news than those with more moderate viewpoints, and partisans on the right tend to consume more partisan news than partisans on the left (Guess, 2021). We argue there are important distinctions of far-right hyperpartisan outlets in their harm to a healthy democracy, not only because of their prolific presence in the U.S. media sphere, but also because they often publish false and outrageous news stories, often told through xenophobic news frames and ideologies (Heft et al., 2020). Furthermore, their extreme content diffuses to larger, more mainstream conservative outlets and beyond (Kaiser et al., 2020; Benkler et al., 2018).

Amid the increase in the supply of hyperpartisan news on the right, researchers have not yet been able to nationally capture what hyperpartisan news looks like from the demand side. Studies that look at news usage based on media bias tend to focus on more traditional conservative partisan news outlets like Fox News (e.g., Hmielowski et al., 2020), while leaving out the more extreme far-right hyperpartisan sites. In this study, we delve into whether that ample supply of hyperpartisan news on the right is reflected in Americans’ news consumption. We ask: What does the consumption of far-right news look like? What far-right outlets are these partisans consuming? And who are the Americans consuming it?

To answer these questions, we examine survey responses from a nationally representative sample of more than 10,000 U.S. American adults who answered open-ended questions about their top news sources. To our knowledge, ours is the first large-scale study about hyperpartisan media that asks Americans about their news habits in their own words. After doing so, we move into identifying and describing those who consume far-right hyperpartisan content.

We begin by defining hyperpartisan media and its influence in the media ecosystem. We then situate our work within news consumption scholarship, which shows that relatively few people turn to hyperpartisan outlets. Although this group is small, we argue that it is often overlooked and represents a politically important segment of the population. As our findings show, this group is demographically rather homogenous and align with dominant power groups in the United States—overwhelmingly white, male, Christian, and Republican. They also tend to be more frequent consumers of news. Finally, we discuss the implications of these unique findings on partisan news scholarship, on the field of journalism, and on our democracy.

### **(Hyper-)partisan news in the United States**

In this study, we aim to understand the nature of hyperpartisan news consumption in the United States. News is often labeled *partisan* if it does not adhere to journalistic norms of objectivity by promoting one political party over the other (Groeling, 2013;

Schudson, 2001). In recent years, scholars and media critics have added the descriptive “hyper-” to signal the intensity or extremity of this partisan slant. The term *hyperpartisan* is a more apt term than alt-right or alt-left because it removes the idea that they exist as alternatives to news and acknowledges their standing within the news ecosystem and media economy, even if they do not abide by journalistic standards (Rae, 2021). Usage of hyperpartisan media can also combine partisan and alternative media, as they feature a unique “anti-system” bent (Peacock et al., 2021, p. 214).

Rae (2021) argued for equating far-right and far-left news under the hyperpartisan umbrella because of similar populist language pitting the “people” against “elites,” as well as the shared style of sensationalism, tabloid headlines, and anti-establishment sentiments. At times, these viewpoints have converged. Take, for example, Tim Pool, now an extreme-right YouTube magnate who got his start livestreaming from the leftist Occupy Wall Street movement (Silverman, 2021). We argue, however, that despite prominent exceptions, implying that the right and left have both become extremist—much less to an equal extent—applies a false equivalency that bears little resemblance to empirical research or reality.

First, conservatives have moved increasingly further to the political right without an equivalent movement of liberals to the left (Zimmer, 2019; Grossmann & Hopkins, 2015). Further, research finds stark differences in the level of harm that the views on the right and the left pose to a democracy in which all are included. When considering that no matter the ideology, people on the extreme right and left share some traits, such as more aggressive personality traits, the roots of their extremism differ: Extreme Republican views are primarily shaped by hostility toward women and Black people, for example (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022). These differences make it even more important to distinguish between right and left hyperpartisan news in analyses.

Second, hyperpartisan news on both sides might at times share a populist style, but their content—and the implications of that content—differ widely. For instance, only hyperpartisan news on the right furthers dangerous conspiracy theories about the 2020 election, promulgated by the losing Republican candidate, that led to the violent attempted

coup on the U.S. Capitol and continues to foment anti-democratic actions and violence across the country, contributing to democratic backsliding (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021).

Indeed, while many hyperpartisan media might be considered “fringe” outlets, in recent years Donald Trump accelerated the “mainstreaming of the fringe,” (Barkun, 2017, p. 441), wherein obscure viewpoints from the far-right that had once been contained within small subgroups by informal democratic rules and practices have now become part of common discourse. Our study aims to identify and quantify these extreme media organizations and the demographics of their consumers.

The U.S. media context from this view follows a global trend, but its robust conservative media ecosystem that blurs the lines between partisan and hyperpartisan outlets sets the country apart (Benkler et al., 2018). This conservative media system not only impacts U.S. media, but also plays an outsized role in the right-wing media ecosystems in other countries (Heft et al., 2021). Understanding the supply and demand of far-right media—and the extent of *extreme* far-right media consumption, in particular—can shed light on U.S. hyperpartisan media usage at a particularly fraught time in the country’s democracy.

### ***Supply: Hyperpartisan news in the networked media ecosystem***

In this section, we describe the supply side of far-right media in the United States—the options readily available for consumption—and distinguish it from media on the left. The U.S. boasts a more robust conservative media ecosystem than it does on the left (Benkler et al., 2018). The ecology of conservative news sites in the U.S. is more developed than in other countries, having the largest number of sites that are also closely networked with one another, forming a dense, interconnected community outside of the mainstream news environment, as observed through analyses of which and how often sites connect to one another via hyperlinks (Heft et al., 2021).

A network analysis of the U.S. media ecosystem following the 2016 presidential election found that outlets on the left were dispersed more evenly ideologically, aligning with center outlets, whereas those on the right created an insular cluster featuring center-

right Fox News in close proximity to Breitbart, an online publication founded by former Trump cabinet member Steve Bannon, illustrating their significance in the right-wing ecosystem (Benkler et al., 2018; Kaiser et al., 2020). Narratives from far-right hyperpartisan news tend to spread throughout the media ecosystem as larger partisan outlets, including Fox News, pick up and repeat the messages and falsehoods that far-right outlets such as Breitbart propagate, thereby reaching far more people than the small group who consumed the original content (Kaiser et al., 2020; Benkler et al., 2018). Extreme viewpoints become further integrated within the wider public discourse when such outlets are well-connected to the larger media ecosystem, thereby exposing more of the public to extreme content (Norocel et al., 2017).

The narratives promoted by hyperpartisan news, which are often similar to disinformation in the spreading of intentionally false information, frame current events according to partisan logics rather than completely fabricating information (Mourão & Robertson, 2019). It follows that the agendas of partisan news outlets and untrustworthy or “fake news” outlets are “intertwined” and take cues from one another (Vargo et al., 2018, p. 2044), an occurrence also found in Breitbart setting the agenda of Fox News’s immigration coverage (Kaiser et al., 2020). Furthermore, Republicans’ judgments on the trustworthiness of news outlets tends to be less accurate than Democrats, which suggests that right-leaning Americans are especially susceptible to false information in news (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

As such, far-right news has played a uniquely important role in contemporary U.S. politics. Former President Trump notably preferred conservative media, such as Fox News, and routinely attacked mainstream media (Meeks, 2020), although his favor toward traditional partisan outlets like Fox waned over his presidency, as he increasingly promoted far-right news outlets (Archer et al., 2022). Trump and other conservatives have criticized center-right Fox News and favored far-right outlets such as Newsmax, particularly after Fox News called the 2020 election for Biden (Dwyer, 2016; Rugar, 2020). Politicians preferring political news that supports their administration or party is hardly a new phenomenon, but the extent to which Trump repeated far-right talking points and implemented them in policy, such as his xenophobic border policies, set a precedent for

future politicians to make similarly extreme claims with less resistance. Moreover, Trump established a direct line between far-right news and the White House when he brought Bannon of Breitbart into his administration as a strategist (DelReal, 2016).

Outside electoral or mainstream politics, hyperpartisan media are key to extremist recruitment and maintenance strategies. For example, members of far-right organizations told researchers they would scour mainstream news websites for stories and then frame and share them through their xenophobic worldview to recruit people via social media. Once recruited, leaders said it was key that lower-ranked recruits consumed only media filtered through this view, lest they be exposed to more mainstream viewpoints (Baugut & Neumann, 2019).

Considering the prominence far-right media have gained in the United States and the unique danger they pose to democracy, it is imperative that media research continues to identify and quantify the outlets available.

### ***Demand: Asymmetric hyperpartisan news consumption***

Having shown that there is an ample supply of far-right hyperpartisan media in the United States rife with extreme content, we ask: Who consumes far-right news? Here we discuss the demand for far-right media.

Contrary to popular discourse about Americans' polarized news habits, most people consume rather moderate media—with considerable overlap between Republicans and Democrats on sites such as CNN.com and MSN.com (Guess, 2021). Most Americans also care very little about politics (Krupnikov & Ryan, 2022), and as such, most Americans do not consume ideologically extreme news (Guess, 2021). Most people, regardless of ideology, get their political news from similar, well-known news sources, such as Yahoo, *The New York Times*, and ABC News. More partisan media, such as Fox News on the right and MSNBC on the left, also attracted an ideologically diverse set of users, suggesting that the content of these sites is appealing beyond any one partisan subset of the population (Nelson & Webster, 2017).

For whatever reasons, people do seek out alternatives to mainstream media. This could be due to declining trust in media and institutions (Strömbäck et al., 2020), especially among Republicans (Gottfried & Liedke, 2021). Partisanship thus influences news consumption. When given the choice, people turn to media that affirm their political beliefs, which might have a reinforcing effect on those consumers—especially those with strong partisan beliefs (Stroud, 2010; Levendusky, 2013; Hmielowski et al., 2020). Partisan media use strengthens both liberal and conservative ideological beliefs, but only conservatives appear to turn to media echo-chambers (Hmielowski et al., 2020). While much research on partisanship and news consumption focuses on partisan outlets (such as MSNBC and Fox) rather than hyperpartisan, far-right news outlets (Hmielowski et al., 2020; Stroud, 2010), this work underscores the importance partisanship may play in news consumption.

However, news preferences may not merely be about partisanship. Other factors, such as identity and anti-establishment beliefs, might also factor into news choice. Partisanship and social identity groupings overlap with multiple groups and categories, including ideology, race, and religion (Mason, 2018)—all of which might help us understand the role of identity in consumption of far-right media. Anti-establishment views are another potential explanation. These views, though dispersed across the ideological spectrum, are associated with conspiratorial thinking about mainstream media as well as usage of far-right social media platforms like Gab (Uscinski et al., 2021). Similarly, members of far-right extremist groups express hostility toward mainstream news media, as their anti-establishment views include news media as part of the system against which they conspire (Baugut & Neumann, 2019).

As there is asymmetry in the supply between right and left, so, too, do researchers find it in demand of hyperpartisan news. The ideologies of those who seek out partisan news suggest asymmetric political polarization in news habits. Guess (2021) found that the most left-slanted consumers landed on left-leaning sites such as NYTimes.com and BuzzFeed. Conversely, even though more Republicans than Democrats tended toward moderate sites, about a tenth gravitated to sites that were more ideologically extreme than their left counterparts—well to the right of center-right Fox News. This group may be



proportionately small, but it is mighty. Guess found that this small group drove about a quarter of overall news traffic on the right, enough to create an illusion of a highly polarized audience (ibid, 2021). Rather than polarization—a phenomenon at both ends of the political spectrum—this suggests extremism on the right alone.

Notably, hyperpartisan news consumers were also more likely to vote, especially those consuming news on the far-right end of the spectrum. This higher political involvement may explain their outsized influence as conservative thought leaders to both the public and political leaders in the GOP (Guess, 2021). We take this as a starting point, striving to learn more about a small but influential aspect of the American electorate.

### *The scope, content, and consumption of far-right hyperpartisan media in the U.S.*

While a minority, consumers of hyperpartisan news, especially those on the far-right, are an important and understudied aspect of the populace. Survey analysis on news consumption usually includes hyperpartisan and far-right outlets, as well as the people who regularly consume them, as “Other” or list prominent outlets only, such as Breitbart. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine U.S. Americans’ news consumption in their own words, allowing us to robustly capture the nature of hyperpartisan news consumption, the extent of it, and the characteristics of its audience.

Our hypotheses and research questions focus on two areas of inquiry: hyperpartisan news outlets and the U.S. Americans who consume them. Leveraging a large, representative, and unique dataset, we seek to understand the consumption of hyperpartisan news in scope and content, and to develop a robust description of its consumers. We addressed this novel and exploratory inquiry in two parts with the following research questions and hypotheses:

**RQ1:** What hyperpartisan news outlets are U.S. Americans consuming?

Although this is the first study of its kind to undertake a project on hyperpartisan news consumption with this magnitude of descriptive, self-reported data, previous literature suggests we will find key differences in hyperpartisan news outlets on the left and the right. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H1:** Hyperpartisan news on the right will be more ideologically extreme than on the left and will be consumed more frequently.

Anticipating a smaller, underpowered sample on the far-left, we then turn our attention in the second part of our inquiry to address the people behind the demand for far-right news. We ask:

**RQ2:** Who are the U.S. Americans consuming far-right hyperpartisan news?

Finally, we anticipate differences between those in this group as far as their consumption goes and hypothesize:

**H2:** People who consume content on the far-right will be more frequent news consumers overall than those with a more moderate consumption score.

## Methods

### *Participants and data collection*

This study uses data from a Gallup Panel, which was distributed through mail and web, between July 30 and August 26, 2021. The panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults, selected by Gallup randomly using both address-based sampling and dual-frame random-digit dialing phone interviews. The dataset used in this study was completed by 10,226 adults in the U.S., aged 18 or older. The AAPOR5 response rate is 22%.

Before we conducted our analysis, we weighted the sample using weights provided by Gallup, which corrected for unequal selection probability and nonresponses. Weighting adjustments were made to ensure this sample matches the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, and geographic region based on the 2019 Current Population Survey figures for U.S. adults.

The questions used in this study, as well as those on the full instrument, were designed by both Gallup and The Knight Foundation, in consultation with academics, including the third author. The full dataset has been publicly available since the May 2022 release of the report. For more information on the sample, as well as the full questionnaire

from which this study is drawn, see *Media & Democracy: Unpacking America’s complex views on the digital public square* (2022)<sup>2</sup>.

### *Coding open-ended responses for news outlets*

In examining news consumption, we draw from an item on the survey that asked: “Please name the top two to three news sources you use. Be as specific as possible.” Respondents were offered up to three text boxes, though they could choose to not answer. Respondents provided these as free-form text, resulting in more than 30,000 data points in raw form with varying articulation, punctuation, and spelling. Making sense of what this massive amount of data means for hyperpartisan news consumption in the United States required laborious cleaning and processing, detailed below.

With this large sample, we had 30,678 possible total responses. Of these, 5,200 were left blank, leaving 25,478 for us to analyze further. As a first step, we converted all responses to lower case, identified unique strings, and ranked them by frequency of appearance. This resulted in 5,319 distinct responses. The most common response was “cnn” with 1,967 appearances, followed by “fox news” with 1,027. Because the outlets appeared as free-form text, they were extremely long-tail, with the median response appearing only once.

We then created a hybrid codebook/dictionary (see Appendix A) to match each response to a media outlet. This was an important step because many of the 5,319 unique responses were aliases for the same outlet. We first sorted the responses alphabetically to identify aliases. For example, 78 different responses (e.g., “nytimes,” “the new york times,” “n. y. times”) were given for *The New York Times*. As we coded responses, we assigned political bias scores to each outlet ranging from –33 (extreme left) to +33 (extreme right). These scores are from Media Bias Fact Check, as described next.

We obtained these scores from Media Bias Fact Check (MBFC), an independent website that rates outlets for political bias and factual accuracy (Media Bias/Fact Check,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/media-and-democracy/>

n.d.) and has been used in various peer-reviewed studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2021; Cinelli et al., 2020). We chose MBFC because they rank many sources—more than 4,400 at the time of writing—using a robust and well-documented methodology that considers content, word choice, and factual reporting in its ratings. Especially because we focus conceptually on hyperpartisan news, which is marked by flouting journalistic norms, we decided to use a scoring system that took content into consideration. No rating – MBFC or others – can be seen as completely objective, though MBFC notes that they use objective measures and subjective analysis in their scoring, and their full methodology is described on their website.

As a secondary source for outlets not scored by MBFC, we used Ad Fontes Media (Ad Fontes Media, n.d.), which has a similar scoring service based on content. A bivariate correlation of scores that were available from both MBFC and Ad Fontes Media showed strong correlation ( $n = 30, r = 0.88, p < 0.01$ ). As with other studies that have used various measures to assign bias or ideological slant to news outlets, the midpoint of “0” should not be presumed to achieve ideological balance (Guess, 2021).

To match a bias score with each outlet, we obtained a comma-separated values file with MBFC scores from the PIEGraph Project at the Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life (CITAP) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which uses the data to study and promote fact-based information consumption (“PIEGraph”, n.d.). The scale captured the range in bias between center-right and center-left outlets and the extremes. We acknowledge limitations with this scoring scale that suggests positive and negative scores are balanced or equivalent in some way, an assumption we approach with caution. This scale is *not* used under the assumption that -33 (far left) is the actual counterpoint to 33 (far right) but used rather to capture the variability between them. To match outlets from our codebook with political bias scores from MBFC, we wrote a Python script using the pandas data analysis library that associated those scores with each response.

After several iterations of coding and scoring, 16,897 responses, more than half of our data, were scored using data from MBFC, and 193 responses by data from Ad Fontes Media (see Appendix A). However, a substantial amount—8,581 responses—had not been scored by either MBFC or Ad Fontes Media. Because of the size of this unscored group,

we applied a categorical labeling protocol to capture the nature of these answers, detailed in Appendix B. The largest categories were local news (33.1%), social media (13.3%), news (12.59%), and aggregators (12.65%). We also created a category for *anti-media sentiment* (.75%), which was characterized by a negative comment directed at the media, such as in our title “cnn can kiss my ass.”

After the data-cleaning process, we were able to identify 6,332 distinct outlets reported by respondents. Of those, 5,471 were *not* scored by MBFC, so we labeled them categorically, as described above. In all, 861 outlets had been scored by either MBFC or Ad Fontes Media. These outlets—and the respondents who listed them as one of their three preferred news sources—formed the basis for our analyses.

### *Variables*

**Partisan bias scoring.** ( $M = -1.78$ ,  $SD = 14.58$ ) This news outlet variable had scores ranging from -33 (extreme left) to +33 (extreme right).

**Sex.** Two categories: female (52%) and male (48%). We recoded sex as a dummy variable so that female took the value of 1 and male took the value of 0.

**Age.** Three categories. Ages 18 to 34 (29.9%) took the value of 1, ages 35 to 54 (33%) took the value of 2, and ages over 55 (37.1%) took the value of 3.

**Race/Ethnicity.** Seven categories: American Indian, (3.2%), Asian (1.9%), Black (11.8%), Native Hawaiian (0.5%), White (85.3%), and Hispanic (9.6%).

**Education.** Nine categories: less than a high school diploma, high school graduate, technical/ trade/ vocational/ business school or program after high school, some college, two-year associate degree, four your bachelor’s degree, some postgraduate or professional school, postgraduate or professional degree, and don’t know. We used a dummy variable where college graduate (45%) took the value of 1, while non-college graduate (55%) took the value of 0.

**Religion.** The religion variable was measured by the following question: “What is your current religion, if any?” Options were Protestant (22.5%), Roman Catholic (15.1%), Mormon (1.7%), Orthodox Christian (1%), Other Christian (14.1%), Jewish (2.1%),

Muslim (.3%), Buddhist (.6%), Hindu (.2%), Atheist (10.3%), Agnostic (9%), or Nothing in particular (14.7%). Those who answered Protestant as well as the 14% of respondents answering “Other Christian” were further prompted to identify as Evangelical (29.2%) or Born Again (39.3%).

**Geography.** The geography variable was measured by the following question: “Which best describes the area where you live?” The options were: a rural area or on a farm (13.4%), a small town or village (27.1%), a large city (23.4%), or a suburb of a large city (35.5%).

**News consumption frequency.** ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .91$ , range 1-4). The news consumption frequency variable was measured by the following item, asked directly after the item asking for a respondent’s top news sources: “How frequently are you using these news sources?” It was a categorical question; options were daily (coded high), weekly, a few times a month, and rarely (coded low).

**Political party.** The political party variable was measured by the following item: “In politics, as of today, with which political party do you most closely affiliate?” The options were Republican, Democrat, Independent, and Other. Respondents who selected Independent or Other were further prompted to answer if they “leaned” toward the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. We add Republican and Democratic leaners to those who identified with a party in the first question, leaving as Independents those who did not express a preference toward either party when pressed. Our political party variable then consisted of three options: Republican (35.2%), Democrat (52%), and Independent (7.9%).

**Political ideology.** ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ , range = 1-7) Participants were asked, “How would you describe your political views?” Answers were given on a 7-point scale, ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. The higher the score, the more conservative respondent’s views were.

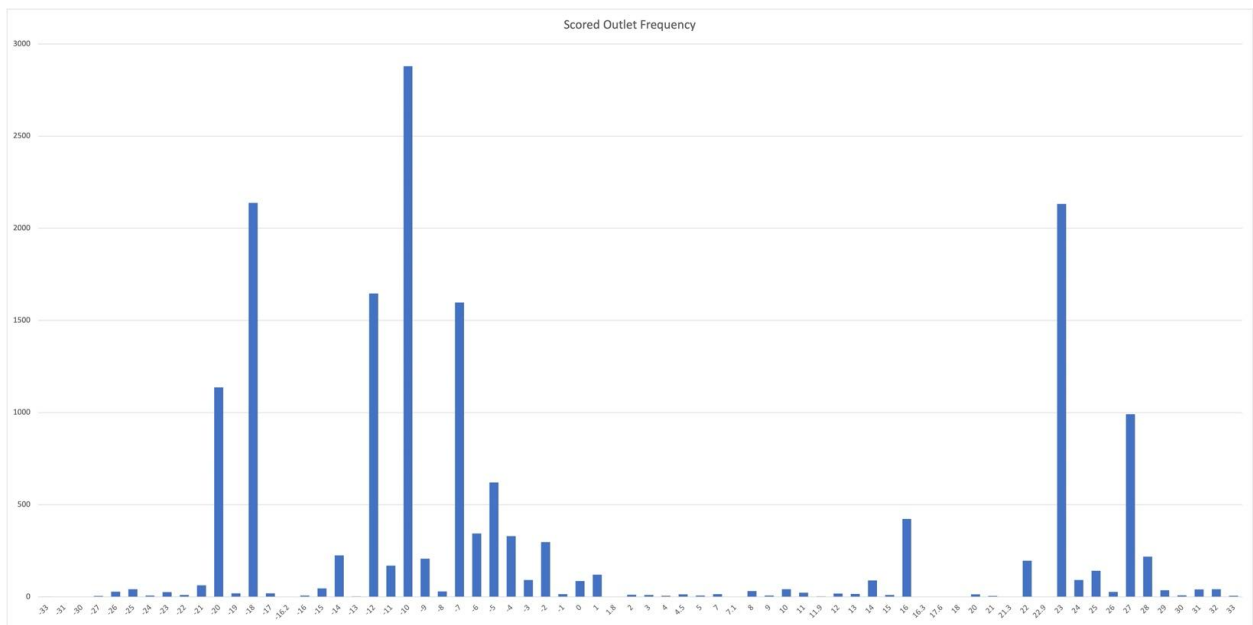
**Anti-establishment beliefs.** (range 1-5) Anti-establishment beliefs were measured using the following two items: “Even though we elect our leaders, a few people will always run things.” ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 1.073$ ) and “Official government explanations of events cannot be trusted.” ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.098$ ). The first item falls into the conspiracy

dimension of anti-establishment beliefs, while the second falls into the populism dimension of anti-establishment beliefs (Uscinski et al., 2021). Both items were asked on a 5-point Likert scale.

### Findings

Our first research question asked simply, what hyperpartisan news outlets are Americans consuming? To answer this, we chose cut points to determine which outlets fall under the hyperpartisan categorization. Rather than bring our a priori to these distinctions (or to suggest equal extremities), we sought natural cut points in the distribution of scored responses. Scored outlets showed a bimodal distribution (see Figure 1), with clear high frequencies at far-left, center-left, center-right, and far-right points.

**Figure 1.** Frequency distribution of all scored outlets



*Note:* The frequency distribution of all scored outlets shows a bimodal distribution with high frequencies at far-left, center-left, center-right, and far-right points.

Based on the distribution of the scored responses, we chose the following cut points: -25 or less for *far-left outlets* (modal outlet with a score of -25 is The Young Turks); -20 or less for *center-left outlets* (modal outlet with a score of -20 is MSNBC); 23 or greater for *center-right outlets* (modal outlet with a score of 23 is Fox News); and 27 or greater for *far-right outlets* (modal outlet with a score of 27 is Newsmax). We classified hyperpartisan news as -25 or less (on the left) and as 27 or higher (on the right).<sup>3</sup> These cut points are bounded, such that center-left outlets encompass those with a score from -20 to -24, and outlets categorized as far-left begin at -25 and extend to -33. For outlets on the right, center-right outlets begin at 23 and extend to 26, and far-right outlets begin at 27 and extend to 33. Though the selection of cut points is both arbitrary yet important (see Fletcher et al., 2021), several considerations guided our decision.

First, we sought guidance from our conceptual focus on hyperpartisan news, aiming to determine cut points that reflect outlets' position within the news media ecosystem and media economy, even though they do not abide by journalistic standards. Because MBFC scores are based in large part on the extent to which outlets adhere to journalistic norms, we see strong alignment between our conceptual focus on hyperpartisan media, the use of MBFC for scoring, and our decisions on cut points.

Second, we looked to the number of respondents listing each outlet, taking relative reported frequency of consumption as a signal of an outlet's distinction from others. For example, on the right, the outlets between center-right Fox (23) and the far-right (27) include Townhall (24), Zerohedge (24), and Daily Wire (25). In total though, these outlets were only listed 187 times—noticeably less than the number of respondents listing Newsmax (N=594) and OANN (N=257), both of which have a score of 27. Therefore, we chose this as a commonsense and conservative cut point. Finally, we are at pains to point out that what we label as far-right is a narrower range and farther to the endpoint of the scale (27 to 33) than is our labeling of the far-left (-25 to -33). Given that, our description of far-right hyperpartisan outlets is a conservative measure.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix for frequencies of scoreable outlets mentioned more than 15 times.



Using this distribution, we found a substantial difference in the *amount* of people who reported preferred news outlets on the right and the left. More respondents listed the most frequent news they consume with a center-right and far-right bias score than relatively scored outlets on the left. Based on the summaries, 2,052 people, or about 21% of all respondents, listed Fox News as one of their three preferred news sources, compared to only 932 people, or 9%, who listed MSNBC. On the extreme ends, 594 people, about 6% of respondents, listed Newsmax, compared to just 31 people, 0.3% of respondents, who listed The Young Turks. The difference in the frequency of these outlets confirms previous studies that show more people are consuming far-right news than far-left. Table 1 below lists the frequencies for outlets (mentioned at least 15 times) that we classified as far-left and far-right.

**Table 1. Frequency of hyperpartisan sources listed by respondents.**

Outlet or source	Frequency	Score
<i>Far-left</i>		
Daily Kos	21	-26
Young Turks	31	-25
<i>Far-right</i>		
Newsmax	594	27
One America News Network	257	27
The Blaze	66	27
Breitbart	129	28
Dan Bongino	28	28
Tucker Carlson	27	28
Sean Hannity	20	28
Infowars	18	31
Rumble	16	31
Gateway Pundit	30	32

Additionally, the most frequently listed sites on the right were had scores neared the extreme end of the scale than did outlets on the left, supporting our first hypothesis. Fox News, the most listed outlet of the center-right, is rated at 23, while MSNBC, the most listed outlet on the center-left is rated at -20. Newsmax, the most listed outlet on the far-right, is rated at 27, while The Young Turks is -25. Using this scoring tool, these differences show that people consuming hyperpartisan news on the right are consuming news that is more ideologically extreme than those consuming hyperpartisan news on the left.

Notably, scholars are not aligned on where to place Fox News ideologically. Some studies place Fox as an ideological counterpart to *CNN*, the most commonly named outlet in our study. Conversely, Fox News is considered even farther to the right in some work, with Benkler et al., (2018) suggesting the outlet's networked connection with farther-right Breitbart and other far-right outlets makes it more extreme than our scoring system reflects (see also Kaiser et al., 2020). PEW also reports significant crossover in Fox News viewers and those of Newsmax and OANN ([Mitchell, 2021](#)).

Fox News is indeed a complicated outlet worthy of further clarification. On one hand, the outlet's news anchors called Arizona for Biden in 2020, prompting many viewers to leave and seek farther-right news (Barr, 2020), but opinion programming on Fox News purposely shared disinformation related to the 2020 election (Peters & Robinson, 2023). Our study cautiously places the outlet within the center-right with the caveat that it is complicated due to the ideological range of their opinion and news programs. Importantly, MBFC scores two prominent Fox News hosts separately – Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity. These two opinion show hosts each have a score of 28, to the right of Fox News itself and within our far-right categorization. Respondents who mentioned Carlson (N=27) or Hannity (N=20) are counted as consumers of far-right hyperpartisan news.

Our second research question asked: Who are the Americans consuming far-right hyperpartisan news? To examine this, we calculated an index for far-right news consumption. If a respondent listed no far-right outlets, their score was 0; if they listed one, it was 1; if they listed two, it was 2; and if they listed all three top consumed news outlets as far-right, it was 3. Overall, 90.9% of respondents listed no far-right outlets as their top news sources, while 99.1% listed no far-left outlets. Another 6.4% of respondents listed at

least one far-right outlet, 2.3% listed two, and .3% listed all three top news sources as far-right outlets. In comparison, .9% listed one far-left outlet, and no respondents listed more than one far-left outlet. We examined the relationship between this measure of depth of far-right news consumption with a series of socio-demographic variables and political attitudes. Leveraging our large dataset, we were able to richly describe consumers of far-right hyperpartisan news (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Number of far-right news outlet listed by socio-demographics.**

Number of far-right news outlets		0	1	2	3
<i>Gender</i>	Male	89.1%*	7.9%*	2.6%	0.4%
	Female	92.7%*	5.1%*	2.1%	0.2%
$\chi^2(6)=51.56, p < .001, N=10,225$					
<i>Age</i>	18-34	96.2% <sub>a</sub>	2.8% <sub>a</sub>	0.9% <sub>a</sub>	0.1% <sub>a</sub>
	35-54	90.8% <sub>b</sub>	6.7% <sub>b</sub>	2.1% <sub>b</sub>	0.4% <sub>b</sub>
	55+	86.9% <sub>c</sub>	9.1% <sub>c</sub>	3.7% <sub>c</sub>	0.4% <sub>b</sub>
$\chi^2(6)=184.98, p < .001, N=10,227$					
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	Asian	98% <sub>b, c</sub>	2% <sub>b, c</sub>	0 <sub>a, b, c</sub>	0 <sub>a</sub>
	Black	98.1% <sub>b</sub>	1.2% <sub>b</sub>	0.7% <sub>c</sub>	0 <sub>a</sub>
	Hispanic	93.5% <sub>c</sub>	4.9% <sub>c</sub>	1.3% <sub>b, c</sub>	0.2% <sub>a</sub>
	White	88.9% <sub>a</sub>	7.8% <sub>a</sub>	2.9% <sub>a</sub>	0.4% <sub>a</sub>
$\chi^2(12)=149.91, p < .001, N=10,202$					
<i>Education</i>	College	94.6%*	4%*	1.3%*	0.1%*
	No college	87.9%*	8.4%*	3.2%*	0.5%*
$\chi^2(3)=92.76, p < .001, N=10,156$					
<i>Religion</i>	Protestant	92.3% <sub>a, b, c, d</sub>	6.2% <sub>a, b</sub>	1.4% <sub>a, b</sub>	0.1% <sub>a, b</sub>
	Catholic	89.5% <sub>c, d</sub>	6.8% <sub>b</sub>	2.9% <sub>b, c, d</sub>	0.8% <sub>a, b</sub>
	Mormon	86.1% <sub>b, d, e</sub>	8.1% <sub>a, b, c</sub>	4.6% <sub>b, c, d</sub>	1.2% <sub>b</sub>
	Evangelical	84.1% <sub>e</sub>	11% <sub>c</sub>	4.4% <sub>c, d</sub>	0.5% <sub>a, b</sub>
	Born Again	79.7% <sub>e</sub>	14.6% <sub>c</sub>	5.1% <sub>d</sub>	0.6% <sub>a, b</sub>

	Jewish	96.7% <sub>a, f, g</sub>	1.9% <sub>a, b, d, e</sub>	0.9% <sub>a, b, c, d</sub>	0.5% <sub>a, b</sub>
	Something else	91.6% <sub>a, b, c, d</sub>	6.3% <sub>a, b</sub>	1.9% <sub>a, b, c</sub>	0.1% <sub>a, b</sub>
	Atheist	98.3% <sub>g</sub>	1.3% <sub>e</sub>	0.4% <sub>a</sub>	0 <sub>a</sub>
	Agnostic	97.2% <sub>f, g</sub>	2.2% <sub>d, e</sub>	0.7% <sub>a</sub>	0 <sub>a</sub>
	Nothing	94.6% <sub>a, f</sub>	4% <sub>a, d</sub>	1.1% <sub>a</sub>	0 <sub>a</sub>
$\chi^2(27)=392.34, p < .001, N=8981$					
<i>Partisanship</i>	Democrat	99.8% <sub>b</sub>	0.2% <sub>b</sub>	0 <sub>b</sub>	0 <sub>b</sub>
	Republican	76.5% <sub>a</sub>	16.8% <sub>a</sub>	5.9% <sub>a</sub>	0.7% <sub>a</sub>
	Independent	95.3% <sub>c</sub>	2.7% <sub>c</sub>	1.9% <sub>c</sub>	0.1% <sub>a, b</sub>
$\chi^2(6)=1408.03, p < .001, N=9,723$					
<i>Geography</i>	Rural	83.9% <sub>a</sub>	11% <sub>a</sub>	4.5% <sub>a</sub>	0.5% <sub>a</sub>
	Small town	89% <sub>b</sub>	8.6% <sub>a</sub>	2.2% <sub>b, c</sub>	0.2% <sub>a</sub>
	Suburb	92% <sub>d</sub>	5.4% <sub>c</sub>	2.3% <sub>b</sub>	0.3% <sub>a</sub>
	Large city	95.7% <sub>c</sub>	2.8% <sub>b</sub>	1.3% <sub>c</sub>	0.3% <sub>a</sub>
$\chi^2(9)=179.99, p < .001, N=10,158$					

*Note:* All largest proportions that differed significantly from the other row proportions within each category at the .05 level are noted with a \* or subscript letters.

As far as socio-demographic variables go, U.S. Americans who consume far-right partisan news are a rather homogenous group. Those who reported consuming at least one far-right outlet as one of their top news sources were significantly more likely to be male, 55 or older, white, without a college degree, more likely to be Christian – especially evangelical, born-again, or Mormon – to be Republican, and to live in a rural area or small town. Consumers who report two-thirds of their top three news sources to be far-right outlets were significantly more likely to be 55 or older, white, without a college degree, Christian (again, especially evangelical, born-again, or Mormon), to be Republican, or to live in a rural area. Less than 1% of the sample (N=32) reported all three of their top news sources as far-right partisan outlets, but those who did were marginally, but significantly, more likely to be 35 or older, without a college degree, and to be Republican.

Next, we assessed the relationship between far-right news consumption and political attitudes. We found that those who consume far-right news are more likely to be ideologically conservative. Of those who reported at least one far-right news outlet as a top news source, 60% identified as conservative, 6% as moderate, and .9% as liberal. We further find far-right news consumption to be positively and significantly correlated with conservative ideology ( $r = .350, p < .001$ ). We find that far-right news consumption is positively and significantly correlated with anti-establishment beliefs, but much more so with the populist dimension ( $r = .293, p < .001$ ) than the conspiracy dimension ( $r = .083, p < .001$ ).

Our second hypothesis suggested that people who consume content on the far-right and far-left will be more frequent news consumers overall than those with a more moderate consumption score. We find that far-right news consumption is correlated with frequency of news consumption ( $r = .059, p < .001$ ). Though the strength of the correlation is small, it provides some support for this hypothesis.

## Discussion

In summary, our study captures one of the most comprehensive pictures to date of U.S. Americans' media usage through self-reporting. We build on previous research to understand demand for far-right media through the eyes of its consumers and then paint a portrait of these consumers.

First, most Americans who consume partisan content prefer outlets with a right-leaning bias, from center-right to far-right. Second, preferred outlets on the right are scored as more extreme than the most preferred on the left. Put simply, more Americans are consuming center- and far-right content than content with a center- or far-left bias, and the content on the right is far more extreme, when considering relative bias ratings.

Second, our descriptive analysis found that Americans who consume the most extreme content on the right are a fairly homogenous group: white, Republican, conservative, Christian (especially born-again, evangelical, or Mormon) males who are 55 or older, who do not have a college degree, and live in rural areas or small towns. They

also consume more news content in general than others and are more likely to hold anti-establishment beliefs.

### *Outlets*

We confirm research that most people cite moderate, mainstream news outlets, such as *The New York Times*, ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN, as their preferred source of news. This supports Guess's (2021) work, as do findings that those who consume far-right hyperpartisan news have stronger partisan views than those who consume center-left, center-right, or "moderate" news. Then, those who consume far-*right* news far outnumber those who consume far-*left* news, making up a small but not insignificant proportion of 9% of respondents in this nationally representative survey.

Although this study focuses on this important share of respondents consuming far-right news, the connection between these outlets with more center-right outlets, notably Fox News, which a whopping 21% of Americans in this study consider a preferred source for news, cannot be understated when considering the connections between Fox and far-right news. Far-right news outlets such as Breitbart influence Fox News's coverage, and so-called "fake news" websites have been found to have a symbiotic relationship with partisan media (Benkler et al., 2018; Kaiser et al., 2020; Vargo et al., 2018). Relatedly, our use of a pre-existing scale to measure bias is not without limitations. Though we contend that a content-based scoring system, especially one that focuses on levels of adherence to journalistic norms, operationalizes well our study's focus on hyperpartisan news, the challenges of determining bias – or the ideological slant of an outlet's audience – are many. Neither of these widely used methods contend with the distinct content one consumes on any given outlet. Any scoring method suffers from interpretability, as they measure relative bias or slant, not a firm scale that allows for one-to-one comparisons.

### *Self-reported and open-ended data*

Our data underscores the extent to which people self-report turning to hyperpartisan news outlets that encompass a much broader and varied swath of far-right sources of information and provides a compelling argument for more self-reporting and open-ended questions in this area. Our study used an open-ended model to ask respondents to name their top three news sources, a method which have been found to be more accurate than close-ended questions (Guess, 2015), although partisan media may be likely to be named (Cardenal et al., 2022). The limitations of close-ended questions are but one of many issues plaguing meaningful measurement of media consumption. Polling organizations such as Pew Research Center, for example, now include hyperpartisan news outlets such as Newsmax and One America News in their surveys of partisan news consumption (e.g., Mitchell, 2021). These two outlets certainly appear in our dataset, yet they do so alongside Bannon’s War Room, Alex Jones’ Infowars, and individuals like Tim Pool, far-right content producers that rarely feature in closed-ended question types.

Another question our study raises is how to make sense of self-reported data on news media use in conjunction with behavioral data, as survey respondents tend to over-report news consumption (Konitzer et al., 2021; Prior, 2009) while behavioral data show more limited consumption of partisan news than survey data in some studies, although not in all cases. While Fox News was over-reported in surveys compared to behavioral data, MSNBC was underreported (Konitzer et al., 2021). A web-tracking study during the 2016 campaign found that Republicans turned to partisan news websites more often than Democrats, with a third of all Republican website visits confined to Fox News, Drudge Report, and RealClearPolitics (Peterson et al., 2021). In his study of news consumers in 2015 using web-tracking data, Guess found that 8% of Republicans consumed conservative news, operationalized as outlets at and to the ideological right of Fox News. Notably, our study was conducted six years later, a gap that includes a spread of conspiracy beliefs ranging from public health to politics and the election of a far-right president who wielded his presidential pulpit to endorse far-right outlets (Archer et al., 2022).

Given lower levels of response to open-ended questions, ours is likely an undercount of those who might self-report consuming far-right media. For example, when given a list of possible news sources in a recent survey, 43% of Americans reported turning to Fox News (and 10% to Newsmax) for political news in the past week (Mitchell, 2021), higher numbers than our study found. Furthermore, behavioral data, while useful, encompass only certain mediums (often excluding mobile usage) and is typically gleaned from a smaller sample size than the survey used in this study. As a relatively newer method compared to surveys, metered data comes with their own limitations (Bosch & Revilla, 2022).

We also proffer another mechanism for differences in consumption found in our study: Self-reported media use may be a stronger indicator of expressive partisan identity than it is of actual consumption. This echoes findings from Konizter et al., (2021) that surveys measure attitudes better than they do news consumption rates and Cardenal et al., (2022) that respondents might be more likely to list a partisan outlet when questions are open-ended. Responding to signals from political leaders on the right, many conservatives today know that adhering to far-right media is an important aspect of what it means to be a Republican. Future work should directly test this political identity performance hypothesis, tying detailed self-report data to tracking and traffic data.

### *Consumers*

Like we do, Guess (2021) and others find that those consuming conservative news consume a lot of it. This minority of adherents to far-right media play an outsized role in driving web traffic but more importantly in politics writ large. Guess (ibid) finds that those with the most conservative media diets had markedly higher turnout rates for both the general election and the primaries in 2016. Put bluntly, an extremist minority both supports the far-right media ecosystem and likely plays a significant role in driving the Republican party to the right due to their increased political participation. These far-right opinion leaders, fed a steady diet of anti-democratic content, disproportionately and systemically distort elite influence.



In finding that consumption of far-right hyperpartisan news is correlated with anti-establishment beliefs, we look toward the unique “anti-system” bent of hyperpartisan media (Peacock et al., 2021, p. 214). This sentiment is also apparent in the people who took the time to write in anti-media sentiment, as our title illustrates.

### **Conclusion**

Our study reinforces that patterns in hyperpartisan media usage demonstrate growing extremism, *not* polarization. The far-left news outlets that Americans consume are less ideologically extreme than those on the far-right by a significant margin. Furthermore, we find vast differences in the size of audiences for far-left and far-right hyperpartisan media. Given that many more Americans report consuming far-right news, this suggests asymmetric extremism, not polarization.

Extremism is intricately tied to anti-establishment sentiments and political identity, both of which we found correlate with far-right media usage (see also Berger, 2018). This extremism is dangerous to democracy, and it is not simply a matter of polarized partisan differences—left or right. We contribute to literature on the *range* of extreme (or hyper) partisan news consumption and show that a small but politically important group turn to these extreme outlets. These extreme viewpoints, littered with hatred and disinformation, permeate public discourse and the words of elected officials. A significant number of Republicans—both in the populace and in elected office—deny election outcomes (Jurkowitz, 2021), reflecting an extreme anti-democratic stance. Taken together, this signals that we need to pay more constant attention to this minority group of extreme partisan news consumers.

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**Appendix A.** Frequencies of some scored news outlets**Table 3. Frequencies of scored news outlets mentioned more than 15 times.**

Outlet or source	Frequency	Score
Daily Kos	21	-26
Young Turks	31	-25
Rachel Maddow	18	-23
New Yorker	25	-21
The Daily Beast	15	-21
MSNBC	932	-20
Huffington Post	91	-20
Democracy Now	37	-20
Vox	33	-20
Slate	24	-20
CNN	2131	-18
Buzzfeed	20	-15
Time Magazine	19	-15
Apple News	223	-14
NBC	738	-12
Washington Post	676	-12
The Guardian	109	-12
AOL	35	-12
Vice News	18	-12
San Francisco Chronicle	15	-12
LA Times	78	-11
Seattle Times	34	-11
New York Times	1138	-10
ABC	725	-10
CBS	673	-10
CNBC	95	-10



The Atlantic	87	-10
ESPN	35	-10
Minneapolis Star-Tribune	19	-10
David Muir	17	-10
Detroit Free Press	15	-10
News Break	45	-9
Boston Globe	41	-9
Al Jazeera	36	-9
Newsweek	19	-9
NPR	1067	-7
MSN	239	-7
USA Today	88	-7
Politico	81	-7
Axios	35	-7
The Skimm	24	-7
PBS	238	-6
Bloomberg	46	-6
<a href="https://www.newsy.com">newsy.com</a>	18	-6
BBC	569	-5
Good Morning America*	23	-5
Today show*	18	-5
AP	307	-4
SmartNews	46	-3
Sky News	18	-3
Reuters	211	-2
1440 Daily Digest	18	-2
CSPAN	32	0
The Hill	53	1
Economist	42	1
Breaking Points*	17	1

Chicago Tribune	25	8
HLN	27	10
Fox Business	75	14
Wall Street Journal	263	16
Drudge Report	78	16
New York Post	47	16
The Epoch Times	148	22
Tim Pool*	28	22
Fox News	2052	23
Daily Mail	30	23
Daily Caller	19	23
Townhall	27	24
Zerohedge	20	24
Daily Wire	140	25
Newsmax	594	27
One America News Network	257	27
The Blaze	66	27
Breitbart	129	28
Dan Bongino	28	28
Tucker Carlson	27	28
Sean Hannity	20	28
Infowars	18	31
Rumble	16	31
Gateway Pundit	30	32

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*Note:* Asterix denotes scores from data provided by Ad Fontes Media. The other scores are from Media Bias Fact Check.

## **Appendix B. Categories built from unscored responses**

During our data-cleaning process, we found that 8,581 responses were not outlets that had been scored by either MBFC or Ad Fontes Media. Because of the size of this unscored group, we applied a categorical labeling protocol to capture the nature of these answers. This protocol started with three of the authors repeatedly going through these unscored responses in an iterative process that included discussing the types of news outlets they observed, researching unfamiliar ones, and eventually reaching a consensus for the inductive categorical schema detailed below. Some answers were not news outlets at all, such as “my husband,” Facebook, or the name of an individual influencer. We then categorized all 8,581 by assigning them 15 labels.

Categories were: local (33.1%), in which respondents named a local newspaper, television, or radio station that had not been rated; social media (13.3%), social media like Facebook or Twitter; news (12.59%), for responses that listed unspecified news such as “newspapers”; aggregators (12.65%), such as Yahoo News or Apple News; individuals (5.54%), individuals or news personalities listed by name, such as Phillip De Franco; digital media (4.34%), general digital media such as “my phone”; family/friends (1.13%), for when people listed personal contacts; conservative news (.8%), for unrated right-leaning sites; anti-media sentiment (.75%), which was characterized by a negative comment directed at the media, such as in our title “cnn can kiss my ass,” or “news tell lies”; religious news (.57%), mostly encompassing conservative Christian news websites with a handful of progressive Jewish and Catholic sites; weather (.37%), such as “the weather channel”; satire/comedy (.31%), such as The Onion; government website (.21%); liberal news (.2%), for unrated left-leaning sites; sports (.19%), such as MLB.com; other (1.1%), for the remaining responses that defied categorization; and finally, none/no news (14.62%), for answers that either listed a website that was not a news outlet, such as Amazon, or a statement such as “I do not follow news.”