

CHANGING POLITICS THROUGH LIKES AND TWEETS:  
HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT  
POLITICAL POLARIZATION?

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study answers the following question: How does social media affect political polarization. It was posited that social media may be the mechanism by which the general public has transformed from Fiorina's non-polarized public to Abramowitz's polarized public because social media lowers the bar for political engagement and the law of group polarization allows for social media users' views to become more extreme. Based on Arceneaux and Johnson's study on political polarization and television, my study was conducted to test the hypotheses that viewing congruent content on social media leads one's views to become more extreme than viewing non-political social media content and viewing incongruent content on social media leads one's views to stay the same as or become more extreme than viewing non-political social media content. In reality, viewing congruent social media content did not cause views to become more extreme, and viewing incongruent social media content caused views to become less extreme. This led to the theoretically important finding that the law of group polarization may not apply to social media, but three other concepts do apply: (1) pressure to conform, (2) motivated reasoning, and (3) perception of threat. Practically, campaigns most likely will not be able to make individuals become more extreme in their views, but, if they are able to show really concentrated content, may be able to make individuals become less extreme in their views. Overall, even though it is in the opposite way of my theory, this study does demonstrate that social media is changing politics through likes and tweets.

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*The 112th Congress was ... the most polarized body since the end of Reconstruction, according to one study, and I grew embarrassed by its partisan bickering, inactivity, and refusal to address the vital challenges facing America.*

–Olympia Snowe, United States Senator, Maine, 1995-2012

With these words, Senator Snowe accurately characterized the large amount of polarization currently found among the United States's politically elite and active citizens. While political scientists agree that those actively involved in politics are polarized, there has been an ongoing debate on whether the general public is polarized. Fiorina calls the polarization of America and consequent culture war a myth (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005), whereas Abramowitz believes that a great ideological and cultural divide has polarized the general public (Abramowitz, 2013). Although both Fiorina and Abramowitz have tried to win this debate by supporting their arguments with many pieces of evidence, including the media's role in polarization, one specific aspect that they have not looked at is the role of social media.

Just like the television, radio, and Internet blogs that have preceded social media, it is possible that social media also has certain media effects, especially in regard to polarization. Furthermore, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, social media has been growing exponentially, making its media effects more widespread across the general public. Most notably, the year 2006 saw the beginnings of the two current social media giants, with Facebook expanding its membership to "anyone over age 13" and Twitter being launched (Curtis, 2013). Currently, approximately 39% of United States citizens are exposed to political content through social media (Rutledge, 2013; Raine, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012). Hence, this paper addresses the question: How does social media affect political polarization? Not only does this investigation help to explain

the media effects caused by social media, specifically as it pertains to political polarization, but this new data also helps to resolve the ongoing debate between Fiorina and Abramowitz. Furthermore, there is practical relevance in knowing the effects of social media on political polarization for how candidates and their campaigns appeal to the general public and especially how they interact with potential voters on social media.

### POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has affected many aspects of society, including political polarization, which concerns the division in politics between two groups, namely those who lean to the left and usually identify as liberal and Democratic and those who lean to the right and usually identify as conservative and Republican, whose members hold different, and most often conflicting, beliefs about political, social, and economic issues. Political polarization is driven by the two sides becoming more extreme in their views. Scholars agree that polarization has been occurring in the United States. As Cost observes, “the core debate is not over if, but how much” polarization is occurring. Though scholars agree that the politically elite, including those who hold political offices and party activists, are polarized, there has been an ongoing debate concerning the level of polarization in the general public. From this debate, two competing sides have clearly emerged. One side is led by Fiorina and believes that elite polarization, but not mass polarization, has been occurring in American society. The other side, led by Abramowitz, contends that both elite and mass polarization exist in American society (Cost, 2009).

#### **Fiorina – Against Mass Polarization**

Fiorina and other scholars who believe in elite, but not mass, polarization believe that the electorate of the present looks strikingly similar to the electorate of the previous

generation. In fact, since the 1970s, the distribution of ideology in the United States has remained consistent, with 'moderate' remaining the modal category for almost all of this time period. Furthermore, attitudes on most issues, just like in the past, cluster in the center rather than towards the extremes. Hence, the electorate has not changed in the aggregate, and a normal distribution remains an accurate characterization of the general public's political views. Instead of becoming polarized, the general public has actually become better sorted. In the past, ideology and partisanship were not synonymous with each other. Not only were there liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans, but there were also conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans. Over the past generation, individuals whose ideology conflicted with the issue positions taken by their party either changed their ideology or party affiliation so that they would be consistent or died out of the electorate and were replaced by voters whose ideology and party affiliation were consistent. Now, the general public is better sorted so that Democrats are more homogeneously liberal and Republicans are more homogeneously conservative. Hence, the consistency, not the extremeness, of the American public's political views has increased.

Thus, according to Fiorina, overall, the American public is not polarized. However, Fiorina argues that some scholars and individuals believe in mass polarization because they misinterpret political occurrences and data and confuse sorting with polarization. Because sorting has created a public in which most Democrats are liberals and most Republicans are conservatives, the ideology and viewpoints of the average Democrat and the average Republican have moved farther apart. However, this is a result of the increased consistency between ideology and party affiliation and not increased

extremeness of viewpoints. In fact, the political views of the American electorate still approximate a normal curve with most individuals in the center, instead of a U-shaped curve that would be expected if individuals' views had become more extreme and moved towards the poles. The only difference between today and a generation ago is that today, almost all Democrats fall to the left of center and all Republicans fall to the right of center, unlike a generation ago when Democrats and Republicans were found on both sides of the ideology distribution. Additionally, the political candidates and issue positions from which the electorate can choose have become increasingly polarized and more extreme. Because of sorting, almost all conservatives are closer to extreme Republican candidates and issue positions, and almost all liberals are closer to extreme Democratic candidates and issue positions. However, it is important to note that the public itself is not polarized. Instead, the political candidates, who are members of the political elite, and the issue positions, which are formed by the political elite, are polarized, and because a sorted public must choose between these two extremes, the public's viewpoints have appeared to become more extreme even though they have remained consistent over time (Fiorina, 2014; Fiorina & Abrams, 2014; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005).

#### **Abramowitz – For Mass Polarization**

Abramowitz and other scholars believe that the general public, especially those who are politically engaged in activities such as voting, donating, and attending rallies, has become increasingly polarized because of the major transformation of the American population since the 1960s in which there has emerged a deepening divide between different racial groups, as well as between the religious observant and the religious non-

observant. Inequality between racial groups still exists in the United States, and the worse conditions, including higher unemployment, poorer education and job opportunities, lower incomes, and discrimination, experienced by non-Whites leads them to affiliate with the Democratic Party, whose policies are more favorable to them than the Republican Party's policies. Additionally, the issue of race also divides Whites, as those who support racial liberalism tend to identify with the Democratic Party and those who do not support racial liberalism tend to identify with the Republican Party. Furthermore, the population is further divided into subgroups by social and cultural issues, including the issue of abortion leading to a deep divide among Caucasians between those who are pro-choice and those who are pro-life. These deep divisions in the general public lead individuals to shift their views more towards the extreme, thus diminishing the percentage of the electorate in the middle of the distribution. In essence, the center of the American public is vanishing as individuals on both sides of deep divisions in society become more extreme in their views and find it more difficult to understand each other.

Although the increased sorting of individuals with particular demographic characteristics into the same party could account for the increased distance between the average Democrat and the average Republican, this increased Democratic-Republican gap is not the only change to the distribution of the electorate. In addition, the standard deviation of the distribution has also increased as the Democratic-Republican gap has increased, providing evidence that individuals truly are moving away from the center and more towards the poles. In fact, those among the general public who are the most politically engaged actually create a U-shaped distribution in which most individuals can be found at the extremes and the least number of individuals can be found at the center.

Furthermore, this polarization is not the result of a centrist public being forced to choose between two extreme candidates or issue positions. If this were the case, individuals would react similarly towards candidates and positions found on the extreme left of the distribution and candidates and positions found on the extreme right of the distribution, as these would be approximately equidistant away from the center of the distribution, which is where a majority of a centrist public would be located. However, this is not true, as individuals tend to rate one candidate or issue position significantly better than the other candidate or issue position. Hence, it appears that the general public has become more extreme in their political positions, and this is supported by the fact that the ideology and viewpoints of Democratic and Republican voters have increasingly moved closer to the ideology and viewpoints of their respective parties since the 1970s (Abramowitz, 2013a; 2013b; 2014; Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008).

### **The Effect of Social Media on Political Polarization**

These two competing sides, led by Fiorina and Abramowitz, first and foremost disagree on the issue of mass polarization. However, driving this disagreement about mass polarization is their disagreement over whether sorting exists independent of polarization (Figures 1A and 1B) and if the politically elite truly represent the views of the mass public or just force them to choose between two extreme candidates and positions that do not represent them (Figures 2A and 2B).

Figure 1A: Sorting Independent of Polarization - Fiorina

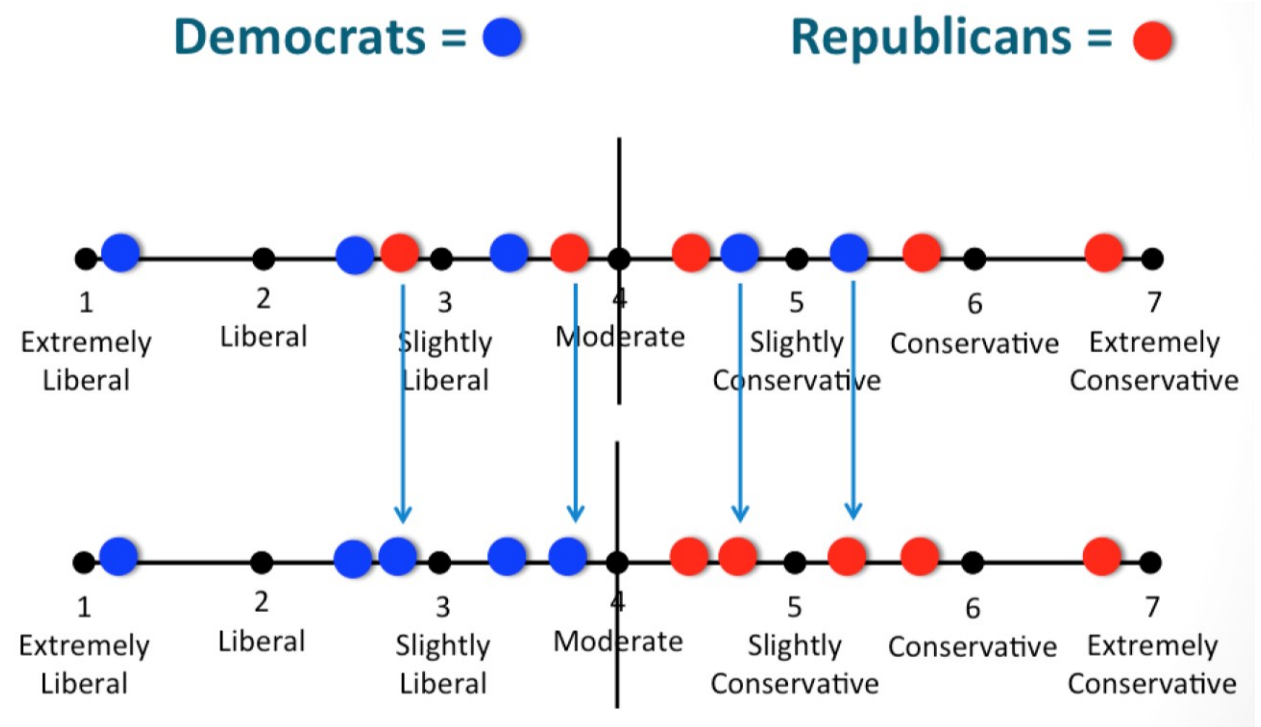
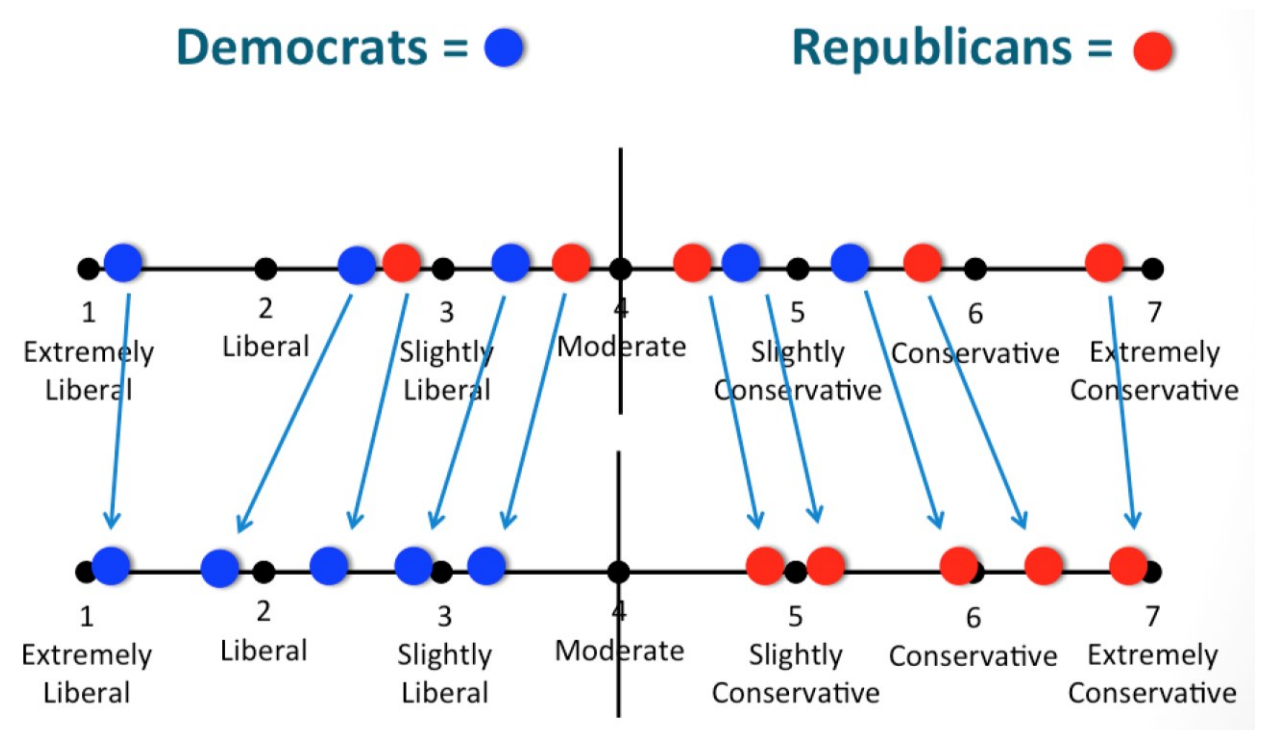
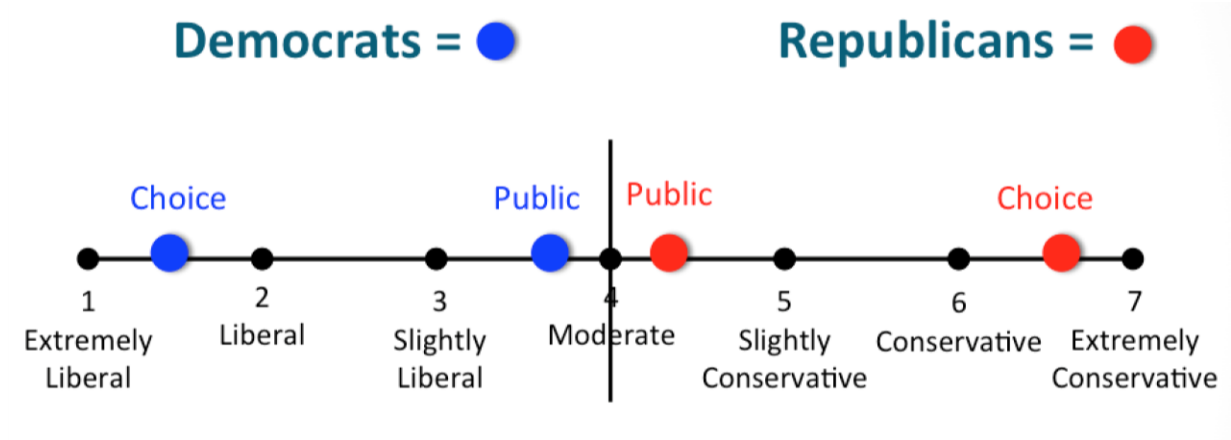


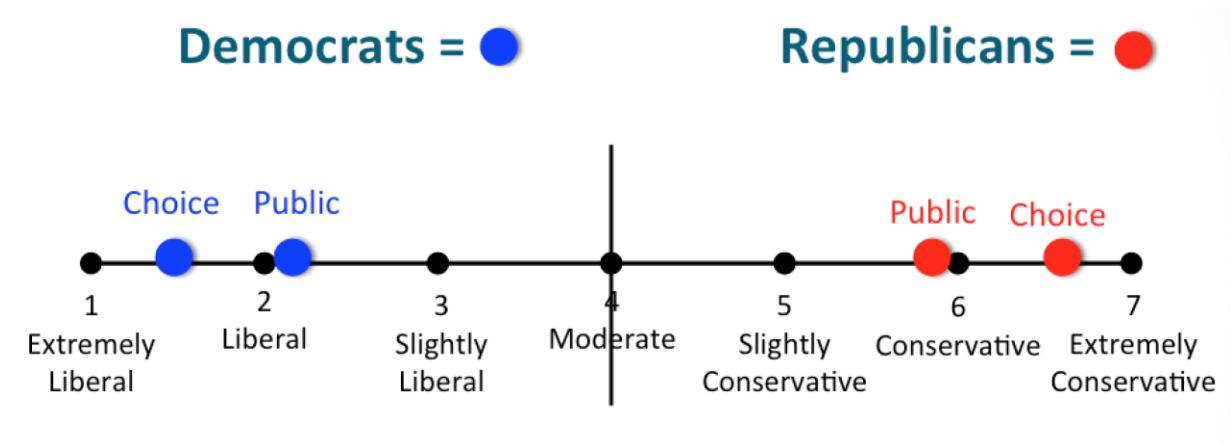
Figure 1B: Sorting with Polarization - Abramowitz



**Figure 2A:** Polarized Choices (not representative) – Fiorina



**Figure 2B:** Polarized Choices (representative) - Abramowitz



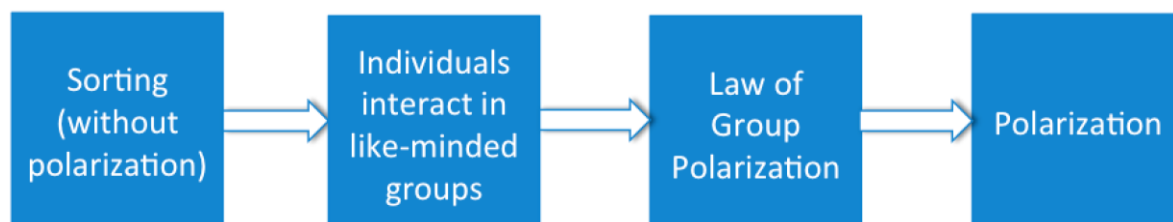
Although both sides of the debate are well researched and supported by evidence, they cannot both be fully correct. Furthermore, the rise of social media in the last decade has greatly impacted society, including political polarization. Hence, a third explanation of political polarization in American society which takes into account social media's profound influence and attempts to referee between Fiorina's and Abramowitz's positions on mass polarization is necessary to fully understand political polarization in the twenty-first century.

First, while Fiorina believes sorting has happened without polarization, Abramowitz uses evidence of an increasing standard deviation of the distribution of the public's views to support his claim that sorting has led to polarization. While Fiorina is probably correct that sorting in itself does not cause individuals' views to become more extreme, Abramowitz is most likely correct that sorting will eventually lead to polarization because these individuals will probably interact with each other within their sorted groups. As Sunstein notes, according to the law of group polarization, when individuals interact in groups with others who share the same viewpoints, each individual's viewpoints will become more extreme (Sunstein, 1999). Because sorting by definition puts individuals who share the same viewpoints into homogenous groups, individuals' viewpoints will become more extreme if they interact within these groups. Although individuals had opportunities in the past, including political rallies and caucuses, to interact with others who shared the same viewpoints, social media has increased individuals' ability to interact in homogeneous groups by allowing them to communicate with each other more easily. Now, individuals no longer need to meet in person but instead can interact in a virtual world where individuals, even if they live far apart from each other, can interact any time of day.

Additionally, there is evidence that political information that is communicated through social media is mostly viewed by those belonging to the same sorted group and thus agree with the information. Conover et al, through studying "more than 250,000 tweets from the six weeks leading up to the 2010 U.S. congressional midterm elections," found that the network of retweets about political information is highly divided into those who politically lean left and those who politically lean right, with little connectivity

between the two groups (Conover et al., 2011). Furthermore, according to Prior, the way in which social media suggests friends and content to users according to their previous activity may further lead individuals to interact only with others with whom they share similar views (Prior, 2013). Hence, as shown in Figure 3, although sorting by itself does not lead to polarization, as Fiorina suggests, the interactions that occur in social media with like-minded individuals allow sorting to lead to polarization, which corroborates Abramowitz's argument that sorting leads to polarization.

**Figure 3:** Sorting Leads to Polarization

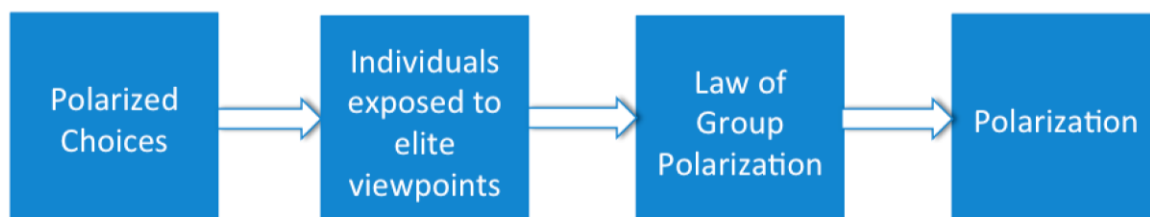


Second, Fiorina is probably correct that the elite are more polarized than the general public and present them with options that are more extreme than their views. However, because of social media, the elite are less isolated from the general public than they were in the past. Fiorina et al. found that in 2004 about 17-18 million people viewed *Fahrenheit 9/11*, 15-16 million people listened to Rush Limbaugh within the last week, and 3.3 million people watched Fox News (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005). Although these numbers are relatively high, they pale in comparison to the number of individuals who are exposed to political content through social media. With the expansion of social media, 198 million United States citizens now use Facebook and 49 million United States citizens now use Twitter, which indicates that 62.63% of Americans use Facebook and 15.50% of Americans use Twitter (Yarrow, 2014). More importantly, with the creation of

numerous political pages and profiles on Facebook and Twitter, including those of political parties, political figures, interest groups, news media, and United States citizens who are interested in politics, it is estimated that just over 60% of social media users in the United States are exposed to a variety of political news and stories through social media, which translates to approximately 123 million United States citizens being exposed to political content through social media (Rutledge, 2013; Raine, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012). Furthermore, the political content to which citizens are exposed often originates from social media accounts affiliated with the most elite politicians. For example, as of 2014, Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, and Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee for president in 2012, had the first and third most-liked Facebook pages in the world, with Obama's page having 43,381,798 likes, and Romney's page having 11,344,443 likes ("Facebook Society Statistics," 2014). Hence, a significantly higher percentage of the general public is being exposed to elite viewpoints than in the past. Even if most Americans just 'like' these pages and do not read them, their politically engaged 'friends' and 'followers' might 'share' or 'retweet' these elite viewpoints. Because Americans often interact on social media with those who share the same viewpoints, those with weaker views will probably become exposed to the more extreme elite viewpoints with which they will be more likely to agree. Overtime, being exposed repeatedly to these similar viewpoints will, as the law of group polarization suggests, make those in the general public come to have more extreme viewpoints. Thus, as shown in Figure 4, over time, although the views of the general public started as less extreme than those of the political elites, as Fiorina suggests,

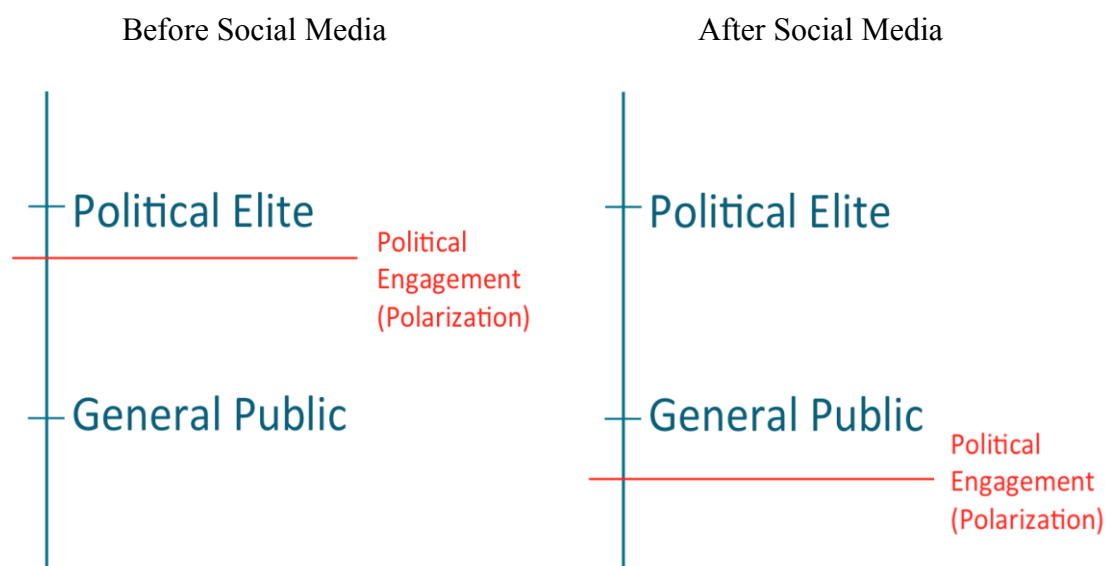
because of social media, they may become more extreme so that they are accurately represented by the political elites, just as Abramowitz suggests.

**Figure 4: Polarized Choices Lead to Polarization**



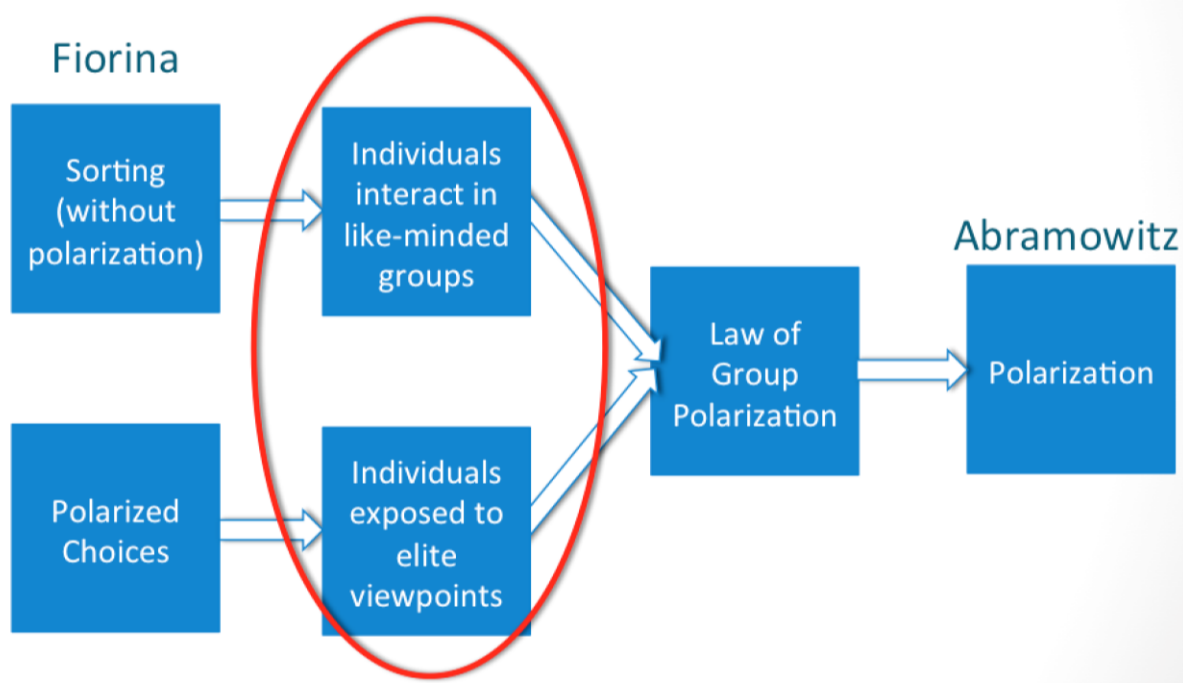
Although Fiorina is probably correct that sorting by itself will not lead to polarization and the elite represent viewpoints that are more extreme than the general public, the general public most likely resembles Abramowitz's findings that the public, especially those most engaged in politics, have become increasingly polarized because social media has changed the way Americans interact with political content. Social media seems to have lowered the threshold for what it means to be politically engaged, which can be seen in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Social Media Lowering the Threshold**



By strengthening the already existing divisions of a sorted public through connecting individuals with like-minded ‘friends’ and ‘followers’ and allowing them to ‘share’ and ‘retweet’ political content, especially those posted by accounts associated with political elites, social media has allowed more Americans to be exposed to political content today than in the past. This important step is circled in Figure 6.

**Figure 6:** Social Media’s Role in Polarization



Although being exposed to political content through social media seems to be a very low bar for being politically engaged, this form of political engagement has major implications for the American public. The law of group polarization implies that these individuals who are exposed to political content congruent with their views should become increasingly extreme in their viewpoints. As Americans’ views become increasingly extreme, then, by definition, the general public will become polarized.

From this foundation, two main premises emerge: First, at the macro-level:

Premise 1: The more the American public uses social media, the more polarized the American public will be.

Second, at the micro-level:

Premise 2: The more an American uses social media, the more extreme his or her political views will be.

### **Premise 1**

If social media has truly lowered the bar for political engagement and allowed the general public to become increasingly polarized just like the politically elite have become, then it follows that the more the American public uses social media, the more polarized the American public will be.

**Figure 7:** Social Media Use from 2006 to 2013

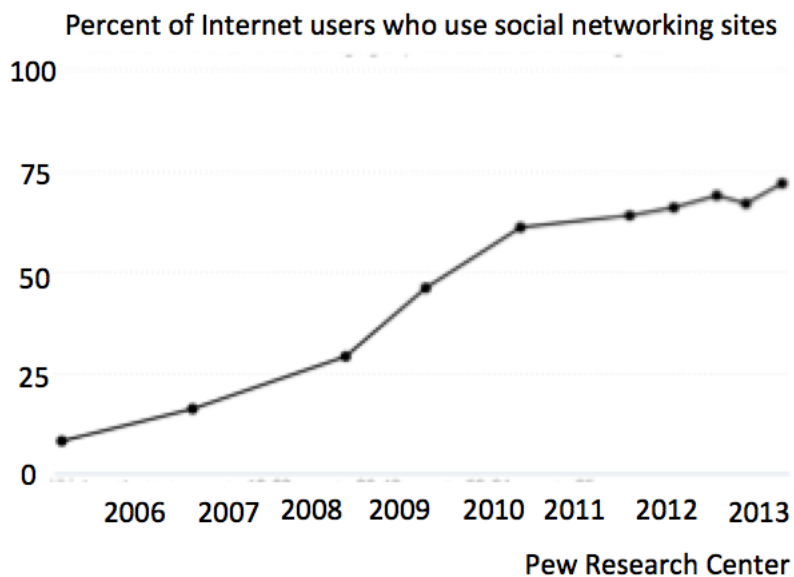


Figure 7 displays data collected from the Pew Research Center, “a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world” and conducts empirical social science research (“About the Pew Research Center,” 2014). The graph provides an over-time look at the percentage of “online adults [who] use a social networking site of some kind,” including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest (“Social Media Use Over Time,” 2014). Of course, this measure of social media use as it pertains to political polarization is somewhat flawed because some of these social media sites, such as Instagram and Pinterest, are not conducive to viewing political content or having online discussions about politics. However, many individuals who use these sites use their Facebook account to login, and thus most of the individuals who are included as ‘using a social networking site’ most likely have a Facebook, which, along with Twitter, are the social media sites that are the most conducive to viewing and discussing political content. It is evident that social media use in the United States has substantially increased since 2006 when social media sites like Facebook and Twitter first started becoming used by the general public, with 16% of adults using social media in 2006, 29% of adults using social media in 2008, 61% of adults using social media in 2010, and 69% of adults using social media in 2012.

Just as it is expected based on Premise 1, as social media use in the United States has increased from 2006 to 2012, the American public has become more polarized. This increased polarization of the American public is based on the results of the General Social Survey, which includes the following question: “We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I’m going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal – point 1 – to

extremely conservative – point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale” (“General Social Survey,” 2014)? More specifically, the scale was coded as: 1 = extremely liberal, 2 = liberal, 3 = slightly liberal, 4 = moderate, 5 = slightly conservative, 6 = conservative, and 7 = extremely conservative. Thus, a score of 4 is the middle of the distribution, with scores from 4 to 1 becoming increasingly liberal and scores from 4 to 7 becoming increasingly conservative. Although this ideology scale is ordinal data, most scholars agree that “[it is] generally [acceptable] to take means ... [of] ordinal data” (Sauro, 2014). Thus, by taking the mean ideology score of the whole scale, the mean ideology score of those who identify themselves as liberals, and the mean ideology score of those who identify themselves as conservatives, it is evident that liberals and conservatives have generally been moving further away from the middle of the ideology distribution, thus increasing the gap between themselves. Figure 8 shows the percent of social media use for 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012, and Figure 9 shows the corresponding ideology distribution for 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012.

Figure 8: Social Media Use in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012

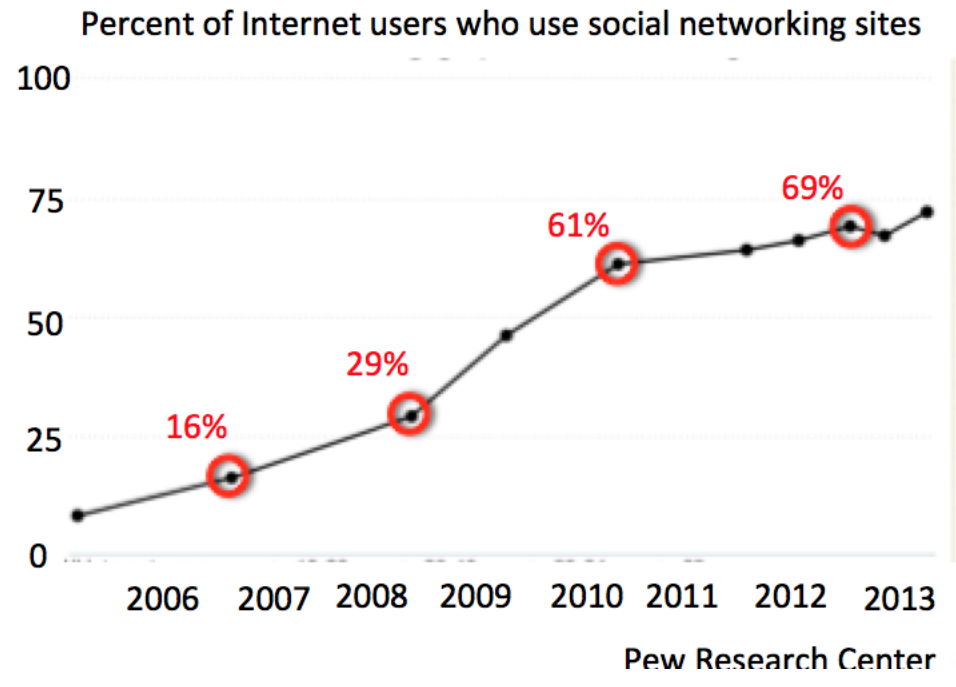
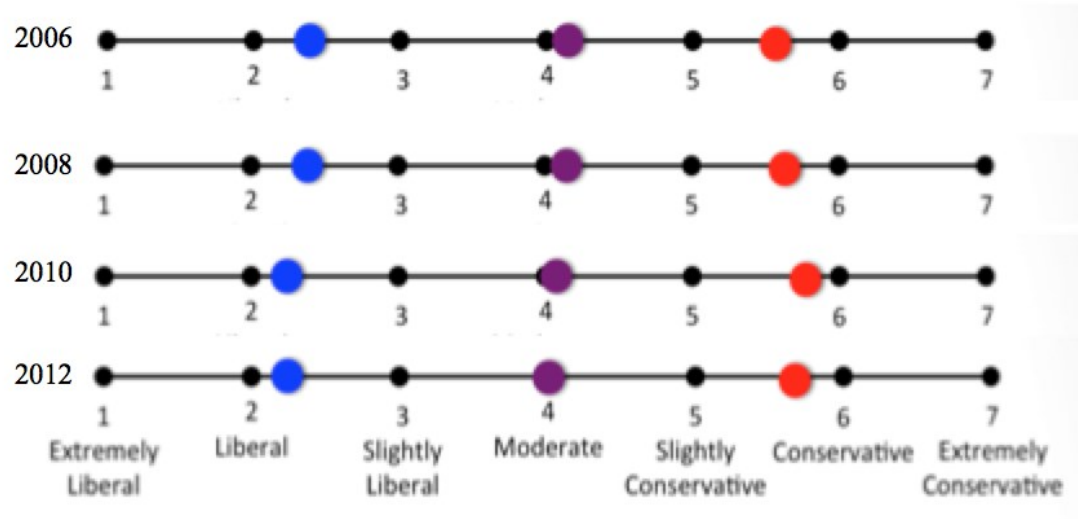


Figure 9: Ideology Distribution in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012



In 2006 when social media use was at 16% of adults, the mean ideology score of the whole 7-point scale was 4.12, with the average liberal scoring 1.80 points below at a

mean ideology score of 2.32 and the average conservative scoring 1.57 points above at a mean ideology score of 5.69. Thus, there was a gap of 3.37 points between the average liberal and the average conservative. In 2008 when social media use increased to 29% of adults, the mean ideology score of the whole 7-point scale was 4.11, and the average liberal and the average conservative moved even further away from the middle of the ideology scale and further apart from each other. The average liberal scored 2.29, which was 1.83 points below the middle of 4.11, and the average conservative scored 5.70, which was 1.59 points above the middle of 4.11, and the gap between the average liberal and the average conservative increased to 3.41 points. In 2010 when social media use increased dramatically to 61% of adults, the mean ideology score of the whole 7-point scale was 4.08. Although the gap between the average liberal and the mean of the whole ideology scale decreased to 1.80, this was caused by the middle of the distribution moving to the left and not by liberals becoming less extreme, as the average liberal did become more extreme with an average score of 2.28. The average conservative also became more extreme with an average score of 5.72, which was 1.64 points above the middle of 4.08. Furthermore, the gap between the average liberal and the average conservative increased to 3.44 points. Finally, in 2012 when social media use increased slightly to 69% of adults, the mean ideology score of the whole 7-point scale was 4.06. The average liberal became more extreme with an average score of 2.24, which was 1.82 points below the middle of 4.06. However, the average conservative became less extreme with a score of 5.68, which was 1.62 points above the middle of 4.06. Still, the gap between the average liberal and the average conservative stayed constant at 3.44, which

is not that surprising since social media use only slightly increased between 2010 and 2012.

Overall, it appears that based on ideology scores, the American public became more polarized from 2006 to 2012 as social media use increased, just as Premise 1 suggests. Yet, because this measure of political polarization only measures the distance between two groups and not the standard deviation, it may initially appear that this measure may confuse sorting with polarization. However, the key is that this measure of political polarization is concerned with the difference between two ideologies rather than two parties. Sorting becomes confused for polarization when the difference between average members of the two parties increases over time because individuals' ideologies and parties become more consistent. As compared to the present, more people in the past identified as a member of the party that had views that did not match their ideological beliefs. For example, an individual may have identified as a Democrat even though he or she was conservative. By examining the difference in ideology, which has been a more accurate representation of how individuals behave than with which party they identify, and by not including party affiliation into this measure, the likelihood of confusing sorting with polarization is greatly diminished. Furthermore, Premise 2 discusses whether individuals' views actually become more extreme or if they just become more consistent after using social media, which will help determine if the increased extremeness of the average liberal and the average conservative's ideology between 2006 and 2012 is actually a result of polarization or if it is a result of sorting. Additionally, Premise 1 just shows that social media use and political polarization co-vary, but Premise 2 discusses whether social media actually causes increased polarization.

**Premise 2**

If social media has truly lowered the bar for political engagement and allowed the general public to become increasingly polarized just like the politically elite have become, then it follows that the more an American uses social media, the more extreme his or her political views will be. Although there has not been one study that specifically investigates whether using social media can make one's views more extreme, Arceneaux and Johnson "[investigated] the effect of ideologically biased [television] news programs on attitude polarization" (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2010). Their two main findings were: (1) viewing political content congruent with one's beliefs leads one to become more extreme in one's views, and (2) viewing political content incongruent with one's beliefs either has no effect or leads one to also become more extreme in one's views (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2010).

Their first finding fits with the idea that the law of group polarization applies not only to when individuals interact with like-minded individuals in person, but also through other mediums, such as television. Thus, if the law of group polarization applies to watching television shows that include political content congruent with one's beliefs, it follows that it could also apply to reading social media posts that include political content congruent with one's beliefs.

The second finding can be explained by the fact that individuals who already have an opinion on an issue do not listen to the opposing viewpoint with an open mind. Instead, they either ignore the opposing viewpoint (and thus do not change their own opinion) or look for weaknesses in the opposing viewpoint so that they believe more strongly that their own opinion is correct (and thus become more extreme in their views).

## **Hypotheses**

Because Premise 1 is supported by the literature but Premise 2 is not directly supported by the literature since no study directly examines whether reading social media posts causes one to become more extreme in his or her views, it follows that this causal mechanism between social media use and extremeness in views must be tested.

Furthermore, because Arceneaux and Johnson tested the causal mechanism between watching television news programs and extremeness in opinions and because the same causal mechanism should apply to both situations (both television news programs and social media), then their findings can be used as a basis for my hypotheses. Hence, from this foundation, two main hypothesis emerge:

H1: Those who view political content congruent with their beliefs on social media will have a greater change in the extremeness of their views than those who view non-political content on social media.

H2: Those who view political content incongruent with their beliefs on social media will have a greater or equal change in the extremeness of their views than those who view non-political content on social media.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

To answer the question of how does social media affect political polarization and test both hypotheses, research was conducted at Texas Christian University (TCU) during the Spring 2015 semester. The main objective of this research was to determine the plausibility of the theory that social media lowers the bar for political engagement by allowing individuals to more easily interact in sorted, like-minded groups and more easily be exposed to elite viewpoints consistent with their own, and this, through the law of

group polarization, allows a sorted, non-polarized public to transform into a polarized public whose viewpoints are accurately represented by polarized choices.

Because the main part of the theory that is not specifically supported by the literature is the causal mechanism in the relationship between social media use and extremeness of views, an experiment was conducted from March 24, 2015 to March 27, 2015 in five classes at TCU. Because this causal mechanism can be substantiated through H1 and H2 both being supported, the experiment was designed to test H1 and H2. More specifically, a pre-test/post-test experimental design was used in which participants' views on a political issue, the Keystone XL Pipeline, were measured, three randomly selected groups of participants were exposed to different levels of political content on social media, the participants' views on the Keystone XL Pipeline was measured again, and then the changes in participants' views were calculated.

Using an experimental design was vital for this research because experiments allow researchers to determine causality, which was the primary goal of this research. The ability of an experiment to help determine causality stems from the researcher's ability to control for factors other than the independent variable by either holding them constant or accounting for them through random assignment of participants to treatment conditions. Thus, the internal validity of the experiment is high. Conversely, TCU students served as the units of analysis, and thus the external validity of the experiment is low because TCU students are not representative of the American public.

There were 78 undergraduate TCU students who participated in this study. Although these demographics were not specifically asked about participants, it can be assumed since they were all undergraduate TCU students that most participants were

between 18 and 22 years old and at least upper middle class. In regards to gender, about 37% (29) of the participants were male, and 63% (49) were female. As far as race, about 85% (66) of the participants identified as White, 10% (8) as Hispanic/Latino, 4% (3) as African American/Black, and 1% (1) as something other than White, Hispanic/Latino, African American/Black, Asian American or Pacific Islander, or Native American. For ideology, about 45% (35) of the participants identified as conservatives, 27% (21) as moderates, and 28% (22) as liberals. For party, about 47% (37) of the participants identified as Republicans, 23% (18) as Independents, and 29% (23) as Democrats<sup>1</sup>. As far as political knowledge, about 59% (46) of the participants believed that they were at least somewhat well informed about politics and 41% (32) only a little informed or not at all informed. Finally, about 23% (18) of the participants either had someone in their immediate family (parents or siblings) who had worked in the oil industry or had worked in the oil industry themselves, and 77% (60) did not.

However, there are no known reasons why the causal mechanism relating social media use to more extreme political views in TCU students would not also apply to the broader population of Americans. Furthermore, because, as stated earlier, data collected from the Pew Research Center and the General Social Survey show evidence that social media use and political polarization co-vary, if this experiment identifies a causal mechanism at the micro-level in TCU students, it is very plausible that this casual mechanism also applies to the broader population and is part of the explanation for why social media use and political polarization co-vary. Also, the operationalization of the variables and the method in which the experiment was conducted is discussed below in detail so that the experiment can be repeated and its level of reliability can be determined.

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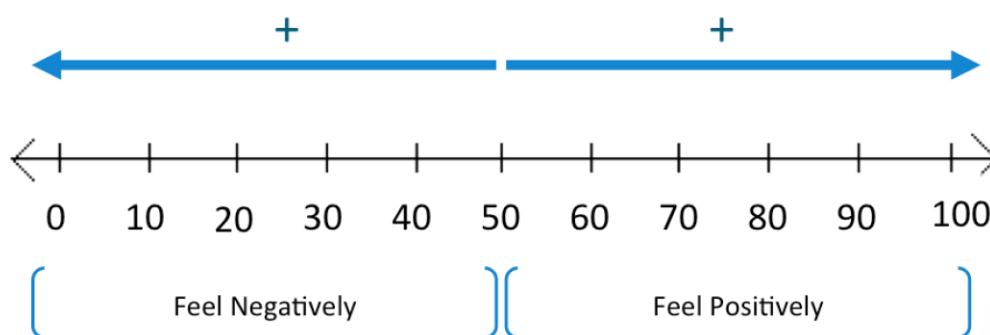
<sup>1</sup>The percentages for party do not add to 100% because of rounding.

## Experiment

### Dependent Variable – Change in Extremeness of Views

In the experiment, the dependent variable was ‘change in extremeness of views,’ the change in the participants’ views on the Keystone XL Pipeline as measured by movement on a 101-point feeling thermometer from before to after they were exposed to one of the levels of the independent variable. Scores between 0 and 49 inclusive represent that the participants felt negatively about the Keystone XL Pipeline. Scores of 50 represent that the participants felt neither positively nor negatively Keystone XL Pipeline, possibly because they were not informed about it and thus did not have an opinion about it. Scores between 51 and 100 inclusive represent that the participants felt positively about the Keystone XL Pipeline. This scale can be broken down into two sections, with the middle score of 50 as the point between them. In the section of the scale that ranges from 0 to 50, political views become more extreme as they move from 50 to 0. In the section of the scale that ranges from 50 to 100, political views become more extreme as they move from 50 to 100. The feeling thermometer is shown in Figure 10.

**Figure 10:** Feeling Thermometer



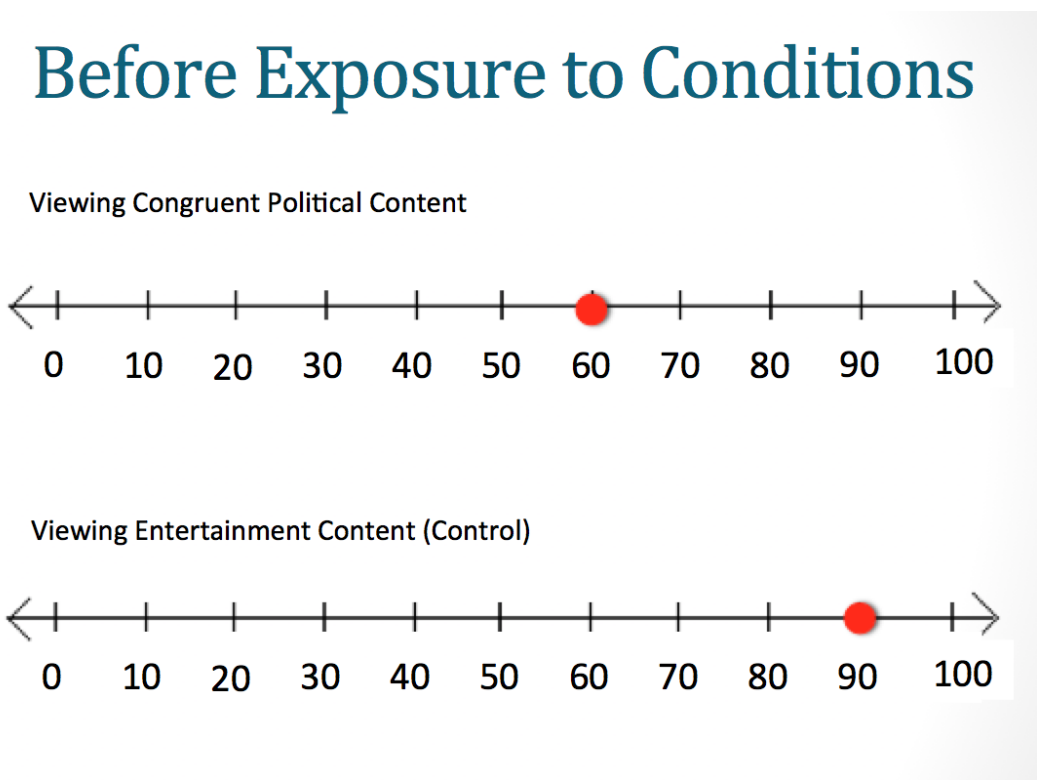
In general, for participants who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline with a number other than 50 (and thus had an opinion about the Keystone XL Pipeline),

movement away from 50 was coded as positive because political views became more extreme, and movement toward 50 was coded as negative because political views became less extreme. The one exception to this was participants whose views on the Keystone XL Pipeline changed from positive to negative or from negative to positive. For these participants, the movement of their rating of the Keystone XL Pipeline began as toward 50 and then changed to be away from 50; however, this was coded as negative because the strength of their initial views became less extreme. For example, if a participant initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline a 60 and then after receiving a treatment condition rated the Keystone XL Pipeline a 10, even though his or her rating is now more extreme, his or her initial positive opinion did not become more extreme. In fact, his or her initial positive opinion became so much less extreme that he or she crossed over to having a negative opinion about the Keystone XL Pipeline. For those who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline a 50, they could only move away from 50. Thus, movement away from 50 in the expected direction based on the treatment condition was coded as positive, and movement away from 50 in the opposite of the expected direction based on the treatment condition was coded as negative.

It is important to note that the dependent variable is ‘change in extremeness of views,’ and not simply the extremeness of participants’ views. Although it may have been simpler to have conducted a post-test only experiment and simply have seen whether those who viewed political content on social media had more extreme views, this design would not have accurately tested the hypotheses. Not only is this because the phrase “change in extremeness of their views” is stated in H1 and H2, but also because Premise 2, from which the hypotheses were formed, includes the phrase “the more

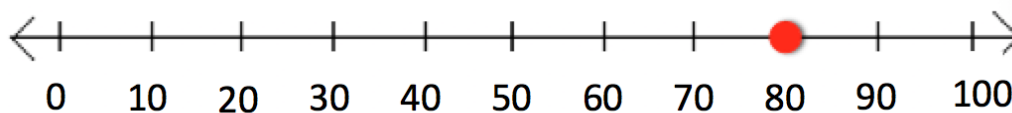
extreme his or her political views will be.” This phrase does not refer to an American’s extremeness of political views as compared to other Americans, but an American’s extremeness of political views as compared to his or her prior political views before using social media. The following scenario, shown in Figure 11, illustrates why measuring ‘change in extremeness of views’ is better than measuring ‘extremeness of views.’

**Figure 11:** Why ‘Change in Extremeness of Views’ is Necessary

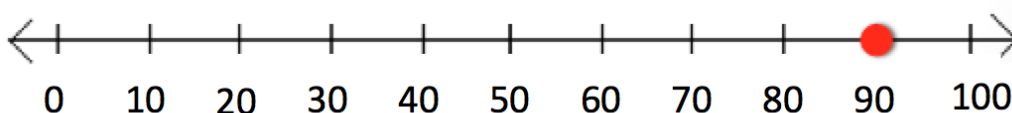


## After Exposure to Conditions

Viewing Congruent Political Content



Viewing Entertainment Content (Control)



A participant's views are initially a score of 60 and then move to a score of 80 after viewing congruent content on social media. Another participant's views are initially a score of 90 and then stay a 90 after viewing entertainment content on social media. By using 'change in extremeness of views,' the dependent variable accurately measures that the participant who viewed congruent content on social media had his or her views become more extreme, and the participant who viewed entertainment content on social media did not have his or her views become more extreme. However, by using 'extremeness of views,' and thus also using a post-test only experimental design, the dependent variable would show that the participant who viewed entertainment content on social media has more extreme views. However, this participant's more extreme views is because he or she initially had more extreme views and not because social media failed to have an impact on making the other participant's views more extreme. Indeed, the participant who viewed congruent content on social media did have his or her views

become more extreme, but the dependent variable of ‘extremeness of views’ would not detect this. Thus, the dependent variable of ‘change in extremeness of views’ was used.

Of course, this may have created a measurement error because participants’ views that were initially extremely negative or positive about the Keystone XL Pipeline (i.e. scores of 0 or 100, respectively) during the pre-test could not be measured as more extreme during the post-test, even if these participants’ actual views did become more extreme, because scores of 0 and 100 represent the limits of the measurement scale. Hence, there could have been a floor and ceiling effect. However, measuring the change in the extremeness of political views still appears to be the best measure, and about 87% (68) of the participants fell within the range of 20 to 80 on the feeling thermometer, allowing them the opportunity to become 20 points more extreme. Of the other 13% (10) of participants, only 3% (2) were at the most extreme ratings, with both of these participants initially rating the Keystone XL Pipeline a 100.

### **Independent Variable – Type of Content on Social Media**

The independent variable was the type of content the participants viewed on social media. There were three types of social media content: (1) a Twitter page and a Facebook page with tweets and posts that were in favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline, (2) a Twitter page and a Facebook page with tweets and posts that were against the Keystone XL Pipeline, and (3) a Twitter page and a Facebook page with tweets and posts about college basketball. Using these three types of social media content, two treatment conditions and one control condition were created based on the treatment conditions and control condition Arceneaux and Johnson used in their study of television news programs and political polarization. In their study, participants were either exposed to news show

congruent with their views (a liberal news show from MSNBC for liberals and a conservative news show from FOX News for conservatives), a news show incongruent with their views (a conservative news show from FOX News for liberals and a liberal news show from MSNBC for conservatives), or, as a control, an entertainment show that had a similar audience size to the political shows (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2010).

Similarly, in my experiment, participants who initially did not rate the Keystone XL Pipeline a 50 were exposed to: (1) social media content congruent with their views (social media content in favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline for participants who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline above 50 and social media content against the Keystone XL Pipeline for participants who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline below 50), (2) social media content incongruent with their views (social media content against the Keystone XL Pipeline for participants who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline above 50 and social media content in favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline for participants who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline below 50), or, as a control, (3) social media content that was entertainment (social media content about college basketball). However, for participants who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline a 50, they did not have an overall opinion about the Keystone Pipeline (most likely because they were not informed about the Keystone XL Pipeline), so the treatment conditions could not be social media content that was either congruent or incongruent with their opinion. Thus, they still viewed one of the three types of social media content, but instead of the conditions being (1) congruent social media content, (2) incongruent social media content, and (3) entertainment social media content, the three conditions were (1) social media content in

favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline, (2) social media content against the Keystone XL Pipeline, and (3) entertainment social media content.

The Keystone XL Pipeline was chosen as the topic for this experiment because at the time of this study, it was a current political topic that was discussed regularly in the news and on social media but was not extremely polarizing to the point of other issues such as gun control and abortion. It is important that the Keystone XL Pipeline was a current topic discussed regularly so that some participants would be sufficiently informed to have views on it, which was vital for the treatment conditions of congruent social media content and incongruent social media content to be applicable. Additionally, it was important that the Keystone XL Pipeline was not extremely polarizing so that participants were not fully set in their views, thus allowing their views to change in response to the social media content. If, for example, an issue that has been extremely polarizing for a long period of time such as gun control or abortion were used, then participants may not have changed their views on these issues just because they are extremely set in their beliefs for these particular issues and not because social media lacks the capability to make individuals' views more extreme. Of course, the fact that the Keystone XL Pipeline was chosen as the topic because it was expected that participants' views about it could be changed should not be confused with the notion that the Keystone XL Pipeline was chosen because it would be very easy to change participants' views about it. The Keystone XL Pipeline, although not extremely polarizing, does divide along party lines fairly well, with Democrats generally being against it and Republicans generally being in favor of it, and this, combined with the fact that it was regularly discussed in the news during this study, means that participants who knew about it probably did have a set

opinion on the issue. However, their opinions about the Keystone XL Pipeline were just not as set as their opinions about gun control and abortion because the Keystone XL Pipeline is a newer topic that does not yet invoke as intense opinions as gun control and abortion. Lastly, the social media content about the Keystone XL Pipeline that was chosen for the treatment conditions contained real tweets from Twitter and posts from Facebook and were mostly opinion rather than simple facts about the Keystone XL Pipeline. This is because on social media, where character-limited tweets and short posts are the norm, concise opinions about a political issue are more common than long posts that provide detailed information about a political issue. Furthermore, because the objective of this study is to determine if social media causes individuals' views to become more extreme and not to determine if becoming more informed about an issue causes individuals' views to become more extreme, it is logical that the social media content primarily included opinions instead of basic facts. As far as the entertainment social media content, college basketball was chosen because it was also a current event that was regularly discussed during the time of this study. Thus, just like how the treatment and control conditions in Arceneaux and Johnson's study had a similar level of viewership, the treatment and control conditions in my study included topics that were discussed at a similar rate.

Of course, with the control condition still consisting of exposure to social media, it may appear that this goes against Premise 2, which includes the phrase 'the more an American uses social media.' The reason for this discrepancy is that Premise 2 is based on the idea that the more an American uses social media, the more likely he or she will be exposed to political content through social media. Thus, the treatment group was exposed

to political content on social media to determine the effect of seeing congruent and incongruent political content on social media on the change in extremeness of political views. Participants viewed social media in the control condition in order to make the control condition as similar to the treatment conditions as possible in every respect except for political content. This allows me to be more certain that being exposed to other political views on social media and possibly the effects of group polarization are the true cause of the change in extremeness of political views. If participants were given another activity, such as just sitting silently for the same period of time while the other participants assigned to the treatment conditions were viewing social media, this difference in what participants in the control condition and treatment conditions were doing (sitting silently vs. using social media) could have affected the accuracy of the results of the experiment. For example, if sitting silently allowed individuals to reflect on their views and possibly change them, then the experiment might incorrectly have shown that viewing congruent and incongruent political content on social media does not lead to an increase in extremeness of political views that is different than a naturally occurring increase in extremeness of political views over the same time period. This would be incorrect because the control condition would have introduced a new treatment, sitting silently, and thus the control group could not have been used as a baseline with which to compare the treatment conditions.

### **Methodology**

The following process was followed for the experiment, which was conducted in two parts on two different days. For Part 1, participants were asked to rate how they felt about the Keystone XL Pipeline on a 101-point feeling thermometer from 0 to 100, which

was labeled Rating 1. Next, participants were divided into two groups. Group 1 consisted of the 41 participants who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline with number that was not 50 (and thus had an opinion on the Keystone XL Pipeline), and Group 2 consisted of the 37 participants who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline a 50 (and thus did not have an opinion on the Keystone XL Pipeline). Then, the participants in Group 1 were randomly assigned to receive either (1) congruent social media content, (2) incongruent social media content, or (3) entertainment social media content, and the participants in Group 2 were randomly assigned to receive either (1) social media content in favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline, (2) social media content against the Keystone XL Pipeline, or (3) entertainment social media content. Although Group 2 does not directly correspond to the two hypotheses, splitting the participants into two groups was necessary because the hypotheses, which are about viewing congruent and incongruent content, only make sense for individuals who have an opinion on the issue. Furthermore, even though this was not hypothesized about, Group 2 can be used to learn how ‘in favor’ and ‘against’ content on social media influence individuals who do not have an opinion on the issue, which relates to the larger question of how does social media affect political polarization. For each of the three conditions in both groups, the participant who had the highest change in extremeness of views and the participant who had the lowest change in extremeness of views were excluded from the data in order to try to eliminate any outliers and thus more accurately test the hypotheses. Especially because the sample size of each condition was only about 10-12 participants, outliers would have greatly affected the results of the experiment and prevented an accurate test of the hypotheses. Two days after Part 1 was conducted, Part 2 was conducted. Part 2 involved the participants viewing one

of the three types of social media content, each of which consisted of print-outs of about six pages of one Twitter feed and about five pages of one Facebook feed, for about 3 minutes. Participants were allowed to finish reading the social media content if they were not finished after 3 minutes, but no participants needed more than 15 extra seconds. Then, participants rated the Keystone XL Pipeline again on the same 101-point feeling thermometer, which was labeled Rating 2<sup>2</sup>. The change in the extremeness of their views was then calculated. Finally, using the statistical software SPSS, for both Group 1 and Group 2, an ANOVA and post-hoc t-tests were run to compare the means of change in extremeness of views for the three conditions. A significance level of 0.05 was used for the tests.

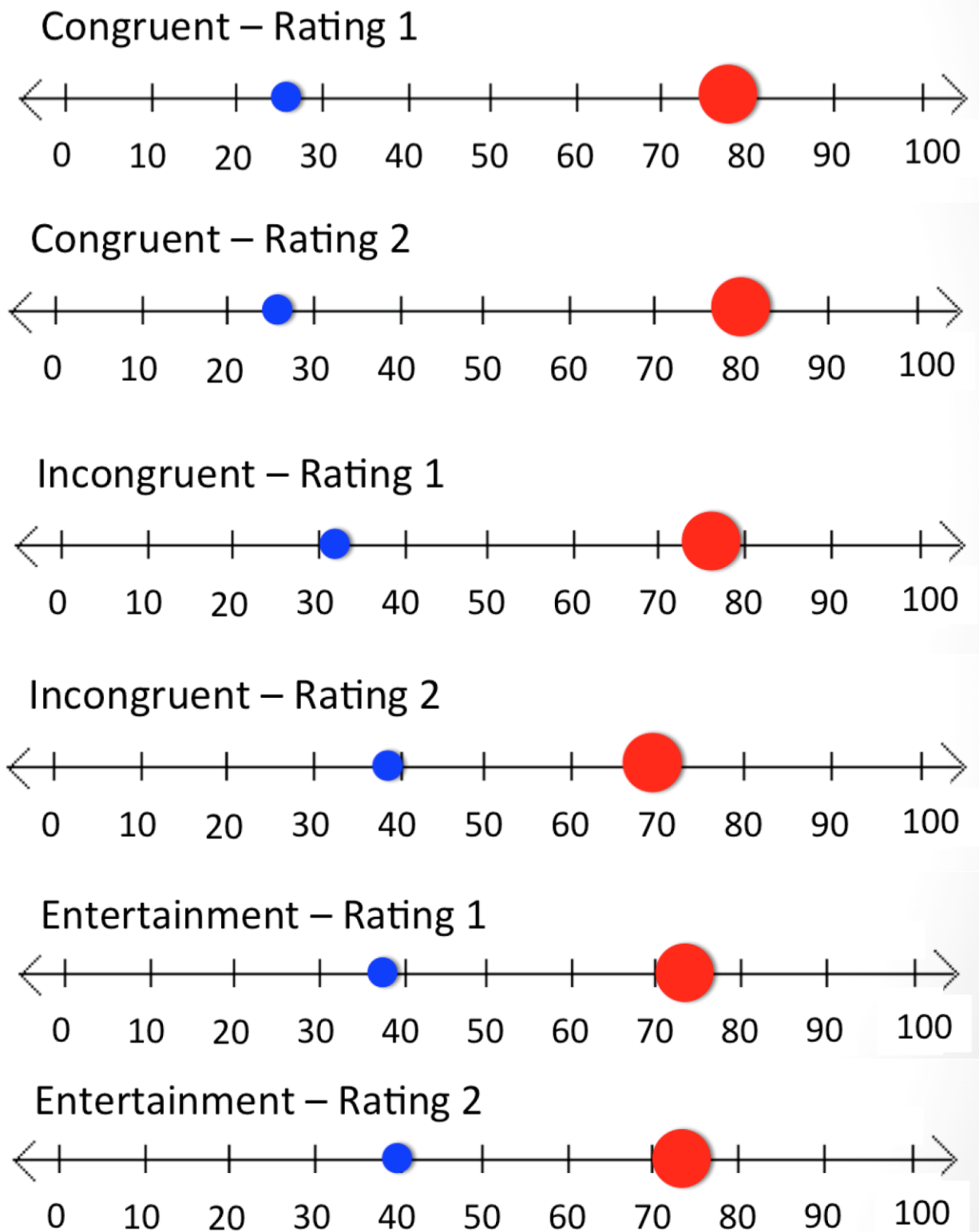
## RESULTS

Figure 12 shows Rating 1 and Rating 2 for Group 1. In Figure 14, the blue dots represent the mean rating of participants whose initial rating was below 50, and the red dots represent the mean rating of participants whose initial rating was above 50. There were more participants who rated the Keystone XL Pipeline above 50 than below 50, so the red dots are larger than the blue dots.

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<sup>2</sup> The specific questions that the participants were asked and the social media content that the participants viewed are included in the appendices. Part 1 is in Appendix A, and Part 2 is in Appendix B.

Figure 12: Results for Group 1



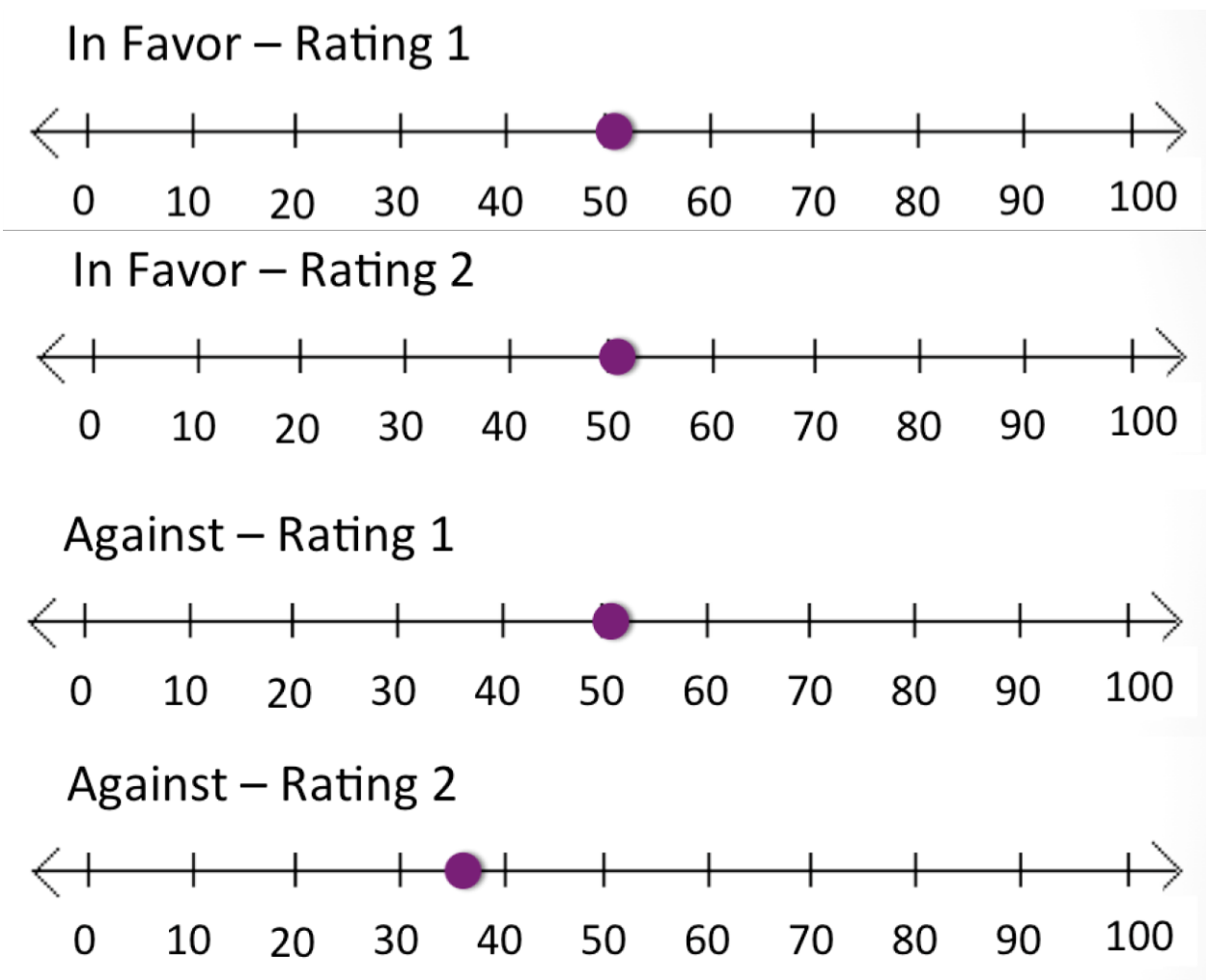
For those who viewed congruent political content, those who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline below 50 gave a mean rating of 26.25 for Rating 1, which did not change after they viewed the congruent content and stayed at 26.25, and those who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline above 50 gave a mean rating of 76.89, which became 2 points more extreme after they viewed the congruent content to a mean rating of 78.89. For those who viewed incongruent political content, those who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline below 50 gave a mean rating of 32.5, which became 5 points less extreme after they viewed the incongruent content to a mean rating of 37.5, and those who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline above 50 gave a mean rating of 74.75, which became 7.5 points less extreme after they viewed the incongruent content to a mean rating of 67.25. For those who viewed the entertainment content, which was the control condition, those who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline below 50 gave a mean rating of 37.33, which became 2 points less extreme after they viewed the entertainment content to a mean rating of 39.33, and those who initially rated the Keystone XL Pipeline above 50 gave a mean rating of 72.14, which did not change after they viewed the entertainment content and stayed at 72.14.

Combining those whose initial ratings were below 50 and those whose initial ratings were above 50, those who viewed congruent content became an average of 1.38 points more extreme, those who viewed incongruent content became an average of 6.67 points less extreme, and those who viewed entertainment content became an average of 0.6 points less extreme. The ANOVA test found that at least one of the three conditions was significantly different from the others. Based on the post-hoc t-tests, the incongruent condition's movement of 6.67 points less extreme was significantly different from the

congruent condition's movement of 1.38 points more extreme and was marginally significantly different from the entertainment condition's movement of 0.6 points less extreme. (This was only marginally significantly different because alpha was 0.059, which is slightly larger than the alpha of 0.05 that was used for the statistical tests). The congruent condition's movement of 1.38 points more extreme was not significantly different from the entertainment condition's movement of 0.6 points less extreme.

Figure 13 shows Rating 1 and Rating 2 for Group 2.

Figure 13: Results for Group 2





Obviously, participants in all three conditions gave a mean rating of 50 for Rating 1. For those who viewed content in favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline, their mean rating stayed the same at 50. For those who viewed content against the Keystone XL Pipeline, their rating moved 13.91 points more negative to a mean rating of 36.09. For those who viewed entertainment content, which was the control, their mean rating stayed the same at 50.

The ANOVA test found that at least one of the three conditions was significantly different from the others. Obviously both the ‘in favor’ condition’s 0 point change and the entertainment condition’s 0 point change were not different from each other. Based on the post-hoc t-tests, the ‘against’ condition’s movement of 13.91 points more negative was significantly different from the ‘in favor’ condition’s 0 point change and the entertainment condition’s 0 point change.

### DISCUSSION – HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA REALLY AFFECT POLITICAL POLARIZATION?

Based on H1, the expected results were that those who viewed political content congruent with their beliefs on social media would have a greater change in the extremeness of their views than those who viewed non-political content on social media,

and, based on H2, the expected results were that those who viewed political content incongruent with their beliefs on social media would have a greater or equal change in the extremeness of their views than those who viewed non-political content on social media. In reality, those who viewed political content congruent with their beliefs on social media did not have a significantly greater change in the extremeness of their views than those who viewed non-political content on social media, and those who viewed political content incongruent with their beliefs on social media actually became marginally significantly less extreme in their views and thus did not have a greater or equal change in the extremeness of their views than those who viewed non-political content on social media. Thus, H1 and H2 are both rejected.

Although there were no hypotheses related to Group 2, if social media truly causes polarization, the expected results would be that those who viewed ‘in favor’ content would become more positive in their views than those who viewed entertainment content, and those who viewed ‘against’ content would become more negative in their views than those who viewed entertainment content. Although those who viewed ‘in favor’ content did not change their views, just like how those who viewed entertainment content did not change their views, those who viewed ‘against’ content did become significantly more negative in their views than those who viewed entertainment content.

These results lead to three main questions:

Q1: Why did participants who viewed incongruent content change their views, but those who viewed congruent content did not?

Q2: Why did participants who viewed ‘against’ content change their views, but those who viewed ‘in favor’ content did not?

Q3: If social media does not polarize the general public, then what does cause polarization?

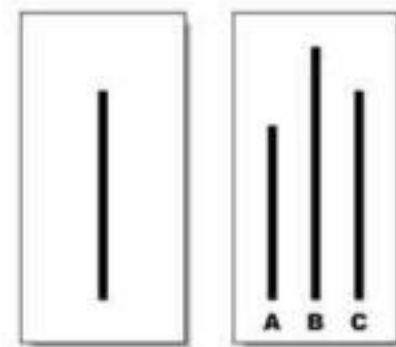
### **Pressure to Conform**

A possible answer to Q1 is that the pressure to conform caused participants who viewed incongruent content, but not congruent content, to change their views. This is because participants who viewed congruent content agreed with the opinions that they read, and thus they felt like they were part of the group and had no reason or motivation to change their views. However, participants who viewed incongruent content disagreed with the opinions that they read, and thus they felt like they were outsiders. Hence, they changed their views to become less extreme so that they would feel more accepted and less like outsiders. This notion that the participants were conforming to the opinions of the group of social media users whose posts and tweets were included in the social media content is supported by a Pew Research Center study that found that “those who use Facebook were more willing to share their views if they thought their followers agreed with them” (Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Dwyer, Shin, & Parcell, 2014). Hence, in my study, participants who viewed congruent information thought that social media users agreed with them and thus were more willing to share their true views for Rating 2. However, participants who viewed incongruent information thought that social media users disagreed with them and thus censored their true views and shared less extreme views for Rating 2. Over time, if social media users keep censoring their own views, they might actually become less extreme in their views and move toward the group opinion. Furthermore, if those with dissenting views do not share their true views and actually become less extreme, then this can lead to a spiral of silence, as gradually less social

media users will have dissenting views, which will put even more pressure on those with dissenting views to conform to the group opinion.

Pressure to conform can be really powerful, as shown in Asch's conformity study in the 1950s. Asch asked a group of participants questions such as which line in Figure 14 is the same as the reference line.

**Figure 14:** Asch's Conformity Study



(McLeod, 2008)

Of course, the obvious answer is Line C. However, Asch placed confederates in the room who purposely gave the wrong answer, for example Line B. Because of this, 75% of the participants conformed and gave the wrong answer at least once. Through this study, Asch came to two main conclusions for why individuals conform: “because they want to fit in with the group (normative influence) and because they believe the group is better informed than they are (informational influence)” (McLeod, 2008). Of course, the first conclusion of normative influence supports what has been discussed above. However, the second conclusion of informational influence can help further explain why the participants who viewed incongruent content, but not the participants who viewed congruent content, changed their views. The social media content viewed by the

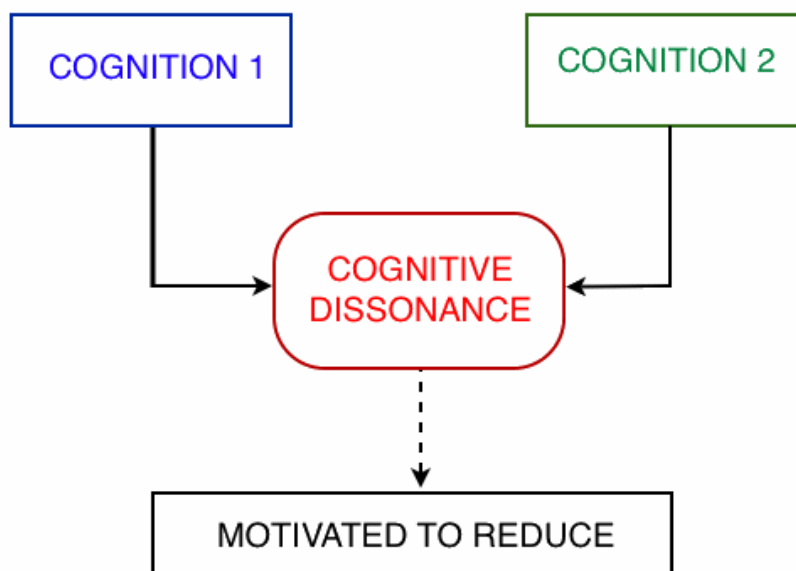
participants contained mostly opinions instead of information, and the nature of social media with short posts and tweets and character-limits do not allow for a lot of information to be presented. Thus, participants did not gain a lot of information by reading the social media posts. If participants viewed congruent content, then they may have believed that the existing information they had about the Keystone XL Pipeline was correct and thus they did not change their views. However, if participants viewed incongruent content, then they may have believed that the existing information they had about the Keystone XL Pipeline was incorrect and thus they changed their views about the Keystone XL Pipeline to become more in line with the group opinion (and thus less extreme). Furthermore, as Konnikova states, “if [Asch] can get [participants] to doubt the length of a line, when the answer is staring at [them] from the page, imagine how much easier it would be to get [individuals] to doubt something more complex, something where the shades of grey are much more believable, the ‘correct’ answer far less straightforward” (Konnikova, 2011). Because political issues, including the Keystone XL Pipeline are complex and have no clear answer, then it is very likely that individuals who view incongruent content on social media about political issues will become less extreme in their views, possibly even to the point of switching sides, because they feel pressured to conform because of normative and informational influence.

However, pressure to conform cannot answer Q2, and thus we must examine another concept to see why those who viewed ‘against’ content, but not those who viewed ‘in favor’ content changed their views.

### Motivated Reasoning

One model of motivated reasoning that can help answer both Q1 and Q2 involves cognitive dissonance, a term Festinger coined in 1956. As shown in Figure 15, cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals have two beliefs or thoughts that disagree with each other, and individuals are motivated to reduce this cognitive dissonance (Tompkins & Lawley, 2009).

**Figure 15:** Motivated Reasoning



(Tompkins & Lawley, 2009)

In regards to Q1, participants who viewed congruent content agreed with the opinions they viewed and thus did not experience cognitive dissonance. Hence, they were not motivated to reduce cognitive dissonance and did not change their views. However, participants who viewed incongruent content disagreed with the opinions they viewed and thus experienced cognitive dissonance as a result of believing one thing about the Keystone XL Pipeline and viewing opposing opinions about the Keystone XL Pipeline on

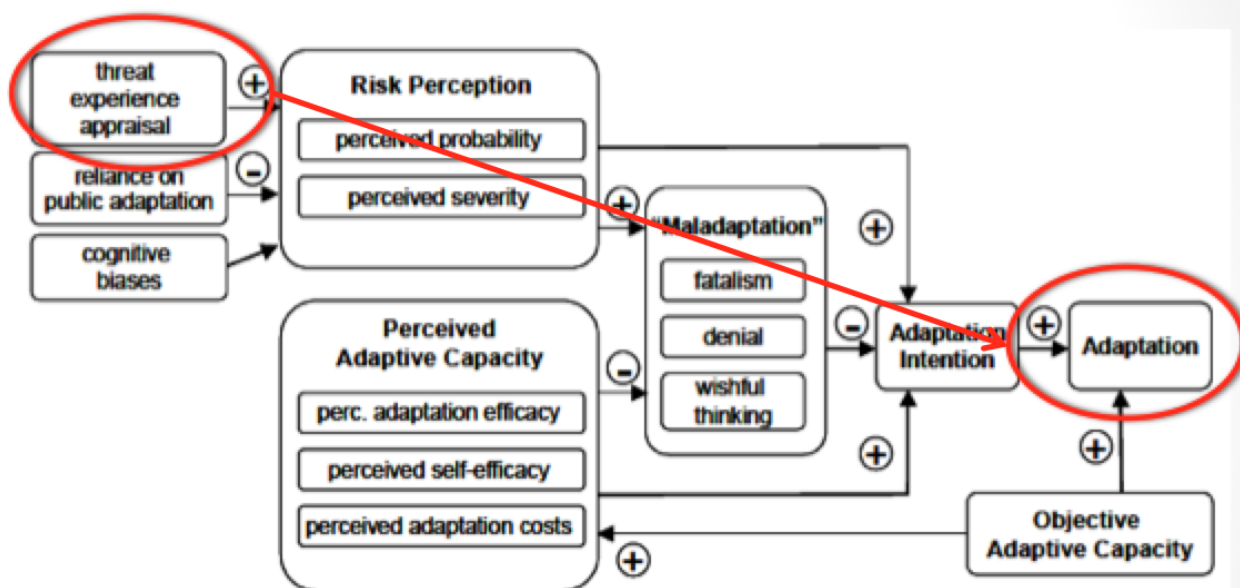
the social media content. Hence, these participants were motivated to reduce their cognitive dissonance and thus changed their views to become less extreme so that their views more closely matched the opinions they viewed on the social media content.

Furthermore, in regards to Q2, those who viewed ‘against’ content and those who viewed ‘in favor’ content all did not have an opinion about the Keystone XL Pipeline. Participants who viewed ‘against’ content read about negative impacts of the Keystone XL Pipeline, including negative environmental impacts and climate change. Thus, these participants probably experienced cognitive dissonance because they may have wondered how they could not have felt negatively about a pipeline that would cause so much harm, especially to the environment and the climate. Thus, they were motivated to reduce this cognitive dissonance and changed their views to become more negative about the Keystone XL Pipeline. However, participants who viewed ‘in favor’ content read about positive impacts of the Keystone XL Pipeline, including creating more jobs and allowing the United States to trade with Canada instead of the Middle East to help meet its energy needs. Thus, these participants should have also experienced cognitive dissonance because they may have wondered how they could not have felt positively about a pipeline that would have so many benefits, and, consequentially, these participants should have been motivated to reduce this cognitive dissonance and changed their views to become more positive about the Keystone XL Pipeline. However, this did not happen, and thus we must consider why those who viewed ‘against’ content experienced more cognitive dissonance and motivation to reduce their cognitive dissonance than those who viewed ‘in favor’ content.

## Perception of Threat

Both pressure to conform and motivated reasoning can be examined through the lens of perception of threat. As shown in Figure 16, the perception of threat can lead to adaptation, which includes changes in views (Whitworth, 2015).

**Figure 16:** Perception of Threat



*Figure 1. Socio-cognitive model of proactive private adaptation to climate change impacts*

(Whitworth, 2015)

Although this model is specific to climate change impacts, which is acceptable since the Keystone XL Pipeline is related to climate change, the notion of threat leading to adaption also holds true in general.

Participants who viewed ‘congruent’ content, as stated above, agreed with the opinions they viewed on the social media content and thus felt accepted and not threatened. However, participants who viewed ‘incongruent’ content, as stated above, disagreed with the opinions they viewed on the social media content and thus felt like

outsiders. Their outsider status threatened them, and this perception of threat was probably of one the reasons they felt pressured to conform and changed their views to become less extreme.

Participants who viewed ‘against’ content read about negative impacts of the Keystone XL Pipeline, which are, by nature, more threatening than the positive impacts of the Keystone XL Pipeline about which those who viewed ‘in favor’ content read. This more threatening ‘against’ content thus caused more cognitive dissonance than the ‘in favor’ content. Consequentially, those who viewed ‘against’ content were more motivated than those who viewed ‘in favor’ content to reduce cognitive dissonance and hence changed their views to become more negative while those who viewed ‘in favor’ content did not change their views to become more positive.

### **Comparison to Arceneaux and Johnson’s Study**

Obviously, the results of my study do not match the results of Arceneaux and Johnson’s study. Thus, now that we have examined the three concepts of pressure to conform, motivated reasoning, and perception of threat that influenced the behavior of my participants, there are still some questions that remain. First, why do these concepts not also apply to television? Furthermore, in Arceneaux and Johnson’s study, it appeared that the law of group polarization played a role in influencing those who viewed congruent content to become more extreme in their views, but this was not the case for my study. Hence, second, why does the law of group polarization not apply to social media?

The answers to both questions may lie in the fact that on television, there is one commentator who is able to give more in-depth information and on social media, there

are many individuals who can only give less in-depth information. As far as the first question, Asch found in his conformity study that “the tendency to conform increases as the size of the group increases ... for up to 6 or 7 members” because “as the group becomes [larger than 6 or 7 members], people may begin to suspect the other members [are] working together purposefully to affect their behavior and, in response, they become resistant to this obvious pressure” (Hock 2009). Of course, the first part that the tendency to conform increases as the size of the group increases perfectly explains why individuals feel more pressure to conform when on social media than when watching television. Yet, the second part that the tendency to conform then decreases after the group size hits 6 or 7 members seems to suggest that, in reality, the pressure to conform should not be more when on social media than when watching television. However, I believe that this second part was a result of Asch’s experiment clearly having a right answer. If the group was too large, then too many individuals obviously gave the wrong answer, and the participant was able to guess that the other individuals were working together to purposefully give the wrong answer. However, with political issues such as the Keystone XL Pipeline, there is no ‘right answer,’ and thus I believe that as the group becomes larger than 6 or 7 members, even if everyone disagrees with the participant, the participant will not believe they are all working together to purposefully give the wrong answer because there is no wrong answer. They could all just be more informed about the issue or find different aspects of the issue more important than the participant and thus could reasonably all disagree with the participant. Thus, I believe that in the real world with real issues, as group size increases, pressure to conform also increases. Furthermore, as group size increases, more opposing opinions are viewed, and thus cognitive dissonance should

similarly increase. Likewise, the participant will feel more like an outsider and thus perception of threat should also increase. Hence, individuals should feel more pressure to conform, cognitive dissonance, and perception of threat when viewing incongruent content on social media than when watching television, and that is why individuals' views become less extreme when viewing incongruent content on social media but not when watching television. As far as the second question, the law of group polarization was based on a group of individuals discussing a topic. Arceneaux and Johnson's study appears to support that the law of group polarization may also apply to watching television. This would make sense because, although the conversation may appear to be one-sided with the commentator talking to the viewer, the commentator is giving in-depth information just as one would do in a conversation. Furthermore, the viewer most likely has his or her own views and, when the commentator agrees with them, may feel as though the commentator is speaking directly to him or her as though they were having a conversation. However, social media users are more just passively viewing material. Whereas with television, a commentator speaks about an issue, which somewhat approximates a discussion, with social media, other users just post about an issue, and their posts lack the depth that is provided by a face-to-face discussion or a television commentator. Thus, it makes sense that when viewing congruent content, the law of group polarization applies to television but not social media.

### **The Authoritarian Divide**

Now that Q1 and Q2 have been answered, Q3 still needs to be answered. Since, according to my study, social media does not polarize us, I believe that what does polarize us, or at least makes us seem that we are more polarized, is the authoritarian

divide. However, before we discuss what the authoritarian divide is, Figure 17 shows a positive correlation between being willing to physically discipline children and voting for George W. Bush.

**Figure 17:** Positive Correlation between Favoring Physical Discipline and Bush Vote

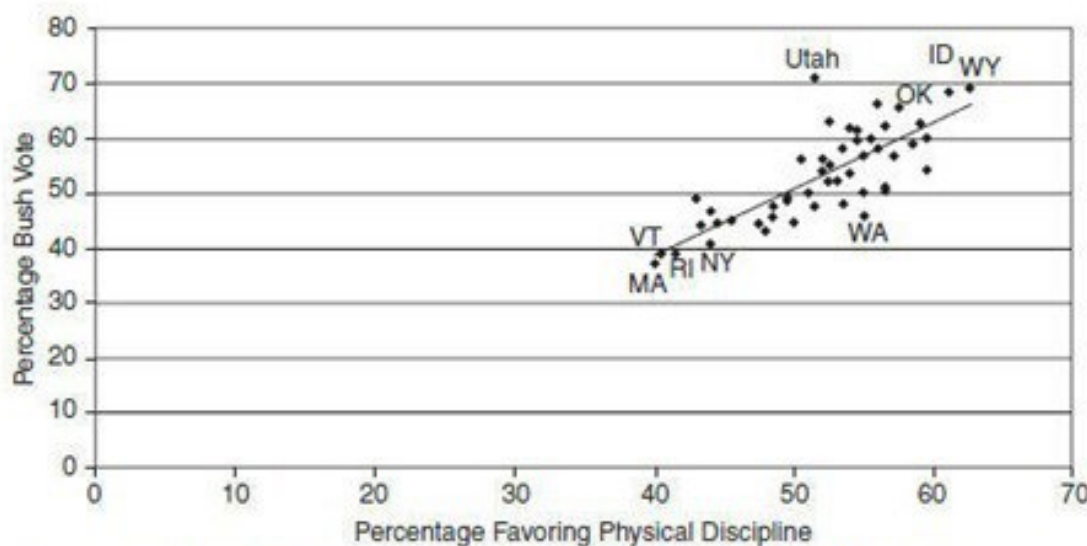


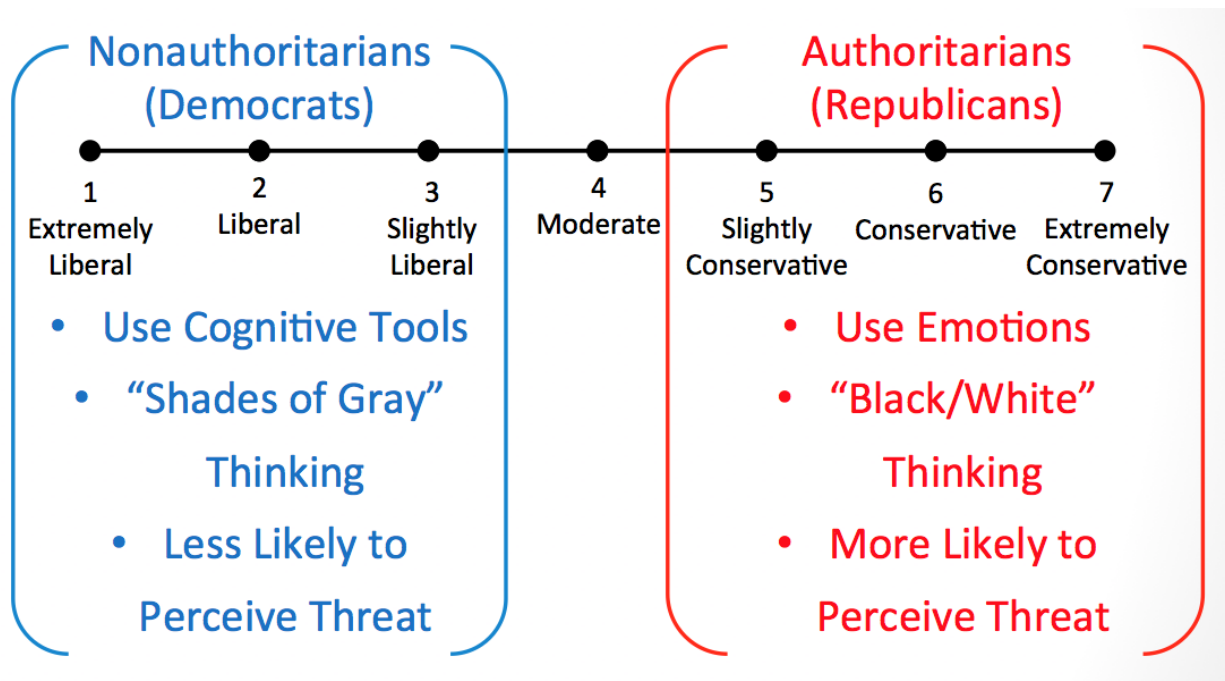
FIGURE 1.1. Bush Vote as a Function of Willingness to Physically Discipline Children, by State

(Hetherington & Weiler 2009)

Now, although these two variables are correlated, it is almost assuredly apparent that one does not cause the other. Thus, there must be an underlying third variable that drives this relationship. That third variable is a personality trait or disposition that Hetherington and Weiler label authoritarianism. Along the authoritarian divide lies those who exhibit high levels of authoritarianism (and low levels of nonauthoritarianism) and are called authoritarians at one end and those who exhibit low levels of authoritarianism (and high levels of nonauthoritarianism) and are called nonauthoritarians at the other end. As one's level of authoritarianism increases, one's willingness both to physically discipline children and to vote for George W. Bush increases, so that is why these two variables are

correlated. As one might assume based on the relationship between authoritarianism and one's willingness to vote for George W. Bush, the authoritarian divide maps well onto the political ideology and party spectrum, as shown in Figure 18.

**Figure 18:** How the Authoritarian Divide maps onto the Political Spectrum



Nonauthoritarians tend to be Democrats and liberals, while Authoritarians tend to be Republicans and conservatives. Because nonauthoritarians and authoritarians have different ways of viewing the world, Democrats/liberals and Republicans/conservatives have different ways of viewing the world. Nonauthoritarians tend to use cognitive tools when making decisions and think in terms of “shades of gray” when deciding whether something is right or wrong. Furthermore they are less likely to perceive changes to the social order as threatening. On the other hand, authoritarians tend to use their emotions when making decisions and think in terms of “black and white” when deciding whether something is right or wrong. Additionally, they are more likely to perceive changes to the social order as threatening. Hence, overall, we have two dramatically different

personalities and ways of looking at issues, and, as Hetherington and Weiler note, this leads to one side not even being able to see the other side's viewpoints and beliefs "as an acceptable alternative" (Hetherington & Weiler 2014). Thus, even if the general public is not moving further apart (which, according to the GSS, was true from 2010 to 2012), the divide between Democrats/liberals and Republicans/conservatives is becoming more intense, and, consequentially, the general public seems more polarized.

### **Limitations and Questions for Future Research**

Although these conclusions are supported by my study, they should be interpreted with caution, as there were some limitations to my study. First, my study was limited because participants rated the Keystone XL Pipeline for the second time right after they viewed the social media content. Thus, even if their views did change right after they viewed the social media content, this change in views could be limited to the short-term, and thus social media may actually have no long-term impact in regards to changing individuals' views. This limitation could very well be true, as there is a disconnect between the results of the participants who viewed the 'against' content and what has occurred in real life. Although the participants who viewed the 'against' content, including bad environmental impacts and climate change, changed their views to become more negative about the Keystone XL Pipeline, in real life over the long term, even though scientists like Hansen and politicians like Gore have been warning us about climate change for years, individuals have not really responded by changing their views in regards to climate change and how they should live in light of the evidence that the way we are currently living is harming the Earth and changing our climate. Thus, future

research could be done not only to replicate my study, but also to determine if my results are just true in the short-term or if they also hold true for the long-term.

Second, participants in my study viewed social media content that was heavily concentrated on one issue, the Keystone XL Pipeline. However, in real life, social media content mainly includes posts and tweets from family and friends, and, if it does include political issues, it most likely includes multiple issues. Thus, the effects of my study may be greatly exaggerated, and future research could be done to see if social media content that is more similar to individuals' real Facebook and Twitter feeds would produce the same results.

Third, as stated above, Conover et al and Prior suggest that individuals mostly view congruent political information on their social media feeds (Conover et al, 2011; Prior 2013). Hence, my findings about individuals becoming less extreme in their views when exposed to incongruent political content on social media may be true, but it may actually only rarely occur in real life since individuals do not really see a lot of incongruent political content on social media, and, if they do, it is almost definitely not as concentrated as the incongruent content to which the participants in my study were exposed. Thus, future research could see if viewing less concentrated incongruent content on social media may also have the effect of making individuals change their views to become less extreme.

In addition to these three suggestions for future research based on the limitations of my study, there are also two other suggestions for future research based on my study. First, some of my participants not only became less extreme in their views when they viewed incongruent content but even switched sides (went from feeling negatively about

the Keystone XL Pipeline to feeling positively about it or from feeling positively about it to feeling negatively about it). Future research could help determine what causes individuals to switch sides on an issue, and, more specifically, what causes an individual to switch sides on an issue when viewing content on social media.

Second, because my study and Arceneaux and Johnson's study, although they had similar research designs, had different results, future research could include a study that combines my study and Arceneaux and Johnson's study so that, using the same political issue, one group of individuals views congruent, incongruent, and entertainment content on television and the other group views congruent, incongruent, and entertainment content on social media. Doing this study in which both groups are tested at the same time and on the same issue would help to clarify if, as the different results of our studies suggest, television and social media have different effects in regards to polarization.

### **What Did We Learn?**

Overall, my study suggests that social media does not cause political polarization and thus is not the mechanism from which the general public can move from not being polarized, as Fiorina believes, to being polarized, as Abramowitz believes. This leads to both theoretically and practically important conclusions. Theoretically, the law of group polarization does not apply to social media. However, three main concepts do apply to social media: (1) pressure to conform, (2) motivated reasoning, and (3) perception of threat. Practically, campaigns most likely will not be able to make individuals become more extreme in their views, but, if they are able to show really concentrated content, may be able to make individuals become less extreme in their views. Obviously, these conclusions are the exact opposite of the conclusions I expected to make when I laid out

my theory. However, even if it is in the opposite way of what I originally thought, I believe that this study does demonstrate that social media is changing politics through likes and tweets.

APPENDIX A: PART 1 OF EXPERIMENT

**Feeling Thermometer and Questions**

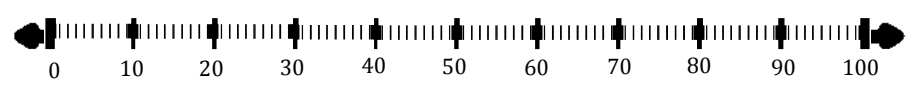
Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

Part 1

Please rate how you feel about the Keystone XL Pipeline on a scale that runs from 0 to 100. Ratings between 0 and 50 mean that you feel negatively toward the Keystone XL Pipeline. Ratings between 50 and 100 mean that you feel positively toward the Keystone XL Pipeline. A rating of 50 means that you feel neutral (neither negatively nor positively) about the Keystone XL Pipeline.

You may use the rating scale at the bottom of the page to help you visualize your rating of the Keystone XL Pipeline. However, you do not need to mark your rating on this scale.

Please write the number that corresponds to your rating of how you feel about the Keystone XL Pipeline: \_\_\_\_\_.  
Please make your rating an integer (whole number).



Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 1 (Continued)

Now, please answer the following question.

1. How well informed do you consider yourself about the Keystone XL Pipeline?

\_\_\_\_ Very Well    \_\_\_\_ Well    \_\_\_\_ Somewhat Well    \_\_\_\_ Only a Little    \_\_\_\_ Not at All

Between now and the time you complete Part 2 of this study, please do not actively seek out information about the Keystone XL Pipeline.

APPENDIX B: PART 2 OF EXPERIMENT

**Social Media Content in Favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline**

(“Keystone XL Pipeline (@ForKXLPipe),” 2015)

(“Build The Keystone Pipeline,” 2011)


Home Notifications Messages Discover Search Twitter



TWEETS **24**
Edit profile


**Keystone XL Pipeline**  
@ForKXLPipe

Who to follow · Refresh · View all

- 
**Abigail Buckley** @Abbyroo19 Follow
- 
**Hilton Garden Inn** @HGI\_Ft... Follow
- 
**Fort Worth Can** @FortWorth... Follow

Popular accounts · Find friends

Trends · Change

- #OutOftheBlue
-  Promoted by Pepsi™
- #GrammysRedCarpet
- #AskAdapt
- #BeyonceOnGrammy
- #SongsThatDeserveGrammys
- #TWDIsBack
- Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban
- Sia and Maddle
- Taylor and Abigail
- Best Rap Album

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**Tweets** Tweets & replies

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

 **Reince Priebus** @Reince · 11h

#KeystoneXL = Jobs + Critical Infrastructure. [gop.com/6012LO30](http://gop.com/6012LO30) Tell Obama: Don't veto the pipeline.



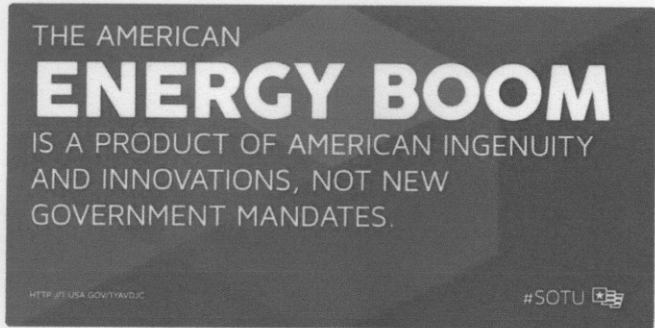
[View more photos and videos](#)

← ↻ 24 ☆ 23 ⋮

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

 **Steve Stivers** @RepSteveStivers · Jan 20

#KeystoneXL has been stalled for 6 years. America is #1 because of our ingenuity not the President's policies #SOTU



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← ↻ 6 ☆ 4 ⋮

**Canada Action** @CanadaAction · Jan 17  
Canada is Transparent, Democratic, & a Strong Ally.

When you oppose #KeystoneXL you are promoting Venezuelan oil.



22 14 View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

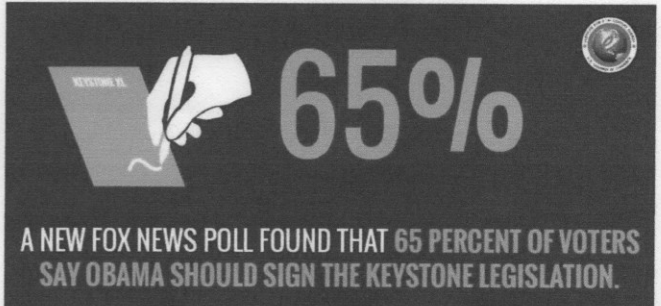
**Build the Keystone** @buildkeystonexl · Feb 1  
65% of #America wants #Obama to approve #KeystoneXL #TimeToBuild #KeystonePipeline #BuildTheKeystonePipeline #KXL



2 1 View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

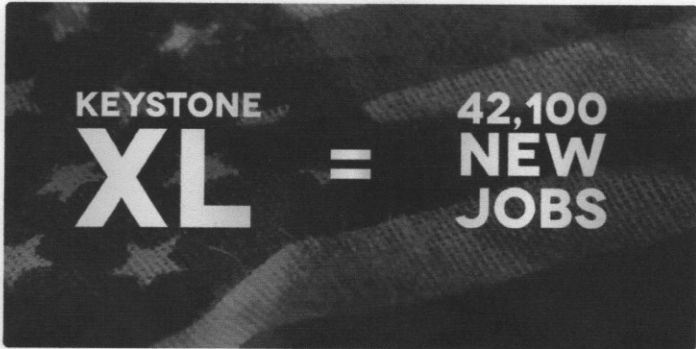
**Build the Keystone** @buildkeystonexl · Feb 1  
9 #Democrats and 53 #Republicans voted for the #KeystoneXL Pipeline Act, #TimeToBuild #KXL #BuildTheKeystonePipeline



A NEW FOX NEWS POLL FOUND THAT 65 PERCENT OF VOTERS SAY OBAMA SHOULD SIGN THE KEYSTONE LEGISLATION.

← ↻ 2 ★ 1 ... View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted  
**Tea Party Express** @TeaPartyExpress · Feb 3  
#KeystoneXL = 42,100 new jobs! #TimeToBuild



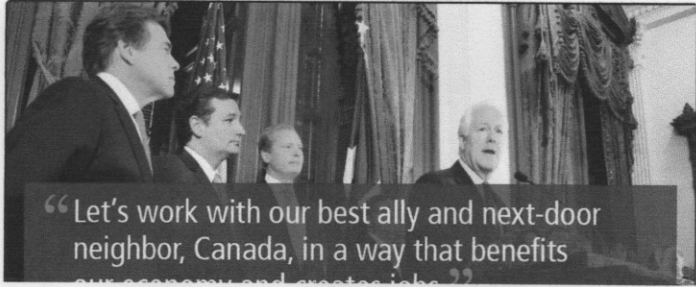
← ↻ 12 ★ 7 ... View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted  
**EnergyTomorrow** @EnergyTomorrow · Feb 3  
After 6 years of analysis, it's #TimeToBuild the #KeystoneXL pipeline.  
[nwsdy.li/167DSeQ](http://nwsdy.li/167DSeQ)



← ↻ 6 ★ 2 ... View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted  
**TransCanada** @TransCanada · Jan 27  
U.S. Senator @JohnCornyn on why it's #TimeToBuild #KeystoneXL:  
[ow.ly/HAspc](http://ow.ly/HAspc) #KXL



our economy and creates jobs.

— Texas Senator John Cornyn

16 12 View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Energy Institute** @Energy21 · Jan 26

#KeystoneXL will play a vital role in the creation of American products and jobs. It's #TimeToBuild

**MYTH: KEYSTONE XL IS AN EXPORT PIPELINE TO CHINA AND OTHER NATIONS**

**FACT: KEYSTONE XL IS A SUPPLY LINE TO U.S. REFINERIES**

**OIL FROM KEYSTONE XL WILL HELP REFINERIES CREATE THE AMERICAN PRODUCTS AND JOBS THAT WE RELY ON EVERY DAY**

via TransCanada 2015

7 View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Mark Kirk** @MarkKirk · Feb 7

#KeystoneXL will create 42,000 new American jobs, boost our local #Illinois economy & support energy independence.

**LET'S FOSTER AMERICAN ENERGY INDEPENDENCE**

ILLINOIS

**Kirk**  
UNITED STATES SENATE

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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

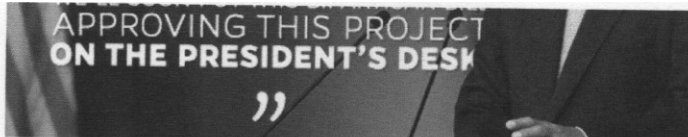
**Speaker John Boehner** @SpeakerBoehner · Feb 6

#KeystoneXL = thousands of American jobs. We'll soon put this bill on the president's desk.

“

**THE KEYSTONE PIPELINE IS GOING TO MEAN TENS OF THOUSANDS OF AMERICAN JOBS.**

WE'LL SOON PUT THIS BIPARTISAN BILL

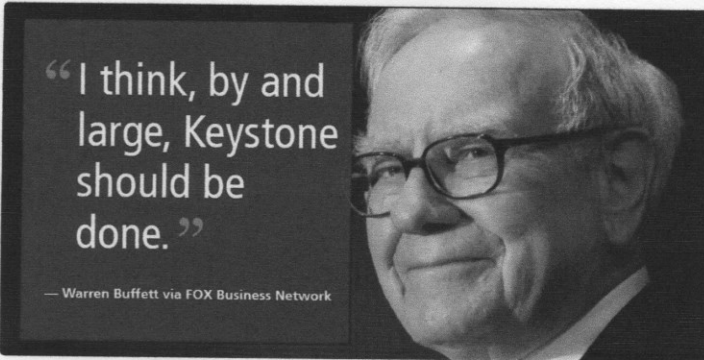


← ↻ 69 ☆ 69 ... View more photos and videos

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**TransCanada** @TransCanada · Feb 5

Famed investor @WarrenBuffet on #KeystoneXL via @FoxBusiness.  
#TimeToBuild #KXL

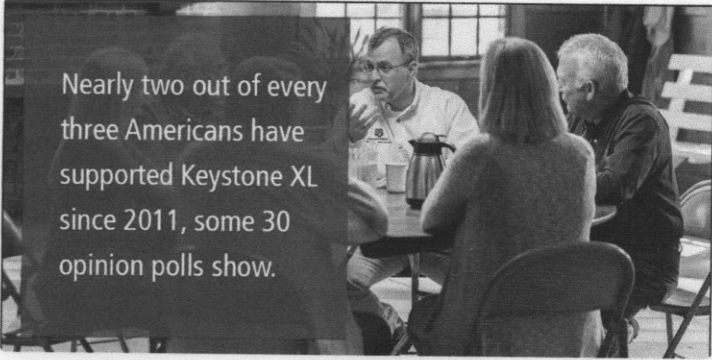


← ↻ 24 ☆ 5 ... View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**TransCanada** @TransCanada · Jan 30

Latest Senate vote on #KeystoneXL mirrors the strong will of the American public. [ow.ly/IdARb](http://ow.ly/IdARb) #KXL #uspoli



← ↻ 18 ☆ 2 ... View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**BuildKXLNow** @BuildKXLNowORG · Sep 22

Attending .@ClintonGlobal? Remember President Clinton is a KXL supporter.. [bit.ly/1C52jUx](http://bit.ly/1C52jUx)

← ↻ 1 ☆ ...

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**BuildKXLNow** @BuildKXLNowORG · Sep 29

Keystone XI Would Generate \$55 million in property tax

buildkxlnow.org/55-million-tax...

3 2

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Sean Hackbarth** @seanhackbarth · Oct 22

The Company Behind the Keystone XL Pipeline Wins an Environmental Award [shar.es/1mB4X9](https://shar.es/1mB4X9) via @sharethis

4

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**BuildKXLNow** @BuildKXLNowORG · Nov 14

For the 9th time, the U.S. House passes legislation approving the construction of #KeystoneXL [usat.ly/116Fcv3](https://usat.ly/116Fcv3)

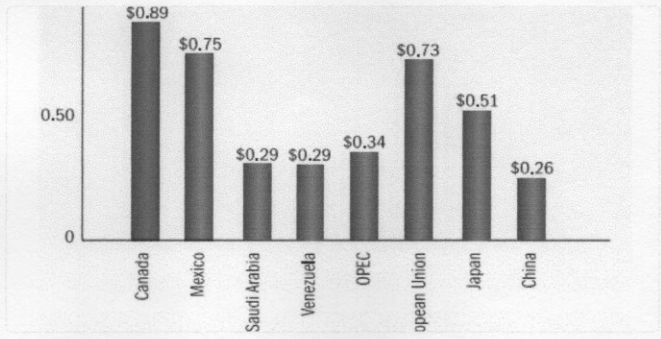
3

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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Pipeline Action** @PipelineAction · Dec 3

If you were the United States of America: What country would you want to trade with? #KeystoneXL



16 8

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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**BuildKXLNow** @BuildKXLNowORG · Jan 15

Americans support pipelines as the best way to transport #energy. #KeystoneXL is not exception. [bit.ly/1ziPjfQ](https://bit.ly/1ziPjfQ)

2

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**BuildKXLNow** @BuildKXLNowORG · Jan 29

#Keystone XL passed in the Senate amid an open and fair process. Now the President should get out of the way. [bit.ly/1ESqSVT](https://bit.ly/1ESqSVT)

1

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**NE Jobs & Energy** @nejobsandenergy · Feb 5

Being a proponent of #KeystoneXL means being a proponent of #job creation and of a boost to the local and nationwide economies. #TimeToBuild

4 2

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**NE Jobs & Energy** @nejobsandenergy · Feb 5

#KeystoneXL would help enhance our booming energy sector. #Jobs #EnergySecurity

1 1

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**NE Jobs & Energy** @nejobsandenergy · Feb 6

Cont: "#KeystoneXL will be approved because it is in the national #energysecurity interests of the United States to do so." #BuildItNow

1

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**NE Jobs & Energy** @nejobsandenergy · Feb 6

#KeystoneXL = #EnergySecurity

1

f Build the Keystone Pipeline
Brandon Home

# KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

KXL NORTH (PHASE IV): PROPOSED EXPANSION    K1 (PHASE I): KEYSTONE PIPELINE  
 K1 EXTENSION (PHASE II): KEYSTONE PIPELINE    KXL SOUTH (PHASE III): PROPOSED



0,000/900,000  
Barrels per day

**Build the Keystone Pipeline**  
Political Organization

435,000/591,000  
Barrels per day

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1,847 likes

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Send a message that you support jobs, energy independence and more oil for America.

<https://twitter.com/buildkeystonxl>

<http://buildthekeystonepipeline.wordpress.com/about/>

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**Build the Keystone Pipeline**  
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#Pentagon says #BuildTheKeystonePipeline #Obama #America needs 42000 new #Jobs #TimeToBuild #KXL #KeystoneXL

<http://t.co/QcipnmaAvS>



**Keystone Pipeline Draws No Objections From Pentagon After Review**


The Pentagon "continues to have no objection" to approving the Keystone XL pipeline, a Defense...

NEWSMAX.COM

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**Build the Keystone Pipeline**  
February 6 at 2:51pm · 🌐

9 #Democrats and 53 #Republicans voted for the #KeystoneXL Pipeline Act, 65% of #America wants #Obama to approve the #KeystonePipeline #TimeToBuild #KXL #BuildTheKeystonePipeline



Why I voted for the Keystone XL Pipeline: Guest

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2014



2013

2012

Launched

Sponsored

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www.foxsports.com  
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- 
**Dan Allen**  
 January 29 at 3:35pm  
 Yes vote in the senate. Yaaay  
 Like · Comment
- 
**Russia Watch**  
 January 25 at 8:10pm  
 #Russia raises tensions with the West by selling advanced S-300 missiles to #Iran and #Syria.  
 Like · Comment
- 
**Tara-Kay Booth**  
 January 24 at 6:58am  
 Put America to work!  
 Like · Comment

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**Giving Congress a Pay CUT!** Like
- 
**Americans for a strong nation...** Like

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opinion

By Rep. Kurt Schrader I have been getting a lot of "fan" mail recently from very liberal groups chastising me for voting in a bipartisan manner in Congress the...

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Build the Keystone Pipeline  
February 5 at 2:46pm

End the debate #Obama and approve #KeystoneXL today, #America could use 42000 more #Jobs, it's #TimeToBuild #KXL, a majority of Americans want the #KeystonePipeline #BuildTheKeystonePipeline



Why Obama should OK the Keystone Pipeline

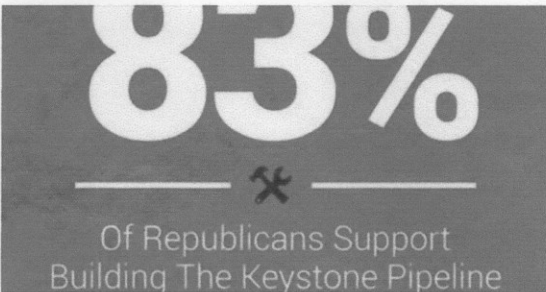
The president could push Republicans into a broader deal that extends his own policies, writes Tim Mullaney.

MARKETWATCH.COM | BY TIM MULLANEY

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Build the Keystone Pipeline  
February 4 at 9:28am

#Obama should approve #KeystoneXL #America needs #Jobs #TimeToBuild #KeystonePipeline #BuildTheKeystonePipeline #KXL http://t.co/ap8ZExCF5o



Build the Keystone (@buildkeystonexl) posted a photo on Twitter

Get the whole picture - and other photos from Build the Keystone

PIC.TWITTER.COM

Like · Comment · Share · 19 · 2

Build the Keystone Pipeline  
February 3 at 2:41pm

Building #KeystoneXL will create 42,000 #jobs, tell #Obama #BuildTheKeystonePipeline and help #America's 629,000 unemployed construction workers.

#KeystonePipeline #Keystone #KXL #BuildKeystoneXL #TimeToBuild #KeystoneXLPipeline



### Obama should sign Keystone Pipeline bill

The U.S. Senate voted Thursday to follow the House in authorizing construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. Amendments remain to be worked out with the House, but a compromise version is expected to reach President Obama's desk as soon...

SUN-SENTINEL.COM | BY SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL

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### Build the Keystone Pipeline

February 2 at 2:38pm · 14

2/3 of #America wants #Obama to approve #KeystoneXL, 629,000 unemployed construction workers need the 42,000 #jobs building the #KeystonePipeline will provide.

#BuildTheKeystonePipeline #Keystone #KXL #BuildKeystoneXL #TimeToBuild #KeystoneXLPipeline



### Will Obama Negotiate On Keystone XL?

After six years of kicking the can down the road, the President will finally have the out he needs to approve the Keystone pipeline. The question is, will he? The Senate yesterday passed a bill approving the Keystone pipeline, 62 to 36 with...

FORBES.COM | BY BRIGHAM A. MCCOWN

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### Build the Keystone Pipeline

February 1 at 2:09pm · 14

65% of #America wants #Obama to approve #KeystoneXL #TimeToBuild #KeystonePipeline #BuildTheKeystonePipeline #KXL <http://t.co/HaIG5i0SPj>



Build the Keystone (@buildkeystonexl) posted a photo on Twitter

Get the whole picture - and other photos from Build the Keystone  
PIC.TWITTER.COM

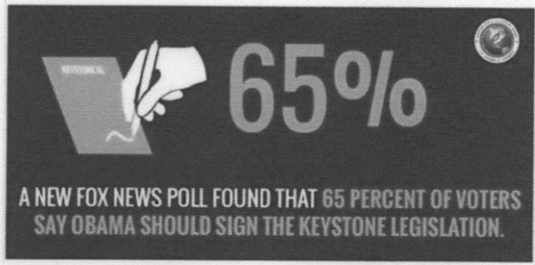
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Build the Keystone Pipeline

February 1 at 2:02pm · 🌐

9 #Democrats and 53 #Republicans voted for the #KeystoneXL Pipeline Act, #TimeToBuild #KXL #BuildTheKeystonePipeline  
<http://t.co/vAm0CpJX5w>



Build the Keystone (@buildkeystonexl) posted a photo on Twitter

Get the whole picture - and other photos from Build the Keystone  
PIC.TWITTER.COM

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Build the Keystone Pipeline

January 31 at 1:01pm · 🌐

Approving #KeystoneXL will provide 42,000 #jobs, tell #Obama #BuildTheKeystonePipeline and help #America's 629,000 unemployed construction workers.

#KeystonePipeline #Keystone #KXL #BuildKeystoneXL #TimeToBuild #KeystoneXLpipeline



Don't disparage pipeline construction jobs

With pipeline projects come jobs. It's just plain logic that many people — maybe thousands of people — will be needed to build them. Yet we constantly hear that pipelines won't be as economically lucrative as...

JAMESTOWNSUN.COM

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**Social Media Content Against the Keystone XL Pipeline**

(“Keystone XL Pipeline (@AgainstKXLPipe),” 2015)

(“Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil,” 2010)

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### Keystone XL Pipeline

@AgainstKXLPipe

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-  Promoted by Pepsi™
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- #TWDIsBack
- #AskAdapt
- Brian Johnson
- Tony Bennet

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Tweets Tweets & replies

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

 **Shepard Fairey** @OBEYGIANT · Feb 2

The Senate's Keystone XL pipeline approval puts a lot at risk, for the main benefit of two powerful people. Help: [bit.ly/1BPEFcc](http://bit.ly/1BPEFcc)

22 14

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

 **Jamie Henn** @Agent350 · Feb 2

"Keystone XL is literally a pipeline to nowhere," writes @AndrewWinston in @HarvardBiz: [bit.ly/1LEQZnZ](http://bit.ly/1LEQZnZ) #NoKXL

6 4

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

 **350 dot org** @350 · Feb 3

The EPA just released their comments on the Keystone XL EIS. They clearly show that the pipeline fails the President's climate test. #noKXL

38 21

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

 **Adam Greenberg** @Pragmactivist99 · 7 Oct 2013

Another physicist against #keystonexl. #climate #science #nokxl



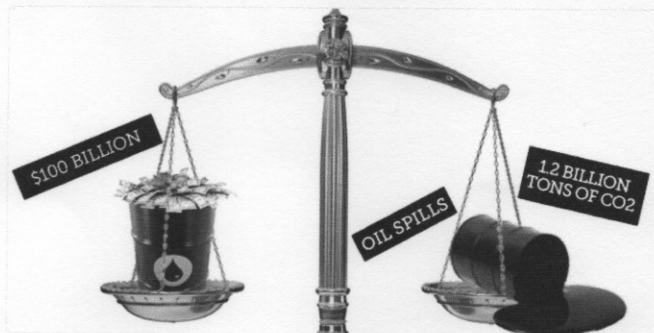
8 3 [View more photos and videos](#)

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

 **Profile** @username · 07 Oct 2013

**BOLD NEBRASKA** @boldnebraska · 27 Oct 2013

#NoKXL RT @WeLoveOurLand: It's Koch brothers vs. Everyone Else: Retweet if you are on Team Everyone Else.

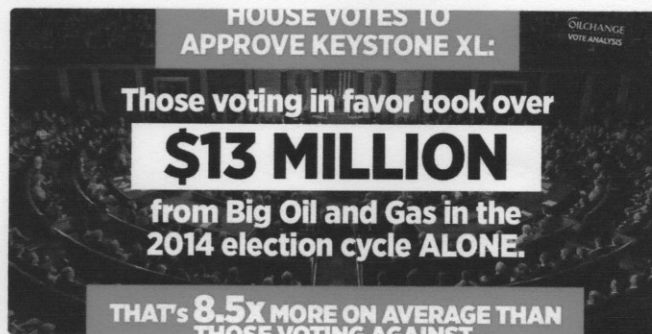


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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**NoKXL** @nokxpledge · Jan 10

#KeystoneXL: people power vs. the power of Big Oil. Time to reject: a.ran.org/s1A #NoKXL @PriceofOil



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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**350 dot org** @350 · Jan 13

#noKXL rallies have hit the US West Coast.

People taking to the streets in the 1000s, in the cold -- this is what democracy looks like.

54 36

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**NoKXL** @nokxpledge · Jan 14

Thank you, #NoKXL movement, for showing up in force last night! Events in all 50 states! Pics: a.ran.org/q1C





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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**NoKXL** @nokxlpledge · Feb 3  
#KXL utterly fails Pres. Obama's climate test; It's time to reject the pipeline [a.ran.org/a1P](http://a.ran.org/a1P) #NoKXL



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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Karen Laffey** @larkspurkaren · Jan 31  
"@thinkprogress: The fourth major pipeline incident \*this month\* [thkpr.gs/3615805](http://thkpr.gs/3615805) \* Wake up America! #KeystoneXL



View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**The Baxter Bean** @TheBaxterBean · Jan 31  
Even TransCanada CEO Admits #KeystoneXL 'Creates ONLY 50 Permanent Jobs' (VIDEO) [m.dailykos.com/story/2014/11/...](http://m.dailykos.com/story/2014/11/)  
@DocWashburn





21 2 View more photos and videos

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted



**NRDC** @NRDC · Feb 2

"Approving #KeystoneXL pipeline is clearly a losing proposition for everyone involved —and everyone on the planet." [on.nrdc.org/1zMQHZ0](http://on.nrdc.org/1zMQHZ0)

16 7 View summary

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted



**Sarah LilRedfeather** @WeLiveNative · Feb 2

Houska: Congress "Using must-pass legislation to harm Native peoples" - ACTION! #RejectKXLNOW [ictmn.com/Z6MW](http://ictmn.com/Z6MW)



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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted



**Guardian Environment** @guardianeco · Feb 3

Keystone pipeline: oil price drop will worsen climate impact, EPA warns [gu.com/p/45f5g](http://gu.com/p/45f5g)

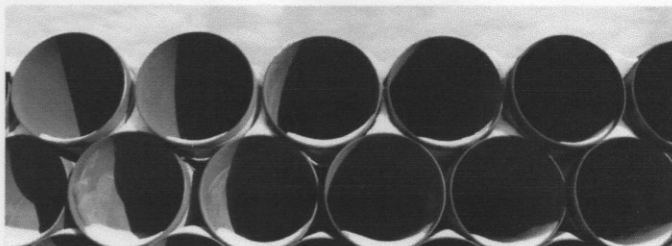
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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted



**Post Green** @postgreen · Feb 3

EPA: Cheap oil weakens the case for the #KeystoneXL pipeline [wpo.st/Ulc20](http://wpo.st/Ulc20) by @JobyWarrick & @eilperin





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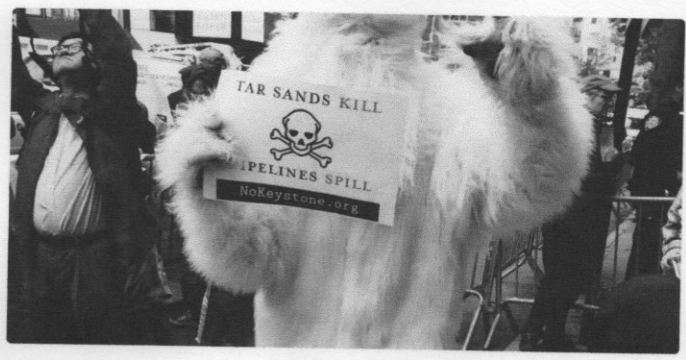
Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Occupy Wall Street** @OccupyWallStNYC · Feb 3  
EPA sends State Dept. damning report on environmental impact of Keystone XL pipeline #KeystoneXL ow.ly/lryg6

21 7 View summary

Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**NoKXL pipeline NYC** @NYC4NoKXL · May 14  
#NoKXL protest right now at 80th st and Madison ave. asking Obama to #RejectAndProtect @StateDept @BarackObama @350



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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Captain Clarion** @citizensrock · Nov 17  
In 2010—Michigan's Kalamazoo had tar sands oil up the wazoo—a million gallons of Canadian goo. #NoKXL in the ♥land.

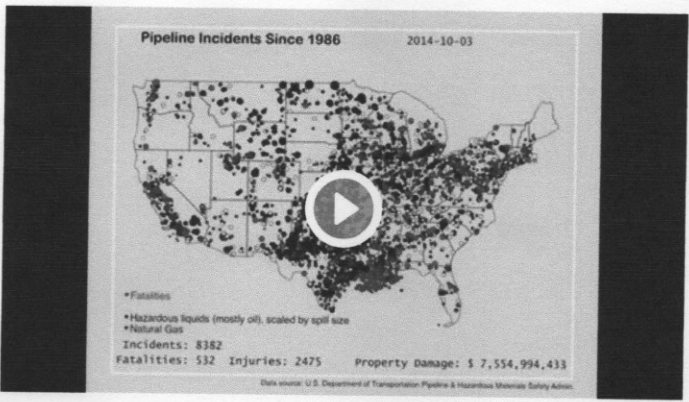


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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Center for Bio Div** @CenterForBioDiv · Nov 17  
Since 1986 pipeline accidents have killed 532 people, injured 2,400 and cost \$7.5bn in damages: bit.ly/1t6cykp #NoKXL

YouTube



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Keystone XL Pipeline retweeted

**Mashable** @mashable · Feb 3

EPA: Keystone XL Pipeline would emit 1 billion extra tons of greenhouse gases on.mash.to/1LJryS4 via @climatecentral

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Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil

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Non-Profit Organization

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ABOUT

We are fighting Big Oil's new pipeline plan, the Keystone XL, which would pump more dirty tar sands oil into the U.S.

In Canada's tar sands, Big Oil makes...

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Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil  
May 12, 2014 ·

Big Oil just got a big 'ole slap in the face. It's desperate maneuver to try to short-circuit the President and force approval of Keystone XL just went down in flames.

Friends of the Earth statement on the Senate effort to force pro-Keystone XL vote  
WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today the proposed legislation to force approval of the Keystone XL...

FOE.ORG

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Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil shared Friends of the Earth U.S.'s photo.  
May 5, 2014 ·

Have you written your Senators yet to tell them no backroom deals to get Keystone XL approved? If not please do so immediately. Thanks!!!



Friends of the Earth

Big Oil is trying to force approval of the Keystone XL pipeline  
**WE CAN'T LET THEM**

Friends of the Earth U.S.




NOTES

**Tar Sands: First Nations Reject Enbridge Pipeline Equ...**  
February 16, 2011

**Senators Stepping Up**  
September 29, 2010

**Act to Stop Tar Sands in Utah**  
September 17, 2010

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Big Oil and its allies in the Senate are pushing a bill that will bypass the Keystone XL review process and allow Congress to force the approval of the dirty pipeline. We need your help! Call on your senators to oppose this bill: <http://bit.ly/117cefR>

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 **Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil** shared Friends of the Earth U.S.'s photo.  
May 3, 2014 ·


Big Oil and its allies in the Senate are pushing a bill that will bypass the Keystone XL review process and allow Congress to force approval of this dirty, dangerous pipeline. We need your help! Call on your senators to oppose this bill. Click here: <http://bit.ly/117cefR>



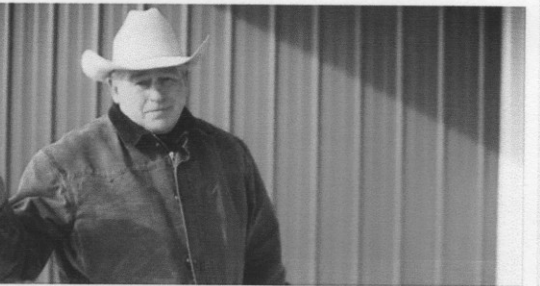
**Friends of the Earth U.S.**

Big Oil and its allies in the Senate are pushing a bill that will bypass the Keystone XL review process and allow Congress to force the approval of the dirty pipeline. We need your help! Call on your senators to oppose this bill: <http://bit.ly/117cefR>

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 **Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil**  
May 1, 2014 ·

Nebraska rancher Randy Thompson has some harsh words for Senators currently pushing a measure to override the President's decision making authority on the Keystone XL pipeline. Thanks to our friends at Bold Nebraska for standing up for what's right!



### Nebraska Rancher Randy Thompson's Open Letter to Senate on Keystone XL Vote

As the Senate once again prepares to take a vote on the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, Nebraska voices will remind Senators that states' rights are at stake, and...

BOLDNEBRASKA.ORG

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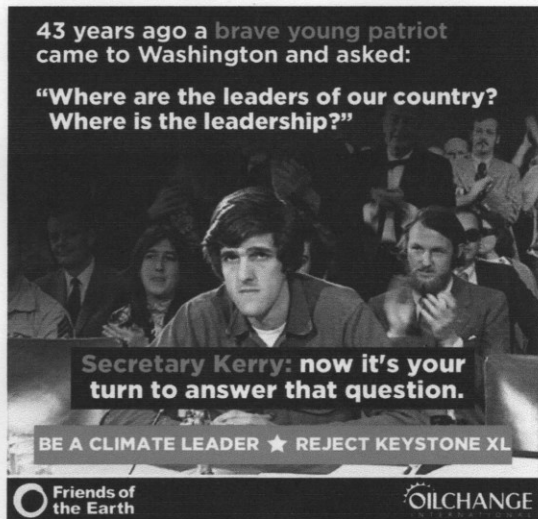


### Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil

shared Oil Change International's photo

April 25, 2014 ·

This past Tuesday marked the 43rd anniversary of when Secretary of State John Kerry came to Washington to speak out against the Vietnam war. His courage is needed once again.



Oil Change International

One week ago the Obama Administration decided to delay it's decision on Keystone XL. If they thought this would let them off the hook, they were wrong.

Today th...

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### Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil

April 25, 2014 ·

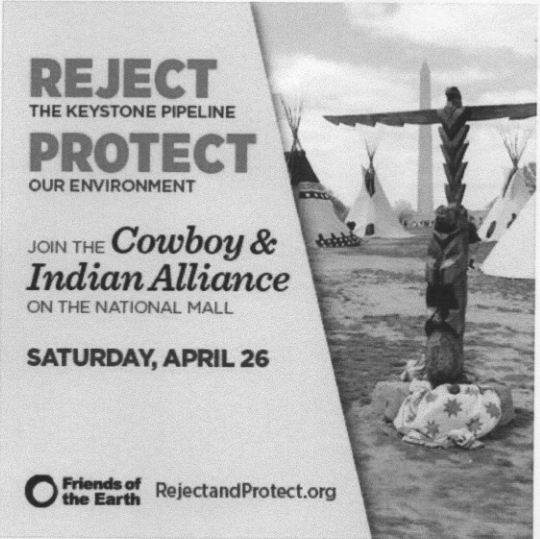
Beautiful photos from this week's Reject & Protect. Hope to see you all on the mall tomorrow!!



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**Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil** shared Friends of the Earth U.S.'s photo. April 24, 2014 ·

If you are anywhere near the Washington, DC area this Saturday you won't want to miss this. Please join us, and spread the word!!!

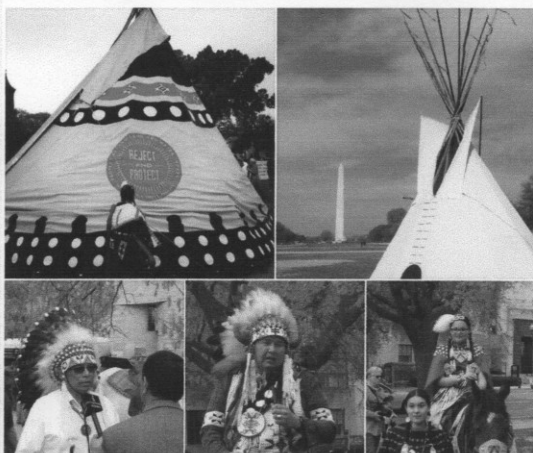


**Friends of the Earth U.S.**  
 Have you seen the tipis on the National Mall this week? Come out this Saturday, April 26 and stand with Bold Nebraska and the Cowboy & Indian Alliance to say NO to the Keystone pipeline. <http://rejectandprotect.org/>  
 Like · Comment · Share · 257 21 18

**Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil** shared Mike Hudema's album. April 22, 2014 ·

Incredible photos from the opening of the Reject & Protect Encampment on the National Mall by our colleague Mike Hudema. A great reminder of the

growing resistance to Keystone XL all across the United States!



Mike Hudema added 44 new photos to the album: Reject and Protect Day 1: No KXL — with Roger Denedragon.

RejectandProtect.org Day 1: No KXL

Photos of the historic first day. Cowboy and Indian Alliance coming together to say No to the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline.

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**Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, No More Dirty Tar Sands Oil**  
 April 18, 2014 · 🌐

**BREAKING: The Obama Administration has just announced a delay in the decision on Keystone XL. Here is Friends of the Earth's reaction.**

**Friends of the Earth statement on Keystone XL delay**  
 WASHINGTON, D.C. – The State Department announced today that it will provide agencies more time to comment on the proposed Keystone XL pipeline project, in the wake of uncertainty about the...  
 FOE.ORG

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**Entertainment (Non-political) Social Media Content**

(“ESPN College BBall (@ESPNCBB),” 2009)

(“ESPN College Basketball,” 2009)

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**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 3h  
 Iowa takes down #17 Maryland 71-55. Terrapins suffer 5th loss of the season »  
 es.pn/16HUSrN #MDvsIOWA

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**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 4h  
 ICYMI: Virginia loses star guard Justin Anderson for four to six weeks »  
 es.pn/16HII7H

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- #AskAdapt
- T Swizzle
- Best Rap Album
- Does Beyoncé

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**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 4h  
 Dominant first half! Iowa leads No. 17 Maryland, 40-17. Terps are shooting 24% from the field while Hawkeyes are shooting 61% #MDvsIOWA

52 80

**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 5h  
 ICYMI: Willie Cauley-Stein delivered a #DunkOfTheYear candidate in Kentucky's win vs. Florida. #SCtop10 es.pn/1DQ4ZWa

ESPN



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**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 5h  
 President Barack Obama released this statement on Dean Smith

**Statement by the President on the Passing of Dean Smith**

Last night, America lost not just a coaching legend but a gentleman and a citizen. When he retired, Dean Smith had won more games than any other college basketball coach in history. He went to 11 Final Fours, won two national titles, and reared a generation of players who went on to even better things elsewhere, including a young man named Michael Jordan—and all of us from Chicago are thankful for that.

But more importantly, Coach Smith showed us something that I've seen again and again on the court – that basketball can tell us a lot more about who you are than a jumpshot alone ever could. He graduated more than 96 percent of his players and taught his teams to point to the teammate who passed them the ball after a basket. He pushed forward the Civil Rights movement, recruiting the first black scholarship athlete to North Carolina and helping to integrate a restaurant and a neighborhood in Chapel Hill. And in his final years, Coach Smith showed us how to fight an illness with courage and dignity. For all of that, I couldn't have been prouder to honor Coach Smith with Medal of Freedom in 2013.

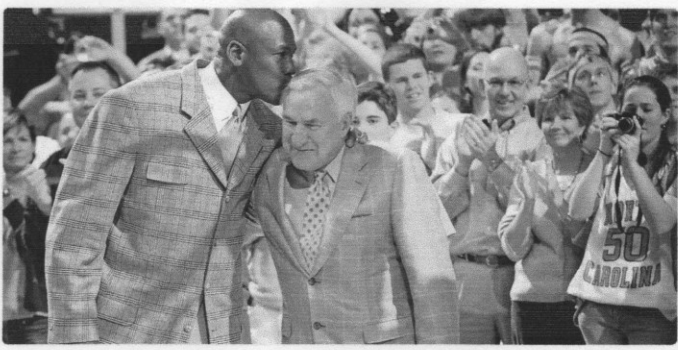
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**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 5h  
Hoosiers win! Indiana beats Michigan, 70-67. Troy Williams led IU w/ 20 points, who move to 17-7 on year #MICHvsIND



71 117 View more photos and videos

**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 6h  
Dean Smith changed the game & earned respect from those he coached & faced [es.pn/1zLMGRv](https://es.pn/1zLMGRv)

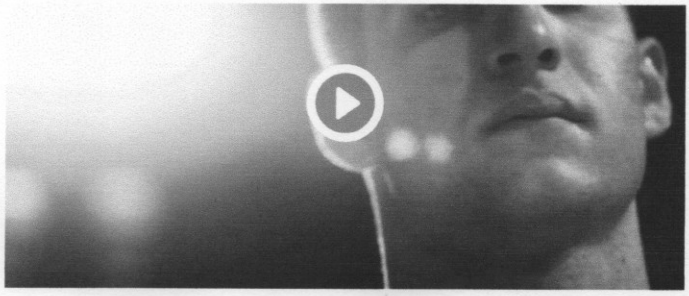


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**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 6h  
A survivor of two separate plane crashes, Austin Hatch realized his dream to play for the Michigan Wolverines. [es.pn/18ZCrjN](https://es.pn/18ZCrjN)



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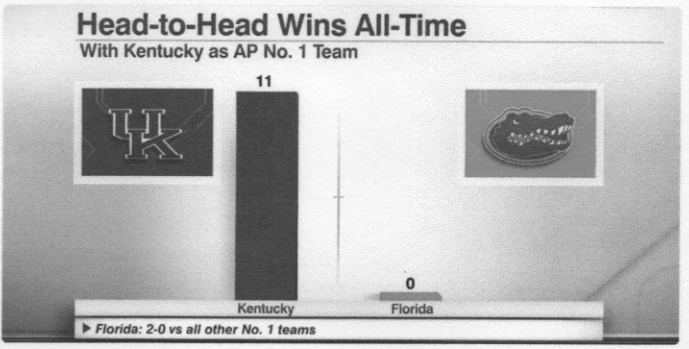


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**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 6h  
At the half, Indiana leads Michigan, 36-29. James Blackmon Jr. leads the Hoosiers with 12 points & 6 rebounds. #MICHvsIND

16 41

**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 9h  
Florida is 0-11 all-time vs. Kentucky when the Wildcats are ranked No. 1.



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**ESPN College BBall** @ESPNCBB · 9h  
As news broke of Dean Smith's passing, Twitter reaction came in from across the bball world. es.pn/1C8a2RX



**Frank Martin** @FrankMartin\_SC

Follow

game of basketball & life lost 1 of the gr8est teachers/mentors of all time. TY 4 impacting me from afar & helping so many. RIP Coach Smith

9:56 AM - 8 Feb 2015

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ESPN College BBall retweeted  
**ESPN Stats & Info** @ESPStatsInfo · 9h  
In 36 seasons as North Carolina head coach. Dean Smith's only losino

season was his first

← ↻ 509 ★ 490 ...

ESPN College BBall @ESPNCBB · 10h

.@DickieV looks back on the artistry, innovation and integrity of Dean Smith. es.pn/1KD3jSb

ESPN



← ↻ 204 ★ 205 ...

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Dick Vitale @DickieV · 10h

DEAN SMITH was so innovative-had a major impact on many coaches & those that played/coached 4 him May he RIP es.pn/1cd0Jki

← ↻ 334 ★ 509 ...

ESPN College BBall retweeted

John Calipari @UKCoachCalipari · 10h

Dean Smith was the most innovative and player-loved coach of his time.

← ↻ 415 ★ 633 ...

ESPN College BBall retweeted

Carolina Basketball @UNC\_Basketball · 11h

Statement from Roy Williams on the passing of Dean Smith: bit.ly/16GCPSK #UNCBBall

← ↻ 713 ★ 481 ...

ESPN College BBall retweeted

Jahlil Okafor @BigJah15 · 11h

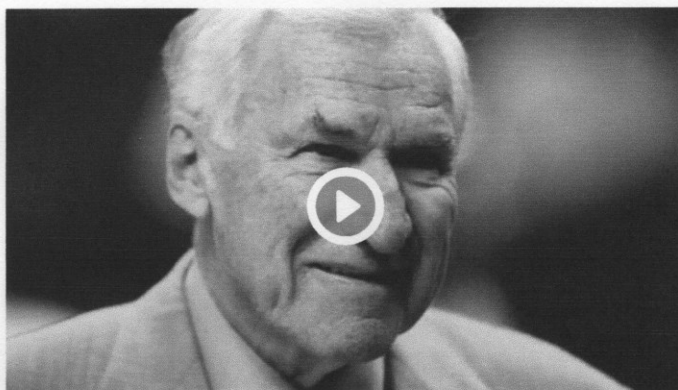
#RIPDeanSmith

← ↻ 638 ★ 953 ...

ESPN College BBall @ESPNCBB · 11h

Jeff Goodman discusses the legacy of Dean Smith, who coached North Carolina from 1961 to 1997 es.pn/187o7wa

ESPN



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ESPN College BBall retweeted

**Duke Athletics** @Duke\_ATHLETICS · 11h

We're saddened to hear of the loss of Dean Smith - a tremendous coach and teacher, but an even better person. Condolences to the UNC family.

1.3K 1.5K

ESPN College BBall retweeted

**Jay Bilas** @JayBilas · 11h

Profoundly sad to learn of the passing of Dean Smith: [es.pn/1Dt7Bvb](https://es.pn/1Dt7Bvb)  
One of the finest coaches and people in the history of sport.

1K 1.1K View summary



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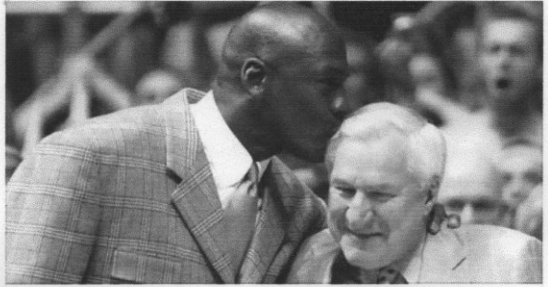


VIDEOS



College Basketball from B/R  
8 hrs · 🌐

From Michael Jordan to Mike "Coach K" Krzyzewski, the sports world reacts to the passing of legendary coach Dean Smith.



**Sports World Reacts to Smith's Passing**

During his 83 years, Dean Smith touched countless lives. He was a bastion of excellence on the basketball court, a mentor to many of basketball's all-time great players and coaches ...

BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TYLER CONWAY

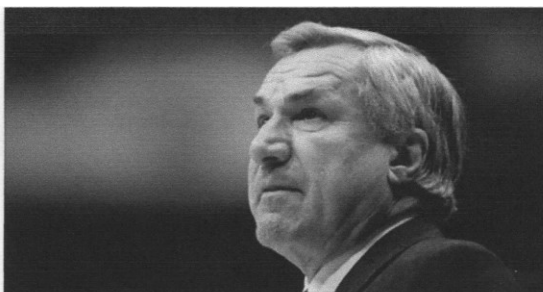
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College Basketball from B/R  
10 hrs · 🌐

Legendary North Carolina Tar Heels basketball coach Dean Smith passes away at age 83. RIP.



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### Dean Smith, Former UNC Basketball Head Coach, Dies at Age 83

Legendary North Carolina men's basketball coach Dean Smith, who pushed the Tar Heels to national prominence during his four decades on the bench, died...

BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TYLER CONWAY

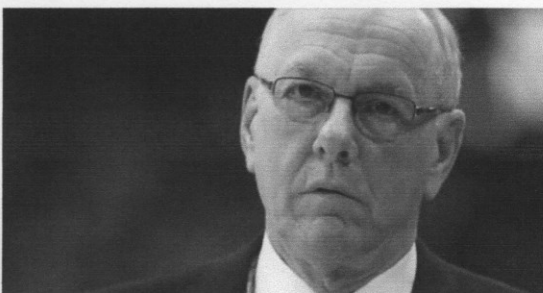
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### College Basketball from B/R

Yesterday at 6:40pm · 🌐

"I don't give a s\*\*t what those people think."



### Boeheim Comments on Cuse Hoops in Wake of Postseason Ban

Some people don't like how Jim Boeheim is running the Syracuse basketball program, which is fresh off a self-imposed postseason ban. And Boeheim could...

BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TIM KEENEY

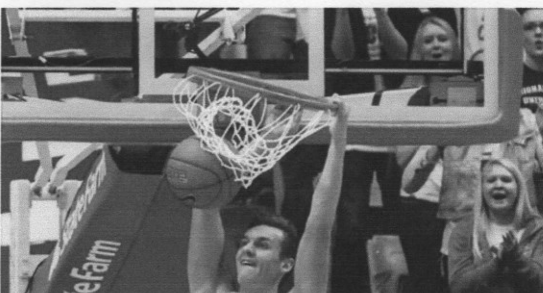
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### College Basketball from B/R

Yesterday at 6:10pm · 🌐

Five triple-doubles. FIVE.



Kyle Collinsworth Breaks NCAA Record with 5th Triple-

### Double of the Season

It was another typical Saturday for BYU guard Kyle Collinsworth, who tallied 23 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists against Loyola Marymount to give him an...

BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TIM KEENEY

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### College Basketball from B/R

Yesterday at 5:36pm ·

That's one way to do it.



### VIDEO: ASU Fans Twerk in Animal Costumes to Distract Free-Throw Shooters

You might not want to let your kids watch this one. The Arizona State Sun Devils were playing their in-state rivals in the Arizona Wildcats on Saturday. To distract...

BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TYLER BROOKE

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### College Basketball from B/R

Yesterday at 4:25pm ·

NOT TODAY.



### VIDEO: Duke's Allen Denies ND's Jackson At The Rim

This is what the Duke Blue Devils look like when they're firing on all cylinders. Notre Dame's Demetrius Jackson was driving to the rim on Saturday hoping to get some points...

BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TYLER BROOKE

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### College Basketball from B/R

Yesterday at 4:24pm ·

Just like they wrote up.





**VIDEO: Xavier's Off-The-Backboard Alley-Oop Slam**

This is how to properly finish off a win. With 39 seconds left on Saturday, Xavier held a seven-point lead over the Providence Friars...

BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TYLER BROOKE

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**College Basketball from B/R**

Yesterday at 4:21pm · Edited ·

**Incredible last-second layup!**



**VIDEO: Bonnies Stun VCU on Nasty GW Layup**

The St. Bonaventure Bonnies don't have a nationally renowned basketball program, so it's a huge deal whenever they pull off an upset. With the game tied at 71-71 against the No...

BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TYLER BROOKE

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**College Basketball from B/R**

Yesterday at 4:16pm ·

**It just popped out.**



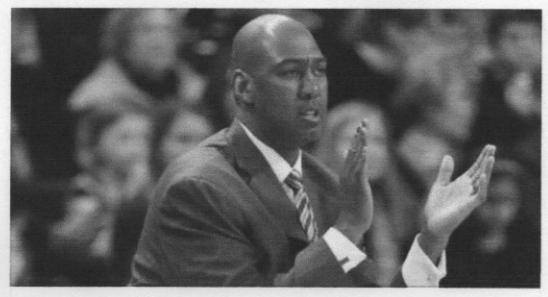
**VIDEO: UNC's Brice Johnson Slams It Home, Net Has Other Ideas**

Slam dunks aren't supposed to work like that. North Carolina's Brice Johnson tried to throw down a putback dunk against Boston College on Saturday. It looked like...  
BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY TYLER BROOKE

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**br** College Basketball from B/R  
February 6 at 1:41pm ·

He looks forward to the challenge of resurrecting Wake Forest.

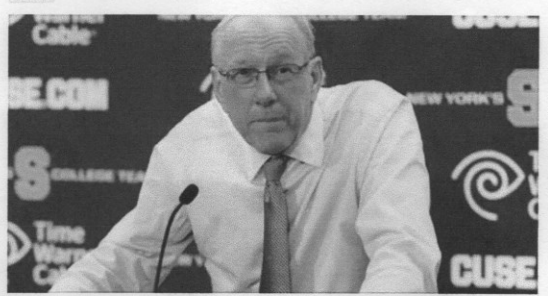


### Manning Relishing New Life at Wake Forest

WINSTON-SALEM, North Carolina — The lopsided loss to North Carolina is less than 10 minutes old when Danny Manning enters the Wake Forest locker room...  
BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY JASON KING

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**br** College Basketball from B/R shared a link.  
February 5 at 5:26pm ·



### Is Cuse Taking Easy Way out with Self-Imposed Postseason Ban?

Sometimes a postseason ban in college sports is the "sheep in wolf's clothing" version of a punishment...  
BLEACHERREPORT.COM | BY SCOTT POLACEK

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**br** College Basketball from B/R  
February 5 at 10:33am ·

Get that weak stuff out of here.



## **Feeling Thermometer and Questions**

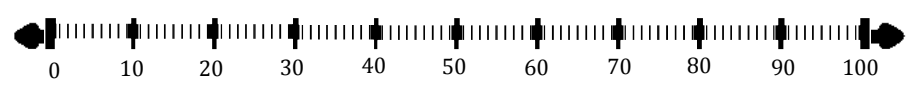
Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

Part 2

Please rate how you feel about the Keystone XL Pipeline on a scale that runs from 0 to 100. Ratings between 0 and 50 mean that you feel negatively toward the Keystone XL Pipeline. Ratings between 50 and 100 mean that you feel positively toward the Keystone XL Pipeline. A rating of 50 means that you feel neutral (neither negatively nor positively) about the Keystone XL Pipeline.

You may use the rating scale at the bottom of the page to help you visualize your rating of the Keystone XL Pipeline. However, you do not need to mark your rating on this scale.

Please write the number that corresponds to your rating of how you feel about the Keystone XL Pipeline: \_\_\_\_\_.  
Please make your rating an integer (whole number).



Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 2 (Continued)

Now, please answer the following questions.

1. In general, where do you place yourself on a conservative to liberal scale?

Extremely Conservative  Conservative  Slightly Conservative  
 Moderate  Slightly Liberal  Liberal  Extremely Liberal

2. In general, how do you identify yourself politically?

Strong Democrat  Democrat  Independent-leaning Democrat  
 Independent  Independent-leaning Republican  Republican  
 Strong Republican

3. How well informed do you consider yourself about politics?

Very Well  Well  Somewhat Well  Only a Little  Not at All

4. Now that you have read the social media posts, how well informed do you consider yourself about the Keystone XL Pipeline?

Very Well  Well  Somewhat Well  Only a Little  Not at All

5. Are you male or female?

Male  Female

6. What is your race?

White  Hispanic/Latino  African American/Black  
 Asian American or Pacific Islander  Native American  Other

7. Has anyone in your immediate family (parents or siblings) worked in the oil industry?

Yes  No

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