The Polarizing Effects of Partisan and Mainstream News

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Background

- Partisan selective exposure
- Polarization
- Mainstream news popularity
- Does mainstream news viewing stunt the affects of likeminded news exposure?
United States Department of State
Bureau of Oceans and International
Environmental and Scientific Affairs

Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
for the
Keystone XL Project
Executive Summary
January 2014

Applicant for Presidential Permit: TransCanada Keystone Pipeline, LP
Control Condition

Likeminded News Condition
Fox News for Republicans
MSNBC for Democrats
Random for True Independents

Mainstream News Condition
NBC News

Likeminded, then Mainstream News Condition

Mainstream, then Likeminded Condition

Amazon.com’s mTurk
n=274
Hypotheses

• Partisans viewing the mainstream clip will exhibit fewer differences in the facts shown than partisans viewing likeminded clips.

• Media trust will be affected by clip order, whether mainstream or partisan is seen first.

• Beliefs about the pipeline will be most polarized in the likeminded condition, next in the mixed conditions, and finally in the mainstream condition relative to the control.

• Partisanship will predict attitudes more strongly when people view likeminded news than a combination of likeminded and mainstream, which will be stronger than mainstream news only.
What Did the Report Find? (Mainstream Clip)

Democrats (n=84) vs Republicans (n=46)

- Create jobs: Democrats 75%, Republicans 70%
- Won't affect crude oil demand: Democrats 60%, Republicans 40%
- Produce more pollution: Democrats 25%, Republicans 30%
- Little environmental impact: Democrats 80%, Republicans 85%
What Did the Report Find? (Partisan Clips)

- Create jobs: Democrats (n=79) - 0%, Republicans (n=52) - 10%
- Won't affect crude oil demand: Democrats (n=79) - 0%, Republicans (n=52) - 20%
- Produce more pollution: Democrats (n=79) - 90%, Republicans (n=52) - 100%
- Little environmental impact: Democrats (n=79) - 80%, Republicans (n=52) - 90%
Distrust (1-5, higher values = more distrust)

Likeminded
- Saw first: 2.5
- Saw second: 3.0

Mainstream
- Saw first: 2.4
- Saw second: 2.3
Do you think the pipeline would or would not pose a significant risk to the environment?

![Bar chart showing the percentage of Democrats and Republicans who believe the pipeline poses a significant risk in different conditions: Control, Mainstream, Mainstream - Likeminded, Likeminded. The chart shows varying percentages for each group, with Democrats generally having a higher percentage than Republicans, except in the Likeminded condition where the difference is minimal.]
Do You Think The Pipeline Would or Would Not Create a Significant Number of Jobs?

![Bar chart showing percentage of Democrats and Republicans on different scenarios.]

- **Control**: Democrat 50%, Republican 70%
- **Mainstream**: Democrat 40%, Republican 60%
- **Likeminded - Mainstream**: Democrat 30%, Republican 70%
- **Mainstream - Likeminded**: Democrat 40%, Republican 60%
- **Likeminded**: Democrat 50%, Republican 90%
Support for Keystone XL Pipeline

- Strong Democrat
- Strong Republican
- Likeminded
- Mainstream
- Control

Graph showing the support for the Keystone XL Pipeline across different categories.
Support for Keystone XL Pipeline

- Likeminded
- Mainstream
- Likeminded-Mainstream
- Mainstream - Likeminded
- Control
Conclusions

• Mainstream and partisan clips present different facts & viewers recognize the differences

• Assessments of media credibility vary depending on order

• Mainstream media doesn’t affect partisan gap in beliefs, but any hint of likeminded media does

• Effect of partisanship on attitudes varies by condition
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