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### The Partisan Effects of COVID-19: News Sources and Mask Wearing

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# The Partisan Effect of COVID-19:

## News Sources and Mask Wearing

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### HYPOTHESIS:

People who watch Fox News are more likely than those who watch CNN to disagree that the benefits of wearing mask outway the consequences of not wearing one.  
 Replucans are more likey to watch Fox News while Democrats are more likely to watch CNN.  
 Republicans are more likely to disagree that the benefits of wearing a mask outweigh the consequences of not wearing one than democrats.

### Discussion

The results of this research show important implications about the relationship of party identification, news source, and perceptions of risk prevention, specifically the use of masks. While the initial expectation was that how often an individual watches FOX News and/or CNN would have the most influence on the perception of mask wearing, the strongest relationship and influence proved to be party identification. From there, as the results showed, party identification greatly affected whether an individual watched FOX News, CNN, or MSNBC. Thus, The implication here is then that FOX News and CNN perpetuate the partisan perceptions of COVID-19 rather than dictate perceptions of mask wearing. Thus, party identification is the dictator of mask perceptions. This also implies that individuals selectively choose their new source based on their party identification, thus fueling the cycle of partisanship and making it difficult to get out of.

Because the United States is one of the only countries in which the global coronavirus pandemic became politicized and partisan, it is important to understand the causes that perpetuated partisanship of this health crisis in order to better prepare for the future of politics in the United States and public risk and health communication (i.e. party identification, how often an individual watches FOX News, CNN, or MSNBC). During the early stages of the pandemic, there was widespread uncertainty about the new virus that led to the spread of misinformation and conflicting viewpoints headed by the Trump administration. Because of the Trump administration's controversy that had already deep partisan divides before the pandemic, already partisan media sources adopted the responses to COVID-19 of democrat and republican politicians. Evidence shows that with the onset of COVID-19, American's attention to news grew rapidly and largely. What all of this tells us about the nature of politics and citizens within the U.S. is that even issues concerning the public health can become politicized and lead to increased political, economic, and social tensions and that politics has a significant effect and influence on the way in which Americans perceive issues, regardless of whether they are initially partisan or not. It also shows that political elites also have a strong influence over the response of the public.

### Methods

Using the Chapman University Survey of American Fears, the following variables were measured on an ordinal scale specifical to the variable.

#### Measures:

##### Mask Wearing:

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about coronavirs (COVID-19): The benefits of wearing a mask outweigh the consequences of not wearing one.

- On a scale of 1-4 (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

##### Party Identification:

Would you describe yourself as republican, independent, or democrat?

- On a scale of 1-3 (republican, independent, democrat)

##### FOX News:

How often do you watch FOX News?

- On a scale of 1-3 (Often, sometimes, not often)

##### CNN:

How often do you watch CNN?

- On a scale of 1-3 (often, sometimes, not often)

### Results

All three of the hypothesis proved to be correct. There was a negative relationship between mask wearing and FOX News showing that the more respondents watched FOX News, the less they agreed with mask wearing. There was a positive relationship between CNN and mask wearing showing that the more respondents watched CNN, the more they agreed with mask wearing. However, there was a negative relationship between CNN and party identification and a positive one between FOX News and party identification. This proves that the more the respondents watched CNN, the less republican they were and the more respondents watched FOX News, the less democrat they were.

However, when looking at the statistical significance of party identification, CNN, MSNBC, and FOX News in relation to mask wearing, party identification proved to be the most important variable and the p-value of FOX News dropped from statostically significant at  $-.123^{**}$  to not statistically significant at  $.66$ . Both the CNN and MSNBC variables dropped in strength of relationship to mask wearing but still remained statistically significant.

Table 3: Party ID and Mask Wearing

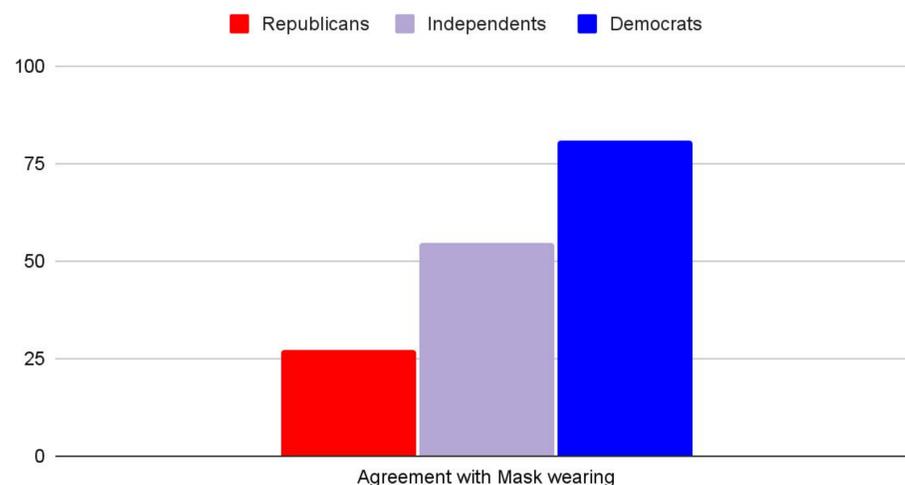


Table 2: News Source and Party ID

