

Chapman University

## Chapman University Digital Commons

---

Student Scholar Symposium Abstracts and Posters

Center for Undergraduate Excellence

---

Spring 5-5-2022

### What Are You Scared Of? How Social Media News Consumption Impacts Voter Fear

Emilie Haskell

Chapman University, [emhaskell@chapman.edu](mailto:emhaskell@chapman.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd\\_abstracts](https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts)



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Haskell, Emilie, "What Are You Scared Of? How Social Media News Consumption Impacts Voter Fear" (2022). *Student Scholar Symposium Abstracts and Posters*. 528.

[https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd\\_abstracts/528](https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts/528)

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Undergraduate Excellence at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Scholar Symposium Abstracts and Posters by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [laughtin@chapman.edu](mailto:laughtin@chapman.edu).



# What Are You Scared Of?

## How Social Media Consumption Impacts Voter Fear

Emilie Haskell

Chapman University, Department of Political Science, Orange, CA

### Introduction

This study examines the relationship between social media as a news source and the presence of fear in voters. The following are key points made consistently throughout the literature.

#### The Psychology of Voting and Social Trends

Studies show that voters are impacted by media that makes them feel negative emotions like fear and hate. Social media news contains an extremely high volume of fear and hate based news content, and in the case of a twitter study, has been proven to be as good of an indicator of election outcomes as polling data.

- Studies have been conducted proving that voters are impacted by media that inspires negative emotions like fear and anger. (Parker, 2010)
- Research found that “100% of television episodes and 98.8% of talk radio programs contained outrage content” such as mockery, extreme misrepresentation, and fear mongering (Berry, 2016)
- Social media forms like Twitter/Facebook are constantly filled with clips from TV/radio, meaning the outrage content being spread on TV is also being spread through social media. (DiGrazia, 2013)
- Findings also suggest that social media data could be developed into measures of public attitudes and behaviors that could serve as alternatives to polling data.

#### Outrage and Fearmongering

Fear mongering in social media news is so ingrained that we’ve coined a term for it: “fake news”.

- Scholars argue that we have entered a “post-truth” period in which the truth has lost its value, perceptions are more important, and manipulated content can be given to masses at ease (Yerlikaya, 2020)
- Routine political behaviors are regularly presented in ways to create the impression that views or people are ignorant, dangerous, or inept.
- During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, there were over two million shares of a fake news article claiming Barack Obama signed a nationwide ban on the pledge of allegiance.

#### The Echo Chamber Effect

Many voters consume enough social media that algorithms tailor each user’s content to stay within their existing views. (Schroeder, 2022)

- Early 2000s growth on online news creates excessive diversity of viewpoints that makes it easy to form echo chambers, insulated from contrary perspectives and interactions with others outside of their beliefs.
- less than 25% of survey respondents from a cited source were able to identify one person with differing views with whom they interact.

### Hypotheses and Methods

**H1: Respondents who reported getting their news from social media are more likely to vote for a politician or party because of their fears.**

**H2: Respondents who reported getting their news from social media are more likely to report being afraid of voting issues.**

**H3: Respondents who reported being afraid of major voting issues are more likely to vote for a politician or party because of their fears.**

The second and third hypotheses are a result of the inconclusive data received from testing the first. The general roots of these hypotheses come from literature supporting the effective use of fear mongering and disinformation in the media.

Data from the 2020 Chapman Survey of American Fears indicated no correlation between the questions, “how often do you get your news from social media?” and “have you ever voted for a political party or candidate because of your fears?” despite the clear link between fear and voting outlined in the cited literature.

This led to two possibilities: a “Z” factor, or outside influence, causing respondents to vote based on their fears, or the question of, “have you ever voted for a political party or candidate because of your fears?” simply not being an effective question for many respondents. Several strong correlations between social media news and major voting and media issues such as climate change and terrorism show support for the latter argument, additionally positing an interesting point of how subconsciously people are affected by fear.

Additionally, the fear climate change shows strong positive correlation with voting based on fear, furthering the previous argument.

### Results

#### Hypothesis 1

Correlation between Social Media News and Voting Fear

Social Media News	Pearson Correlation	1	.028
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.360
	N	1,035	1,035
Voting out of Fear	Pearson Correlation	.028	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.360	
	N	1,035	1,035

Hypothesis 1’s correlation results showed no conclusive results, indicating that the question was potentially an ineffective measure.

#### Hypothesis 2

Correlation between Social Media News and Fear of Climate Change

Social Media News	Pearson Correlation	1	.111**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1,034	1,034
Fear of Climate Change	Pearson Correlation	.111**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1,034	1,034

\*\*Correlation is significant

Hypothesis 2 showed a strong positive correlation, leading me to test Hypothesis 3 to confirm my initial beliefs about the connection in Hypothesis 1.

#### Hypothesis 3

Correlation between Voting Fear and Fear of Climate Change

Voting out of Fear	Pearson Correlation	1	.107**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	1,035	1,035
Fear of Climate Change	Pearson Correlation	.107**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	1,035	1,035

\*\*Correlation is significant

Hypothesis 2 and 3 display the gap in emotional voting awareness, showing strong correlation between respondents fearing major voting issues and those respondents also voting out of fear.

### Conclusions

#### Hypothesis 1

- The lack of convincing data encourages a deeper look into how conscious respondents are of their emotional responses when voting.

#### Hypothesis 2 & 3

- Hypothesis 2 and 3’s correlations point out the missing invisible step that gets respondents from using social media for news to voting because of their fears.
- Strong correlations between social media news and major voting issues such as climate change and terrorism.
- Moderate correlation between fear of major voting issues and respondents saying they have voted because of their fears.

When broken down into the two steps of 1) social media news’ strong correlation to fear of major voting issues and 2) the fear of major voting issues’ correlation to voting because of fears, the original hypothesis is proven correct. This finding is particularly concerning, as it shows respondents to be somewhat unaware of how social media news impacts their voting habits. It’s very important to be aware of how the news we consume is impacting our voting habits, especially when the news is often based in fear and disinformation, as is the case with social media.

### References

Berry, Jeffrey M., and Sarah Sobieraj. “Chapter 2: Mapping Outrage in Blogs, Talk Radio, and Cable News.” *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2016.

Berry, Jeffrey M., and Sarah Sobieraj. “Chapter 5: Political Anxiety and Outrage Fandom.” *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2016.

DiGrazia, Joseph, et al. “More Tweets, More Votes: Social Media as a Quantitative Indicator of Political Behavior.” *PLoS ONE*, vol. 8, no. 11, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0079449>.

Parker, Michael T., and Linda M. Isbell. “How I Vote Depends on How I Feel.” *Psychological Science*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2010, pp. 548–550., <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610364006>.

Schroeder, Ralph. “Media Systems, Digital Media and Politics.” UCL Press, 2018, pp. 28–59. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/libproxy.chapman.edu/stable/j.ctt20krxdr.5>. Accessed 26 Apr. 2022.

Yerlikaya, Turgay, and Seca Toker. “Social Media and Fake News in the Post-Truth Era: The Manipulation of Politics in the Election Process.” *Insight Turkey*, 2020, pp. 177–196., <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2020222.11>.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Ann Gordon and the Henley Research Lab.