The Consequences of Broader Media Choice: Evidence from the Expansion of Fox News

Daniel J. Hopkins and Jonathan M. Ladd

Georgetown University

May 10, 2013

Changes in the Media Landscape in the "Post-Broadcast Era"

Changes in the Media Landscape in the "Post-Broadcast Era"

- More choices

Changes in the Media Landscape in the "Post-Broadcast Era"

- More choices
- More diversity in the mode and style of news delivery

Changes in the Media Landscape in the "Post-Broadcast Era"

- More choices
- More diversity in the mode and style of news delivery
- One of the main types of diversity is ideological diversity

The Fox News roll out

The Fox News roll out

- An opinionated news source in a high choice environment

The Fox News roll out

- An opinionated news source in a high choice environment
- Provides variation in access to identify this effect

DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) estimate a town-level effect on vote choice:

- 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points
- Larger in Democratic areas

Our Approach: Build on DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) by

- Combining town-level data on availability with individual-level data from the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES)

Advantages:

Advantages:

- Estimate individual-level average treatment effect without ecological inference bias

Advantages:

- Estimate individual-level average treatment effect without ecological inference bias
- Estimate effect heterogeneity without ecological inference bias

Advantages:

- Estimate individual-level average treatment effect without ecological inference bias
- Estimate effect heterogeneity without ecological inference bias
- Condition on additional individual-level (and zip code-level) covariates in parametric models and matching

Creating the Dataset

Creating the Dataset

- 33,063 NAES respondents lived in the 26 states where DellaVigna and Kaplan collected at least some Fox availability data

Creating the Dataset

- 33,063 NAES respondents lived in the 26 states where DellaVigna and Kaplan collected at least some Fox availability data
- We matched 22,592 (68%) of these to the town-level dataset

Analysis

Analysis

- Difference-in-differences design following DellaVigna and Kaplan

Analysis

- Difference-in-differences design following DellaVigna and Kaplan
- Include every independent variable employed by DellaVigna and Kaplan (including state fixed effects, but not county and CD fixed effects)

Analysis

- Difference-in-differences design following DellaVigna and Kaplan
- Include every independent variable employed by DellaVigna and Kaplan (including state fixed effects, but not county and CD fixed effects)
- Individual-level covariates (such as gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, education, union membership, income, etc.)

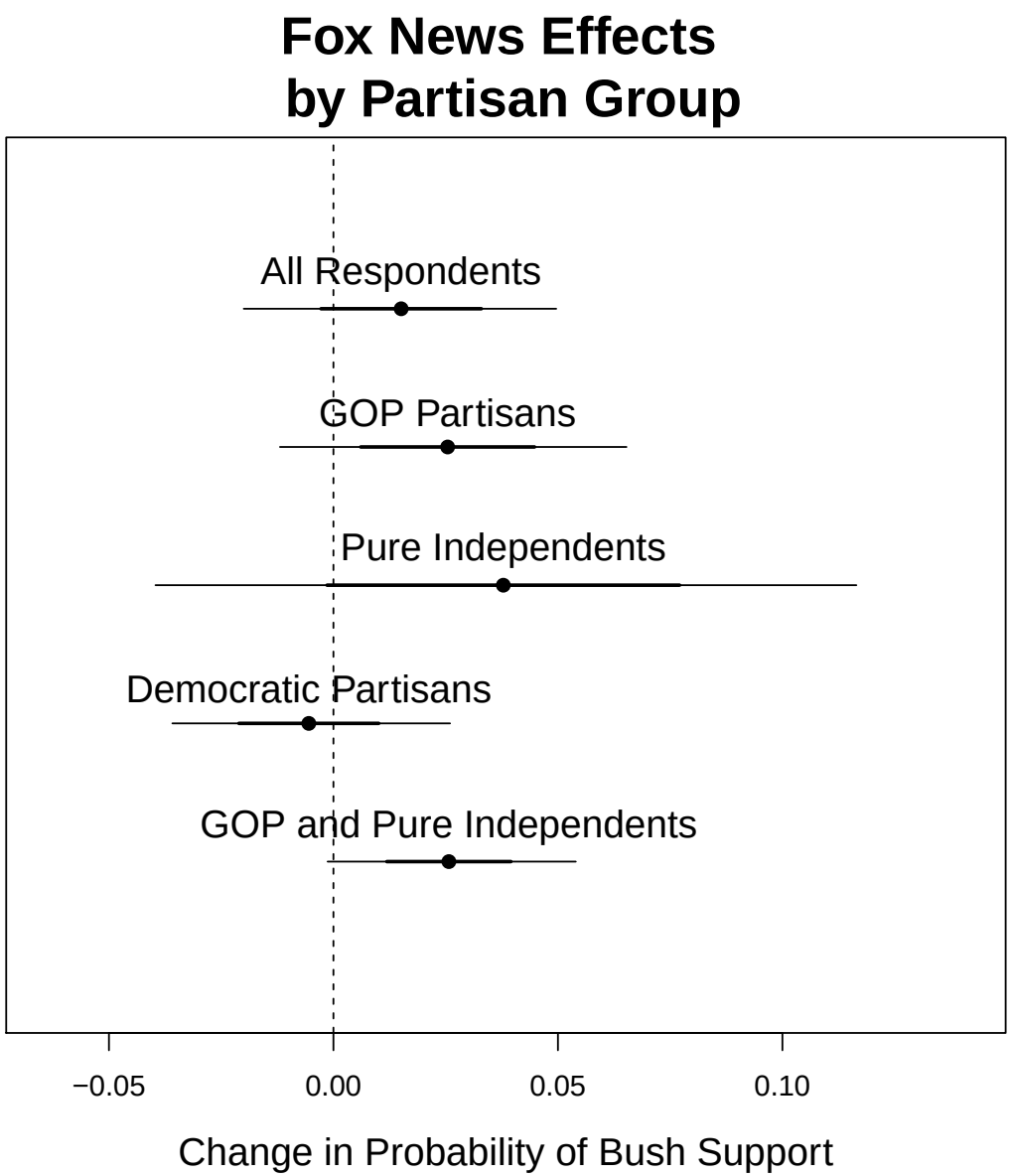
Analysis

- Difference-in-differences design following DellaVigna and Kaplan
- Include every independent variable employed by DellaVigna and Kaplan (including state fixed effects, but not county and CD fixed effects)
- Individual-level covariates (such as gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, education, union membership, income, etc.)
- Zip-code-level covariates (such as % black, % hispanic, % with bachelor's, population density, % in same home from 1995-2000)

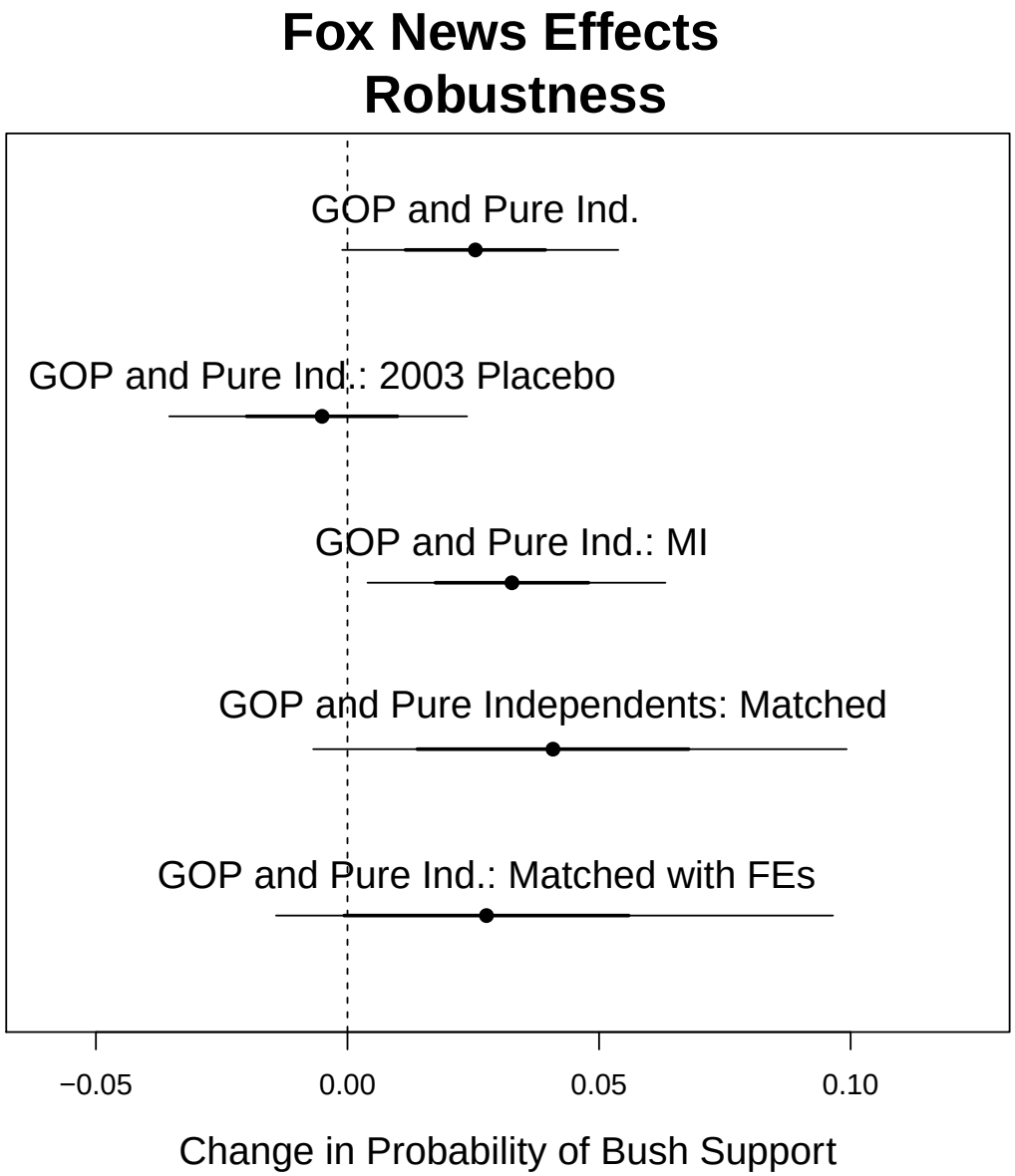
Analysis

- Difference-in-differences design following DellaVigna and Kaplan
- Include every independent variable employed by DellaVigna and Kaplan (including state fixed effects, but not county and CD fixed effects)
- Individual-level covariates (such as gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, education, union membership, income, etc.)
- Zip-code-level covariates (such as % black, % hispanic, % with bachelor's, population density, % in same home from 1995-2000)
- Overall, 109 control variables (only 2 are attitudinal: party ID and "born again" Christian ID)

Effects Among Partisan Groups - Logistic Regression Results



4 Robustness Checks



Weaknesses

Weaknesses

- Treatment effect of access, not exposure (unable to differentiate selective exposure and selective incorporation)

Weaknesses

- Treatment effect of access, not exposure (unable to differentiate selective exposure and selective incorporation)
- Unable to be more specific about type of media effect than reinforcement (framing? direct persuasion? priming?)

Summary of Findings

Summary of Findings

- No evidence of conversion of Democrats

Summary of Findings

- No evidence of conversion of Democrats
- Some evidence of an effect on Republicans and Independents

Summary of Findings

- No evidence of conversion of Democrats
- Some evidence of an effect on Republicans and Independents
- Partisan reinforcement and swaying of incumbents more consistent with literature on political communication / campaign effects

Broader Implications

Broader Implications

- Availability of partisan media outlets does not lead to greater media control over public opinion.

Broader Implications

- Availability of partisan media outlets does not lead to greater media control over public opinion.
- But can lead to more polarized election preferences.