

## **The Participatory Roots of Selective Exposure: Baby Boomers, Political Protest, and Talk Radio**

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Much political communication research examines the effects of media on political attitudes and behavior. But what of the contributions of political behavior toward selective exposure? This study draws on literature from selective exposure and political socialization to explore whether one's likelihood of engaging in selective exposure may originate in part during the "crystallization period" of young adulthood. After controlling for demographic and political variables in adolescence and midadulthood, an analysis of data from a four-wave longitudinal panel of "baby boomers" from 1965 to 1997 indicates that selective exposure can be traced to political protest activity during this time and, very marginally, in subsequent years. The implications for the future of selective exposure among emerging generations are discussed.

*Keywords: selective exposure, political protest, political socialization, talk radio*

Research on partisan media exposure typically focuses on individual-level characteristics such as party identification (Garrett, 2009; Stroud, 2008, 2011) as well as social context (Mutz, 2002). Exposure to such media can have positive *effects* on participation (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007; Dilliplane, 2011). This study addresses two challenges in the general literature. First, research on partisan selective exposure often focuses on media use as a *dependent* variable, even when mutually reinforcing effects may be at work (Slater, 2007). Second, such studies often focus on samples of adults at one point in the life span and in political time. The present study incorporates literature on selective exposure and political socialization to test whether political participation earlier in the life cycle—along with participation in subsequent years—influences selective exposure later in life. This study utilizes longitudinal panel data from a sample of "baby boomers" from 1965 to 1997 and finds that type and timing of political activism may influence selective exposure, even after controlling for potential confounds. This article concludes by discussing the implications for emergent generations in today's political climate.

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## Literature Review

### *Selective Exposure*

A significant body of scholarship has documented a tendency for individuals to seek out information that will likely be consonant with their preexisting political views (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Garrett, 2009; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008, 2011). Selective exposure is of concern to modern democracy if it allows for a potential reduction in “cross-talk” between citizens holding different political views, the development of opinion polarization, and the demonization of (perceived) political out-groups (Barker, 2002; Gervais, 2014; Levendusky, 2013; but see Mutz & Martin, 2001).

Those who engage in media and interpersonal selective exposure tend to be more engaged in political life (Mutz, 2002), and this may be especially true for non-Internet electronic formats such as television news (Boulianne, 2011). Exposure to partisan-tinged media can have a positive effect on participation in general (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007; Dilliplane, 2011; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Despite causal evidence in both directions, on balance, political beliefs lead citizens to select media outlets rather than the reverse (Slater, 2007; Stroud, 2011).

The cornerstone for contemporary selective exposure research continues to be the fundamental political orientations of party identification and ideology (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1964; Sears & Funk, 1999). Liberals prefer MSNBC, liberal talk radio, and liberal websites; conservatives prefer Fox News Channel, conservative talk radio, and conservative websites (Stroud, 2008, 2011). However, evidence of selective *avoidance* is weaker (Garrett, 2009; Weeks, Ksiazek, & Holbert, 2016). One-sided information flows are more common among those who are highly engaged with politics (Prior, 2013). The data often used to examine selective exposure capture individuals of all ages at a single point of one’s life cycle, be they 18 or 80, yet partisanship, ideology, and one’s penchant for political participation are established earlier in life through processes of political socialization.

### *Political Socialization and Life Trajectories*

Political socialization is “the processes by which people acquire relatively enduring orientations toward politics in general and toward their own particular systems” (Merelman, 1990, quoted in Sigel, 1989, p. viii). Early, classic research in this area focused heavily on the passive role of children in absorbing fundamental political attitudes, values, and beliefs from socialization agents, and political party affiliation is the strongest transmitted value (Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009).

Two models of political development flow from this premise. The *crystallization* hypothesis suggests that political tendencies are firmly rooted in what occurs during early adulthood, about ages 18 to 26 (Mannheim, 1927).<sup>2</sup> For example, American baby boomers who engaged in political activism during

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<sup>2</sup> Another variation of this approach is to examine the stabilization of attitudes and political orientations between adolescence (preadult years) and the early adult years (e.g., Jennings & Niemi, 1968). However,

this life stage subsequently participated in political activities at higher rates, were more strongly opposed to American involvement in Vietnam and school prayer, more strongly supported school integration and civil liberties, and were more Democratic in party identification and voting from 1973 to 1997 (Franz & McClelland, 1994; Jennings, 1987, 2002; Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Sherkat & Blocker, 1994, 1997). Interest in political affairs is established early and is stable over the life course (Prior, 2009). A second and related approach, the *sensitization* hypothesis, emphasizes dynamism over time, as initial political activity makes some individuals *more* receptive to political engagement and change (Merelman & King, 1986; Sigel & Hoskin, 1977). The present study uses the crystallization and sensitization concepts somewhat differently by testing for the influence of activism during the crystallization and subsequent adult years on one's likelihood of engaging in selective exposure.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars traditionally treat media as a collective *agent* of socialization (Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2012; McDevitt, 2006), and news use during adolescence is positively correlated with political participation in the young adult years. Those who report higher levels of political discussion as young adults also report higher levels of public affairs media consumption (Chaffee, Jackson-Beeck, Dean, & Wilson, 1977). Recent data from the European Social Survey demonstrate that the link between media use and forms of participation such as signing a petition or boycotting a product does not truly develop until at least age 21 and is even stronger after age 30 (Moeller & de Vreese, 2013; see also York & Scholl, 2015), which conforms to a sensitization process.

While research such as that of Chaffee et al. underscores the basic premise that media use habits *in general* are established early, little is known about the long-term (i.e., life cycle) factors that influence one's likelihood of engaging with contemporary, *politicized* media. In other words, "at different stages of life, media and political behavior indices may be increasing, decreasing, or remaining static, and the *causal principles* governing the relationship between these variables seem to differ" (Chaffee et al., 1977, p. 253, emphasis added). Thus, the relationship between media and engagement may be established and change at any point throughout the life cycle.

As central as political party affiliation and ideology are to both socialization and selective exposure, the mechanism linking the latter two are not clear. Adapting an apt observation by Sigel (1989), we lack systematic knowledge whether selective exposure is simply rooted in political partisanship (learned early) or other behavioral factors throughout life. The latter may enhance one's *personal political salience* (PPS). This concept is defined as a "propensity to internalize, as central to one's self-identity, engagement with political events, issues or ideologies" (Duncan, 2005, p. 966), and it is conceptually distinct from classic measures of engagement such as political expertise, interest, and knowledge.

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the present study focuses instead on the long-term consequences of events that occur *during* the crystallization period (for a classic example, see Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Merelman and King (1986) tested these hypotheses by looking at the link between one's adolescent characteristics and activism during the crystallization period, while the primary starting point for the present study is the crystallization period itself.

In the case of the baby boomers, for example, their collective early adult years were noteworthy for the high levels of political conflict and activism, and PPS may be especially affected in such circumstances. Crucially, “collective identifications certainly may often precede initial involvement in activism, [but] it is also possible that *early experiences with political engagement* engender collective identifications” (Curtin, Stewart, & Duncan, 2010, p. 946, emphasis added). Whereas political salience may be furthered by any number of forms of political engagement, relatively “high-risk/cost activism” (Curtin et al., 2010, p. 963) may especially heighten it among activists (McAdam, 1986), predisposing them to subsequent political engagement (Braungart & Braungart, 1991; Finkel, 1985; Gastil, Deess, & Weiser, 2002; Green & Shachar, 2000; McAdam, 1989; Stewart, Settles, & Winter, 1998). Protest activism provides “opportunities for socialization by plunging the individual into a collective dynamic, which translates into an intensification of interpersonal contacts *and a greater attention to the flow of media information*” (Fillieule, 2012, p. 237, emphasis added). Contemporary, politically charged media could therefore be of interest to those who have prior, direct experience with the political world in this way (Duncan, 2005; Merelman & King, 1986). Mass political media—especially media with parasocial elements—may provide a vicarious way to remain politically engaged (Giles, 2002; Pan & Kosicki, 1997; Rubin & Step, 2000).

The classic literature on political crystallization (Jennings, 1987, 2002) implies that activism in young adulthood will make the stronger contribution toward selective exposure because it sets the salience of politics early. Recent work on the effects of political conversations among college students (a low-risk form of political engagement) shows that it is the *initial* engagement at this life stage that has the most dramatic effect on subsequent participation in partisan groups, groups that take political positions, and contacting elected officials (Klofstad, 2015). The sensitization hypothesis, however, implies that subsequent activism may *also* play a role in shaping the personal salience of politics (Merelman & King, 1986).

Although PPS cannot be directly observed in the data for this study, activists are more likely to be familiar with arguments that support their political views because of sustained salience of political cues, which may increase the likelihood that they will desire some amount of politically charged media content (Gvirsman, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012; Tsfati, Stroud, & Chotiner, 2014). Thus, the following hypothesis is posed:

*H1: Participation in protest activity during the crystallization period will be directly related to selective exposure later in life.*

Whereas activists may, on average, find politicized media to be of interest, scholarship on the consequences of activism and the concept of PPS imply that the *ideological leaning* of such activism—even while controlling for baseline partisan-ideological affiliation—may also play a role. Many studies of PPS and socialization have either combined all activists together or focused exclusively on left-wing activism (Curtin et al., 2010; Duncan, 2005; Duncan & Stewart, 2007; Jennings 1987, 2002). Although the political activists of earlier eras were disproportionately on the left (Dunlap, 1970; Klatch, 1999), the long-term influence of relatively more conservative activists may have been larger than their absolute numbers

(Lipset, 1968). Moreover, the political right has dominated much of the partisan media landscape of the past 20 years (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Crucially, conservative college students in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, were least likely to be engaged in civil rights activism, but made up a majority of student government officers and the politically noninvolved (Fendrich & Tarleau, 1973). Conservative and liberal activists exhibited no significant differences in conventional forms of political engagement, yet aligned themselves with divergent sets of political and civic organizations over the life cycle (Braungart & Braungart, 1991; Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988; Klatch, 1999). In Klofstad's (2015) terms, partisan media can be considered a form of "partisan group" that should appeal to activists. Stated formally:

*H2: The ideological orientation of one's protest activity during the crystallization period will be directly related to selective exposure in middle age.*

Again, it is also possible for *subsequent* participation to influence the relationship between protest and selective exposure, as suggested by the sensitization hypothesis (Merelman & King, 1986). Political participation in later life stages may intersect with important political periods (Duncan & Agronick, 1995; Stewart & Healy, 1989); the rise of the current partisan environment in the United States was due in part to younger generations being socialized into more partisan environments, while (relatively) less divided generations passed (Stoker & Jennings, 2008). There is also evidence that boomer protesters on the left weakened in their progressivism on some issues over time, even as nonactivists became less progressive as well, and this pattern was firmly in place by the early 1980s (Jennings, 1987). Thus, political participation throughout the life cycle may be positively related to media choice because of increasing proximity to the contemporary media environment, which provides more opportunities for selective exposure relative to the past (Levendusky, 2013; Prior, 2007). Thus, two additional hypotheses that parallel H1 and H2 are offered:

*H3: Participation in protest activity in adulthood will be directly related to selective exposure in middle age.*

*H4: The ideological orientation of one's protest activity in adulthood will be directly related to selective media exposure in middle age.*

The four hypotheses posit direct contributions toward the tendency for activists to remain politically involved over time (E. A. Andersen & Jennings, 2010; K. Andersen, 1988). Likewise, per the sensitization hypothesis, the present study asks whether the contributions of "political baptism" during the crystallization years are mediated when subsequent political participation is taken into account:

*RQ: Are any effects of protest during the crystallization period mediated by protest during adulthood?*

There are several methodological challenges in testing the above hypotheses. Ideally, longitudinal data exist that measure political protest and exposure to specific media programs. Recent work on selective exposure has made relatively stronger causal claims via panel and experimental designs (e.g.,

Levendusky, 2013; Stroud, 2011), but often these designs are carried out over a relatively short time period (i.e., within an election cycle), focusing on one or two waves (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2014). Finally, in media studies generally, media variables often play an independent or mediating role, but less so as the dependent variable when behavioral measures are included in the mix. Political participation often serves as the dependent—but not independent or mediating—variable (Fillieule, 2012).

### **Method**

#### ***Participants***

The data for this study come from a panel of baby boomers that spans 32 years, the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study (Jennings, Markus, Niemi, & Stoker, 1998). In 1965, the original investigators sampled 97 U.S. high schools nationwide using the probability proportionate to size method. Members of each school site's senior class were then randomly selected. The response rate among the students was nearly 100% (initial  $N = 1,669$ ), and the data were collected on-site. These participants were subsequently contacted again in three additional waves in winter of 1973 ( $N = 1,348$ ; 80.8% retention), spring 1982 ( $N = 958$ ), and late spring/early summer 1997 ( $N = 935$ ; 56% final retention). The 1973 data were largely collected in person, with 17% of the respondents providing information via mail-back questionnaires with no crucial differences between the two groups (Jennings & Niemi, 1981). Although there was a slight tendency of those who remained in all four waves to be more engaged and liberal than those who dropped out, these factors account for no more than 2% of variability of other politically relevant measures in the original data (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009).

#### ***Measures***

The key dependent variable in this study comes exclusively from the fourth wave (1997), when the panelists were in their 40s. The survey only allows a test of the hypotheses with respect to one specific form of partisan media, political talk radio. Respondents were asked, "There are a number of programs on the radio in which people call in to voice their opinions about public affairs and politics. Do you ever listen to political talk radio programs of this type?" Not counting eight missing respondents, 47% of the 1997 wave reported in the affirmative, and 52% said they did not listen to political talk radio. A dummy dependent variable was created from this measure; it was coded as 1 if the respondent listened and 0 if the respondent did not. Although there were some prominent liberal talk radio hosts in the 1990s, the format was primarily conservative at the time and remains so (Barker, 2002; Bolce, De Maio, & Muzzio, 1996; Cappella, Turow, & Jamieson, 1996; Center for American Progress, 2007; Davis & Owen, 1998; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Stroud, 2008). Moreover, Table A1 shows Pearson correlations between talk radio listening and feeling thermometer scores for a variety of political groups and figures in 1997; all of the significant positive correlations are on the conservative side of the political spectrum (see also Bennett 2002, 2009; Jones, 2002, for similar findings).

In terms of independent variables, all four hypotheses posit a link between political protest and political talk radio listening. In 1973, respondents were asked, "Have you ever taken part in a demonstration, protest march, or sit-in?" (83% answered no). This is the basis of an *overall protest*

dummy variable in which participation in any of these activities between 1965 and 1973—regardless of ideological shading—was coded as 1; a parallel dummy variable was also created for protest activity between 1973 and 1982. Open-response items then queried protesters in both waves about the topic of the activism. Jennings (1979) recorded up to two mentions of protest involvement by each respondent, which served as the basis of the coding categories included in the original data and codebook.<sup>4</sup>

The protest *cause* dummy variables constructed for this study are based on the first mentioned protest event for each respondent, which was presumed to be the most salient at the time of the interview in both waves. Activists who participated for more “liberal” causes (1973  $n = 104$ ; 1982  $n = 50$ ) were coded as 1 in two *liberal protest* dummy variables, with all other respondents coded as 0. In a separate set of dummy variables, *moderate-to-conservative protest*, the remaining, nonprogressive activists (1973,  $n = 38$ ; 1982,  $n = 20$ ) were coded as 1, with all other respondents coded as 0. For example, a respondent who was active for environmental causes was a liberal activist, while an anti-school busing or college policy protester was coded as moderate-to-conservative (see the Appendix for details regarding the classification of different protest causes). In the relevant regression analyses reported below, both of these dummy variables were included such that nonactivists served as the reference category.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Plan of Analyses***

To fully test the link between the criterion variables and selective exposure, several hierarchical binary (probit) regression models were conducted in Stata 9 using the *nestreg* command (see Long, 1997).<sup>6</sup> The basic regression design is as follows. Several orientation variables from 1965 were included as a first block: partisan strength, interest in political affairs, internal and external efficacy, and political activities in school (see the Appendix for full details). Another block consisted of a control for completed college education as of 1973 to account for the fact that many, but not all, Vietnam-era protests occurred on college campuses; entering the variable in its own block checks for any independent effect on the models. Additional, yet separate, blocks included protest measures from 1973 and 1982. An additional block consisted of measures from 1982 (political activity index, internal and external efficacy, ideological self-placement, and radio news use). A final block consisted of controls in 1997 for family income in 1996 and southern residency. Each model utilized robust standard errors to guard against possible heteroscedasticity. All models discussed below present probit regression coefficients. Wald  $\chi^2$  tests are reported for each block and the final model.

### **Results**

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<sup>4</sup> v555 [1973] and v1734 [1982] in Jennings, Markus, Niemi, and Stoker (1998).

<sup>5</sup> An ideal analysis would have included a code only for those clearly protesting on the hard right given the small, but vocal right-wing movement at the time (e.g., Young Americans for Freedom; see Klatch, 1999). However, only two panelists could be identified as clearly protesting for the right as of 1973: one in support of Vietnam and the other against school busing. Thus, they were combined with the remaining “other”-type protesters in both waves.

<sup>6</sup> The general formula for probit models is:  $y^* = \alpha + \beta x + \varepsilon$ , where  $y^*$  indicates the latent propensity for an outcome to occur (in this study, listening to talk radio).

Table 1 shows the results of a probit model containing the overall protest statuses as of 1973 and 1982.<sup>7</sup> None of the 1965 political controls were significant, though race and gender were. Most crucially, 1973 protest status was positively and significantly related to listening ( $B = 0.47, p < .01$ ), providing support for H1. The block of political variables from 1982 significantly contributed to the model, with self-placed ideology, participation, and radio news use all positively related to listening. The final block controlling for income and residency did not add significantly to the model, though southern residency was negatively related to listening. In this same model, the coefficient for overall protest from 1973 to 1982 is positive, but not significant. Thus, H1 is supported, but H3 is not.

To make the magnitude of protest coefficient easier to interpret, predicted probability values were calculated assuming a baseline hypothetical respondent who was White and male with moderate 1965 school political involvement, partisan affiliation, political interest, and internal/external efficacy; had completed college as of 1973; was moderate in political engagement, efficacy and radio news use in 1982; and reported a moderate family income and lived in the South.<sup>8</sup> Moving the value of the 1973 protest variable from nonactivist to activist increased the probability of listening to talk radio from 50% to 68%, for a difference of 18 percentage points. Among the significant control variables, moving the value of the race variable from White to non-White led to a 30-percentage-point *increase* in one's likelihood of listening (80%); however, moving the value of 1982 self-placed ideology from most liberal to most conservative evinced a probability change of +37 percentage points (30–67%).

Hypotheses 2 and 4 speak to the question of whether the relative ideological shading of one's protest involvement was related to listening in 1997. The model presented in Table 2 shows the results of an analysis similar to Table 1, except overall protest has been replaced by the liberal and moderate-to-conservative protest dummy variables from the 1965–1973 and 1973–1982 intervals, with each dummy variable entered in its own block. Again, none of the 1965 political variables are significantly related to listening, while race and gender are; political activity, radio news use, and ideology in 1982 are significant contributors as well. Moderate-to-conservative protesters during the 1965–1973 period were more likely to listen compared to nonprotesters ( $B = 1.65, p < .001$ ). Returning to the assumptions of the hypothetical panelist, moving the value of the moderate-to-conservative variable from 0 to 1 resulted in a 44-percentage-point increase in the probability of listening (51–95%). This provides support for H2, but only among such protesters during this time; liberal activism was not significantly related to listening in this time interval.

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<sup>7</sup> These analyses did not include respondents who indicated protest activity that occurred up to and including 1965, so as to remove possible effects of protest due to parental or preadult socialization (values 60–65 for variable v554 in Jennings et al., 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Calculated using the *normprob* command in Stata 9.



**Table 1. Hierarchical Probit Regression of Political Talk Radio Listening in 1997 on Protest at Two Time Intervals (n = 719).**

	B (SE)	Step $\chi^2$
Step 1 (1965)		24.77***
Internal efficacy	−0.03 (.10)	
External efficacy	0.02 (.04)	
School political activity	0.04 (.03)	
Partisan strength	0.00 (.03)	
Interest in politics	0.07 (.07)	
Race (1 = White)	−0.84*** (.21)	
Male	0.31** (.10)	
Step 2: College education <sub>73</sub>	0.01 (.11)	2.03
Step 3: Overall protest <sub>65-73</sub>	0.47** (.15)	7.07**
Step 4 (1982)		37.21***
Political activity	0.08** (.03)	
External efficacy	0.09 (.07)	
Internal efficacy	−0.13 (.08)	
Ideology	0.16*** (.04)	
Radio news	0.11*** (.03)	
Step 5: Overall protest <sub>73-82</sub>	0.20	1.16

	(.20)	
Step 6		5.78
Income <sub>96</sub>	0.01 (.01)	
Southern residency <sub>97</sub>	-0.28* (.12)	
Constant	-0.78 (.49)	
Pseudo- $R^2$	.0834	
Wald $\chi^2$ (df)	80.25 (17)***	

\*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

Turning to ideological protest from 1973 to 1982, conservative activism was insignificant, and the positive coefficient for liberal protesters fell just outside of conventional significance ( $B = 0.46$ ,  $p = .052$ ); moving the value of this variable from 0 to 1 led to only a 17-percentage-point gain in the likelihood of listening (51–68%). These results provide directional, though statistically marginal, support for H4.

Could the results observed here simply reflect an ideological shift among members of this generation (Jennings, 1987; Martin, 1994)? If one subtracts the 1973 seven-point ideological self-placement measure from the 1982 analogue, the average panelist does evince a shift of approximately  $+.46$  ( $SD = 1.37$ ), indicating a rightward change. Liberal activists from 1965 to 1973 moved rightward the most ( $M = +.88$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ), followed by the moderate/conservatives ( $M = +.56$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) and nonprotesters ( $M = +.40$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ); in 1982, the nonprotesters were the most conservative group, followed by the moderate-to-conservative activists (4.38 and 4.09, respectively). However, when the change score replaces the 1982 ideological self-placement measure (not shown), the regression results are essentially the same. A similar concern is that the data presented in Table 2 only compare liberal and conservative activists with nonactivists. A separate model (not shown)—in which the liberal protest variables are replaced with dummy variables where 1 denotes a nonprotester—indicates that moderate-to-conservative activists still had a higher likelihood of listening ( $B = 1.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2 = 20.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ); the estimated shift in the probability of listening when changing the hypothetical respondent from a liberal to conservative activist is 38 percentage points (57–95%). Neither protest measure from 1973 to 1982 was significant. Thus, across these results, there is little to support the idea that protest a little later in adulthood—but before middle age—directly contributed toward political talk radio listening.

**Table 2. Hierarchical Probit Regression of Political Talk Radio Listening in 1997 on Ideological Protest at Two Time Points (n = 717).**

	B (SE)	Step $\chi^2$
Step 1 (1965)		24.61***
Internal efficacy	−0.02 (.10)	
External efficacy	0.01 (.04)	
School political activity	0.04 (.03)	
Partisan strength	0.00 (.03)	
Interest in politics	0.07 (.08)	
Race (1 = White)	−0.78*** (.21)	
Male	0.34*** (.10)	
Step 2: Education <sub>73</sub>	0.00 (.11)	1.95
Step 3: Moderate/conservative protest <sub>65-73</sub>	1.65*** (.36)	20.34***
Step 4: Liberal protest <sub>65-73</sub>	0.17 (.17)	.27
Step 5 (1982)		32.70***
Political activity	0.08** (.03)	
External efficacy	0.08 (.07)	
Internal efficacy	−0.11 (.08)	
Ideology	0.14*** (.04)	

Radio news	0.10*** (.03)	
Step 6: Moderate/conservative protest <sub>73-82</sub>	-0.24 (.37)	.51
Step 7: Liberal protest <sub>73-82</sub>	0.46 (.24)	3.86*
Step 8		6.81*
Income <sub>96</sub>	0.00 (.01)	
Southern residency <sub>97</sub>	-0.31** (.12)	
Constant	-0.78 (.50)	
Pseudo- $R^2$	.1039	
Wald $\chi^2$ (df)	92.80 (19)***	

\*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

The research question asks whether protest was mediated by subsequent, similar protest. Separate mediation analyses were conducted for each protest type (overall, moderate-to-conservative, liberal), with overall 1965–1973 protest serving as the independent variable and the 1973–1982 protest variable serving as the potential mediator. Teenage internal/external efficacy, partisan strength, political trust, intraschool political activities, and biblical fundamentalism were entered as control variables. The tests were conducted using the *binary\_mediation* command in Stata 14 (see Ender, 2011).

Results shown in Table 3 confirm those in Tables 1 and 2 (mediation regression tables not shown). For overall protest, the indirect effect over time comprised a small portion of the total effect, but later protest was not a significant predictor of listening ( $B = 0.22$ ,  $p = .21$ ). For moderate-to-conservative protest, *none* of the effect was mediated by later protest. Finally, with liberal protest, it is clear that mediation is more evident. Unlike in Table 2, the mediation regression model evinced a significant coefficient for later liberal activism ( $B = 0.48$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 3. Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of Protest (1965–1973)  
on Listening via Protest From 1973–1982.**

	Overall protest ( <i>n</i> = 833)	Liberal protest ( <i>n</i> = 830)	Moderate/conservative protest ( <i>n</i> = 831)
Total effect coefficient	.14	.04	.19
Bootstrap S.E.	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)
95% bias-corrected CI	[.05, .22]	[–.05, .12]	[.09, .3]
Direct effect coefficient	.12	.02	.19
Bootstrap S.E.	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)
95% bias-corrected CI	[.04, .21]	[–.07, .11]	[.09, .29]
Indirect effect coefficient	.01	.02	–.00
Bootstrap S.E.	(.01)	(.01)	(.00)
95% bias-corrected CI	[–.01, .03]	[.001, .04]	[–.02, .001]
Approximate proportion of total effect mediated	.08	.45	–.001

*Note.* Bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) based on ~500 bootstrapped iterations each. Figures for approximate proportion of total effect based on original (nonbootstrapped) estimations.

Because partisan affiliation is a cornerstone of selective exposure research, a second set of simple mediation analyses were conducted to check for crystallization. Here, teenage partisanship served as the key independent variable and the relevant 1965 protest variable as the mediator (regression tables not shown). Table 4 clearly shows no evidence of either direct or indirect effects of teenage partisanship on political talk radio listening in middle age. Thus, according to these data, the observed likelihood of listening appears to be primarily shaped by the postadolescent periods.

### Discussion

This study provides evidence that one's earlier protest activity may influence the likelihood of engaging in selective exposure later in life. However, type and timing matters. Protest during the young adult years was most crucial for those who did so for relatively less progressive causes; this initial protest experience was neither linked to nor mediated by similar protest from 1973 to 1982. In contrast, liberal protest from 1965 to 1973 *may* have had an effect on political talk radio listening via later liberal protest (mediation analysis), but this pattern is very marginal in the full regression model with covariates included from later waves. The contribution of activism is not explained by controls from 1965 in either the primary or mediation analyses. Although previous research has found valuable contributions of political efficacy to the relationship between participation and media use (e.g., Cho et al., 2009), preadult measures of such constructs showed no direct link with selective exposure later, mostly likely due to the long time frame. Future research should include measures of parental political variables from the adolescent period as part of a broader examination of the contributions of preadult socialization and family communication patterns of *partisan* media choice (Valenzuela, Bachmann, & Aguilar, 2016).

**Table 4. Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of Teenage Partisanship on Listening, With Protest (1965–1973) as the Mediating Variable (n = 835).**

	Overall protest	Liberal protest	Moderate/conservative protest
Total effect coefficient	.05	.05	.04
Bootstrap S.E.	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)
95% bias-corrected CI	[−.03, .14]	[−.03, .14]	[−.05, .13]
Direct effect coefficient	.05	.05	.06
Bootstrap S.E.	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
95% bias-corrected CI	[−.03, .13]	[−.03, .14]	[−.04, .14]
Indirect effect coefficient	−.01	.00	−.02
Bootstrap S.E.	(.01)	(.00)	(.02)
95% bias-corrected CI	[−.03, .01]	[−.01, .01]	[−.07, .01]
Approximate proportion of total effect mediated	−.10	.01	−.54

*Note.* Bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) based on ~500 bootstrapped iterations each. Figures for approximate proportion of total effect based on original (nonbootstrapped) estimations.

The liberal activists' selective avoidance somewhat comports with previous research on activists from the 1960s and early 1970s (Fendrich & Tarleau, 1973; Stewart et al., 1998); this suggests the *sensitization* hypothesis, possibly operating through sustained personal political salience, is better supported among these activists (Curtin et al., 2010; Merelman & King, 1986). But only part of this is observed here because selective *exposure* among liberal activists was not testable with these data. By contrast, the more time-bound (but stronger) findings for relatively less liberal protesters' selective *exposure* better comport with the *crystallization* (period) hypothesis. Likewise, the analyses here are asymmetric given conservative *avoidance* of liberal media was not testable. With these caveats in mind, the findings are consistent with Boulianne's (2011) panel analysis in that talk radio, as an electronic medium with somewhat parasocially interactive elements, may draw a politically consequential segment of its audience from Americans with prior interest and involvement in politics (Hofstetter et al., 1994).

Two key implications for selective exposure scholarship emerge from these results. First, they suggest that contemporary media alone did not create the current media-opinion dynamic noted so widely in the literature (Slater, 2007; Stroud 2008, 2011), as is also implied, for example, in DellaVigna and Kaplan's (2007) study of the positive effect of Fox News Channel market entry on Republican political participation. For the moderate-to-conservative protesters especially, it seems that the act of being part of a demonstration—as opposed to being a nonactivist (or progressive activist)—created an underlying orientation to politically congruent messages (Olcese, Saunders, & Tzavidis, 2014), but contributions to potential *avoidance* are less clear. It is possible the results reflect more the asymmetry of the dependent variable than psychological processes.

Second, recall that in Table 2, liberal activism from 1973 to 1982 barely missed conventional significance and was significant in the mediation analysis (Table 3). This partly comports with the recent work on the parallel processes of selective exposure and avoidance. For example, supporters of Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry not only sought out opinion-reinforcing information, but encountered opinion-challenging statements; the same was not true of former President George W. Bush's supporters, who preferred opinion-reinforcing information (Garrett, 2009; Garrett & Stroud, 2014). The present study's findings support the hypotheses that conservatives' selective exposure—and liberals' propensity toward a more balanced media diet—may have deeper individual roots than previously observed. More specific measures of media use over longer, life cycle time frames are needed to detect any (a)symmetry across the political and media spectra. Overall, the results suggest that the general landscape for selective exposure was emerging well before the 1990s (Stoker & Jennings, 2008).

The dependent measure cannot rule out noise generated by nonconservative/other radio formats given the strong negative coefficient for race. There are two possible reasons for this finding. First, as recently as 2011, 22% of nonurban talk radio listeners were Black (Harrison, 2011). Second, Black (and Black-owned) radio plays a powerful role in the Black community as a forum for disseminating information and as an "institutional basis for Black discourse and links to certain forms of political action and organization" (Squires, 2000, p. 89; see also Johnson, 2004). Both are possibly at work in the data. None-the-less, the correlations shown in Table A1, the positive coefficient for 1982 ideology, and the results for moderate-to-conservative protest provide, on balance, evidence of a conservative medium (Barker, 2002; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Moreover, even if some liberal activists did tune in to conservative talk radio, this would be consistent with evidence that liberals consume a relatively heterogeneous diet of media sources (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Wicks, Wicks, & Morimoto, 2014).

### Conclusion

The present study highlights the importance of prior political experiences in providing potential pathways by which citizens develop selective exposure orientations. Given the present polarization of U.S. politics (Pew Research Center, 2014), the increased salience of political cues (Levendusky, 2013), and the large set of Americans engaged in selective media behaviors (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Prior, 2007; Stroud, 2008, 2011), this study is instructive. The findings here have implications for the future relationship between media use and political behavior among members of currently emerging generations (Slater, 2007; Stoker & Jennings, 2008). It behooves political communication, socialization, and social movement scholars to begin new, long-term panel studies with quality measures of activism *and* media use to answer an important question: How will the present constellation of political activism (especially online), media choice, and political polarization influence *future* media choice and political behavior among contemporary 18-to-26-year-olds, or even those slightly older? Only when future research incorporates longitudinal designs and more precise measures of partisan media exposure will the scholarly community have a better sense whether behavior shapes selective exposure as part of the general life cycle or whether the unusual experiences of the Baby Boom generation make the findings here a set of unique generational artifacts.

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## **Appendix**

The key independent variables were as follows: Liberal protest (1973) was defined as anyone participating for any of the following causes according to the "first mention" variable (v555) in the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study data (Jennings, et al., 1998): peace, antiwar, anti-Vietnam, 1969, 1970, 1973 inaugural marches on Washington, D.C.; 1968 nominating conventions; student killings/Kent State; other references to issues related to war; pro-civil rights marches/demonstrations; prointegration; protest/demonstration at school/college, no further specifications; against military, ROTC on campus; labor issues, shop strike; ecology, Earthweek, "Walk for Water"; women's issues.

For the 1982 liberal protest dummy, those qualifying protested for: Vietnam, American policy in Southeast Asia; American involvement in Latin America generally (e.g., El Salvador, Nicaragua); nuclear freeze, disarmament, weapons reduction, halting arms production, arms race; peace, antiwar in general; pro-women's rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and other mentions of equal treatment and opportunities; labor and union issues or shop strikes; ecological issues, environmental problems, anti-nuclear power, protection of endangered species.

Moderate-to-conservative protest (1973) was defined by participation in any of the following: pro-Vietnam/Washington counter demonstration; race issues—neither pro nor anti indicated; anti-busing of school children; specifically student issue (e.g., course requirements; school policies; demonstration of particular student group, excluding war-related); other references to student-related issues; other. Also included were three panelists who indicated protesting, but could not recall the circumstances thereof.

For the 1982 moderate-to-conservative protest dummy, those qualifying protested for: anti-civil rights, anti-racial or ethnic minorities; antibusing, anti-integration of schools; protest, demonstrations, etc. at college/school without further specification; specifically student issues (e.g., course requirements, school policies) or demonstration by particular student group that is not war- or race-related; antiabortion/pro-life; other local issues; other references to war and peace; "race issues, no pro or anti"; other specific references (not provided in original codebook).

## **Key Control Variables**

### *Demographics*

- Race (91% White = 1)
- Gender (49% Male = 1)
- Education as of 1973 (39% bachelor's degree or higher = 1, others = 0)
- Family income in 1996 (median = \$70,000–\$80,000).
- Residential location in 1997 (South [25%] = 1; Virginia, Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas).

*Teenage Political Orientations (1965)*

- Party affiliation strength (v84): Six-point scale where higher values are more Republican. Modal response was "not very strong Democrat."
- Internal political efficacy (v59): Two-point scale indicating agreement (1) or disagreement (2) with the statement that "government is beyond understanding"; modal response is "agree."
- External political efficacy (v90): Five-point scale ranging from 1 (good deal) to 5 (not much), in response to the concept that the government cares about what people like the respondent think,  $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ; modal response is "a good deal."
- Political trust (v250): Six-point scale ranging from 1 (low trust) to 6 (high trust),  $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ .
- Political activity in school (v244): Six-point scale ranging from 0 (low) to 5 (high) combining v39–41, v43, and v189,  $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ .
- Biblical fundamentalism (v202): Four-point scale ranging from 1 ("The Bible is God's word and all it says is true") to 4 ("The Bible was written by men who lived so long ago that it is worth very little today"),  $M = 1.63$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ .

*Adult Political Orientations (1982)*

- External political efficacy (1–3 scale [low, medium, high],  $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ).
- Internal political efficacy (1–3 scale [low, medium, high],  $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ).
- Political activity additive index (0–9 scale,  $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 2.09$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ).
- Self-placed ideology (1–7 scale, where higher score is more conservative,  $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ).

*Radio Use (1982)*

- Respondents were asked how often they attended to "public affairs, politics and the news" in different media: "almost daily," "two or three times a week," "three or four times a month," or "a few times a year." Original figures are 34%, 13%, 8%, and 3%, respectively (reverse-coded).



**Table A1. Pearson Correlations of Talk Radio Listening and Feeling Thermometer Scores for Political Figures and Groups, 1997.**

	Political talk radio frequency
Unions	-.10**
Democrats	-.14***
Women's liberation movement	-.17**
Liberals	-.18**
Blacks	-.03
Catholics	.01
Jews	.00
Gays/lesbians	-.05
Federal government	-.15***
Environmentalists	-.25***
Hillary Clinton	-.17***
Bill Clinton	-.20***
Christian fundamentalists	.08*
Big business	.07*
Conservatives	.17***
Whites	-.06
Republicans	.12***
Southerners	-.05
Protestants	-.02
Newt Gingrich	.20***
Ronald Reagan	.06
Richard Nixon	.03

Source: Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study (Jennings et al., 1998).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .