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Implications of Pro- and Counterattitudinal Information Exposure for Affective Polarization

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The American electorate is characterized by political polarization, and especially by increasingly negative affective responses toward opposing party members. To what extent might this be attributed to exposure to information reinforcing individuals' partisan identity versus information representing the views of partisan opponents? And is this a uniquely American phenomenon? This study uses survey data collected immediately following recent national elections in two countries, the United States and Israel, to address these questions. Results across the two nations are generally consistent, and indicate that pro- and counterattitudinal information exposure has distinct influences on perceptions of and attitudes toward members of opposing parties, despite numerous cross-cultural differences. We discuss implications in light of recent evidence about partisans' tendency to engage in selective exposure.

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Over the last several decades, Americans' attitudes toward members of an opposed political party have shifted from mild negativity to outright hostility, while attitudes toward their preferred party have remained relatively stable (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). The phenomenon, which is based on emotional reactions to party identifications and is evident among Democrats and Republicans alike, has been termed affective polarization, thus distinguishing it from other forms of political polarization. Affective polarization in the United States stands in contrast to other countries, which have not seen comparable changes in attitudes toward oppositional parties (Iyengar et al. 2012). Furthermore, although this is a relatively new area of inquiry, evidence for affective polarization, which is grounded in in-group and out-group distinctions (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1979), appears to be more robust than for polarization grounded in citizens' issue positions or policy preferences (Iyengar et al. 2012).

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The potentially harmful consequences of affective polarization are numerous. As animosity increases, citizens' interactions may become less deliberative and more partisan. Aversive reactions make citizens less likely to seek diverse perspectives on controversial topics (Valentino, Hutchings, Banks, & Davis, 2008), while reducing collaboration and compromise (MacKuen, Wolak, Keele, & Marcus, 2010). Negative affect directed toward party elites and members could promote political cynicism, incivility, and intolerance (e.g., Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006), while potentially contributing to issue polarization among elites (Hetherington, 2009).

Given these undesirable consequences, identifying factors that contribute to affective polarization has obvious practical significance, but it is also an intriguing theoretical puzzle. Iyengar and colleagues provide compelling evidence implicating negative campaign advertising. During the 2004 and 2008 U.S. presidential elections, individuals living in battleground states, who presumably had extensive exposure to political advertising, exhibited greater affective polarization and polarized more rapidly over the election period than individuals in other states. But of course negative advertising does not fully explain the phenomenon.

This study considers the role that partisan media play in promoting affective polarization, paying special attention to the influence of individuals' exposure decisions in high-choice information environments. Previous scholarship has demonstrated that selective exposure to political news promotes polarization of attitudes toward candidates (Stroud, 2010); this work extends those findings by (a) distinguishing between selective approach, a preference for proattitudinal information, and selective avoidance, an aversion to counterattitudinal information, and (b) by considering other expressions of affective polarization. The study also provides cross-cultural validation of these patterns, testing the relationships both in the United States and in Israel to broaden our understanding of the phenomenon.

Affective polarization and selective exposure

Selective exposure, which occurs when individuals exercise bias in their communication encounters (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), promises to exacerbate the polarizing potential of partisan media. Media users tend to allocate a disproportionate amount of their news diet to attitude-consistent content (Stroud, 2008). To a lesser extent, media with attitude-discrepant content may also sometimes be avoided (Garrett, 2009). These processes may be contributing to increasing affective polarization levels observed in the United States over several decades. Successive technological advancements, especially cable television and the Internet, have allowed for greater media variety and accessibility, presenting possibilities for more efficient observance of selective exposure (Sunstein, 2001). If partisan selective exposure has become more prevalent, greater bias in news consumption might account for increased polarization (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Prior, 2013). Evidence is mixed as to whether selectivity is actually on the rise (Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2011; Stroud, 2011), but it is clear that the contemporary media environment offers a wide array of partisan voices that could contribute to affective polarization.

Building on the social identity theory-based account of affective polarization presented by Iyengar et al. (2012), selective exposure, much like campaign advertising, likely activates partisan identities. A salient partisan identity is characterized by positive evaluation of the in-group and negative evaluation of the out-group (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). Slater (2007) has argued that selective exposure to identity-relevant media reinforces social identity (Slater, 2007); indeed, greater selective exposure to attitude-consistent messages has been shown to activate the political self-concept (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012). Accordingly, exposure should also activate emotions toward both the in- and out-party.

In addition to a more salient partisan identity, there are at least two other possible mechanisms through which partisan media consumption could promote affective polarization: affective learning and attitude rehearsal. Given the tendency to model behaviors and beliefs after others (Bandura, 2001), citizens often turn to “elite cues” for developing and refining their political attitudes (Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999; Zaller, 1990). Exposure to partisan news in which out-parties are denigrated and attacked may lead to an affective learning process in which the negative emotions on display are mimicked and learned (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) through an emotional contagion effect (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993). Alternatively, selective exposure could make attitudes toward an out-party more extreme through an attitude rehearsal process. The more one thinks about an attitude object, the more polarized the attitude becomes because extensive thinking allows people to produce more consistent thoughts (Tesser & Leone, 1977). Indeed, proattitudinal argument familiarity mediates selective exposure’s polarizing influence (Dvir Gvirsman, 2014).

Recent research is consistent with these mechanisms, providing compelling evidence that partisan media contribute to political polarization. Correlational data suggest that readers of political blogs are as highly polarized as party elites in Congress (Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010), although the causal relationship remains untested. Stroud (2010) goes farther, using panel data to show that selective exposure preceded polarization of attitudes toward candidates during the 2004 election. Most recently, Lelkes, Iyengar, and Sood (2013) find that after the debut of the conservative-leaning Fox News channel in 1996, access to cable television in the United States was associated with higher levels of affective polarization among Republicans. Similarly, the authors find that politically interested individuals exhibited greater affective polarization if they had access to the Internet (including partisan online content) than if they did not (Lelkes et al., 2013). In other words, the more extensive individuals’ opportunities for encountering partisan content, the more polarized they are.

Prior studies have not, however, distinguished between the consequences of approaching attitude-consistent and avoiding attitude-discrepant media. Given that approach and avoidance have been shown to be independent behaviors, with approach being more prevalent (Frey, 1986; Garrett, 2009), discrete effects could emerge from those two facets of selective exposure. Experimental studies find that attitude-consistent exposure strengthens attitudes toward parties and issues, and that attitude-discrepant exposure weakens them (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012;

Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012; Levendusky, 2013b). Related studies into interpersonal political talk also generally show that depolarization or ambivalence commonly result from counterattitudinal exposure (Mutz, 2002; Parsons, 2010). Therefore, we would expect opposite effects from supportive and oppositional media exposure.

H1: Proparty news exposure will promote affective polarization, while counterparty news exposure will reduce it.

Attitude-consistent and attitude-discrepant exposure effects may also differ in magnitude. People are typically motivated to maintain and reinforce their existing beliefs when processing new information (Taber & Lodge, 2006) so that the attitude-reinforcing effect of proattitudinal exposure should be stronger than the attitude-weakening effect of counterattitudinal exposure. Experimental evidence supports this notion of a stronger influence of attitude-consistent messages (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979), at least in part because partisans do not find out-party media credible (Levendusky, 2013a). Partisans are quick to evaluate media messages based on the ideological affiliation of the source (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), and are less likely to be persuaded or otherwise influenced by messages from attitude-discrepant sources than from attitude-consistent sources. These same patterns are evident among interpersonal political discussions (Eveland & Hively, 2009). Although strongly supported by the existing literature, the relative influence of different types of exposure has not been tested.

H2: Influences of proparty exposure on affective polarization will be stronger than the influences of counterparty exposure.

The two types of exposure may also work in tandem. A growing body of evidence suggests that media users who engage in more exposure to proattitudinal outlets are also more likely to access counterattitudinal outlets (Garrett et al., 2013; Holbert, Hmielowski, & Weeks, 2012). The combination of attitude-consistent and attitude-discrepant messages might have implications for affective polarization. Attitude-discrepant content could counteract the polarizing thought consistency resulting from exposure to attitude-consistent media, or it could lead individuals to question attitude-consistent content. Some evidence for an effect of coincident exposure on affective polarization comes from research into interpersonal political talk. The presence of both Democratic and Republican discussants can reduce polarization toward candidates (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004), and diverse discussion networks lower participation compared with more homogeneous networks (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Mutz, 2006). Contradictory claims received via a mix of pro- and counterattitudinal media might therefore reduce polarization.

H3a: Counterparty exposure is more affectively depolarizing the more it is accompanied by proparty exposure.

However, there is another possibility. The presence of conflicting information in one's media environment could heighten polarization. Consumption of counterattitudinal information tends to go up with proattitudinal information exposure (Garrett et al., 2013), and there is some evidence that this has a utilitarian

motivation (Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2011). For example, counterattitudinal information is particularly attractive when it allows individuals to defend their opinions against critics (Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009). Seeking attitude-challenging messages to counterargue them might ultimately increase thought consistency and confidence, promoting polarization (cf. Tesser & Leone, 1977). And from the perspective of affective learning, out-party messages might be taken as confirmation of in-party media elites' affective assessments. Indeed, cross-ideological links on blogs are frequently used to ridicule opponents (Hargittai, Gallo, & Kane, 2008).

Furthermore, the contrast between pro- and counterattitudinal information might make the former seem even more worthy and the latter more wrongheaded. Accordingly, the experimental presentation of balanced information appears to generate polarization (Taber & Lodge, 2006), and the combination of cross-cutting interpersonal talk and strong interpersonal ties to politically similar discussants increased polarization (Lee, Kwak, & Campbell, in press). In contrast to H3a, it may be that:

H3b: Counterparty exposure is more affectively polarizing the more it is accompanied by proparty exposure.

Affective polarization, as operationalized by Iyengar et al. (2012), has at least two dimensions: favorability and social distance. Although related, these dimensions are distinct and pro- and counterattitudinal exposure might plausibly have different effects on each. Perhaps favorability judgments are not focused on evaluating a target's worth, but instead are grounded in an emotional response to the target's political beliefs. For example, an individual could disagree with a candidate based on policy positions, leading to an unfavorable assessment, while still respecting the individual. In contrast, social distance, typically measured by stereotyping and attitudes toward out-group marriages, is more consistent with a judgment of individuals' worth.

Levendusky and Malhotra (2013) have proposed that the current political climate in the United States is characterized by "false polarization," where the *perception* of disagreement is greater than its actual extent. Survey data support this idea (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2013), and the researchers argue that extensive media coverage of political polarization is to blame. Regardless of its source, this misperception leads individuals to see their own views as more centrist while simultaneously evaluating out-group members more negatively. This suggests that selective consumption of partisan media is particularly likely to promote divergent favorability assessments. There is, however, also evidence to suggest that stereotyping is uniquely vulnerable to the influence of partisan media (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009; Rahn & Cramer, 1996), which suggests that social-distance perceptions will be uniquely vulnerable to partisan media's effects. Given these unclear expectations about how selective exposure might impact multiple dimensions of affective polarization, we pose the following question:

RQ1: Does selective exposure to partisan media have different implications for out-party favorability and social distance?

Only a few studies have tested the effects of selective exposure outside of the United States, and even fewer have compared results across countries (but see Kobayashi & Ikeda, 2009). This limits generalization to other political contexts, as the U.S. media market and political system are unique. In this study, we extend our assessment of the relationship between selective exposure and affective polarization to include Israel. This allows us to confirm that these effects are not limited to the United States, and it provides evidence that they cannot be attributed solely to idiosyncratic attributes of the U.S. media market. Such an expansion is especially important given Iyengar et al.'s (2012) observation that affective polarization is more prevalent in the United States today than in Britain, and that the phenomenon is most evident in the distinctly American "battleground states."

Israel is an appropriate comparison case for several reasons. Because partisan media exposure is the primary causal mechanism under consideration, this study requires that the online news markets in both countries present a broad spectrum of political views, allowing consumers to engage in partisan selective exposure (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001; Nie, Miller, Golde, Butler, & Winneg, 2010). In most other respects, however, the two countries are strikingly different. The Israeli political system is parliamentary, extreme multiparty, and it employs a coalition power structure. Compared with the United States, Israeli politics are also characterized as more intense, and the electorate as more involved (Arian, 2004). These attributes could fan citizens' political passions, driving up affective polarization, or they could have a moderating effect, resulting from widespread familiarity among the citizenry with divergent thoughts and opposing arguments. Israeli media are also relatively centralized: The United States has numerous local, cable, and national channels, whereas Israel has a total of three noncable television channels, none of which are devoted entirely to news or are overtly partisan. News media effects are also often weaker in a power-sharing political system (such as Israel) than in a presidential system (Nir, 2012). Thus, including Israel in this study provides a check against the threat that effects observed here are a result of the unique features of the United States, and replication across these cases provides compelling evidence for the hypothesized effects.

Method

The hypotheses and research question were tested with data from two online surveys, one conducted in the United States and the other in Israel. For the U.S. case, a three-wave panel survey was conducted during the 2012 U.S. presidential election by GfK Research (formerly Knowledge Networks), with a sample selected from a panel that was constructed using probability-based sampling via random-digit dialing (RDD) and address-based sample techniques. The baseline survey was conducted from July 14 to August 7, 2012, with 1,004 respondents. Wave 2 ran from September 7 to October 3 with 782 returning participants (a 77.9% retention rate), followed by

Wave 3 from November 8 to 20, with a final count of 652 (83.4% retention from Wave 2, 64.9% from baseline). Most analyses are based on data collected in the third wave, which included relevant variables not available in prior waves, and any exceptions are explicitly noted below.

U.S. sample demographics indicate diversity and representativeness with regard to age ($M = 50.9$, $SD = 16.1$), gender (50.3% male), education (92.0% high school graduate or higher and 35.9% bachelor's degree or higher), race (77.0% White, 7.7% Black, 8.7% Hispanic, 6.6% Other), political party affiliation (45.2% Democrat or Democrat-leaning, 13.3% pure Independent, 35.7% Republican or Republican-leaning), and ideology (30.8% liberal, 32.5% moderate, 36.7% conservative).¹

In the Israeli case, hypotheses were tested with data from a two-wave panel survey conducted during the 2013 Israel National Election among a sample of Israeli Jewish voters.² Data were gathered by Panels, a survey company specializing in Internet-based research. The company recruits panelists via the Internet, sponsoring ads on Google, Facebook, and other popular sites. Panelists are asked to take part in periodic surveys in exchange for incentives (gift certificates). The nonrepresentative panel includes more than 40,000 participants, and although it is limited to Internet users, Internet access among the Jewish population in Israel stood at 82% (Dror & Saar, 2012).³

Baseline data were collected from December 23 to 25, 2012. The survey company sent e-mail invitations to a sample of 900 panelists, stratified by age, gender, and geography. Of those, 453 respondents completed the first survey. Respondents' demographics roughly matched Israeli Census figures for age ($M = 44.4$, $SD = 16.9$), income (on a 5-point scale, $M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.3$) and education (on a 6-point scale; 46% held academic degree, the same rate as found in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data regarding Israel), but women were overrepresented (56% in the sample, when compared with 52% in the general population), and ultraorthodox were underrepresented (5.5% ultraorthodox, compared with 8.2% in the general population and 7% in RDD samples). The second wave of data collection began 1 day after the election (between January 27 and 31, 2013), and yielded 397 respondents (a 12% attrition rate). Attrition was associated with holding more right-wing attitudes, $t(450) = -2.9$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.27$, but no other differences were detected between the two waves.

Measures

Party leaning

In the baseline survey, U.S. respondents were asked to select the option that best described their party affiliation, on a 7-point scale from 1 = *strong Democrat* to 7 = *strong Republican*. On the basis of these categorizations, true independents (4 = *independent [close to neither party]*) were excluded and the remaining partisans were coded as either Democrat/Democrat-leaning (55.9%; dummy = 0) or Republican/Republican-leaning (44.1%; dummy = 1).⁴ In the Israeli baseline survey,

respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale ranging from 1 = *extreme right* to 7 = *extreme left*, $M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.3$ (49% of respondents self-identified with the right and 22% with the left). The political orientation of 125 participants placing themselves at the middle of the scale was further investigated using other attitudes measured in the survey.⁵ Based on these attitudes, it was determined that 37% of these participants were left-wing, 57% right-wing, and 6% were centrists. The latter 6% (eight participants) were not included in the analysis.

Pro- and counterattitudinal exposure

Respondents in the United States were asked about their online use of liberal and conservative news sites and blogs.⁶ A 5-point scale (1 = *every day or almost every day* to 5 = *never*) was used to indicate frequency of exposure, with the values reverse coded so that a greater number reflected more frequent exposure. Exposure to liberal media by Democratic or Democratic-leaning respondents and exposure to conservative media by Republicans or Republican-leaning was computed as property exposure ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.95$). Likewise, conservative media exposure by Democratic or Democratic-leaning and liberal media exposure by Republican or Republican-leaning respondents was computed as counterparty exposure ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 0.61$).

Respondents in Israel were asked to what extent they were exposed to a list of ideological outlets, including Websites, newspapers, and radio stations (the ideological tendency of the outlets was independently established by the researchers).⁷ Response categories varied between 1 = *not exposed at all* and 5 = *exposed regularly*. In the next phase, we created two separate measures of partisan exposure to right-wing and left-wing outlets by averaging the 15 items measuring right-wing exposure ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 0.65$, $\alpha = .79$) and the 13 items measuring left-wing exposure ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.71$, $\alpha = .85$). As in the U.S. case, exposure to left-wing media outlets by respondents leaning to the left and exposure to right-wing media outlets by respondents leaning to the right were computed as property exposure ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 0.60$). Likewise, exposure to right-wing media outlets by respondents leaning to the left and exposure to left-wing media outlets by respondents leaning to the right were computed as counterparty exposure ($M = 1.30$, $SD = 0.50$).

Mainstream and neutral media use

Americans' frequency of exposure to mainstream, relatively neutral, online news was measured by asking how often in the previous month (1 = *every day or almost every day* to 5 = *never*, reverse coded) they received information about candidates or the campaign from the "the website of a major national news organization that is not frequently characterized as favoring a particular party or ideology, including *USA Today*, *CBS News*, and *Yahoo! News*" ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 0.90$).

Using the question and response categories described in the previous section, respondents in Israel indicated to what extent they had been exposed to a list of nine news outlets considered mainstream, including radio stations, newspapers, Internet news sites, and television news shows ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 0.71$, $\alpha = .75$).

Affective polarization

Following Iyengar et al. (2012), U.S. affective polarization was measured both using favorability ratings of in- and out-party candidates and partisans, and using assessments of social distance from the opposed party. Most of these measures were included only in Wave 3, though candidate favorability ratings were measured in all the three waves.

Favorability ratings utilized an 11-point feeling thermometer. Respondents were told “we would like to know your feelings toward some political figures on a scale from 0 to 10” (0 = *very unfavorable* to 10 = *very favorable*). Respondents assessed the two leading presidential candidates: Barack Obama, the Democrat, and Mitt Romney, the Republican. In-party ratings equal the scores given to the candidate sharing the respondent’s party affiliation, while out-party ratings correspond to scores for the opposing party’s candidate. Affective polarization is calculated as the difference between in- and out-party ratings (Wave 1: $M = 5.31$, $SD = 3.85$; Wave 2: $M = 5.55$, $SD = 4.18$; Wave 3: $M = 5.75$, $SD = 4.21$).

In the third wave, respondents were also asked about both “individuals who support the Republican Party” and “individuals who support the Democratic Party.” Affective measures were computed as they were for the candidate ratings (polarization: $M = 4.21$, $SD = 3.79$).

Social distance was operationalized in two ways, in keeping with Iyengar et al. (2012). The first was displeasure at the prospect of one’s offspring marrying an out-group member (Almond & Verba, 1963; Bogardus, 1947; Iyengar et al., 2012). Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how they would feel if their child married someone from their preferred political party or the opposing party (1 = *very upset* to 5 = *very pleased*). Longitudinal analysis by Iyengar et al. (2012) shows growing displeasure among U.S. partisans over the possibility of children’s out-party marriage. As with favorability ratings, a difference score was computed between the in- and out-party scores, with higher values corresponding to greater affective polarization, $M = 0.80$, $SD = 1.25$.

Out-party trait ratings are the second measure of social distance. Respondents used a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) to indicate whether out-party supporters (Republicans assessed Democratic Party supporters and vice versa) were patriotic, intelligent, honest, open-minded, generous, close-minded, hypocritical, selfish, or mean. The nine items were dichotomized, set to 1 if a respondent believed out-party supporters possessed the trait (i.e., scores of 4 or 5), and both positive ($\alpha = .72$) and negative ($\alpha = .78$) trait stereotypes were summed. On average, 1.87 ($SD = 1.53$, out of four) negative traits are attributed to the out-group, compared with 0.84 ($SD = 1.13$, out of five) positive traits. Finally, the net number of positive traits was computed, subtracting the negative trait count from the positive trait count, $M = -0.92$, $SD = 1.98$. Negative scores indicate a net negative attitude toward the out-party.

In the Israeli case, only one measure of affective polarization was available: party favorability ratings. Given that Israel has a multiparty system, we asked participants

to rate parties with strong ideological identification. Favorability ratings utilized a 10-point feeling thermometer. Respondents were told “we would like to know your feelings toward some political parties on a scale from 1 to 10” (1 = *dislike/hate* to 10 = *like/favor*). Respondents assessed their support for the Meretz party on the left and of Ha’ihud Haleumi (National Union)-Habit HaYehudi on the right (the two parties merged 2 months before the election). In-party ratings equal the scores given to the party sharing the respondent’s political leaning/identification, whereas out-party ratings correspond to scores for the opposing party. Affective polarization is calculated (as in the United States) as the difference between in- and out-party ratings (Wave 1: $M = 2.80$, $SD = 3.59$; Wave 2: $M = 2.68$, $SD = 3.87$).

Control variables

In the U.S. case, a dummy variable was computed from the party affiliation item described above to identify strong partisans. Those who identified as strong Democrats or strong Republicans (35.4%) were assigned a value of 1 and all others a value of 0. With the Israeli data, ideological extremity was computed by folding the measure of political leaning. Scores range from 1 to 4, with higher scores reflecting more extreme ideologies ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 0.91$). Controls for political knowledge were also tested in both countries, but their effect was nonsignificant and so the variables are omitted from the models reported here.

Results

We analyze the two datasets separately, considering each hypothesis using the cross-sectional data from the U.S. case before turning to the Israeli data. We begin by examining the influence of pro- and counterattitudinal exposure on polarization using the four distinct measures of affect available in the American dataset. The first pair of measures focuses on favorability: U.S. presidential candidate favorability and party-supporter favorability. The former has been used to model the polarizing effects of selective exposure (e.g., Stroud, 2010), providing comparability across studies. The latter explicitly taps a concept that Iyengar et al. (2012) identify as crucial by asking respondents to assess “individuals who support” the Republican or Democratic Party. Although the affective polarization argument fundamentally concerns perceptions of citizens, not just political leaders or elites, scholars previously had to rely on ratings of Democrats/Republicans and of the Democratic/Republican Parties. Although it is plausible that assessments of these categories included perceptions of citizen supporters, Iyengar et al. note that they are unable to be sure that respondents were thinking only of partisan voters when providing these scores. Our measure helps reduce this ambiguity. Following Iyengar and colleagues, we utilize “net favorability” measures as our dependent variables, calculated as the difference between respondents’ favorability toward the in-party less favorability toward the out-party, in order to reduce measurement concerns.

We find that the frequency with which partisan media are consumed does influence favorability polarization, and that these effects vary according to whether the

Table 1 Effects of Pro- and Counterparty Exposure on Net Favorability (U.S. Case)

	Net Favorability Toward Candidates				Net Favorability Toward Party Supporters			
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β
Proparty site use	1.07*** (0.25)	0.26	1.09*** (0.24)	0.27	0.88*** (0.22)	0.24	0.91*** (0.22)	0.25
Counterparty site use	-1.17*** (0.32)	-0.18	-2.01*** (0.41)	-0.31	-0.84** (0.29)	-0.15	-1.64*** (0.38)	-0.28
Proparty \times counterparty site use	—	—	0.73** (0.23)	0.18	—	—	0.66** (0.20)	0.19
Major news sites use	-0.33 (0.29)	-0.07	-0.34 (0.29)	-0.07	-0.30 (0.26)	-0.07	-0.31 (0.25)	-0.07
Republican/leaning	-0.25 (0.34)	-0.03	-0.13 (0.34)	-0.15	-0.34 (0.31)	-0.04	-0.23 (0.30)	-0.03
Strong party identifier	2.72*** (0.36)	0.31	2.71*** (0.36)	0.31	2.98*** (0.32)	0.38	2.97*** (0.32)	0.37
Intercept	5.15*** (0.46)		5.15*** (0.57)		3.38*** (0.41)		3.53*** (0.51)	
Observations	521		521		513		513	
<i>R</i> ²	0.165		0.181		0.205		0.221	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

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

outlets utilized are tilted toward or away from the respondents' own party. These results are based on a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models (see Table 1, result columns 1 and 5). We find that more frequent use of proparty sites is associated with more polarized attitudes toward candidates and toward party supporters, whereas the use of counterparty site reduces polarization at comparable levels. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

H2 asserts that the influence of pro- and counterparty site usage differs in magnitude, but we fail to find evidence supporting this claim. To the contrary, the magnitudes of the coefficients on the two modes of selective exposure are very similar, $t(515) = -0.28$, n.s., $d = 0.02$, for candidate favorability and $t(507) = -0.14$, n.s., $d = 0.01$, for party supporters. Thus, both selective approach and selective avoidance contribute to polarization, and we cannot conclude that the influence of one is greater than the other. We will say more about this in the discussion.

The last test based on the two favorability measures concerns a pair of competing hypotheses about using pro- and counterparty content in tandem. Theory and extant empirical evidence suggest that diverse exposure could be associated with either polarization or depolarization. In these data, we find that polarization is the more likely outcome, which supports H3b, not H3a. The evidence for this comes from a variation on the previously described regression models (see Table 1, result columns 3 and 7). The interaction between pro- and counterparty site use has a

Table 2 Effects of Pro- and Counterparty Exposure on Social Distance (U.S. Case)

	Objection to Inter-Party Marriage				Net Positive Out-Party Traits			
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β
Proparty site use	0.15*	0.12	0.15*	0.12	−0.37***	−0.33	−0.37***	−0.33
	(0.07)		(0.07)		(0.07)		(0.07)	
Counterparty site use	−0.06	−0.03	−0.06	−0.03	0.10	0.06	0.13	0.07
	(0.10)		(0.12)		(0.09)		(0.12)	
Proparty × counterparty site use	—	—	−0.01	−0.00	—		−0.02	−0.02
	—		(0.07)		—		(0.06)	
Major news sites use	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.14	0.11	0.14	0.11
	(0.09)		(0.09)		(0.08)		(0.08)	
Republican/leaning	0.10	0.04	0.09	0.04	0.12	0.05	0.12	0.05
	(0.10)		(0.10)		(0.10)		(0.10)	
Strong party identifier	0.88***	0.34	0.88***	0.34	−0.65***	−0.27	−0.65***	−0.27
	(0.11)		(0.11)		(0.10)		(0.10)	
Intercept	0.14		0.32		−0.24		−0.74***	
	(0.14)		(0.17)		(0.13)		(0.16)	
Observations	522		522		526		526	
<i>R</i> ²	0.151		0.151		0.158		0.158	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

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

positive significant influence on polarization levels. In other words, the polarizing effects of proparty news exposure appear to be amplified when it is accompanied by counterparty exposure. This has important implications for the overall influence of partisan media on polarization, which we will return to in the discussion.

The second pair of outcomes of concern is based on the social-distance measures described previously: objection to inter-party marriage and how many fewer positive than negative traits are attributed to the out-party. Reassessing the first three hypotheses with these outcomes yields intriguing results. As with the first set of analyses, we find that proparty site use promotes social-distance polarization. More frequent use of these party-affirming outlets is associated with higher levels of objection to inter-party marriages and with attributing fewer net positive traits to the out-party (Table 2, results columns 1 and 5). The influence of counterparty sites on both measures of social distance, however, is not statistically different than zero. Thus, H1 is not supported for social distance. Testing the magnitudes of coefficients, we find that the proparty coefficient's magnitude is significantly greater than the counterparty coefficient when predicting out-party traits, $t(520) = 2.65$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.23$, which means that H2 is supported in the context of social distance.

Turning next to the moderating influence of counterparty site use on proparty site use, H3a and H3b, we fail to find support for either of the competing hypotheses.

When predicting perceived social distance from the out-group, we find no significant interaction between the two forms of exposure. This is a stark contrast to our models of favorability polarization, which showed evidence of a moderating relationship between the two forms of selective exposure. Taken together, these results suggest that pro- and counterattitudinal exposure may have different implications for social distance than for favorability. We consider this possibility in the discussion.

Next, we turn to the Israeli dataset. As in the U.S. case, the results of the regression model predicting affective polarization—net party favorability in these data—lend support to H1, but not to H2 (see Table 3, result column 1). Frequent exposure to attitude-consistent partisan outlets is associated with more polarized attitudes toward parties, while exposure to attitude-discrepant partisan outlets reduces polarization at comparable levels. There is no evidence that the magnitude of influence varies across the two types of content, $t(407) = -0.01$, n.s., $d = 0.001$. There is, however, one important difference between the results reported here and those of the U.S. case: we find no evidence of an interaction between exposure to attitude-consistent and attitude-discrepant outlets (see Table 3, result column 3). Thus, neither H3a nor H3b are supported in the cross-sectional Israeli data. We consider this discrepancy in the discussion, but first we use the panel data from both countries to conduct a more rigorous test of our causal claims.

Establishing Temporal Order

The results thus far are based on cross-sectional data, but these surveys utilized panel designs, allowing us to examine changes over time. U.S. respondents provided feeling-thermometer ratings of the two presidential candidates at each wave of the survey. We can use these data to model the influence of partisan media on *changes* in net favorability toward preferred candidates. Using affective polarization in the second wave to model polarization at wave three allows us to control for over-time measurement stability. Any remaining variance corresponds to a change between waves, which other predictors can help to explain. Utilizing this approach (see Table 4), we re-examine our assertion that pro- and counterparty site exposure has conflicting influence on affective polarization (H1). The results are consistent with those based on cross-sectional data: Proparty site use promotes affective polarization, whereas counterparty site use reduces it. Results are also comparable when considering the magnitude influence of these two factors, $t(341) = 0.035$, n.s., $d = 0.004$. The two types of exposure work in opposite directions, but we find no evidence that they differ in the size of their contribution to polarization.

There is, however, one noteworthy difference between the cross-sectional and longitudinal models using the U.S. data. After controlling for prior-wave candidate favorability, the interaction between pro- and counterparty site use is no longer significant. We cannot be sure of the reason for the loss of significance, but it does raise the possibility that the effect may have been an artifact of cross-sectional data. However, the Israeli case suggests otherwise.

Table 3 Effects of Pro- and Counterparty Exposure on Net Favorability and on Change in Net Favorability Toward Parties (Israeli Case)

	Net Favorability Toward Parties at Time 1				Change in Net Favorability Toward Parties			
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β
Proparty outlets	2.55*** (0.38)	0.41	2.55*** (0.38)	0.41	1.21** (0.42)	0.19	1.12** (0.42)	0.17
Counterparty outlets	-2.61*** (0.47)	-0.36	-2.54*** (0.59)	-0.35	-0.98* (0.50)	-0.13	-1.80** (0.65)	-0.24
Proparty \times counterparty site use	—		-0.06 (0.38)	-0.03	—		0.75* (0.38)	0.39
Mainstream outlet use	-0.26 (0.26)	-0.05	-0.26 (0.26)	-0.05	0.30 (0.26)	0.06	0.35 (0.26)	0.07
Political leaning	0.23+ (0.13)	0.09	0.23+ (0.13)	0.09	0.15 (0.13)	0.06	0.16 (0.13)	0.06
Ideological extremity	1.25*** (0.20)	0.32	1.25*** (0.20)	0.32	0.66** (0.19)	0.17	0.61** (0.20)	0.15
Net favorability toward party in prior wave	—		—		0.56*** (0.05)	0.55	0.57*** (0.05)	0.56
Intercept	-2.16+ (1.22)		-2.16 (1.31)		-1.84 (1.21)		-1.56 (1.19)	
Observations	408		408		343		343	
<i>R</i> ²	0.285		0.285		0.451		0.457	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Control for political knowledge, gender, age, and education.

+ $p < .1$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Using the Israel data obtained both pre- and postelections, we modelled the influence of partisan media on changes in net favorability toward the preferred parties, just as we did in the United States. As with that case, the results of the lagged regression using the Israeli data are generally consistent with the cross-sectional results (see Table 3, columns 5 and 7). Exposure to proparty partisan outlets increases polarization, whereas exposure to counterparty outlets reduces it. Thus, H1 was supported by this analysis. The magnitude of influence of the two types of exposure was, again, very similar, so we must reject H2. We have no evidence that exposure to attitude-consistent partisan outlets is more influential than exposure to attitude-discrepant outlets.

There is one important difference between the Israel cross-sectional and longitudinal models. In the former, we did not find evidence of an interactive effect between pro- and counterparty content (H3a and H3b). However, and consistent with the results of the cross-sectional analyses of the U.S. data, the longitudinal analysis supports H3b: The interaction between pro- and counterparty outlets use has a positive significant influence on polarization levels (see Table 3, column 7). In other words, exposure to attitude-consistent media outlets increases affective

Table 4 Effect of Pro- and Counterparty Exposure on Change in Net Favorability Toward Candidates (U.S. Case)

	<i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	β
Favorability toward candidates in prior wave	0.66*** (0.03)	0.65	0.65*** (0.03)	0.72
Major news sites use	−0.11 (0.22)	−0.02	−0.12 (0.22)	−0.03
Proparty site use	0.43* (0.19)	0.11	0.45* (0.19)	0.11
Counterparty site use	−0.53* (0.25)	−0.08	−0.89** (0.33)	−0.14
Proparty × counterparty site use	—	—	0.30 (0.18)	0.08
Republican/leaning	0.07 (0.27)	0.01	0.12 (0.27)	0.02
Strong party identifier	0.81** (0.29)	0.09	0.82** (0.29)	0.09
Intercept	1.99*** (0.39)		1.93*** (0.48)	
Observations	509		509	
<i>R</i> ²	0.510		0.512	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

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

polarization, and this effect is more pronounced when it is accompanied with exposure to attitude-discrepant outlets.

Discussion

Over the past half-century, Americans' attitudes toward their countrymen have undergone a rapid bifurcation. While assessments of preferred-party members have remained relatively stable, out-party perceptions have deteriorated sharply. This study follows path-breaking work by Iyengar et al. (2012) that established the existence of affective polarization. This study examines the influence of partisan media exposure on citizens' attitudes toward one another, especially in light of evidence that social identity shapes which political content individuals consume (i.e., selective exposure). Recent scholarship suggests that individuals' news consumption decisions are modestly informed by their pre-existing political attitudes. Contrary to some of the more dire predictions, individuals are not using the choice afforded by new information and communication technologies to systematically construct information echo chambers, embracing likeminded news while shunning everything else (Sunstein, 2001). Instead, individuals exhibit a preference for proattitudinal

news, termed selective approach, while tolerating other perspectives (Garrett, 2009; Garrett et al., 2013).

Results, which are replicated across datasets collected in two different countries, indicate that the difference between people's propensity to engage in selective approach toward proattitudinal content and selective avoidance of counterattitudinal content has important implications for affective polarization. As expected, the more extensively individuals rely on partisan sources affirming their political viewpoint, the more polarized their attitudes toward other partisans. From a social identity theory perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we find it unsurprising that repeated exposure to content praising one's allies and criticizing political opponents would cause attitudes toward these groups to diverge. And consistent with earlier work on cross pressures (e.g., Mutz, 2002, 2006), more contact with opponents tends to lead to more moderate views. Opponents' arguments can reduce negative affect toward these individuals by providing evidence that they are thoughtful, have legitimate concerns, share some common ground, and so forth. Thus, exposure to these arguments might be affectively depolarizing even if the arguments themselves are not found to be persuasive.

Although there is no statistically significant difference in the magnitudes of the effects of pro- and counterparty exposure, their real-world implications are distinct based on people's greater propensity to engage in selective approach than selective avoidance. Although one-sided partisan media can either promote or constrain polarization, depending on which side is consumed, individuals are most likely to consume the polarizing proattitudinal information (Stroud, 2011). This implies that as partisan news becomes more popular, affective polarization is likely to increase because sympathetic media tend to be used more often than the alternative.

Perhaps, the most intriguing results, however, concern the interaction between pro- and counterparty exposure. Although evidence is mixed, the depolarizing effects of counterattitudinal exposure are possibly constrained by contemporaneous proattitudinal exposure. This is in contrast to—though not contradicting—arguments that a diverse information environment can breed ambivalence (e.g., Mutz, 2002). Instead, individuals who seek information from the other side may be doing so in order to critique it (e.g., Hargittai et al., 2008), and placing pro- and counterattitudinal claims side by side may actually reinforce the sense that one's opponents are in the wrong (e.g., Taber & Lodge, 2006). Given that counterattitudinal exposure is often accompanied by proattitudinal exposure (Garrett et al., 2013; Holbert et al., 2012), these results bring into focus the contribution of hearing the other side. Depolarization is arguably less likely if most people only listen to the argument made by their counterparts with an eye toward rejecting them.

The interaction between pro- and counterattitudinal exposure did not hold up to longitudinal analysis among American respondents, whereas among Israelis, it was *only* significant when modeling change in favorability over time. Taken together, the data suggest that the two types of exposure may work together to further polarize citizens, but there are important questions about the robustness of this evidence.

These differences might reflect the unique political attributes of the two countries. For example, in the United States, where affective polarization is already exceptionally high, perhaps the interaction effect is too weak to make a detectable difference over time. Moreover, perhaps there are distinct theoretical explanations for the interaction in the United States and Israel. Future research should also test the possibility that different causal mechanisms are at work.

Beyond differences in the interaction effect, the results from both the American and Israeli case are in near-perfect alignment. This is despite the distinct political and media systems in the two countries, and some indications that increased affective polarization at the society level may be specific to the recent U.S. history (Iyengar et al., 2012). Even in the case of Israel, a country with a multiparty system and fewer partisan options in its political news coverage, selective exposure had significant effects on individuals' affective polarization that parallel those observed in the United States.

The mere replication of the effect of congenial media exposure on polarization and the reciprocal effect of exposure to cross-cutting news on depolarization in a context so markedly different than the United States is of great theoretical importance. Shapiro (2002) argued that while replication for its own sake is often futile, scholars should engage in "boundary search" (p. 478), attempting to replicate the existing theories and findings exactly in the contexts under which these theories should *not* work.

There are many reasons that the association between exposure to ideologically consistent news media and affective polarization might not hold up in Israel. First, because media may be less influential in multiparty contexts (Nir, 2012). Second, because people's trust in *mainstream* news is higher in democracies in which the government controls larger shares of the television market (Tsfati & Ariely, in press; this is the case in Israel, see Djankov, Caralee, Nenova, & Shleifer, 2003). Trust in *mainstream* news is related to lower exposure to *ideological news*, which weakens the effects of the latter (e.g., Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Third, because overtly ideological channels are harder to find on the media menus of Israeli citizens, compared with the United States, owing to the absence of ideological television channels. Fourth, because of the omnipresence of politics in the lives of Israelis (due to the prominence of the Israeli-Arab conflict, routinely affecting many citizens via mandatory drafts, relatively frequent military conflicts, etc.), one could have expected that ideological news exposure would make little difference, as citizens are already politically informed, and therefore familiar with a host of arguments from other political camps.

The fact that we were able to replicate U.S. findings in this context is revealing, affirming the robustness of the effect of ideological exposure on affective polarization. And even though we have not directly tested the underlying mechanism, replication in such strikingly different contexts suggests that the psychological process is not (entirely) culturally specific.

The potential differences between the two forms of affective polarization examined in the U.S. case also merit comment. Although the motivating research question on this topic was speculative, the pattern of results hints that there may be something

important going on. Specifically, these data suggest that favorability assessments are polarizing more rapidly than perceptions of out-party social distance. Furthermore, although pro-party exposure promotes both expressions of polarization, counterparty exposure is only significantly related to changes in net favorability.

There are several possible explanations. This may simply be a measurement artifact: Perhaps feeling thermometers are better for detecting change than either objection to inter-party marriage or stereotypic trait assignments. Alternatively, perhaps social-distance polarization really is occurring less rapidly, and our failure to detect a significant influence of counterattitudinal exposure is a side effect of this. Another alternative might be that there is a substantively important difference between how people approach—or how counterattitudinal exposure influences—favorability assessments versus social-distance assessments. We believe that these possibilities merit theoretical development and empirical testing.

The present investigation not only advances our theoretical understanding of the consequences of ideologically consistent and inconsistent exposure. It also carries practical relevance for media policy-making. Politicians on the more heavily regulated Israeli context, including prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have called for the privatization of public broadcasting and the creation, instead, of a multiplicity of television outlets, including ideological outlets, in order to facilitate “a free market of ideas.” Netanyahu argued that such a privatization “is necessary to ease tensions in Israeli society and to encourage discussion. In this way we will foster real tolerance of opinions other than our own” (Peri, 2004, p. 240). The risk of reforming Israeli broadcasting along these lines, according to the present findings, is that exposure to ideological channels will be mostly ideologically consistent, and the result will be affective polarization—the exact opposite of the social tolerance envisioned by Netanyahu.

In the U.S. context, these results underscore the importance of preserving a non-partisan news media. Most Americans say that they prefer media that are free of political slant (Kohut, Doherty, Dimock, & Keeter, 2010), and experimental results affirm that news stories offering a range of perspectives are no less attractive than one-sided alternatives (Garrett & Stroud, *in press*). There is still an audience for nonpartisan news, and these results suggest that this format has value beyond its profit-making potential.

We note that both measures of affective polarization rely on difference scores, which can be problematic when modeling change (see Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003, pp. 570–571, for discussion). In this case, however, the concept of interest is polarization, which is fundamentally concerned with differences in assessment between in- and out-groups. A further benefit of this approach is that it increases comparability with Iyengar et al. (2012), which also utilizes difference scores. We did, however, also test models of attitudes toward the out-group that controlled for in-group attitudes. Changing the outcome variable did alter coefficient values, but interpretations were consistent. For example, proattitudinal site use still tends to drive out-group favorability down.

There are a few limitations to acknowledge. First, we rely on self-reported media consumption, which tends to be exaggerated and which can be biased by important sociopolitical attributes (Prior, 2013). Experimental designs and naturalistic data collection (e.g., Nielsen or comScore data) are less prone to these threats, but they, too, have well-known limitations (Goldman, Mutz, & Dilliplane, 2013). Our argument is not that these data are perfect, but rather that they provide a reasonable test of theoretically derived predictions. Methodological triangulation is the next logical step, testing to see whether our results hold up under alternative designs.

A second limitation stems from the fact that Israeli respondents were asked to identify themselves on a left-to-right spectrum rather than by party. We chose this approach because it facilitates the U.S. comparison, but it could underestimate Israeli affective polarization, as partisan identification may be more affectively charged than ideological placement. We also cannot know whether Israeli citizens feel less favorable toward ideologically similar out-party members than in-party members. Future research should examine the role of partisan identity in multiparty systems.

Our final suggestion looking to the future is that scholars need to examine the psychological mechanisms by which selective approach and avoidance influence affective polarization, whether through identity salience, affective learning, attitude rehearsal, or some as of yet unidentified alternative.

In sum, voters' unfavorable feelings toward the other party are influenced by the consumption of partisan news media from either side of the political aisle, and perhaps by the combination of both pro- and counterattitudinal news exposure. These negative emotions are not limited to political candidates or political elites, but spill over to perceptions of party supporters more generally.

Furthermore, the effect of selective exposure on affective polarization is not limited to the hyperpartisan United States, but is also in evidence among voters in Israel. Although these effects could stem from either a tendency to seek party-affirming information or to avoid contact with the other side, prior scholarship suggests that the former is more likely than the latter.

Taken as a whole, these patterns represent both risk and opportunity. The risk is that citizens will become intolerant and unable to work together to solve important social and political problems. The opportunity is that we may be able to stem political divides and promote greater empathy for opponents if we can find ways to limit partisan news consumption and facilitate cross-cutting exposure.

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Notes

- 1 These descriptives characterize respondents participating in the third wave, though demographic data were collected in the baseline survey. Respondent demographics were comparable across waves, and there is no evidence of disproportionate attrition along any of the characteristics reported.
- 2 Israeli Arabs, who at the time of the study comprised approximately one fifth of the Israeli population, are not included, given that the ideological outlets considered in the study were Hebrew language outlets and the affective polarization measure is specific to the Jewish Israeli population. It would be valuable to include Israeli Arabs in future work, adding group-relevant measures of outlet exposure and affective polarization. Consumption of ideologically inconsistent information among Israeli Arabs is exceptionally high, and including the group would afford a valuable opportunity for intergroup comparisons.
- 3 Two sectors in particular use the Internet at a rate far less than the general population: low-income families and ultraorthodox Jews. Notably, the latter are also underrepresented in other sampling methods (Dror & Saar, 2012): Ultraorthodox Jews refrain from using the Internet for religious reasons.
- 4 Note that we have also excluded true Independents when computing the descriptives that follow. The impact of filtering on sample statistics is small.
- 5 Based on attitudes regarding four different issues that stood at the center of the election campaign: social welfare, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation, a possible attack on Iran's nuclear installations, and the relationship between the secular and the ultraorthodox sectors.
- 6 Operationalized as exposure to "the website of a major national news organization that is frequently characterized as favoring liberal positions or Democratic candidates, such as *The New York Times* or *MSNBC*" or "the website of a politically liberal online news organization or blog, such as *The Huffington Post*, *ThinkProgress* or the *Daily Kos*" for liberal media, and "the website of a major national news organization that is frequently characterized as favoring conservative positions or Republican candidates, such as *The Wall Street Journal* or *FOX News*" or "the website of a politically conservative online news organization or blog, such as *Drudge Report*, *TownHall* or the *Cybercast News Service (CNS News)*" for conservative media.
- 7 The list of right-wing outlets included those available online: (*Channel 7*, *Latma*, *Makor Rishon*, *Yesha News*, *Rotter.net*, *Srugim*, *Kr8*, and *Hazofeh*), print outlets (*Yisrael Hayom*, *Makor Rishon*, *Yated Ne'eman*, and *BeSheva*) and radio outlets (*Channel 7*, *Kol Hai Radio*, and *Galei Yisrael*). Left-wing media outlets included those available online: (*Haaretz.co.il*, *Yesh Gvul*, *Lo Nistom*, *Ha Smol Ha Leumi*, *Hagada Ha Smalit*, *Haoketz*, *Hachaverim Shel George*, *Ha Televizia Ha Hevratit*, and *Magazine Hakibutz*). Unaffiliated outlets included "other online publications of social or human rights organizations," the print version of *Ha'aretz*, and the *Kol Hashalom* radio station.

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