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UNNATURAL DIVIDES:
A CASE STUDY OF THE NY-24 CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION IN 2018

By

Chloe R. Coffman

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Science degree
State University of New York
College of Environmental Science and Forestry
Syracuse, NY
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Graduate Program in Environmental Science

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Abstract

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Progress on environmental issues in the U.S. relies on governmental action. However, our partisan political system currently produces intense divides and debate, stalling progress on environmental protections. This project explores how this trend emerged in the 2018 congressional midterm election in the NY-24 district. Through semi-structured interviews with politically active people in the NY-24 district, an intimate understanding of the connections drawn between political subjectivity and environmental values reveals that while conservation is not unimportant, it is not a key or defining issue for many voters in the election. A content analysis of election coverage from local newspapers supports this idea, as the environment was a prevalent issue but far from the predominant issue in the coverage. The conclusions of this thesis demonstrate that a shift in framing the environment on behalf of politicians, the media, and environmentalists is necessary to bring focus and true change for environmental problems.

Key words: conservation, politics, content analysis, New York state, environmental values, political subjectivity

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Chapter 1: Project Introduction

When I entered graduate school at SUNY-ESF, in the fall of 2017, I had a story on my mind.

Nearly 20 years ago, the Alaska Department of Fishing and Game developed a plan. More than 250,000 people live in Anchorage, the state's largest city, and this plan outlined a cooperative effort for humans and wildlife to live side-by-side. The purported goal of the plan was to protect natural habitat for the animals, enhance the benefits provided by the wildlife, and reduce the number of human-wildlife conflicts. It is the only city of its size in the United States to create such a plan (Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, 2000).

Meanwhile, Rep. Don Young is Alaska's sole congressperson. He has held his position in office since 1973. And he is a Republican. Congressman Young has a lifetime score of 8% from the League of Conservation Voters, where a score of 100% would indicate he has never voted against environmental protections, meaning he has routinely and consistently voted against them (LCV, n.d.). Although he is the only congressperson still in office who originally voted in favor of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973, this year he voted in favor of ESA *rollbacks* – specifically to allow the economic costs of listing a species to be made public, a move environmentalists and Democratic lawmakers consider to be detrimental to the ESA (Richardson, 2019). These rollbacks were supported by President Trump, who received Alaska's electoral votes in the 2016 election. In fact, the last (and only) time the state voted for a Democratic candidate in a presidential election was in 1964 (Martinson, 2016).

A state like Alaska could be defined by its wilderness, with eight national parks and a national wildlife refuge of nearly 20 million acres of land within its borders. Its most populous city has a cooperative agreement for humans and wildlife to live side-by-side. It is clear that the natural

environment is a key component of the state's identity and pride. Yet, its voters support the Republican party with reliable regularity, the political party that has become increasingly anti-environmental over the last fifty years (Dunlap, McCright & Yarosh, 2016). I could not stop thinking, was the problem that the state's residents did not truly care about the environment? Or was there something else at work?

New York State does not hold the same acreage of protected lands as Alaska, but public lands are absolutely vital to the state. The Adirondack Park and the Catskill mountains help to define the state's landscape, and the wilderness upstate offer large swaths of land for residents and tourists to enjoy. While New York is generally thought to be a reliably blue state in presidential and gubernatorial elections, the politics of the state is divided geographically, with the majority of Democrats living downstate in New York City. I saw themes similar to Alaska emerge in this state I now called home and decided to explore the relationship between environment and politics from a local perspective. This is the foundation from which my thesis research came.

The timing of my research project was highly unique and politically fascinating. In the 2016 general election, the Republican Party won the presidential race as well as the majority of the seats in the House and the Senate (CNN, 2016). As a result, Democrats quickly set their sights on the 2018 midterm election, in hopes of stripping some of this overwhelming power from the Republican Party. Historically, voter turnout at midterm (non-presidential) elections has been low – in 2014, total voter turnout was 41.9 percent, the lowest recorded rate since 1978 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). For Democrats, that turnout rate is typically even lower, as studies show that Democrats are 20 percent less likely to turn out to vote in midterm elections than Republicans (Cohn, 2017).

However, the loss in 2016 appeared to act as a motivating factor for greater attention to the 2018 midterm elections for the Democrats. Donald Trump's presidency was extremely contentious and highly polarizing – in fact, according to a survey of political experts, President Trump's presidency is the most politically polarizing in history (Eady et al, 2018). In special elections held since the 2016 general election, more Democrats have voted than expected (Cohn, 2017). Political demonstrations like the Women's March in 2017 and 2018 (Mazzei et al, 2018), the March for Science (Smith-Spark and Hanna, 2017), and the March for Our Lives (Durando, 2018) attracted millions of people altogether. I thought that using the 2018 midterm elections as a contextual basis for this research project would no doubt be fruitful, considering the uptick in political activism and attention in the two years preceding the election and the contentious nature of the Trump administration.

As environmental and land management issues become increasingly politically polarized, a state where its Republican base is constantly seeking to assert its presence is extremely important to analyze. Within New York City there are over 3 million registered Democrats but fewer than 500,000 registered Republicans. However, outside New York City the difference between the number of registered Democrats and Republicans is far less – approximately 2.6 million Democrats and 2.2 million Republicans (New York State Board of Elections, 2018). As such, the majority of voters are Democrats throughout New York, but the majority of Republicans live upstate. The political context of New York state, and the NY-24 district specifically, provided a fascinating backdrop for this research project. The NY-24 congressional district is located in the geographic center of the state, encompassing Onondaga County, Cayuga County, Wayne County, and a portion of Oswego County. Its largest city is Syracuse. Congressman John Katko is the current congressperson in NY-24 and had already served two terms. He is a self-described

moderate Republican (Weiner, 2019). His election against Democratic challenger Dana Balter in 2018 was the impetus for this research project.

Unnatural Divides: a case study of the NY-24 Congressional Election in 2018

In May of 2018 the Institutional Review Board at Syracuse University approved the research design for this thesis project. They determined the project met their ethical standards, and I moved forward with data collection. This approval included the interview questions (*Appendix D*), screening survey (*Appendix B*), and interview consent form (*Appendix C*).

The data for this project came from two sources: semi-structured interviews with politically active residents living in the NY-24 district and newspaper articles from three major newspapers in Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oswego County. The interviews took place during the four months prior to the 2018 election in November, while the newspaper articles were sampled from the two months prior to Election Day.

The first manuscript included in this project is titled “Conservation or Conservative? The connections between environmental values and political subjectivity.” I used interview data to explore the connections politically active residents of NY-24 draw between their own political subjectivity and the importance they hold for environmental issues, specifically around conservation and land management, in the months prior to the 2018 midterm election. This manuscript aims to answer the research question: Do politically engaged people draw connections between their political subjectivity and their own environmental values, specifically related to conservation and preserved lands?

The second manuscript included in this project is titled “Nature in the News: A content analysis of election coverage in Upstate New York local newspapers.” It is a content analysis of local

newspaper coverage around the NY-24 election and seeks to investigate the importance environmental issues did or did not have in this coverage. This manuscript aims to answer these three research questions: First, what political issues are discussed and how are they framed by the media outlets in coverage of the NY-24 congressional election? Second, are environmental issues, specifically conservation and land management, prevalent in this media coverage? Third and finally, are the issue platforms held by the candidates or is the campaign itself the focus of coverage?

Together, these two manuscripts use both qualitative and quantitative methods to consider and analyze the context of the NY-24 district during an election. The media coverage allows us to reflect upon the political and public consciousness during the election more generally, while the interview data provides an intimate window into the lived reality of some of the residents. The findings complement and build upon one another, in ways that will be explored in both manuscripts, as well as in the concluding section of this project.

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Chapter 2: Manuscript one — Conservation or Conservative? The connections between environmental values and political subjectivity

Abstract

Political partisan divides in the U.S. are resulting in extreme contention, amongst both elected officials and American citizens. This is starkly observed in trends around environmental opinion, namely over the last 30 years, resulting in an increasing lack of significant and crucial environmental protections (Dunlap, McCright & Yarosh, 2016). This manuscript explores the political subjectivities of politically active people in Upstate New York during the 2018 Congressional Midterm election in the NY-24 district. Using semi-structured interviews, this paper considers connections between political ideology and environmental values, namely around land conservation. While the environment and conservation are important issues for the majority of those interviewed, it is not the dominating issue in their opinions around the election or in their own political lens. This largely comes as a result of other issues dominating the public debate and a lack of connection drawn between the environment and politics altogether. In the case of the Republican party, the connection between the values of the party and environmental issues is even more murky, further diminishing the importance these voters place on the environment in the political sphere.

Key words: partisanship, environmental politics, election, conservation, political subjectivity, political ideology, semi-structured interviews

Introduction

This paper focuses on the ways political partisan affiliations intertwine with the environmental values of Americans living in upstate New York, and the connections these voters draw between environmental values and political beliefs. Most generally, it is a case study of the 2018 congressional election in the NY-24 district, located in Central New York. More specifically, I will consider the issue of conservation amongst the myriad of other issues in a congressional election and examine the importance it holds for both voters and candidates. This section provides an introduction to the temporality of the study, both the growing partisan divide around environmental and conservation issues leading up to the 2018 election in the U.S. and the local context of the election itself. I also discuss the statement of the problem addressed in this paper, Next, I present the literature review that provides the theoretical foundation and demonstrates the usefulness of this research to the larger academic community. Then, in the context of this literature, the justification for this project and the research question I aim to answer are presented. Finally, I outline my methodological strategy and present the data collected throughout the course of this study, and the conclusions reached through this data.

The growing political divide around conservation and land management in the U.S.

This research focuses on conservation issues, and as such it is crucial to define the term. Conservation is distinguished from the concept of preservation; a simplistic definition of the term conservation is protecting lands from human uses altogether (Cronon, 1996; National Park Service, 2015). However, the definition of conservation is not universally agreed upon by scholars – it is “a forest rather than a single tree” depending upon the scholar’s perspective, meaning the multitude of definitions of the term could fill a forest and cannot be simplified by one tree standing within it (Sandbrook, 2015, 566). The National Park Service (NPS) defined

conservation as “the proper use of nature” (National Park Service, 2015) which is contestable due to a lack of consensus on what is “proper.” But, for the sake of this research, this is the definition that will be used. Conservation in this context is defined as the protection of public lands, that still permits human interaction with the land.

Modern environmental policy, as it relates to issues of land conservation in the U.S., is a partisan issue. Our political system is represented by two dominant political groups: Republicans and Democrats. Today, the former is more critical of land conservation, while the latter is generally more supportive (Anderson, 2017). In January 2017, Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States, and since that time there has been a systematic move from the Republican party to reverse previous administrations’ protections of public land. In January 2017, Rep. Jason Chaffetz introduced H.R. 621: Disposal of Excess Federal Lands Act of 2017. This bill would instruct the Department of the Interior (DOI), which oversees all federally protected lands, to immediately sell off 3.3 million acres of land protected and managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the DOI. Selling this land would greatly reduce or prohibit American citizens’ access and threaten the biodiversity of native flora and fauna species in these areas (Ament, et al., 2014). Further, the move sparked outrage and protests across the country, as environmentalists and sportsmen widely viewed it as a blatant land grab (Enders, 2017). Nevertheless, in April 2017, President Trump signed an executive order demanding that the DOI review all national monuments larger than 100,000 acres and designated since 1996 (Dwyer & Siegler, 2017). As a result, in September 2017 the DOI recommended reducing the size of six national monuments, and then declined to confirm or deny that these lands would be opened to drilling or mining, activities for which President Trump had previously advocated

(AP, 2017). This recommendation reduced or reversed land protections made under the Antiquities Act by Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama (Dwyer & Siegler, 2017).

Republican lawmakers continue to stand out as anti-environmental, and environmental issues are becoming increasingly partisan. Indeed, Dunlap et al. (2016) pointed out that from 1970 to 2015 the League of Conservation Voters' scores for lawmakers, which indicate the number of times representatives vote for or against key pieces of environmental legislation, demonstrates this trend. Average Republican House and Senate scores have steadily decreased whereas average Democratic House and Senate scores have steadily increased (Dunlap, McCright & Yarosh, 2016). This move by current Republican legislators is a break from their party's tradition, as environmental issues related to land use and conservation have not always had a partisan connotation. In fact, a number of Republican presidents in the 20th century were environmental leaders. President Theodore Roosevelt sharply focused on conservation issues while in office, creating the 1906 Antiquities Act and establishing 230 million acres of public lands (National Park Service, 2017). President Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, justifying his decision by stating, "It is literally now or never. A major goal for the next ten years for this country must be to restore the cleanliness of the air, the water, the broader problem of population congestion, transport and the like" (Rothman, 2017, n.p.). President Ronald Reagan valued environmental protections for public lands, saying, "The preservation of parks, wilderness, and wildlife has also aided liberty by keeping alive the 19th century sense of adventure and awe with which our forefathers greeted the American West" (Reagan, 1986, n.p.). The modern Republican party of 2018-2019 has moved away from this sentiment.

National monuments, parks, and threatened or endangered species were originally protections all Americans – Republican and Democrat alike – could support. During the Nixon administration

in the 1970s there was significant bipartisan support for much of the U.S.'s pivotal environmental legislation and policies (Layzer, 2012). However, considering modern political trends, this idea no longer holds true. The trend of polarization around environmental issues in the U.S. is alarming for any American who believes in the value of protecting public lands for its inherent value and the ecosystem services it provides. It is important to understand that protecting our federal lands is not only about conserving natural places for their own sakes. These lands are also important habitats for species protected by the Endangered Species Act, as federally protected lands provide protection for nearly 25% of threatened and endangered species in the U.S. (Ament, et al., 2014). It is because of this importance that I undertake this research, to further explore the nature of this trend and elucidate the reaction of New Yorkers to the declassification and development of public lands. These lands have intrinsic and systemic value, and their protection is important for all Americans.

Context: The 2018 midterm election, upstate New York, and the NY-24 District

Most generally, this research aims to explore the ways in which New Yorkers' political subjectivity is connected or related to valuations of the environment and perceptions of environmental issues, specifically those related to land management and conservation. The idea of political subjectivity is rooted in Althusser's (2008) structural theory of ideology, which will be further explained and explored in the literature review.

The temporality of this study is crucial, for the investigation took place during a midterm election year and a divisive Congressional election in upstate New York. This put the politics discussed in the previous section on a prominent and intimate stage for upstate New Yorkers, which provides an excellent opportunity to investigate its underpinnings and connections to conservation issues. The partisan divides in environmental issues are seen on a national level.

This case study provides an opportunity to learn about this issue on a deep and local level, in order to suggest what might be happening elsewhere (though, not everywhere). As such, this research could help to speak to a larger phenomenon that is happening in other localities across the country.

The NY-24 Congressional district was an important race in the 2018 midterm election. In late 2017, political analysts named it one of the top ten races to watch in 2018 (Schneider, 2017). The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) listed it as one of its 33 targeted House district elections (Sena, 2017). However, the incumbent Republican congressman Rep. John Katko defeated his Democratic opponent in 2018 and remained in office for a third term. During the 2018 election, he also ran on the Conservative, Independent and Reform party ballots (Weiner, 2018). Katko's campaign website featured a section on energy and the environment, which focuses on energy independence by domestically extracting fossil fuels and developing clean energy technology (Katko, n.d.).

The Democratic candidate who ran against John Katko was Dana Balter, a Connecticut native who entered the race in mid-2017 (Balter, n.d.). The Working Families Party and Women's Equality party endorsed Balter's candidacy (Weiner, 2018). Balter's campaign website features five key issues on which she is focused, one of which is what she refers to as the "Central New York tradition" of protecting the environment. Her specific policy focus included a carbon tax, clean drinking water, and renewable energy generation (Balter, n.d.).

Statement of the Problem

Environmental issues in America today are often approached through environmental policy and legal protections, thereby inextricably linking the political and the environmental. As such, in

order to successfully protect America's environment, specifically its natural lands, it is essential to work in the American political system, which is today highly divided along partisan lines of political ideology. To this end, it is crucial to consider how the growing partisan divide in recent years affects voters. This research project seeks to explore the connections individuals draw between environmental values concerning conservation of state and federal land and their political subjectivity, which is informed and created by political ideology. This theoretical foundation is based upon the structural theorist Althusser (2008), which is outlined further in the literature review.

Specifically, this paper aims to determine the extent to which voters draw connections between environmental issues and their own political subjectivity. If environmental issues are not considered to be explicitly political, and therefore not overtly related to political subjectivity, it is not likely these issues will be at the forefront of political debate driven by the voters. If this is the case and focus on environmental issues in the political realm are not demanded by voters, then it is likely that environmental issues will not be focused upon in the political arena, and thus remain unsolved.

Literature Review

This research is chiefly concerned with the connection between voters' valuations of environmental issues, namely conservation, and political ideology and subjectivity in the U.S. As such, this literature review will outline the theoretical foundation and historical context of this research. First, I identify the way in which political ideology works to form political subjects, and then how those subjects help to reinforce the structural foundation of the State. Second, the evolution of partisanship and environmental issues has been closely examined through positivist research and is outlined in the context of this conversation of political ideology. Finally, this

section will present a brief outline of the historical and modern treatment of wilderness within this idea of political subjectivity.

Ideology and political subjectivity

Ideology and the ways in which it affects the actions and beliefs of Americans is absolutely crucial to understanding how political ideology and discourse relates to considerations of environmental issues. Ideology is often realized as “a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class... in which individuals live out their relation to a social structure” (Eagleton, 1991). Building upon this idea, individuals interpret and evaluate society in part through the social structure of political ideology, and its variance in form helps to explain why people have differing considerations of political issues, and in this context environmental issues specifically (Sunderlin, 2003). As such, an understanding of the basic American political ideological system is an important foundation to consider. This analysis can help us to better understand why there are such wide differences in public opinion, both around land conservation and environmental issues more generally.

The structural theories of Louis Althusser (2008) are a helpful mechanism with which to understand this political society and the opportunities for change and resistance within it. Althusser’s ideas are rooted in Marxist critique and posit that Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) are used for reproduction – that is, the continued production of society and the status quo, to reinforce the State. The primary site of reproduction is the school, or the educational ISA, where children learn about topics that are “useful in the different jobs in production” and “the ‘rules’ of good behavior” in society (Althusser, 2008). In this way, this ISA not only teaches useful skills but also how to protect, and reproduce, the power of the State. The family ISA is enormously important for Althusser. In fact, he argues that the school-family ISA coupling has

eclipsed the school-church coupling of the Middle Ages, as the family is the second reinforcement of the lessons children learn in school, and perhaps introduces different ideas. The political ISA in the U.S. functions in much the same way, as it teaches those who ascribe to it the goals and ideals of the party and ensures its followers are also its protectors.

Althusser uses ISAs in contrast with the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), which functions predominantly through violence and repression, while ISAs primarily use and reinforce ideology. ISAs are relatively autonomous, but not in the sense that they do not affect one another. Rather, they exist *separately-together* in one superstructure. These ISAs (i.e. family, the church, schools, the political system) overlap, clash, and shift, but all work to reinforce the foundational structure of society: the ruling class and thus the State. For Althusser, ISAs do important work. They indoctrinate individuals and groups with ideas and create social norms, becoming hegemonic in nature and thus largely unquestioned. ISAs are mechanisms for social control. In fact, he argues that no class could reasonably hope to hold State power without them (Althusser, 2008). These theoretical ideas are actualized in reality through interpellation of individuals as political subjects. As such, they are subjects-Subjects of an ideology, spreading these ideas and reinforcing the State by themselves while understanding themselves to be a part of a larger structure.

This theoretical foundation is important, for it helps to explain the hegemonic influence of political ideology amongst voters. Political ideologies work in the construction of political subjects, and in so doing inform political subjectivity. In following Althusser's structural theories, these political subjects help to reinforce the political ideology, or ISA, itself, and thus strengthen the power of the State. Through their loyalty to their political ISA, these political subjects fight for the prevailing discourses and adhere to them. Those who ascribe to a political

party in the U.S. are certainly informed by the ideology emerging from their dominant party and have ensuing or influenced viewpoints on a variety of issues. The political subjects, whether they are Republican, Democrat, or another less dominant political ideology, reinforce both their own political ISA and also the partisan political system in the U.S.

However, it is crucial to understand that these ISAs are never *fully* formed or complete, as they are never quite completely dominant or stable in their hegemonic control. They are always fluid, negotiated, and renegotiated in different configurations of power within the structure. In this way, subjects can introduce discord or incite repression. Yet, the structure is strong, change is difficult, and the system favors reproduction of ideologies. Althusser's ideas can help us to understand modern political ideologies and the political subjects that exist within it. Their political subjectivity is informed and largely constructed within and by their ideology. I argue that these political ideologies are a kind of ISA that helps to reinforce the State, but which consider the differing opinions amongst subject-Subjects.

These factors and conflicting ideological foundations have cascading effects on environmental opinion. The goal of bipartisan policy is to work with our 'opponents' and, in the same breath, stop framing them as our opposition and instead recognize that, to find any feasible solutions, we must work together. To do this successfully, it is vital to understand that, although the U.S. has a partisan-based political system founded upon two major parties, there is a variance of opinion amongst both parties' members, and compromise is possible (Gershtenson, 2006). The structural framework of ideology (Althusser, 2008) informs our understanding of the political ISA and its subsequent creation of political subjects. This framework allows us to analyze differences in opinion around environmental issues in relation to political subjectivity, thus helping to explain why conflicts arise in the context of environmental issues.

Contextualizing partisanship and environmental opinion

There is a long history of political cues to Americans regarding environmental policy and protections, which are shown to influence public opinion (McCright and Dunlap, 2011). This history has been documented through historical analysis and positivist survey research in the field of environmental politics. The 1970s were marked by a growing interest in the environmental movement, and during this time there was bipartisan support for a wide range of important environmental legislation (Sellars 2009, Layzer 2012). Following the divisive era of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, in the 1970s there was celebration of environmental issues, considered by many to be healing issues that every American could support (Dunlap 2001). However, it soon became clear that political ideologies amongst Americans influence their support for environmental protection policies and even environmentally conscious behaviors, as those ascribed to conservative ideology realized that their preference for smaller government and the free market economy clashed with this emerging regulatory state around the environment (McCright, et al. 2014). As such, although the 1970s were marked by some bipartisan support around these environmental policies, it did not last long.

Since the mid-1970s, there has been a noteworthy divide in concern for environmental issues between Democrats and Republicans in office. This divide began with the Reagan administration, which clearly demonstrated the Republican Party's opposition to environmental protection policies. Republicans in America had been increasingly critical of environmental policies and regulations since the mid to late 1970s, but the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a more dramatic increase in Republican resistance to environmental policies (Dunlap, 2001). Gershtenson (2006) examined League of Conservation Voters' congressional voting records spanning several decades and found that the Republican takeover of both Congressional houses

in 1994 led to an extreme increase in partisanship amongst Americans. These trends, noted by Dunlap and Gershtenson in the late 20th century, have been tracked by McCright et al. (2014) into the 21st century. During the Obama administration, the Republican Party's anti-environmental sentiment and efforts to curtail environmental regulatory actions have been supplemented by industry lobbyists in an attempt to lessen the impact of President Obama's "receptivity to environmental science and policy" (McCright, et al., 2014, 252). The Tea Party has systematically worked to pull the Republican Party even further to the right, and attacks on environmental regulations increased during that time as well (McCright et al., 2014).

This increase in the divisiveness of partisanship is absolutely reflected in the opinions of those Americans who identify as Republican or Democrat, as this growing polarization at the level of political elites has a cascading effect on voters. Bartels (2000) used data from the National Election Survey to measure the importance of partisan loyalty when voting. The study found that by 2000, voting along partisan lines in presidential elections was 80 percent higher than in 1972, a marked increase demonstrating the growing power of partisan allegiance (Bartels, 2000).

Political parties in the U.S. "are important in structuring the political agenda, defining terms for political debate, and influencing the behavior of their members" (Gershtenson, 2006, 84). By analyzing surveys from Americans over the last 50 years, numerous scholars back up this claim, finding that this growing political polarization in our federal government has had a significant impact on voters' support for environmental policy and spending (Guber, 2013; McCright and Dunlap, 2011; Pew, 2012).

The Pew Research Center (2012) examined partisan differences on a variety of issues and found that, between 1992 and 2012, the *gap* between Republicans and Democrats on environmental protection grew from 5 points to 39 points, with Democrat respondents being more supportive

than Republicans every year. Similarly, Guber (2013) analyzed Gallup polls from 1990, 2000, and 2010 and found an increasing level of difference between politically partisan groups when it comes to the public's "worry" about global warming specifically, in addition to five other environmental issues, albeit to a lesser degree. McCright and Dunlap (2011) also analyzed Gallup polls every year from 2001 to 2010 and found that Democrats are more likely to be consistent with scientific data around environmental issues and to express concern about the problem than Republicans. McCright et al. (2014) examined General Survey results from 1973-2012 and found that, in all years examined, more Democrats supported the government in spending more money on environmental protections than Republicans, with the largest difference between the two groups being 29.7% in 2010. However, it should be noted that the authors found this trend positively correlated with the public's overall support for general governmental spending, implying that this trend is also related to lack of Republican support for high levels of spending by the federal government.

Some scholars are decisively pessimistic about our ability to bridge this demonstrated political gap, especially when it comes to environmental policy. As there is extreme party and religious polarization on environmental issues, policy change may become increasingly difficult to enact (Newman et al., 2016). For this reason, it is important to investigate how political subjects reinforce their political ideology and their conflicts with other subjectivities. It is also important to consider the interpretivist perspective, which relies less on positivist data and more upon a deeper understanding of the underlying factors influencing this public opinion.

Conservation in the U.S.

This research is concerned with environmental perceptions, chiefly with land conservation. As such, it is important to consider the history of this movement in the U.S., both socially and

politically. Originally, the concept and creation of wilderness was a uniquely American ideal, for “wilderness had no counterpart in the Old World” (Nash, 2014, 67). Romanticism assisted the concept of wilderness in permeating mainstream ideals because “with the flowering of Romanticism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wild country lost much of its repulsiveness” (Nash, 2014, 44). Romantics promoted the idea of “desirable wilderness” and challenged the conception that wilderness was simply dangerous and unexplored lands but was rather something to be admired (Holden, 2016, 42).

The move to embrace rather than conquer wilderness began to take a firmer hold of public consciousness in the mid-19th century. Environmental leader Henry David Thoreau and other naturalists were unsettled by the increasing loss of wild country during this time. The period of industrial development “brought more lumbermen and settlers into the forests” (Nash, 2014, 102). Preservation of small areas prohibited lumbering or settlement simultaneously insured “the continued existence of some wild country” and “at the same time served to keep wilderness out of the path of progress” (Nash, 2014, 104). This trend resulted in some of the first official designations of preserved lands in the nation, and the beginnings of modern land management in the United States.

As these ideals of wilderness rooted in American nationalism and Romanticism developed, a small group of Americans considered and subsequently advocated for its formal preservation (Nash, 2014). In 1872, Yellowstone was designated as the first National Park (Sellars, 2009). It was praised as a “museum” and “marvelous valley” – an area where tourists could see the “freaks and phenomena of Nature” (Nash, 2014, 113). However, conservation or protecting the ecological landscape of this place had little to do with the motivation to formally designate Yellowstone as a national park. For one, the railroads transporting people to Yellowstone hoped

it would “become a popular national vacation mecca like Niagara Falls or Saratoga Springs” which would result in great profit to the railroad companies (Nash, 2014, 111). Congress also maintained that protecting the natural resources in the park would have great economic value (Sellars, 2009). Congress’s intention, in moving to establish Yellowstone, “was not to justify the park positively as wilderness, but to demonstrate its usefulness to civilization” (Nash, 2014, 113). This utilitarian emphasis had long-lasting effects on U.S. land management.

As such, the benefit of wilderness to society, as opposed to its intrinsic value, dominated the early motivations of conservation. Environmentalist George Marsh examined the societal benefits of wilderness, and he found that protecting these lands meant natural land features could help to prevent droughts and floods, an early understanding of ecosystem services provided by conserved lands. Consequently, this sort of preservation “had ‘economical’ as well as ‘poetical’ justifications” (Nash, 2014, 105). Since this point equated the protection of wilderness with economic progress, Marsh’s argument became popular amongst preservationists and those in support of designating lands as protected (Nash, 2014). However, “the challenge is no longer the conquest of the wilderness but rather of the self-destructive tendencies of an excessive civilization,” thus necessitating a greater focus on ecological preservation (Nash, 2014, xxi). Yet, this utilitarian frame for conservation has largely maintained since its conception.

In 1906, President Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act and simultaneously named 18 national monuments, which in fact remained inaccessible for years to the public (Sellars, 2009, 14).

However, since then, numerous presidents have used the Antiquities Act to preserve and set aside land chiefly for human visitation and enjoyment (Dwyer & Siegler, 2017). In addition to tourism, national parks and protected lands provide crucial habitats for a plethora of flora and fauna species. National Parks protect nearly 25% of threatened and endangered species in the

U.S. (Ament, et al., 2014). A number of these species are wide-ranging, and as a result depend upon large swaths of protected wilderness (Ream et al., 1989). Clearly, protected lands have a multitude of uses and benefits for humans, animals, and vegetation, and it is for this reason that some environmentalists advocate for their continued protection, whereas others simply believe in the intrinsic value of these spaces. However, as demonstrated in the previous section, support for environmental issues more generally has an uneven political history.

Fascinatingly, conservation of wilderness has been historically patriotic, for its protection “was in a very real sense [the protection of] the nation’s most sacred myth of origin” (Cronon, 1995, 77; see also Sears, 1989; Lewis, 2007; Nash, 2014; Vidon, 2015, 2016). Patriotism is at the core of Republican and conservative doctrine, and yet the patriotic wilderness ideal is not obviously found in their modern ideological platform. This idea and the historical context presented here is the basis for this research, for it will closely analyze the ways in which New Yorkers value land conservation, both in the state and across the country. But more than that, this research aims to analyze the ways that political subjects in New York connect their own environmental values and their political ideology, and subsequently deal with contradictions that may arise.

There has been a significant shift both in the value Americans hold for conservation and environmental issues more generally. As explained here, over the last few centuries, there has been a societal shift in environmental perceptions that created a dichotomy between nature and humans. We value nature as something separate from humans, as opposed to as an interlinked system. Within this valuation, there is an unconscious belief that “humans” and “nature” are categorically different (Cronon, 1995; Castree & Braun, 2001; Braun, 2002; Koger et al., 2010). Cronon’s thesis is that our ideas of wilderness have in fact become threats “to responsible environmentalism at the end of the twentieth century” (Cronon, 1995, 77). The Anglo-American

wilderness ideal frames nature and wild lands as separate from humans, which is resultantly problematic. Cronon hits on a crucially important point because this frame positions “malign civilization and benign nature” at odds with one another (Cronon, 1995, 84; see also Castree & Braun, 2001; Braun, 2002). Lakoff (2010), in his discussion of framing environmental issues, mirrors this perspective, positing that “the Environment Frame sees the environment as separate from, and around, us” and this does not reflect the true nature of the natural world (76).

Environmentalists tout the ideal of untouched wilderness space, and as a result, Republican leaders can easily employ a utilitarian argument and critique these wilderness designations for their lack of benefit to humans. This means humans inherently see nature as something there for us, as humans, to manage and control – the utilitarian purpose that underlined early land management principles is thus maintained today (Cronon, 1995; Castree & Braun, 2001; Braun, 2002; Sellars, 2009).

The resultant psychological transformation of the Western world in this era has major implications for the natural world, for it means we have come to see the earth as defined by its resources (Koger et al, 2010). Our knowledge has eclipsed traditional and native beliefs, which oftentimes find kinship with nature and the land (Deloria, 1999). This points to the conclusion that assumptions about nature are not organic, they are socially constructed and are therefore deeply rooted in social norms. It is this human valuation of environmental issues that is of paramount concern, and the relationship this valuation has with political ideology and subjectivity.

The utilitarian frame of conservation and political divides in the U.S. have enormous ramifications for Americans’ environmental values. Americans’ political subjectivities, informed and enforced by their ideological foundations (Althusser, 2008), influence their support for

environmental protection policies in addition to a broader involvement in the environmental movement (McCright, et al. 2014, Dunlap 2001). This is the crux of this research – the relationship between the political subjects constructed by political ideologies and their valuation of conservation efforts in the U.S, and the subsequent importance of the issue in the context of a congressional election.

Justification and Research Question

This research provides a new perspective on the growing partisan divide in the U.S. around a variety of issues (including environmental issues) by analyzing upstate New Yorkers as political subjects, their underlying political ideologies, and the connections they draw between this subjectivity and the issue of land conservation. As outlined in the literature review, the majority of existing research in the literature of environmental politics is positivist, based on polling and survey data of Americans about their political and environmental beliefs. This is valuable, but largely fails to illuminate the *reasoning* behind these opinions and subjectivities, and the *ideology* that informs it. By engaging in interpretivist (as opposed to positivist) inquiry, this research builds upon our existing understanding of environmental valuation and partisanship, and engages politically active voters in upstate New York to explore the connections between environmental values and political subjectivity.

This case study helps to examine the phenomenon occurring here on an intimate scale. It also illuminates the larger issues at play that might also be at work in other localities across the U.S. A qualitative focus on individual voters aids in explaining the connections politically active people draw between their own political subjectivity and environmental issues, specifically conservation. Considering the issue of conservation amongst the variety of other important issues in the election demonstrates the importance this issue holds for both voters and candidates. In

this way, a better understanding of one case study could help to explain how the extreme partisanship that has grown around environmental issues in the past few decades affect these individuals as political subjects. This case helps to illustrate these connections more broadly in other districts where similar phenomena are occurring, as extreme partisanship has grown nationwide, and environmental issues have become more and more politically charged.

As such, I seek to address this research question in the context of the 2018 congressional election in the NY-24 district: Do politically engaged people draw connections between their political subjectivity and their own environmental values, specifically related to conservation and protected lands?

Methodology

The data comes from a series of interviews with politically engaged voters in the NY-24 district. These interviews allow us to better understand the environmental values of these voters, their reasoning, and to what degree their political ideology is connected to those beliefs. Moreover, these interviews provide an opportunity to explore what other issues are important to these voters, and whether those are aligned with or in conflict with their stated environmental beliefs. Semi-structured interviews allow for an in-depth and open-ended discussion, “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see” (Glesne, 2006, p. 104), which is not afforded in quantitative surveying to the same degree.

I conducted 20 interviews, which were on average 30-45 minutes long. Interviewees were recruited using purposive sampling methods via Facebook political groups whose members lived in the NY-24 district. Some additional participants were recruited via snowball sampling, wherein participants recruited others that were interested. The interviewees were first screened

using a questionnaire to ensure they fulfilled the requirements for participation, which included being at least 18 years of age, living in the NY-24 district, and at least some level of political activity. The recruitment statement and screening questionnaire are available in *Appendix A* and *Appendix B*.

Once interviewees indicated their interest in participating in an interview, I sent them a written document outlining the process and their informed consent to participate, available in *Appendix C*. The interview questions were designed to guide respondents in discussing a variety of issues including: their political identity; what political issues were important to them; the importance of environmental issues; the connections they draw between politics and the environment; and their reaction to recent news around land conservation in the U.S. The interview questions began with a discussion of political issues and then environmental issues, as they relate to political subjectivity. As a result, the respondents were primed to discuss their opinions around environmental issues in a political context, since they were already answering questions about politics. It is important to note that they may have answered the questions differently, had the interview began with questions about their stances about environmental issues. The questions were designed in this way so that no participants were alienated at the outset of the interview, particularly Republican and conservatives who might think of environmental issues as liberal in nature and thus be subsequently less willing to discuss their political views. The questions used in the semi-structured interviews are available in *Appendix D*.

The interviews took place in the three months preceding the 2018 Congressional election (from August to October 2018) so that respondents were likely to be more politically active and primed to be thinking about these issues in a specific context. Of the 20 interviews, 18 of the interviews took place over the phone and two were conducted in-person. The political identities of the

participants are not easily classified as many participants described nuance in their descriptions of identity, but simplified there were 5 Republicans/Conservative, 11 Democrat, 1 Democratic Socialist, 1 Green Party, and 2 Anarchist participants. There is an obvious imbalance in the political identities represented in this study, with more liberal perspectives than conservative offered. This came as a result of the unwillingness of more conservative viewpoints to participate, an issue that will be discussed shortly. Table 1 includes the interviewees' pseudonyms, ages, self-described political identity, and the political party with which they are registered.

Table 1: Demographic details about interviewees

Pseudonym	Age	Self-described political identity	Registered political party
Alexis	75	Midwest Republican	Republican*
Annie	68	Democrat	Democrat
Becca	50+	Green	Green
Caitlyn	61	Democrat	Democrat
Cassie	69	Democrat	Democrat
Chad	18	Republican	Republican
Christina	58	Democrat	Democrat
Colton	50+	Conservative	Republican*
Derek	22	Anarchist	Green*
Erika	22	Republican	Republican
Hannah	72	Independent	Republican*
Heather	44	Democrat	Democrat
Jenna	45	Democrat	Democrat
Joanne	40+	Democrat	Democrat
John-Paul	33	Democratic Socialist	Democrat*
Kendall	68	Democrat	Democrat
Luke	34	Anarchist	Democrat*
Nick	71	Democrat	Democrat
Nicole	61	Democrat	Democrat
Sydney	77	Democrat	Democrat

**Party registration differs from self-described political identity*

The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 77. Other personal demographic details were not collected, because an analysis of these details is outside the scope of this study. There are no doubt important connections that could be drawn between this information and the data gathered, but the main driving force behind this research is the connection between political subjectivity and environmental values. The gender, race, socioeconomic status or sexual orientation of participants, amongst other details related to identity, are undoubtedly crucially important. However, these ideas were not included the literature review I conducted as they all offer large repertoires of academic work. Moreover, as a researcher conducting qualitative and subjective analysis it was my desire to avoid any implicit bias or assumptions that can accompany these monikers (see (Jost et al., 2009). As such, asking participants about these identity descriptions and the subsequent analysis of these aspects was not appropriate, and thus not included.

To analyze the data, I used inductive or open coding of the interview data, identifying thematic codes and then analyzing them in more detail. This type of coding was initially “without regard for how or whether ideas and categories will ultimately be used, whether relevant observations have been made, or how they will fit together” (Emerson et al, 1995, p. 151) in an effort to capture as much thematic detail as possible. These thematic codes were used in analytical memos to synthesize and identify overarching themes, which will be analyzed in the next section of this paper. Analytical memos are short pieces of writing that describe how the coding categories “interrelate and transcend to themes or concepts” (Saldana, 2016). In this process, I was forced step back from the field, the individual interviewees and “identify, develop, and modify broader analytical themes and arguments” (Emerson et al, 1995, p. 157). The attribution of quotes in this paper were anonymized using pseudonyms, though the age and self-identified political identity

of the respondents are given for context. All data coding was conducted using NVivo 12 software.

Results and Discussion

The data gleaned from the semi-structured interviews was thematically organized in two main categories, which are presented and discussed here. First, the political subjectivity of the interviewees is explored, from the underlying values of the political parties to the ways in which individuals are shifting and resisting in their own political subjectivity. This section is important for understanding the nuance of political thought and opinion amongst these voters and understanding the existing opportunities for change within our structural political system. Second, the connections interviewees drew between their political subjectivity and their position on conservation and other environmental issues is analyzed — specifically, the four most significant reasons why these connections were and were not drawn by participants. This section is most crucial in answering the research question addressed by this research.

Political subjectivity

Political values and political issues: related, not equivalent

It is important to understand how the participants in this study define their own political subjectivity, within the context of their chosen partisan political party. While some participants discussed the policy platform of the Republican or Democratic party as justification for their allegiance to that party, a number of participants first and foremost spoke about the values they believe the party represents. For instance, Caitlyn was fairly critical of political parties in general, but drew a distinction between the Democrats and Republicans based on a guiding principle.

“I mean I feel, everyone is sort of for the corporations because that is who their donors are, but I feel like the Democrats at least try a little bit to legislate for the common people. I don’t feel that the Republicans do that.” (Caitlyn, 61, Democrat)

Cassie, Christina, Nicole, and Heather associated the Democratic party with the idea of benevolence. Cassie said, “I believe in people taking care of one another, and I’ve always been a Democrat” (Cassie, 69, Democrat). Christina went on to say that, “I don’t hate all the Republican ideas, I just think that [the Democrats] are kinder” (Christina, 58, Democrat). Heather outright said the Democratic party represents her values, which she termed “a kind of just that we’re all kind of in it together type of thing” (Heather, 44 Democrat). Similarly, Nicole discussed the support of social welfare most generally.

“I see the Democratic party as a party of being concerned for the general well-being of society and the people around, and that is a defining feature of my life, you know being concerned about the other guy” (Nicole, 61, Democrat).

Similar trends were observed amongst conservative participants. Colton discussed his dissatisfaction with the modern Republican party, instead terming himself a conservative, which to him “means I have strength in my beliefs” (Colton, 50+, Conservative). He admitted that some Republicans also possess this strength in belief, but the party itself is too “wishy-washy” today. Erika said she believes chiefly in conservatism and constitutionalism, which is why she is pro-life and in favor of equal rights for all, issues she believes the Republican party represents. But she said that the important distinction for her between the two political parties was that “sometimes the other party, [the Democratic party], kind of has idealistic views and not realistic views on a lot of issues” (Erika, 22, Republican).

These political subjects aligned with the Democratic or Republican party because of their perceived values of the party, rather than merely the platform of the party. This perhaps demonstrates an emotional connection to the political party, a belief that the party possesses inherent characteristics or values, and that trickles down into the work it does. Interestingly in this case, it is chiefly the ideals of the party that justify its followers' allegiance, rather than specific policy goals. In this way, these subjects reproduce the power of this political ISA, and in purporting the goals and ideals of the party, these political subjects help to reinforce and reproduce its power (Althusser, 2008).

Importance of issues due to underlying values

While some people spoke about issues as important to their support of the Democratic or Republican party, it was often intrinsically related to their own values and emotions, thus extending this idea of important intrinsic values maintaining the ideological support for the party. Nick, an interim pastor at a Lutheran congregation, spoke about faith as an important issue to him and how this pushed him to align with the “values and priorities” of the Democratic party (Nick, 71, Democrat). Hannah discussed how she cannot even talk about guns in schools or separating families at the border because she was so disturbed that children were in danger, because “that goes against everything that as Americans we believe in” (Hannah, 72, Republican). Hannah had long been a registered Republican but was beginning to move away from that party in light of these concerns with the Republican platform. Christina and Cassie, who first talked about the values the Democratic party represents and were discussed in the previous section, extended this discussion in talking about the issues that were most important to them. Christina said that humanitarian concerns were most important to her, related to issues like “equality and the environment, you know those kinds of things” (Christina, 58, Democrat).

Cassie said she believes in “people taking care of one another” and that’s why she cares about issues like equal and nondenominational education, and the protection of unions (Cassie, 69, Democrat). Meanwhile, Chad’s main point of support for the Republican party was their emphasis on limited government and fiscal responsibility, values and defining features that trickle down into their policy positions. While these perspectives demonstrate support for a political party based on issues it generally supports, underlying them is an emphasis on the *values* that define the identity of that political party, and the subsequent party platform. This supports the findings of Voelkel & Willer (2019) who discovered that when progressive economic policies are framed in a way that aligns with more conservative ideals, like patriotism or respect for tradition, support for these policies increased amongst both conservatives and moderates. This suggests that the values framing or the context of a policy can have a major effect on subsequent support, an idea that is shown in the data here.

While the values of the party were important, many participants did discuss concern for specific political issues and policies. When asked about what political issues were important to the interviewed political subjects, the answers were varied and spread across party lines. Throughout the interviews, the issues that were mentioned included abortion, education, gender and LGBTQ equality, the environment, gun control, health care, immigration, criminal justice, jobs and the economy, Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) nominees, senior concerns like Social Security and Medicare, the size of government, social welfare, and racial justice. Of these, the size of government, social welfare, criminal justice, and SCOTUS were the only issues that were not of concern to at least one Democrat and one Republican. Jobs and the economy were the most mentioned issue of top concern, and this prevalence spanned party lines.

This is not to say there was not a difference in opinion about these issues amongst those participants from different political backgrounds – for example, Chad discussed the importance of gun ownership and the second amendment while Jenna advocated for stringent gun control. But Erika argued for a position that was advocated for by both Republicans and Democrats, saying “I believe in the second amendment and that everyone has the right to own a gun, but I also believe that there should be high regulations on the people who are allowed to own them” (Erika, 22, Republican). Erika is an example of a politically active person stepping away or disagreeing with their political party’s standard position on a policy. However, as discussed earlier, Erika chiefly believes in conservatism, an underlying and important value to her. Perhaps this data suggests that the values defining a political party are just as important as the policy platform, if not more important for some voters. In fact, political ideology and subjectivity have been found to be predictors of moral foundations (Hatemi, Crabtree, & Smith, 2019). If morality itself is found to be determined in part by political subjectivity, it would make sense that values are more important to participants than the political platform of their chosen party.

Simultaneous critique and allegiance to a partisan political group

In discussions about their own political allegiance, many interviewees expressed criticisms of the platform of the political party they belonged to, and yet remained registered with that party. The majority of participants in this study were registered as either Republican or Democrat (18 of 20), with the remaining two registered with the Green party. However, the self-described political identity of participants was much more varied than this dichotomous choice, ranging from a registered Republican that preferred the identity of “Conservative” to a registered Democrat that preferred the moniker “Anarchist”. As Althusser (2008) posited, there is opportunity for resistance within the political ISA, allowing political subjects to introduce

discord and disagreement, and even change. For example, Hannah is a registered Republican but discussed how she has moved away from the party. She voted for Katko in 2016 but said she was planning to vote for Balter in the upcoming election in 2018. She credited this shift with agreeing with the positions of the Democratic party on certain issues, like abortion and immigration.

Derek is the self-identified Anarchist that is registered with the Green party. He said he could not be a registered Democrat because the party does “not take climate change seriously enough at the national level.” Derek was the only participant to credit environmental issues as justification for rejection of a political party. However, Derek was still planning to vote for Dana Balter in the upcoming election, the Democratic party candidate.

In addition to these instances of rejecting party identity, a number of other participants were critical of their political party, and yet still remained registered with it. Annie said, “I identify Democrat. I’ll be perfectly frank, it’s not liberal enough for me” (Annie, 68, Democrat).

However, she chose to align with the Democratic party because she believes in the importance of compromise. Both Jenna, Joanne, and Sydney mirrored this perspective. Jenna said she and many of her friends “reluctantly identify as something simply because there’s not a better fit” (Jenna, 45, Democrat). Joanne said “I’m a registered Democrat. I have way more in common with them [than the Republicans], but I don’t always agree with the Democrats” (Joanne, 40+, Democrat). Joanne believed in stronger socialist policies, akin to places like Denmark where her husband is from. Sydney explained, “Now there are a lot of things in the Democratic party that I am very disturbed by, but I’m registered with Democrats because I want to vote in the primaries” (Sydney, 77, Democrat). Colton is a registered Republican, but is still displeased with the party, saying “I’ve become so disillusioned with Republicans’ lack of strength in their beliefs. But I’m still a registered Republican, but I don’t say I’m a Republican anymore, I say I’m a

Conservative.” (Colton, 50+, Republican). These perspectives all further demonstrate Althusser’s (2008) argument that change within ideology is difficult, and the generally hegemonic power of the political ISA.

Interestingly, the participants who outright reject a political party did so based on specific issues they could not agree with, like Hannah and Derek. Hannah is a Republican but is moving towards the Democratic party because of immigration issues. Derek is a member of the Green Party who rejects the Democratic party because of their position on climate change. Yet, those who disagreed but were still aligned with a political party did so because they wanted to participate in the political system and compromised in order to do that. These perspectives from Annie, Jenna, Joanne, Sydney, and Colton provide examples of resistance to the current political ISA, but as Althusser argues, the structure is strong, change is difficult, and the system favors reproduction of ideologies.

None of these participants, nor any others I spoke with, said they were *not* planning to vote in the upcoming Congressional election, in which there were only two choices: a Democratic candidate and a Republican candidate. The idea of reluctant acceptance here on both sides of the political aisle is important, because it demonstrates both tolerance of and an openness or opportunity for change. However, as shown in the previous section, there were a number of interviewees that were *uncritical* of the major political party to which they belonged, due to both the party platform and the values that the party possesses. And so this data simultaneously demonstrates the strength of the existing political structure.

While there was disagreement and criticism with their political party amongst interviewees, most participants still aligned with the Democratic or Republican party. Perhaps the reason for this is a

belief and trust in the values of the party, rather than simply the policy platform. The values these interviewees described in the previous section – kindness, conservatism, faith, realism – are stronger than a single policy position. It is possible this is what truly aligns these people with their political party, even if there is disagreement on specific issues.

The (un)importance of environmental issues

Although many specific issues of concern were often discussed by people on both sides of the partisan political aisle, environmental issues were not. While some Republicans agreed they were concerned with environmental problems, only one discussed them without being prompted by me, while four Democrats, one Green, and one Anarchist brought them up without prompting. This is in line with current trends observed elsewhere wherein Republicans are less environmentally interested than Democrats (Guber, 2013; McCright and Dunlap, 2011). This observed lack of interest is discussed further in this section.

The distinction between the issue platform of a political party, and the inherent values of that party is an important one to make in investigating the research question at hand in this paper – the connections between environmental conservation and political subjectivity. Conservation is a political issue, but perhaps if it does not connect with an underlying value of a political party, it will be more difficult to engage those people that align with that party. This could confirm the idea that environmental protections are not chiefly an individualistic perspective, and therefore not based in the values or ideology of the Republican party (Sunderlin, 2003). Furthermore, Wolsko, Ariceaga, & Seiden (2016) posited that when environmental and conservation issues are framed as obeying authority or protecting the sanctity of the natural world, conservatives are more pro-environmental. This further support the findings of Voelkel & Willer (2019) who focused on the importance of framing the environment in appealing to Republican or

conservative perspectives. The importance of environmental problems, specifically conservation, will be thoroughly explored in the next section.

The connections between political subjectivity and conservation

The environment as not inherently political for all

The environment was not found to be a consistently important political issue. During the interviews with participants, I first asked them to discuss political issues that were important to them. Then, if they had not mentioned environmental issues in answering this first question, I asked them if environmental issues were also important to them. Out of the 20 interviewees, 7 brought up environmental issues as important to them on their own accord when discussing political issues generally, 12 said they were important to them when asked specifically, and one participant said they were simply unimportant. This is a crucial observation when considering the connections political subjects draw between environmental issues and politics. Many of the 12 that required prompting to discuss these issues were quick to admit their importance, but they simply had not thought of them immediately when asked about political issues more generally. Nicole explained,

“Oh, yes they are actually important, and if I’d thought about it, certainly when we talk about it and when I think about it, I like Dana Balter’s position on green technology and certainly, you know our environment is under assault, there’s no two ways about it, people are arguing whether global warming is a thing, which is insane. So, yes, it is important, absolutely.” (Nicole, 61, Democrat)

When pressed further, some participants discussed how the environment is an important political issue, in certain contexts. Colton said, “Sometimes the environment is very important economically, and then I’m really interested in it” (Colton, 50+, Conservative). An intersection

with other issues was an important connection to environmental concerns for other interviewees as well. Annie (68, Democrat) discussed environmental justice as the intersection between environmentalism and social justice and Joanne (40+, Democrat) talked about the importance of clean water or clean air for public health. This contextual aspect of environmentalism is important, because it suggests that for some, environmental issues are especially important when they relate to other related political issues, whereas the intrinsic value of the environment might hold less weight. This idea put forth by these interviewees harkens back to the utilitarianism that underlies the American conservation movement – protecting the environment is important when it intersects with other concerns and human benefits (Cronon, 1995; Castree & Braun, 2001; Braun, 2002; Sellars, 2009).

While some drew connections between environmental issues and politics, others spoke about them as largely and intrinsically *unrelated*. This was not always due to a disinterest in environmental issues, merely that they did not need to be entwined. Colton (50+, Conservative) explained, “When I say I’m not worried about environmental issues, that doesn’t cover a couple areas where I am interested in environmental concerns... I’m just not an environmental voter.” As mentioned earlier, he was most interested when environmental issues affected economic concerns. Alexis took issue with this research project itself. She knew that I was a graduate student at SUNY-ESF and wondered why I was asking her questions about politics, worrying that the college was “diluting their purpose in order to get more students involved [in politics]” (Alexis, 75, Midwest Republican). Kendall spoke to a larger phenomenon she has observed in her own political work, in discussing a group she belongs to encouraging environmentally-minded people to vote, commenting “research shows that even though people are maybe identified with the environment and are maybe concerned, a lot of them don’t vote.” However,

Kendall herself also commented that conservation is a personal issue “but the political part comes in when you have folks in government that don’t realize the value of these resources and are ready to sell them off” (Kendall, 68, Democrat). These testimonials suggest that an interest in environmental issues or a concern for the environment does not fundamentally mean the environment is an issue of *political* concern.

While the majority of participants discussed the importance of the environment and of conservation in the U.S., a few explicitly discussed the *unimportance* of environmental issues generally. Caitlyn discussed how it is simply just not one of her top issues of concern, saying, “I don’t vote primarily on things like guns and the environment, which I should be a little more into, but I can’t do everything” (Caitlyn, 61, Democrat) Chad took a more stark point of view, explaining:

“I just feel like hey I wake up every day, this is the climate I’m in, this is the sort of environment we live in, and that’s what it is, and just leave it at that. But that’s sort of the way I live my life, and for that reason environmental issues don’t really do much for me when I’m voting.” (Chad, 18, Republican)

Colton took a less severe but similar stance in refusing the term “environmental voter” but still discussed when the environment factored into political opinions, like when they intersect with economic concerns. However, he admitted that his lack of interest in environmental issues is more credited to the progress he feels the U.S. has made, saying “I think our environment is in really good condition compared to what it was when I was a child” (Colton, 50+, Conservative). Chad and Colton are outliers in this case study, but conceivably this is due to the number of conservative or Republican subjects in this study. If more opinions of Republicans were

represented, it is possible this disinterest or lack of concern for environmental issues observed in other studies would be more prevalent (Guber, 2013; McCright and Dunlap, 2011; Pew, 2012).

It is clear that while environmental issues were important to the interviewees, they were not always organically discussed as one of the more important issues. However, there were certainly some participants that did discuss environmental concerns of their own accord. This suggests that some politically active voters do not necessarily connect their political positions with environmental issues while others absolutely draw that connection. And for some, there was an outright rejection of the importance of these issues. This begs the question – why do environmental concerns, specifically around conservation, connect with political subjectivity? And in some cases, why do they not? The data show four possible explanations.

1. The appreciation of nature and the importance of conservation

The connection between a personal love of natural places and subsequent support of policies that protect these places is simple to understand and is a connection many participants explained. However, a number of interviewees discussed their appreciation of nature and desire for it to be protected, even though they do not personally enjoy participating in wilderness or visiting protected lands. It is important to point out that the relationship between recreation in wilderness and the moniker of environmentalist is complex. Here I merely aim to point out this relationship for some, but not all. When asked if she enjoys being in nature, Alexis jokingly replied, “Oh, not if I don’t have to,” but then went on to say, “I mean I think it’s important. I have no problem with tax dollars going to parks. I understand the value of trees” (Alexis, 75, Midwest Republican) However, as shown in the previous section, she took issue with discussing conservation as a political concern. Furthermore, she went on to speak to her support of drilling for oil and gas on protected lands if the energy sources are used domestically. Christina argued in

favor of the animals that do live on these protected lands, saying, “I’m not a real outdoorsy person, but I certainly respect the outdoors, I love the animals and I feel like we are infringing on their territory.” Yet, Christina also discussed that while environmental issues were important to her, they “don’t seem as important to me emotionally because people seem more important to me emotionally” (Christina, 58, Democrat). Chad and Colton both said they were uninterested in spending time in these places, and also supported opening up public lands for natural resource extraction. In these cases the participants who had less personal appreciation for public lands simultaneously voiced a political platform where the environment was less important.

However, the majority of participants discussed their reverence for natural places. In this vein, interviewees gave many reasons why wilderness conservation is justified and necessary. Four Democrats and one Democratic Socialist argued for conservation in order to protect animals and endangered species. One Democrat and one Anarchist discussed the significance of ecosystem services, like the carbon sequestration provided by trees. Five Democrats and one Anarchist talked about the value of conservation to future generations, with some thinking of their family members specifically. Cassie commented, “I have a grandson and I want the world to be a safe place for him,” (Cassie, 69, Democrat) while Sydney explained, “I think about my grandkids and what is going to happen to them, and I am very concerned about the environment” (Sydney, 77, Democrat). One Green, two Anarchists, and two Democrats maintained that public land should be protected for native peoples, and titles should even be restored to Native Americans. Pollution of water and air was discussed by one Republican, two Democrats, one Anarchist, and one Green. Alexis argued, “You don’t purposely pollute because it’s the most convenient way to do it” (Alexis, 75, Midwest Republican). Joanne and Luke both talked about this issue in a local context in reference to Onondaga Lake and the high levels of historic pollution there.

2. *Lack of contextual understanding*

While many participants argued in favor of conservation efforts, others argued in favor of oil and gas drilling and other forms of development on public lands. Alexis contended that while building a pipeline through public lands from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico to export oil was not acceptable, “If you ran half that pipeline because you need to keep people in Salt Lake City...and Chicago warm for the winters, I could compromise a little bit on that” (Alexis, 75, Midwest Republican). Chad also argued in favor of domestic energy production, in order to be energy independent.

“I believe in the private sector, and so I think that from an energy stance, we have a lot of energy in our reserves, whether it be oil, natural gas, even coal, and I think that opening those up from extraction is beneficial. It doesn’t have to be entirely detrimental to the environment, but I think if we move towards energy independence, it’s probably something that is good for the entire country, and especially workers in the lower classes.” (Chad, 18, Republican)

Colton mirrored this perspective. He posited that resource extraction and environmentalism are not at odds with one another, saying, “I’m very environmentally interested, but when we put land and resources out of production for environmental reasons only, that is where I stop... why would we do that?” Alexis, Chad, and Colton are all hinting at or overtly discussing domestic energy independence, and the balance between conservation and dependence on foreign energy sources. While their perspective was in the minority amongst participants, it is an important point. However, none of them explicitly argued why this natural resource extraction needs to occur on previously protected public lands specifically.

Other participants admitted their lack of knowledge around this issue. While most participants enjoyed nature and were supportive of conservation efforts, they also mentioned their

unfamiliarity on the topic, particularly not being up to date on the federal government's recent movements to declassify and sell off public lands. Caitlyn (61, Democrat) commented, "I haven't been following it very closely, but I am of course against it," while Heather (44, Democrat) said, "I haven't been following that as closely as some of the other things, but what I do hear about it is very concerning to me," and Alexis (75, Midwest Republican) said, "I'm not really up to date on mineral extraction [on protected lands]." John-Paul admitted that his interest in the issue is closer to home.

"I haven't followed [the selling off of public lands] too closely, I've just heard a little bit, mostly related to debates about fracking and fracking in this district" (John-Paul, 33, Democratic Socialist).

These interviewees felt largely uninformed about issues around land conservation, which could perhaps be attributed to the lack of cues or coverage about this issue. McCright and Dunlap (2011) found that Democrats' environmental knowledge was more consistent with scientific data than Republicans, but that trend was not necessarily found explicitly in the data. Instead, a lack of knowledge was more focused on a lack of interest around the issue. This could contribute to conservation not being a crucially important political issue for the participants.

3. The perception of environmentalism as a chiefly Democratic issue

Many of the participants drew a line between environmental issues and the Democratic party, while arguing that the Republicans are associated with an anti-environmental sentiment. This helps to explain why more Democrats than Republicans voiced concern over environmental issues of their own accord. When asked if she considers the environment to be more of a liberal issue, Erika replied "Definitely." Kendall and Nick were critical of the Republican party for their environmental platform, largely due to their emphasis on the economy and money.

“I would say that Republican leaders tend to back away from [environmental concerns] because it might adversely affect some business interests. And I tend to connect the Republicans with business.” (Kendall, 68, Democrat)

Nick went on to say,

“I believe that the Republican party has launched a full-frontal assault on our national parks and our natural resources in the name of economic prosperity. Which is a lie because the prosperity only goes to a handful of people.” (Nick, 71, Democrat)

Throughout the course of the interview, Chad discussed how environmental issues are simply unimportant to him. But at the end of our conversation, he got quite agitated because he assumed through the course of my questions that I thought all Republicans were anti-environmental.

“I would just say as a concluding note that while I may sound, you know oh it’s a Republican, he doesn’t care about the environment, he’s trying to kill us all with global warming. I think you have to remember that all voters are unique, and they all have different things that drive them. And in my opinion, I think it’s unfair to pin blame on me. You know, often they do, and society says you know, ‘oh you’re a Republican trying to speed up the death of the planet.’ There’s a way to be environmentally sound and economically smart, and I think that’s evident even through the Trump administration so far. I think the EPA just came out with a report that greenhouse gas emissions are down almost 3% from Trump’s first year, so I think there are examples, even the Save Our Oceans Act or Save Our Waters Act, there are examples of Republicans being smart on the environment and although there are some issues where I wouldn’t agree with the Republicans and the Trump administration, especially with their rollback of methane regulations, but I think you can be a Republican and care about the environment.” (Chad, 18, Republican)

This argument demonstrates the way questions about the environment are inherently loaded to some Republicans. Although the participants ahead of time knew that environmental issues

would be a major topic of conversation during the interview, even discussing the topic and allowing him to openly share his viewpoints put Chad on the defensive. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Republicans are more often associated with anti-environmental beliefs in the media and in national survey data (Guber, 2013; McCright and Dunlap, 2011; Pew, 2012). Therefore, they are perceived to be inherently anti-environmental.

Not only did the interviewees clearly express the connection between environmental issues and the Democratic party, but this was also apparent in my own experience as a researcher in recruiting interview participants. My recruitment posts on conservative or Republican Facebook pages received comments like “It’s a trap” or others discouraging people to participate. The lack of Republican participants relative to others clearly demonstrates the problems I had in successfully recruiting conservative perspectives. It is difficult to conclusively say why I experienced such significant issues in recruitment, though I have two speculations. One, universities and higher education are increasingly associated with the liberal elite, and I clearly state I am a Master’s student working on a research project in my recruitment post. Two, environmental issues have become a calling card for Democrat or liberal ideology, an assumption that is supported by these interviewees. Americans are so highly divided along partisan lines, that these signals have possibly alienated participants so much that they are unwilling to even discuss these issues with a researcher.

This perspective begs the question of how Republicans can openly support environmental issues, if discussing them suggests they might be a Democrat. Perhaps Republicans feel that in discussing or even taking an inherently liberal position, they are working to undermine their own political ISA (Althusser, 2008). The answer may lie in framing environmental issues differently, akin to Reagan’s angle of patriotism (Reagan, 1988). But this solution is far from simple.

4. The necessity of government action on conservation

In discussions of environmental issues in the political sphere, there was a clear desire from the participants for government action and strength on conservation issues, and yet this action was viewed as lacking. Becca and John-Paul offered explanations for why that might be.

“Even though I think there is an urgency with what is happening with our environment, I don’t see that urgency telegraphed by politicians. I know that they are aware of it but there is a stain on environmentalism broadly and most politicians are afraid it will get on them somehow.” (Becca, 50+, Green)

John-Paul agreed with this sentiment and discussed how environmental issues seem to be less important in the grand scheme of other issues today, saying,

“I feel like, except from when Trump pulled out of the Paris Climate Accords, [the environment and conservation] hasn’t really been a big focus since Trump was elected, which I guess like... it’s not the worst thing. Like it should be a focus but it’s understandable why other issues have pulled focus.” (John-Paul, 33, Democratic Socialist)

Other participants discussed the importance of government and political leadership on protecting and conserving natural places. Sydney was critical of the observed inaction, arguing, “I just don’t think [the government has] the right mindset with protecting things that Mother Earth has entrusted with us.” Jenna mirrored this perspective, saying,

“I think that most of us want to provide a long and lasting place for our children, so I would presume those of us that have children would end up on the same page. We just need to keep having that conversation, and we need a government that will continue that conversation.” (Jenna, 45, Democrat)

Kendall spoke about New York State's efforts to buy and conserve public lands in lieu of the federal government, commenting, "Somebodies got to protect these places. Sure, isn't going to be Trump" (Kendall, 68, Democrat).

These opinions demonstrate that there is not a clear connection that political leaders are drawing to environmental problems, or to conservation more specifically. Challengingly, if there is a lack of political cues from politicians, then people are perhaps less likely to vote with that in mind. The more extreme result is that, if there are people who do not see their environmental concerns met, it is possible they will not vote at all or, more likely, voters will not consider environmental issues when they vote. Clearly there is an important connection between political signals and conservation issues amongst the respondents. But political leaders are not currently meeting that expectation.

This idea has been observed in the academic literature. Many scholars have found that cues from political thought leaders have an enormous impact on Americans. Concealment is a crucially important tactic used by politicians to frame environmental issues. Freudenburg and Alario (2007) argued that, in order to legitimize their position, politicians use skills akin to those used by a magician in a magic show – concealment and distraction. After all, "even the best eyes in the world are capable of "seeing" only in the direction in which they are pointed" and then these eyes look around only to confirm this pointed direction (153). If politicians do not discuss or highlight environmental issues, then their followers will not look at them – whether or not the politician is environmentally concerned themselves.

There is evidence for this lack of focus by political representatives amongst the interviewees' dissatisfaction with the NY-24 candidates' environmental stances. Becca and Erika were both

critical of the candidate they planned to vote for in the 2018 Congressional election. Becca, who planned to vote for Balter, was critical of both candidates, saying,

“But I just don’t think the environment is even in the top five for people at the local level for elected representatives. I don’t think [the environment is] important to Katko at all, I don’t hear him talking about it at all. I don’t see the environment as a big issue in [Balter’s] campaign, as a top five.” (Becca, 50+, Green)

Erika, who was a registered Republican and planned to vote for Katko in the election had a similarly critical stance but on a specific environmental issue,

“I completely disagree with everything Trump has done with the environment, but John [Katko], I kind of am back and forth with John, because he believes in investing in nuclear energy and I don’t know if that’s my path. I believe in investing in clean energy and renewable energy. So, I don’t really agree with John either.” (Erika, 22, Republican)

Other participants spoke to their political party more generally, rather than focusing on a specific candidate in the NY-24 election. These were all Democrats that were critical of the party’s overall stance and lack of focus on the environment as a driving issue. Nick (71, Democrat) commented that, “Those [representatives] who I agree with essentially represent my interests [on environmental issues], although some of them goof it up” while Sydney (77, Democrat) said more generally that, “I don’t think the Democratic party are vocal enough about the concerns about the environment.” Joanne spoke more about a specific issue, and was outraged the Democrats had not done more for clean water, particularly locally,

“I think they cave way too much [on the environment], so I don’t want to say they are doing a good job because I don’t think they are. They did not... why, why, why did they not make a bigger deal when they voted the safe streams act down? Why did they not... you know what I mean? The Democratic party of Onondaga county could have stood up

next to Onondaga lake and say ‘John Katko, you’re voting for this because why? Which part of this did you not? Do you ever drive by the lake and just smell it? You don’t even have to put your hands in it.’ There are so many missed opportunities, they could be drawing attention to things and they don’t do it, so I don’t think they do a great job of that.” (Joanne, 40, Democrat)

However, none of these participants discussed this inaction or dissatisfaction with their political party as a reason to disassociate with it. Furthermore, they were all planning to vote for either John Katko or Dana Balter in the upcoming election. This demonstrates that while environmental issues can be a source of dissatisfaction with a politician or a political party, it is not enough of an issue to reject it outright amongst participants.

Conclusion

The appreciation of nature and the subsequent support of conservation efforts in the U.S. is understandable and predictable – if lands are treasured and valued, they should be protected. However, where this perspective connects to political subjectivity and subsequent political choices is the crucial point of consideration. As shown in the first section of this paper, if voters do not draw connections between their political subjectivity and environmental issues, it is not likely these issues will be at the forefront of political debate driven by the voters, and environmental issues will remain unsolved at the government or policy level. The data presented here demonstrates that there are connections drawn between environmental values and political subjectivity. But these connections present themselves in varied and nuanced ways that have some significant but also insignificant consequences on subsequent political choices.

While the majority of participants from all political parties discussed the importance of environmental issues, political allegiance is defined by both the issue platform of the party and

the underlying values that party represents. The connections people draw between issues and values is thus crucially important, and very few participants discussed values as they relate to environmental problems. These were more chiefly concerned with humanitarian issues, like immigration or abortion. This was largely because of the importance of underlying values defining their political party. Though environmental issues were important in the abstract, the connection to political subjectivity was less apparent.

Moreover, environmental issues, and by inclusion conservation efforts, are considered to be an inherent aspect of the liberal or Democratic platform. As a result, those who align with the Democratic party feel more comfortable supporting and discussing conservation efforts, while those who align with the Republican party possibly feel alienated. This was demonstrated both in the data and my own experience in recruiting participants to the study.

There is a dissatisfaction on both sides of the political aisle about the inaction of the government or political leaders on environmental issues. This inaction and lack of focus on the environment and conservation efforts trickled into participants' perception of the NY-24 Congressional candidates. No participants discussed making their choice in the NY-24 election on environmental concerns. It is possible that as a result of this lack of signals and cues from politicians, there is less adamant concern for or knowledge about these environmental problems amongst voters.

This phenomenon of concealment done by political leaders (Freudenberg and Alario, 2007) and then perpetuated or observed in this data, harkens back to Althusser's (2008) structural theories and how political ideology can work to reinforce and maintain the State and its economic base. For this reason, it is crucial to "analyze the mechanisms that can cause power and differential

distributions of privilege to become less observable” if we are to ever circumvent this concealment (Freudenburg and Alario, 2007, 154). This calls to highlight the power our political leaders have to steer the political conversation towards, or away from, environmental issues. The participants in this study certainly think politicians and the government are doing the latter. Perhaps this is one explanation for why these political subjects are not drawing a connection between concerns around conservation and their political identity, because their elected political leaders are not pointing them in that direction.

While there are clearly connections drawn between environmental issues and political subjectivity, the consequences of this connection in voting behavior is not apparent in this study. This suggests that while the protection of public lands is an issue of concern in the abstract, it is not important enough to sway a voting decision or allegiance to a politician or political party.

Caveat: Representation of political perspectives

There was a larger number of liberal or Democrat perspectives than conservative or Republican, a significant weakness of this study. The findings would be strengthened if more conservative voices were included. However, this presents an exciting opportunity for further research.

Considering the problems I faced and adjusting the recruitment design to attract or be more inclusive to Republican participants would be a major benefit. Understanding contrasting viewpoints is important, but the greatest advantage to those who seek environmental protections is learning more about how to satisfy those individuals with whom you may disagree, and craft policies that are more appealing to all.

Caveat: Values underlying political parties

The data presented here shows an interesting theme – that the values underlying a political party can be more powerful than the party platform. This was an unexpected finding, and as such the supporting and related theoretical literature is not sufficiently explored in this paper. Moral Foundations Theory is often used as a model to explain political differences at the individual level. The literature is focused upon the correlations and even the causal relationships between morality and political orientation. There is much debate about whether morality guides political identity, political identity affects morality, or if the relationship is reciprocal. An exploration of this theory in the context of the data in this study would be of great interest and benefit to this body of literature (see Haidt, 2012; Hatemi, Crabtree, & Smith, 2019).

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Chapter 3: Manuscript 2 – Nature in the News: A content analysis of election coverage in Upstate New York local newspapers

Abstract

Newspaper coverage about politics and elections acts to inform the public and as a historic record of public and political debate. The issues given attention and the frames used in the coverage are both crucially important to analyze. Environmental issues are long understood to struggle in capturing media attention in political coverage and otherwise, therefore questioning the salience of environmental issues to the public at all. This paper analyzes the media coverage from three local newspapers in the 2018 midterm election in the NY-24 congressional district to measure which issues and topics were most often focused upon. The data shows that while the environment was the fourth most mentioned or discussed issue in this coverage, the prevalence of the topic was far less than other issues, like health care or the economy. In addition, the drama of the election itself, in contrast to policy issues, received significant focus in the coverage. As a result, while the environment is important in this coverage, it struggles to gain significant focus against other issues or topics.

Key words: midterm election, partisanship, conservation, environment, political issues, content analysis

Introduction

For more than a century, media sources have been an important factor in political discourse, both acting as a barometer for social change and an informer to the people (Snyder and Stomberg, 2010). Newspaper coverage has long been used to examine public thought at a moment in time throughout history, helping to reflect public and political debate in perpetuity, and to set the political agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998). The context of a political election is a valuable moment to consider these roles. For this project, I used newspaper articles to examine the public thought and supplied information to the public about the NY-24 congressional election in 2018. This case study presents an interesting opportunity to examine media coverage on an intimate scale. It builds upon the findings of the first manuscript included in this thesis and considers the wider landscape of this partisan political battle in upstate New York. Specifically, I examine the role environmental issues played in the election coverage

The NY-24 congressional election took place on November 6, 2018 between two-term incumbent Rep. John Katko (Republican) and his challenger Dana Balter (Democrat), a PhD candidate and visiting professor at Syracuse University. During the 2018 election, Katko also ran on the Conservative, Independent and Reform party ballots (Weiner, 2018). The Working Families Party and Women's Equality party endorsed Balter's candidacy (Weiner, 2018).

In late 2017, political analysts named it one of the top ten races to watch in 2018 (Schneider, 2017). The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) listed it as one of its 33 targeted House district elections (Sena, 2017). However, Congressman Katko defeated Balter in 2018 and remained in office for a third term.

While Katko won the election, Balter shrank his margin of victory to only 5.2 points – a massive difference relative to the 2016 race where Katko beat his challenger by more than 20 points (New York Times, 2019). The race was hotly contested, and the media coverage around this election was prevalent throughout the four counties in the district, as is shown in the data. The ways in which the newspapers throughout the district covered the election distinctly differed, from the importance issues were given in this discussion to the framing of these issues. The motivation for my project is to examine the ways the campaign and the issues, specifically environmental issues, were treated and covered in newspaper stories about the election.

Statement of the Problem

My research is concerned with the presence and framing of environmental issues in political discourse around and from the congressional candidates. I am interested in investigating the salience of environmental issues in the election because currently the impact of these issues on politics in Upstate New York is not understood. To appreciate that importance, it is crucial to contextualize this coverage within the other issues and information portrayed to readers about the NY-24 congressional election in 2018. If environmental issues are not focused upon during the campaign, it could indicate the lack of importance of it in general, relative to other issues. Moreover, if other factors or ideas around the election dominate coverage, it is difficult for political issues to gain traction in coverage at all, let alone environmental issues. If the issues are not focused upon in public discourse about the election, it is more difficult for the candidate to be held accountable once they enter political office.

The next section outlines the academic literature pertinent to this research, including the important role the media plays in agenda-setting and framing. Then I present the justification for the project and the research questions this paper seeks to answer. Finally, I present my

methodology and results, concluding with caveats and important opportunities for future research in this field.

Literature Review

Social meanings about what constitutes the “environment,” and our understanding of environmental issues and problems shift over time. Mass media has “long played a profound role in the construction and communication about environmental concerns and risks” and helped to form and reinforce these social meanings (Lester, 2010, p. 36). This is the context in which we need to place current media coverage about the environment, and it is why analyzing media coverage is a valuable tool in gaining a better understanding of public conceptions around environmental issues. In this literature review, I first analyze the functions of mass media in American politics, specifically the concept of agenda-setting and salience. Second, I consider the effects of mass media and whether it helps to increase political knowledge and civic participation. Finally, the scholarly work looking at the connections and effects between mass media and environmental issues is presented. It is in this confluence of academic literature that this paper is best situated.

Functions of mass media in American politics: agenda-setting and salience

Many authors posit and defend the idea that the media serves an agenda-setting function for the public in the context of political campaigns. McCombs and Shaw (1972) originated this seminal concept, which is the idea that mass media coverage of elections and candidates effectively set the agenda for the general public. The public both learns from the article, but also attaches meaning and importance to the issue based upon the amount of information given in the article. In their study, the authors examined the content of mass media surrounding the 1968 presidential election and also used surveys to determine important issues to voters. They found significant

correlation between media coverage of an issue and the importance of that issue to voters. This finding has been prevalent and oft confirmed in the academic literature surrounding media studies in the U.S. Since that time, “agenda-setting has evolved from a hypothesis about media effects on the public to a research paradigm that examines the transfer of salience at all levels of political discourse” (Dunn, 2009, p. 635). Dunn (2009) extended McCombs and Shaw’s conclusions, specifically examining the reciprocal nature of press coverage and candidate press releases in the 2005 Virginia gubernatorial election. The author found that there was a connection and relationship between these two variables, thus confirming the conclusion that the media serves an agenda-setting function.

Most simply, agenda-setting is the “transfer of topic salience from the media agenda to the public agenda” and this transfer is dependent on the selection of a topic, or repeated exposure of an issue in the media (Fortunato & Martin, 2016, p. 134). Shaw and Martin (1992) explained, “the press may, unconsciously, provide a limited and rotating set of public issues, around which the political and social system can engage in dialogue,” effectively setting the public discourse agenda (903). Therefore, selection, as an aspect of agenda-setting, can limit the specific issues that are covered. The transfer of knowledge to the public is also highly dependent on framing, or the highlighted attributes of the issue (Fortunato & Martin, 2016). These topics – attention and framing – will be considered more specifically next.

The selection of a topic to be covered in the news has been termed and measured in many different ways. Many researchers term this idea as “salience.” However, Kiouisis (2004) argued that:

“it is clear that agenda-setting researchers have basically adopted an external definition of the concept [of salience] in which an object is evaluated based on its relationship to other

objects (e.g., issues are salient relative to how other topics are situated on the media, public, and policy agendas)” (p. 73).

However, Kioussis (2004) went on to explain that a topic can have both external and internal salience, and so in discussions of agenda-setting it is of the utmost importance to clearly define what salience means. As salience is at the core of my research question, this is a crucial step for this project, and I will rely on the argument and definitions that Kioussis (2004) put forth. Their study examined this issue in the context of issue salience in the 2000 presidential election.

External salience referred to both the attention, or volume of stories devoted to a topic, and prominence, or the placement of the topic within the story. Kioussis (2004) found that attention is a dominant factor in issue salience, while there was no significant difference between prominence and attention. Internal salience is concerned with valence, or the tone of stories devoted to a topic, which affects how the audience will read or understand it. They found that valence is contingent on attention but does have a demonstrable effect on public perception of an issue. Both of these factors and their focus in the literature will be explored more thoroughly here, and in the data analysis of this study.

The attention devoted to a topic affects the public’s perception of the issue. In their study, McCombs and Shaw (1972) found a demonstrable connection between the amount of coverage given to a topic, and the importance of that political issue to voters. Extending and strengthening this finding in a laboratory study, Iyengar and McGrady (2007) found a causal link between higher amounts of issue coverage and that issue being a top concern to the viewer. Similarly, according to Wanta and Wu (1992) “if the news media do not devote coverage to issues, individuals will perceive these issues to be less salient than the issues that do receive coverage,” thus assuming their unimportance (p. 849).

The valence of coverage, also termed framing, is a topic of great importance in the academic literature. This is of intrinsic importance to this paper, for in writing or other communication methods, “one cannot avoid framing” (Lakoff, 2010, 72). Framing is a component of agenda-setting, and it specifically “primes” readers about how to conceive of an issue (Nisbet, 2019). The frame used by the media is of enormous importance in how it impacts the reader, particularly with an issue like the environment. For example, Nisbet (2019) discussed how climate change is a complex issue, and thus the chosen media frame has a massive impact on how people think about it – it would be completely different under another frame. In this way, frames help to connect the dots between facts and create a contextual understanding for the public. As environmental issues are inherently complex, the frame used is of the utmost importance.

The study of mass media relies upon the idea that mass media has an effect on readers. It is important to contextualize the importance of media and the effect it has had over the last century. McQuail (1994) posited that this influence can be divided into four stages. The first lasted for the first quarter of the 20th century and consisted of strategic propaganda during World War I, resulting in fear around the power of mass media. The second, from the 1930s to the 1960s, was a revision of the effects of mass media, for personal influences like family were understood to be the greatest source of attitude changes amongst Americans. The third shifted the focus of mass media research to the cognitive effects of media on readers. The fourth stage began in the 1980s and is characterized by both the influence of mass media in terms of framing the conversation, but also dependent on the interactions between the audience and the media source. Building on McQuail’s (1994) outline of the four stages of mass media effects, Scheufele (1999) argued that understanding mass media is on “the basis of social constructivism” wherein the media frames

public events, which are then discussed and interpreted by the readers or viewers (p. 105). This fourth stage of mass media effects on readers and the ways in which readers interact with this media is explored thoroughly in the literature. As such, next I turn to the literature that considers the impacts of the agenda-setting function of the media and the subsequent discussion and interpretation by the public.

Effects of mass media in American politics

As discussed thus far, media impacts its readers and viewers, from the stories that are covered to the tone in which they are discussed. Simply put, “news is a mediated version of reality but with significant and real consequences” (Lester, 2010, 63). It is important to consider these consequences, namely the impact the media has on both political knowledge and engagement of the public.

The level of knowledge of political and policy specific facts amongst the general public is highly variable, but the reason for this variation is not well understood. Some studies have surmised that exposure to mass media is an important factor in changing the level of knowledge, but it is not a foregone conclusion. In response to this uncertainty, Barabas and Jerit (2009) used 23 nationally representative surveys to measure the impact of mass media coverage, specifically the effect of volume, breadth, and prominence of a topic in the news on the political knowledge of the readers. The results of their study found that these three factors all independently contribute to a change in knowledge about a topic amongst Americans, finding that media coverage is causal on political knowledge. Researchers in Sweden confirmed these findings in the context of digital media (Dimitrova et al, 2011). Using panel data, they found weak though significant effects of online news media sources on an increase in political knowledge.

These papers bring up an important point – the source of the news content matters. Dalrymple and Scheufele (2007) further investigated the differences between media sources, combining the focus of two previously mentioned studies. The different structures of media, including online and traditional print, are attributed to different levels of knowledge acquisition. The authors used national survey data to measure this trend in the context of a presidential election. They found that online news is associated with higher levels of conceptual political knowledge, which is the level of political knowledge that strings together separate facts and contextualizes them. In their study, Dalrymple and Scheufele (2007) operationalized this as the likes, dislikes, and issue stances of the political candidates. This was in contrast with print news readers who more often demonstrated only factual political knowledge, like the candidate's name but not their ideological stances. Their findings illuminate the value of examining online media sources.

Similar to levels of political knowledge, there are considerable differences in political engagement amongst the public. Many researchers have investigated reasons behind this difference. Hayes and Lawless (2015) demonstrated that in places with less robust local coverage about elections, there is diminished engagement amongst citizens (holding individual's political awareness constant). Through a content analysis of newspaper coverage in every congressional district, they found that news coverage about congressional races is less substantive in districts covered with large circulation outlets or where the election is uncompetitive. They then compared these findings with survey data about political involvement and found a correlation between less substantive coverage and lower political engagement. The converse was also true. Similarly, Snyder and Stomberg (2010) measured the congruence between media markets and congressional districts. They found that high congruence was correlated to a greater volume of coverage about the local congressperson. In these areas, the voters are more politically involved

and are more likely to vote in their congressional election. Related to this finding is the trend measured by Chiang and Knight (2011), who took this research question one step further and proved causality between media coverage – specifically newspaper endorsements – and political engagement. They found that a newspaper publishing an endorsement for a presidential candidate in the 2000 election was associated with an improvement in support for that candidate amongst the public and that improvement was observed *after* the endorsement was published.

While newspaper coverage is still a valid and important source of mass media to researchers, the proliferation of internet use in the 21st century merits consideration of the effects of social media on political knowledge and participation. Foot and Schneider (2006) discussed digital media in the context of political campaigns. They posit that there are four functions of this sort of web campaigning, which include: informing the voters, involving supporters in the campaign, connecting digital users with important political actors, and mobilizing citizens generally. As discussed previously, online media has been proven to have an effect on educating and informing voters (Dimitrova et al, 2011; Dalrymple and Scheufele, 2007). There is also an important relationship between social media use and political engagement. In their literature review, Fortunato & Martin (2016) explained that other studies have found that the findings around social media are not unanimous – some find that its use increase both political participation and knowledge while others find it only increases political knowledge. In a meta-analysis of 38 articles examining this trend, Boulianne (2009) did not find a negative relationship between social media use and political engagement or civic life, but the findings were not entirely positive either. In a study in Sweden, digital media use increased political participation (Dimitrova et al, 2011). Clearly, the effects of and relationship between social media and political participation or knowledge are inconsistent and deserve further research. However, one thing is absolutely true –

through online campaigns, social media allows politicians to circumvent traditional media sources to reach the public (Fortunato & Martin, 2016).

Environmental issues in media coverage

Thus far, this review has examined the academic literature around political news and media. Now, it is crucial to specifically look to the literature surrounding environmental issue coverage in the media, for it is unique from other issue coverage. Downs (1972) described and mapped the process of growing and then declining coverage of environmental issues, calling it the “issue-attention cycle.” First is the pre-problem, where certain groups have extreme concern about an issue, but not the general public. Second, there is a drastic increase in concern amongst the public. Third, the associated costs or downsides of dealing with an issue tempers or discourages this concern. Fourth is the post-problem stage, where the issue has lost public attention and yet there are institutions or programs designed to address the issue. Lester (2010) argued that while Downs’ cycle is useful to a point, it fails to capture the myriad of complex factors contributing to the cycle of attention to environmental problems, and simplistically paints it as a linear process. Yet this cycle is still helpful in showing why persistent environmental problems struggle to earn and maintain media coverage.

There has been an overall decrease or lack of consistent coverage of environmental issues in the American media. Over the past 50 years, environmental issues have entered the media arena, but then been eclipsed by other and seemingly more pressing concerns (Lester, 2010). Major newspapers, like the New York Times and the Washington Post, have cut down their number of environmental stories and reporters, opting instead to allow commentators and advocacy groups fill the gap. As a result, there is less fact-based and objective coverage of these issues, and more alarmist and attention-grabbing content (Nisbet and Scheufele, 2012). As Laykoff points out, for

environmental change to be successful, we must have “coherent framing” for “truth must be framed effectively to be seen at all” (Lakoff, 2010, 80). Without coherency or consistency, it is unclear what message the media is sending to the American public about the environment.

As they are looked to more for environmental news, environmental advocacy groups construct and put forth their own frame about the environment. This inherently causes tension for they have to strategize continually to ensure the media uses their desired frame, sometimes resulting in distrust between the advocacy groups and the media (Lester, 2010). Protests, which are a long-used strategy of the environmental movement, are often treated with negative coverage in traditional media (Murdock, 1981; Waddington, 1992). These stories intrinsically posit the protesters against the elite or the powerful. While this by no means always holds true – there has been positive media coverage of protests and other movements – it is never certain how the judgment will fall for the participants. Thus a distrust between these actors remains (Lester, 2010).

In addition to a lack of consistent coverage, there are numerous studies documenting the incongruency between journalism and complex scientific issues. Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) posited that media coverage about climate change is essentially a social relationship between the American people, policy makers, and scientists. They found that journalistic norms like personalization, dramatization, and novelty or uniqueness have affected the informational accuracy around this issue. Because of this trend, stories about climate change are often episodic and inaccurately portray both scientist and denier perspectives, rather than contextualized into the realities of a global phenomenon. It is important to combine a consideration of journalistic norms, as Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) did, with an analysis of frames used to convey ideas by journalists. Journalistic norms, like the newsworthiness of a topic, coincide with the chosen story

frame to highlight certain aspects of a story. The chosen frame itself can fulfill those journalistic norms. For example, the journalistic norm of unbiased reporting has led to coverage of climate change that portrays it as a scientific debate, muddying the complex science behind it and thus framing it as an issue of scientific thought (Boykoff, 2007). The long-term trends underlying climate change is not often explicitly newsworthy out of context of a modern disaster or problem, making coverage of this scientific topic largely sporadic (Lester, 2010).

This is not to say that journalistic norms or framing devices are not valuable to coverage of scientific issues like climate change. As Lakoff points out, “the results of the fundamental material science of the environment are not enough to change brains” (Lakoff, 2010, 79). Scientists as sources are important voices to include in stories about environmental issues. Problematically, the time frames that scientists and journalists focus on are often incongruent. Scientists work on projects for months and even years, gather complex data, and sometimes reach conclusions that are not easily compressed into a sound bite. This can lead to fraught and frustrating relationships with journalists and has spawned a drive amongst scientists to become better communicators. It also spurred a trend to put ordinary people at the face of environmental stories, as victims or activists (Lester, 2010). None of this is inherently problematic, but it does have an effect on the audience that merits attention.

The importance of environmental issues to the public means it deserves media coverage. List and Sturm (2006) termed issues like environmental policy, gun control, foreign aid, and trade policy as ‘secondary policies’, as they typically only affect small groups of voters. Thus it is assumed that these do not have major impacts in elections, or their electoral incentives. In their paper, List and Sturm (2006) examined how much these issues are affected by electoral incentives, as opposed to lobbying. Through a theoretical model, they measure the impact of a group of single-

issue voters around the environment on policy choices. They find that while lobby contributions do affect environmental policy, choices are also made in order to attract voters to their base. As such, though environmental issues are considered to be niche by some, they are valuable political issues to examine in the context of media coverage of an election. This paper examines the role environmental issues play in the coverage of the NY-24 2018 election and is situated in the body of literature presented here.

Justification and Research Questions

Through a content analysis of media coverage around the election, the visibility of environmental issues amongst the variation in coverage can be analyzed as a function of political information portrayed to readers. Furthermore, considering the findings of the first study, this content analysis will reveal if the lack of importance of environmental issues to a number of the people interviewed is reflected in the broader coverage of the election. This study is important and highly relevant for two reasons – one, a case study can help to explain what might be happening elsewhere, and two, content analyses focusing on election coverage, specifically on U.S. House races, are far from prevalent in the existing literature.

First, this case study provides a better and deeper understanding of a phenomena that is likely not unique to upstate New York. There are a myriad of methodologies and contexts through which the media and its connections with environmental issues have been studied. This is a complex web of media frames, salience, and coverage. It behooves researchers to study small parts of this web, and understand it to be part of something larger, for “as more connections can be made between various approaches, the more will be revealed about media roles and responsibilities in the environmental debate” (Lester, 2010, 67). Examining this case study can help us to understand what is happening here on an intimate scale in an attempt to understand what is

happening elsewhere, though not everywhere. Considering the way in which the congressional election was portrayed to the voters in the district helps to explain the ways in which the issues and the candidates were understood. This gives us a valuable window into the context, and the role environmental issues did or did not play.

Second, content analysis studies focusing on U.S. House elections are sparse. Presidential elections are much more often focused upon in the scholarly literature than congressional or other local elections (Carsey, 2000). In fact, in the last fifty or so years, only a dozen studies have analyzed media coverage in the context of a U.S. House election (Hayes & Lawless, 2015). This study takes a close and intimate look at one highly contested House race in the context of a hotly debated and discussed midterm election, and helps to fill an important hole in the academic literature. Congressional races are different from presidential elections because they are each contextually distinct and use local newspaper coverage as a mechanism of analysis rather than considering the entire country as a whole. And in the context of environmental issues, the legislative branch is oftentimes more important, as these representatives are responsible for *writing* legislation. And so considering the salience or importance of environmental issues in a congressional race becomes specifically valuable.

As such, the research questions this study attempts to address are:

1. What political issues are discussed and how are they framed by the media outlets in coverage of the NY-24 congressional election?
2. Are environmental issues, specifically conservation and land management, prevalent in this media coverage?

3. Are the issue platforms held by the candidates or is the campaign itself the focus of coverage?

Methodology

A content analysis of the media coverage around the election is used to understand how the media covers and frames both issues and coverage of the campaign itself. The online databases for three major newspapers in the NY-24 district were used to gather articles for the analysis. The newspapers, used as the units of analysis, included the *Auburn Citizen*, the *Oswego County News*, and the *Post-Standard*. The *Oswego County News* is an online collaboration from Oswego County’s two major newspapers – *The Palladium-Times* and *The Valley News*. All of these newspapers are available in print and online for readers. The *Wayne County Times* is a fourth newspaper that distributes within the NY-24 district, but their archival resources were insufficient and could not provide articles for the time frame required. Information about these three newspapers and their coverage in relation to the NY-24 congressional district is included in Table 1.

Table 1: Details about newspapers included in content analysis

Name of newspaper	Newsroom location	Counties covered	Counties in NY-24
<i>Post-Standard</i>	Syracuse, NY	Onondaga County	Onondaga
<i>Oswego County News</i> <i>-Palladium-Times</i> <i>-Valley News</i>	Oswego, NY	Oswego County	Part of Oswego
<i>Auburn Citizen</i>	Auburn, NY	Auburn County and Cayuga County	Cayuga

The articles were gathered using search terms specific to the election: John Katko, Dana Balter, and midterm election. Each search was conducted separately, so there were duplicate articles

amongst the three searches. The timeframe was restricted to two months prior to Election Day until one week after Election Day, so the included articles were all published between September 6 and November 13, 2018. This timeframe was chosen based upon commonality between previously conducted content analyses looking at media coverage of elections (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Dunaway, 2008; Kahn, 1991; Fogarty, 2013).

The total number of generated articles was N=173. The number of generated articles greatly differed amongst the three outlets, with the *Oswego County News* (N=11) and the *Post-Standard* (N=42) resulting in far fewer articles than the *Auburn Citizen* (N=120). As explained previously, there were duplicate results within these article counts. There were also stories that were not relevant to the content analysis, specifically stories about John Katko as the district's congressman that made no reference to the current election and stories about other elections in the area rather than the congressional election between Katko and Balter. These were removed from the initial articles generated, resulting in the final article count (N=173).

A codebook was developed prior to the reading and analysis of the gathered articles. The theoretical framework used in this content analysis was based upon Golan and Wanta (2001), who looked at the agenda setting function of newspaper coverage of the New Hampshire Republican presidential primary election in 2000. Their content analysis coded for four pieces of information about each article: the issues discussed, the frame of the issue discussion (positive, neutral, or negative), the candidate attributes discussed, and the frame of the attribute discussion (positive, neutral, or negative). This strategy identifies both *cognitive variables*, or basic information, and *affective variables*, or opinions and frames around that information. It provides a more nuanced analysis of the media coverage than simply searching for the mere presence of terms or topics in the articles.

Using Golan and Wanta (2001) as a foundation, the codebook used in this content analysis codes for five categories of variables. The first is information about the article, including the type of article, the date it was published, and whether one or both candidates were mentioned in the headline or lede. The second is the cognitive variable of issue coverage. I code for the presence of eleven issues: Criminal Justice, Abortion, Education, Equality, Environment, Guns, Healthcare, Immigration, Economy, SCOTUS, and Senior Concerns. These were selected because they were the most prevalent issues discussed by interviewees in the first manuscript included in this thesis. The third is the affective variable of issue frame, as either positive, neutral or fact-based, or negative. The fourth is the cognitive frame of campaign coverage, which included four categories that are simplified versions of Golan and Wanta's (2001) attribute categories. These include: trust, endorsement or electability, on the attack or campaign drama, and candidate plan or vision. The fifth is the affective variable of campaign coverage frame, as either positive, neutral or fact-based, or negative. An abbreviated version of the codebook is displayed in Table 2. The complete codebook with additional information about each code is included in *Appendix E*.

It is important to be specific in how frames are analyzed. Frames are treated as both independent and dependent variables in academic studies (Scheufele, 1999). For example, frames as dependent variables are conceived as created by elements like journalistic norms. Frames can also affect audience perception of an issue, wherein it is considered to be an *independent* variable. In this study, I will be treating salience as including both presence of a topic and the frame, with both being independent variables that have an assumed impact on the readers, based on prior studies outlined in the literature review.

Table 2: Abbreviated codebook

Variable	Category	Notes
Newspaper	<i>Post-Standard, Oswego County News, or Auburn Citizen</i>	The newspaper where the article was published
Type of article	News, Editorial, or LTE	The type of article
Candidate mentioned in the headline or lede	John Katko	Article mentions Katko in headline or first paragraph
	Dana Balter	Article mentions Balter in headline or first paragraph
	Both	Article mentions both Katko and Balter in headline or first paragraph
Issue coverage (based on issues of interest amongst interviewees)	Abortion	Reproductive rights, Roe v Wade, abortion laws
	Criminal Justice	Prison reform, policing, drug reform
	Education	Local, state, or federal education issues
	Equality	Broad category to capture equality across sex, race, sexual orientation, or sociodemographic status
	Environment	Climate change, land management or public lands, energy, water quality
	Guns	Gun rights and laws, second amendment protection
	Healthcare	Health care system in NYS or the country, prescription drugs, high health care costs, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act
	Immigration	Border security, Sanctuary cities, immigrants
	Economy	Taxes, jobs, unemployment, economic health, economic development
	SCOTUS	Nominating individuals to the Supreme Court
	Senior Concerns	Medicare, Social Security, retirement age
	NONE	No mention of the issues, article is entirely focused on the campaign and the candidates
Issue Frame	Positive	Issue coverage is supportive
	Neutral	Issue coverage is neutral, and purely factual
	Negative	Issue coverage is critical

Table 2: Abbreviated codebook (cont.)

Variable	Category	Notes
Candidate or campaign attribute	Electability/Endorsement	The likeliness of the candidate winning or losing; demonstrated support for the candidate through an endorsement; a poll showing a candidate leading or falling behind
	On the attack	The candidate is being attacked or criticized; Discussion or description of the drama of the campaign (neutral frame)
	Plan/vision	There is a demonstrated forethought on their plan for the future for the county, state, or country
Attribute Frame	Positive	Attribute coverage is supportive for the candidate
	Neutral	Attribute coverage is neutral, purely fact-based
	Negative	Attribute coverage is critical or negative for the candidate
Attribute Candidate	John Katko	The attribute is about Katko
	Dana Balter	The attribute is about Balter
	Both	The attribute is about both candidates

First, to ensure intercoder reliability, 10% of the articles (randomly selected and weighted by newspaper outlet) were coded by two coders for a Cohen’s alpha score and reached a score above the accepted threshold of 0.65 in all variable categories (Neuendorf, 2002; QSR International, n.d.). Cohen’s Kappa coefficient (κ) was used for this analysis because it is specifically formulated for two coders and has shown to be generally valid within the literature (Neuendorf, 2002). Second, I coded the remainder of the articles to reach the findings discussed in the remainder of this paper. Statistical analysis was performed using StataIC.

Content analysis provides a structure to analyze text-based data. The purposes or goals of content analysis is typically either for *description* of “features of message content” or *predicting* the

“outcome or effect of the messages being analyzed” (Rose, Spinks, & Canhato, 2015, p. 2). The data used in this study are solely media articles from three newspapers, and as such its goal is descriptive in nature. An opportunity for further research would be to measure the effect of this content on the audience, or a predictive approach, which will be discussed in the concluding section of this paper. The results and discussion of the data is presented next.

Results and Discussion

The results presented here cover a multitude of areas within the data. First, the frequency of content is considered, by both candidate, time-period relative to the election, and the newspapers themselves. Here the sole example of predictive analysis in this study is given, considering the correlation between election coverage and voter turnout rate in each county. Second, I analyze the issues covered in the newspapers broadly, examining both differences between newspapers and between the candidates. This analysis helps to contextualize the presence of environmental issues. Third, the coverage of the top five issues in the election coverage is closely considered, including the prevalence of issue coverage and a frame analysis. Fourth, the campaign or candidate attributes are presented.

Story frequency

Although this data does not explicitly address any of the three research questions, it is important to understand the coverage more generally. This section analyzes the number of stories that spotlight or focus upon one or both candidates, the time frame of the coverage leading up to Election Day, and the amount of coverage coming from each of the three newspapers.

Spotlighting candidates

The articles were coded for whether the candidate was mentioned in the headline or lede. This demonstrates that the candidate had a major role or emphasis in the article. The majority of stories (N=80) mentioned both Balter and Katko in either the headline or the lede. However, Katko was featured solely in more stories than Balter (N=53 versus N=32). Only eight stories about the election did not include either candidate's name in the headline or lede. This demonstrates that the media covered Katko, the incumbent Republican, more often than Balter, the Democratic challenger. Figure 1 displays number of stories that spotlight the candidates in the headline or lede.

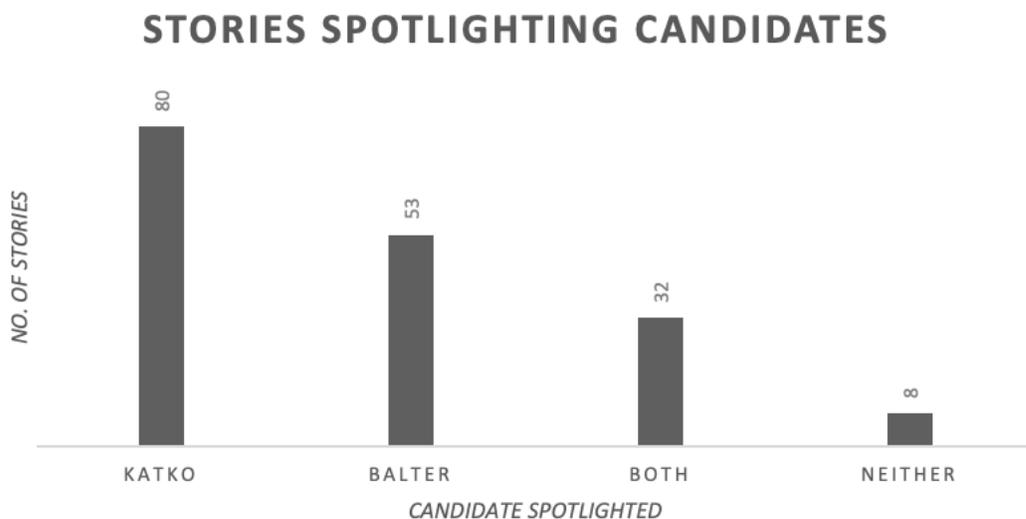


Figure 1: Number of stories spotlighting candidates

Coverage over time

Coverage of the election unsurprisingly increased as Election Day drew closer. Although only 13 days of coverage in November were included in the analysis, more stories were published in November than in September. Moreover, significantly more stories were published in the month

of October than in September. See Figure 2 for total story counts by month from each newspaper.

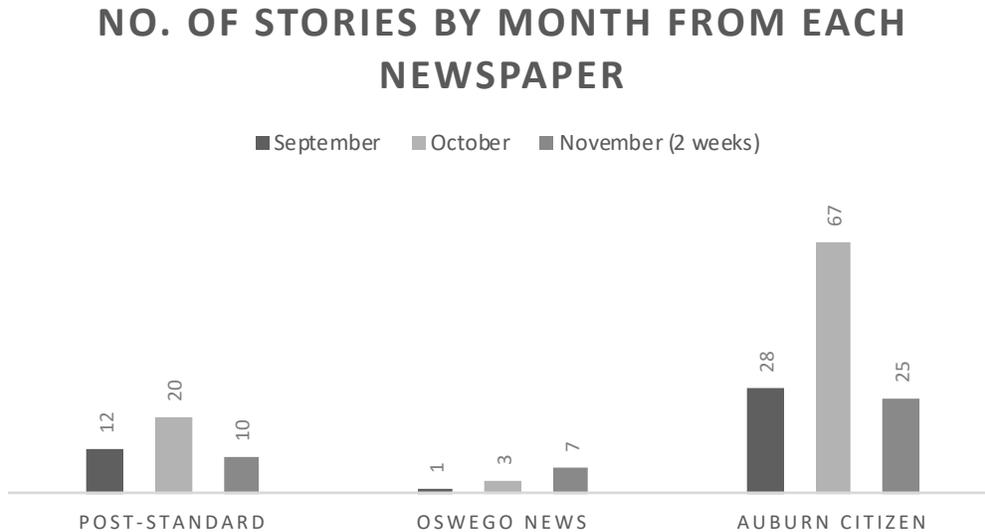


Figure 2: Story frequency from each newspaper, by month

Election coverage

There was a disparity in the amount of coverage from the three newspapers. Of all the news stories analyzed (N=173), 69.4% came from the *Auburn Citizen*, 24.3% came from the *Post-Standard*, and only 6.4% came from *Oswego County News*. Therefore, the volume of coverage varied across these locations. Interestingly, there is a positive correlation between more robust coverage of the election and subsequent voter turnout in the election. This means that in counties where the newspaper published more articles about the election had higher turnout rates.

Moreover, in a linear regression model, holding population constant, there is a statistically significant effect of number of articles on voter turnout in the county with a Pearson's coefficient of 0.003 ($\alpha = 0.01$). This means that regardless of county population, there was a significantly higher turnout rate in counties with greater news coverage.

The two newspapers with greater coverage had higher turnout rates. The *Auburn Citizen* covers Cayuga county, where voter turnout was 60.78% of active voters, and The *Post-Standard* covers Onondaga county, where voter turnout was 61.8% of active voters. Conversely, *Oswego County News* covers Oswego county, where voter turnout was only 34.1% of active voters. This information is summarized in Table 3. It is important to note that this data does not suggest causation. Rather, there is a correlative or associative relationship between higher coverage around the election and voter participation.

Table 3: 2018 midterm election voter turnout rate by county in NY-24 district

County	Newspaper coverage	No. articles published	Turnout rate
Onondaga	<i>Post-Standard</i>	42	61.78%
Wayne	n/a	n/a	57.73%
Cayuga	<i>Auburn Citizen</i>	120	60.78%
Oswego	<i>Oswego County News</i>	11	34.12%

This factor supports findings in previous studies. Hayes and Lawless (2015) found a positive correlation between more robust media coverage of elections and higher political engagement. This phenomenon was observed in Cayuga county, where coverage was relatively more robust and turnout was higher, compared to Oswego county where coverage was significantly less, and turnout was lower. The authors also found that less robust media coverage of local elections was found in areas served by larger media outlets. The *Post-Standard* is the largest of the three newspapers included in the analysis but did not provide the greatest volume of coverage about the election. In addition, Snyder and Stomberg (2010) found that media markets with high congruence with election districts received greater amounts of election coverage. That trend is also observed here. The *Auburn Citizen* and the *Post-Standard* had high congruence with the NY-24 district, while the *Oswego County News* covered both the NY-24 and NY-22 district. The latter had the lowest amount of coverage by far.

Issue coverage

This section addresses research questions 1 and 2. Stories were coded for the presence of each of the eleven issues included in the codebook. More information about the topics included in each of these codes is available in the codebook, located in *Appendix E*. The top five issues covered in stories about the election from these newspapers had similarities but were somewhat distinct from one another. This information is summarized in Figure 3. The economy and health care were top issues covered by all three newspapers, but the other most covered topic varied across the sources.

ISSUE FOCUS IN TOTAL COVERAGE, BY NEWSPAPER

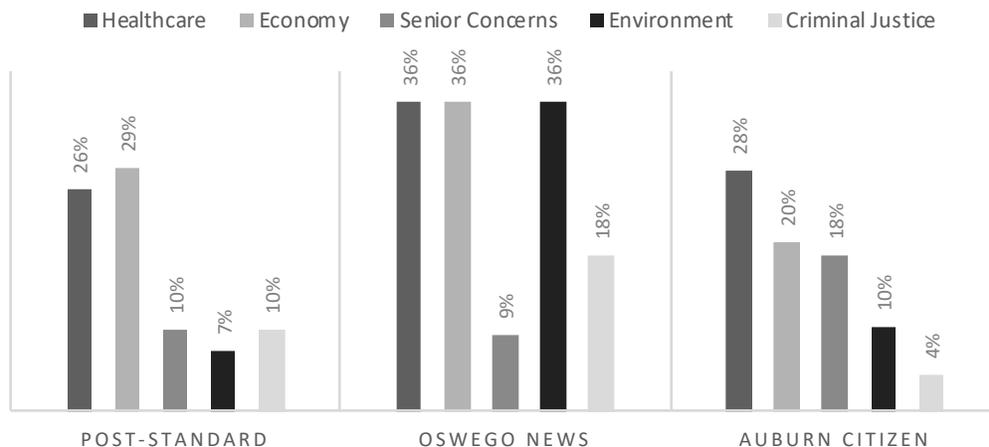


Figure 3: Percentage of stories about the NY-24 midterm election including discussion of the top five issues, by newspaper

While the prevalence of issues ranged across the newspapers, the environment was the only issue that was statistically dependent on the newspaper. The environment was covered with much higher frequency in the Oswego News relative to other issues, compared to the other two newspapers, though that relative frequency was highly dependent on the fact that the Oswego

County News only published 11 articles about the election. Health care, the economy, senior concerns, and criminal justice concerns were independent of the newspaper – in other words, these issues were treated the same by the newspapers. See Table 4 for p-values in the chi-square tests between issue coverage and the newspaper where the story was published ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Dependence between the variables is measured as a p-value of less than 0.05. This indicates that the presence of the majority of top issues discussed in the coverage was independent from the newspaper in which they were published, or that the difference between the newspapers' emphasis on the content was not statistically significant.

Table 4: chi-square test for independence between variables newspaper and issue prevalence

Issue	Health care	Economy	Senior Concerns	Environment	Criminal Justice
p-value	0.801	0.295	0.331	0.018*	0.119

*statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

There was loose association between the candidates themselves and the issues discussed in stories that featured them. The correlation matrix between the candidate(s) included in the headline or lede of the story and a mention of the issues shows the prevalence of association between the candidate and the issue, displayed in Table 5. Interestingly, neither of the candidates have a strong correlation (>0.7) with any issue in the coverage. This means that no specific issue dominated coverage in stories where either candidate was highlighted. However, the signs on the correlation coefficients are interesting to consider. A positive correlation in this test indicates that stories where the candidate was spotlighted (mentioned in the headline or lede), there were more mentions or associations with that issue. A negative correlation is the converse – a candidate spotlight is less associated with mention of that issue in the story.

Table 5: Correlation matrix with candidates and all issues

	Balter	Katko
Criminal Justice	-0.006	0.0867
Abortion	-0.1033	0.0418
Education	-0.0103	-0.2057
Equality	0.0076	-0.0459
Environment	-0.1277	0.1049
Guns	0.1062	-0.0122
Health care	0.1686	-0.0204
Immigration	-0.0556	0.0305
Economy	0.003	0.1056
SCOTUS	-0.0334	0.0593
Senior Concerns	-0.0493	-0.0664

The correlations between issue mentions and candidate spotlights can be explained by examining the number of articles that include the top five issues discussed in association with the candidate spotlighted in the article. As shown in Figure 4, the number of articles that mention these issues associated with each candidate are not significantly different. The article count in Figure 4 include stories that spotlight both the candidates and the candidate individually. Interestingly, the ordinal top five issues associated with each candidate are identical, though the article counts differ between them. Balter is associated with more mentions of health care, while Katko is associated with more mentions of economy, senior concerns, environment, and criminal justice. However, it is important to point out that these do not factor in the frame of the issues, so these are not necessarily pointing to the candidates' issue platforms. For example, Katko was more often associated with senior concerns in a negative frame because he consistently fought attacks that he was seeking to cut Social Security and Medicare benefits. For another, Balter was more often associated with criminal justice mentions in a negative frame because of her arguably weak stance on drug reform policy.

ISSUE MENTIONS, BY CANDIDATE

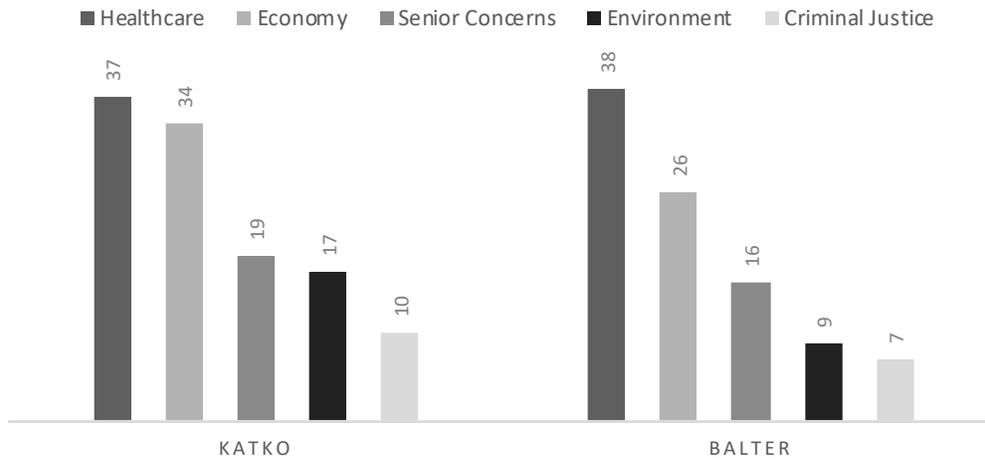


Figure 4: Number of articles highlighting candidates that include mention of a top five issue

The lack of a clear difference between candidates and their association with various issues makes a voter's decision in this election much more muddled. While there are multiple issues on which voters may agree or disagree with a politician, in an election, "voters only have the binary option of retaining the incumbent or replacing [them] with a challenger. Voters are therefore unable to separately sanction specific policy choices of the incumbent" (List and Sturm, 2006, 1249). In this case, the specific policy choices of each candidate are not immediately apparent based upon these data.

These data demonstrate that there was not a high level of association between the candidates and issues that drastically differed from one another. It does not show a reciprocal relationship between the candidates' focus and the newspaper coverage of them (Dunn, 2009). It does demonstrate that the newspapers provided a set of rather limited and rotating issues, with relatively similar associations with each candidate (Shaw and Martin, 1992).

Next, each of the five top issues covered by the newspapers will be examined. Specifically, the story prevalence (shown in Figure 3) across newspapers will be analyzed as well as the dominant topics and frames included in this issue coverage.

Health care

Health care was the most frequently discussed issue in the election media coverage analyzed (N=49). This was due to two main topic focuses of the candidates. One, Balter advocated for a Medicare-for-all health care system throughout her campaign. However, Katko used a clip of her saying, “you would have to pay a tax” to pay for this plan in one of his campaign advertisements. Clarifying this point and critiques about how the Medicare-for-all system would be financed was a major point of debate and contention between the candidates. Two, Rep. Katko voted in favor of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which effectively removed the individual mandate in the Affordable Care Act that required all Americans to have health insurance or pay a fine. Balter continuously brought up this point, arguing that this decision would cause health care premiums to rise for all Americans.

The majority of the stories that discussed the environment used a neutral frame (N=26). Fewer stories used a positive frame (N=13) or a negative frame (N=10). Therefore, healthcare was an issue of relative conflict in the coverage of this election, as most articles presented both sides of the campaigns’ argument. However, stories that featured Balter framed health care positively more often than articles that featured Katko or both candidates. When Katko was included in the story, there was a higher likelihood of the frame being negative or the conflict around the issue being presented. This is due to a significant amount of criticism leveled at Katko over his support of repealing the individual mandate, a crucial component of the Affordable Care Act. A frame analysis by candidate is shown in Figure 5.

HEALTHCARE, BY FRAME

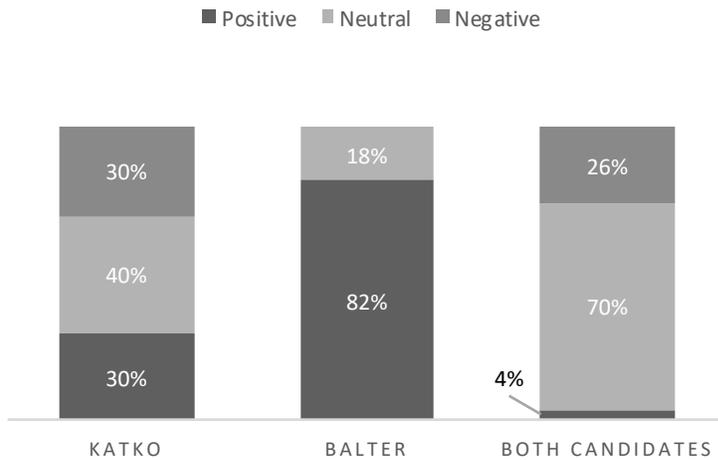


Figure 5: Percentage of stories using a positive, neutral, or negative frame around health care, by candidate spotlighted in the headline or lede

Using a chi² test, there is not an association between the candidate in the article and the inclusion of health care issues ($p=0.168$). This is also clear in the correlation matrix shown in Table 5, where the correlation with both candidates is below $|0.2|$. As a result, these two variables are independent from one another, meaning the association between each candidate and health care issues was not statistically significant. There is also not an association between the newspaper and the inclusion of health care issues in the story (chi² $p=0.801$) because the newspapers' treatment of the issue was not significantly different. Table 6 displays the proportion and count of stories that include health care issues, by newspaper.

Table 6: Health care issue coverage, by newspaper

Newspaper	% of stories	Number of stories	Total stories
<i>Post-Standard</i>	26%	11	42
<i>Oswego News</i>	36%	4	11
<i>Auburn Citizen</i>	28%	34	120

Based on a chi² test, the type of story (news, editorial, or LTE) is independent of whether or not the environment is mentioned in the story itself (p=0.194). However, there was a higher prevalence of mentions of health care issues in news stories (N=42), as opposed to opinion pieces (LTE: N=5, Editorial: N=2).

Economy

The economy was the second most highlighted issue in the election coverage. Two specific topics dominated discussions – taxes and jobs. There was much debate about how much the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act really benefited New Yorkers. Katko consistently defended his vote in favor of the bill, arguing that it would help his constituents pay a lower tax bill, while Balter maintained that it largely benefited the wealthy. The creation and presence of jobs was also an important issue for the candidates. Specifically, there was much debate around a protest at local employer Lockheed Martin’s headquarters, led by a group that Balter was previously associated with. Katko, heralding the job creation Lockheed Martin provides for the district, called on Balter to renounce the group, but she refused. In addition, both candidates often discussed their plans for the future of Central New York in terms of bringing new jobs here, with renewable and nuclear energy being the most frequently mentioned fields.

The majority of the stories that discussed the economy used a neutral frame (N=18) or a negative frame (N=15). There was not a significant difference in the distribution of frame around the economy in stories that featured Balter or Katko alone. However, a larger proportion of stories that featured both candidates showed the economy in a neutral or negative frame. The economy was a point of relative conflict in the election coverage, specifically because of critiques over Katko’s vote in support of the 2017 tax bill, a talking point often utilized by the Balter campaign. A frame analysis by candidate is shown in Figure 6.

ECONOMY, BY FRAME

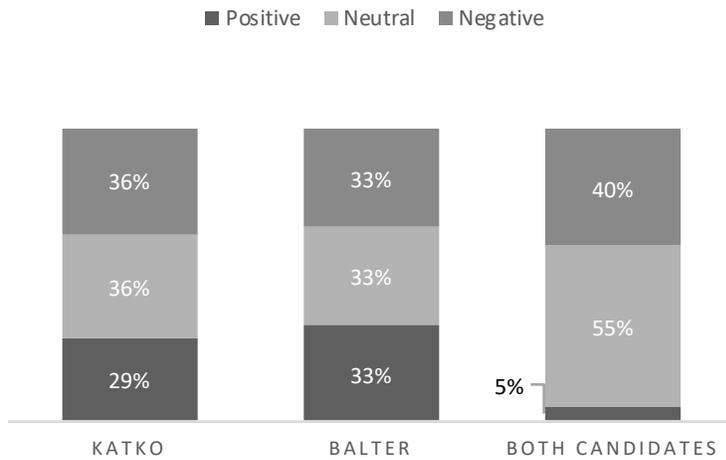


Figure 6: Percentage of stories using a positive, neutral, or negative frame around the economy, by candidate spotlighted in the headline or lede

Using a chi² test, there is not an association between the candidate in the article and the inclusion of economic issues (p=0.357). This is also clear in the correlation matrix shown in Table 5, where the correlation with both candidates is below 0.15. As a result, these two variables are independent from one another, meaning there was no significant differences in the candidates' association with economic issues. There is also not an association between the newspaper and the inclusion of economic issues in the story (chi² p=0.295) because the newspapers' treatment of the issue was not significantly different. Table 7 displays the proportion and count of stories that include economic issues, by newspaper.

Table 7: Economic issue coverage, by newspaper

Newspaper	% of stories	Number of stories	Total stories
<i>Post-Standard</i>	29%	12	42
<i>Oswego News</i>	36%	4	11
<i>Auburn Citizen</i>	20%	24	120

Based on a chi² test, the type of story (news, editorial, or LTE) is independent of whether or not the economy is mentioned in the story itself (p=0.195). However, there was a higher prevalence of mentions of environmental issues in news stories (N=32), as opposed to opinion pieces (LTE: N=6, Editorial: N=2).

Senior Concerns

Senior concerns were the third most discussed issue in the campaign coverage. This coverage largely focused on one issue – whether or not Katko would support future cuts to senior programs, namely Social Security and Medicare. The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act resulted in a national debt hike. Republican leadership in the House and Senate said that reforming “entitlement programs” like Social Security or Medicare would help to reduce the national debt. This would lead to a decrease in earned benefits by seniors. Since Rep. Katko voted in favor of this bill, Balter often argued that he supported cutting these senior programs, but Rep. Katko vehemently denied these claims, and openly disagreed with his party leadership on the topic.

The majority of the stories that discussed senior issues used a positive frame (N=14). Fewer issues used a neutral frame (N=8) or a negative frame (N=5). However, the majority of stories that spotlighted Balter and included senior concerns were in a positive frame, while more stories with a neutral or negative frame were in stories spotlighting Katko or both candidates. This is largely due to the criticism leveled against Katko throughout the campaign that he was not strongly protecting Medicare or Social Security. As such, senior concerns were a source of debate in the election for Katko but worked in Balter’s favor. A frame analysis by candidate is shown in Figure 7.

SENIOR CONCERNS, BY FRAME

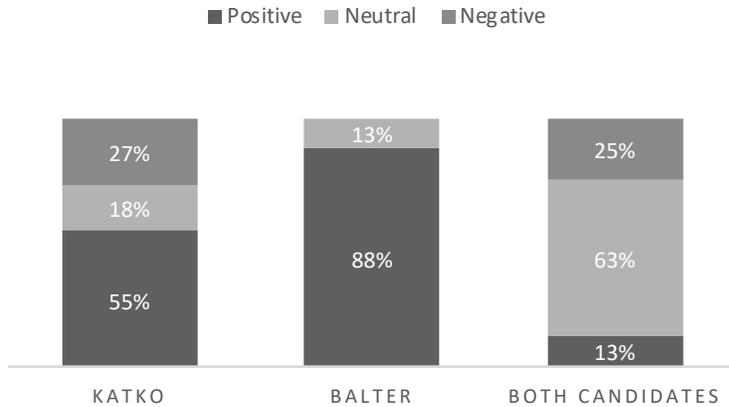


Figure 7: Percentage of stories using a positive, neutral, or negative frame around senior concerns, by candidate spotlighted in the headline or lede

Using a chi² test, there is a weak association between the candidate in the article and the inclusion of senior concerns at a 0.1 significance level ($p=0.086$). Interestingly, both candidates have a weak and negative correlation with the presence of senior concerns. As a result, it can be assumed that these two variables are independent from one another because there is a weak significance level and no significant correlation. This means that both candidates were similarly associated with senior concerns. There is not an association between the newspaper and the inclusion of senior concerns in the story (chi² $p=0.331$) because the newspapers' treatment of the issue was not significantly different. Table 8 displays the proportion and count of stories that include environmental issues, by newspaper.

Table 8: Senior concerns coverage, by newspaper

Newspaper	% of stories	Number of stories	Total stories
<i>Post-Standard</i>	10%	4	42
<i>Oswego News</i>	9%	1	11
<i>Auburn Citizen</i>	18%	22	120

Based on a chi² test, the type of story (news, editorial, or LTE) is independent of whether or not senior concerns are mentioned in the story itself ($p=0.752$). However, there was a higher prevalence of mentions of senior concerns in news stories (N=23), as opposed to opinion pieces (LTE: N=4, Editorial: N=0).

Environment

This section specifically addresses research question 2. Overall, environmental issues were the fourth most discussed issue in the media coverage around the election. While environmental issues were not the most prevalently discussed issue in the media coverage, they were not the *least* discussed. In fact, the code was in a three-way tie for first place in the *Oswego County News* coverage, though it is important to note the sample size for this source was extremely low (N=11). It was the fourth most discussed issue in the *Auburn Citizen* and tied for the fifth most discussed issue in the *Post-Standard*. However, these rankings are not equivalent differences – there are large differences in the number of stories that include environmental issues. In total 19 stories, or 11.0% of stories included discussion or mention of environmental issues. This is relative to 49 (28.3%) stories that included discussions of health care or 40 (23.1%) stories that addressed the economy, across all three newspapers.

The specific topics addressed in these environmental stories ranged, but predominantly focused on three issues. Six stories addressed local water quality, specifically algal blooms in lakes that provide drinking water for Syracuse, NY and the surrounding area – five of these stories focused on Katko's position. Five stories included discussion of climate change and carbon emissions, and four of these were based on Balter's position. Four stories focused upon energy issues, three of which focused on Katko's support for nuclear power and one of which focused on Balter's

support of the same topic. There was one story, published by the *Post-Standard*, that specifically addressed the issue of public lands and conservation. Both candidates were asked to submit written remarks about protecting public lands throughout the U.S. Balter discussed the importance of land protections, while Katko focused on the value these lands provide for state tourism.

The majority of the stories that discussed the environment used a neutral frame (N=11) or a positive frame (N=7). Only one story had a negative frame, and it was in an LTE criticizing Katko’s poor environmental voting record and endorsing Balter. The environment was not an issue of significant conflict in the coverage of this election. A frame analysis by candidate is shown in Figure 8.

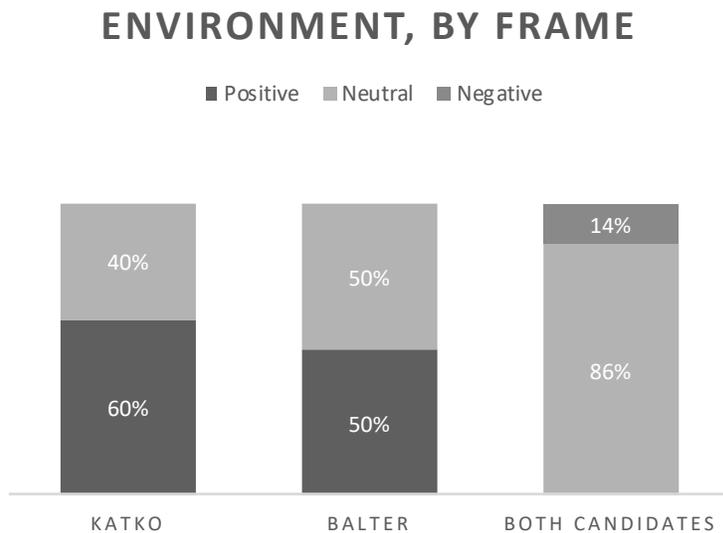


Figure 8: Percentage of stories using a positive, neutral, or negative frame around environmental issues, by candidate spotlighted in the headline or lede

Using a chi² test, there is not an association between the candidate in the article and the inclusion of environmental issues (p=0.139). This is also clear in the correlation matrix shown in Table 5, where the correlation with both candidates is below |0.15|. As a result, these two variables are

independent from one another, meaning both candidates were similarly associated with environmental issues. However, there is an association between the newspaper and the inclusion of environmental issues in the story ($\chi^2 p=0.018$). Table 9 displays the proportion and count of stories that include environmental issues, by newspaper. This shows that the prevalence of the issue in the newspapers was statistically different. The Oswego News had a higher prevalence of stories mentioning the environment, though they published far fewer stories than the other newspapers.

Table 9: Environmental issue coverage, by newspaper

Environment	% of stories	Number of stories	Total stories
<i>Post-Standard</i>	7%	3	42
<i>Oswego News</i>	36%	4	11
<i>Auburn Citizen</i>	10%	12	120

Based on a χ^2 test, the type of story (news, editorial, or LTE) is independent of whether or not the environment is mentioned in the story itself ($p=0.402$). However, there was a higher prevalence of mentions of environmental issues in news stories (N=16), as opposed to opinion pieces (LTE: N=2, Editorial: N=1).

Criminal Justice

The fifth-most discussed issue, criminal justice, was focused upon one topic – the opioid crisis in New York state and how drug dealers and drug users should be treated under the law. As a former federal prosecutor, Rep. Katko often referred to his record as being tough on drug policy and advocating for harsher sentences for drug dealers. Balter took a different angle, calling for reform in the criminal justice system around drug policy – a position which she was critiqued for and therefore did not refer to.

The majority of the stories that discussed criminal justice used a neutral frame (N=7) or a positive frame (N=4). No stories had a negative frame, meaning criminal justice was not an issue of significant conflict in the coverage of this election as most stories heralded Katko’s position and record on the issue. This can be shown in Figure 9, as the majority of stories spotlighting Katko used a positive frame around this issue, while the majority spotlighting Balter or both candidates use a neutral frame.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE, BY FRAME

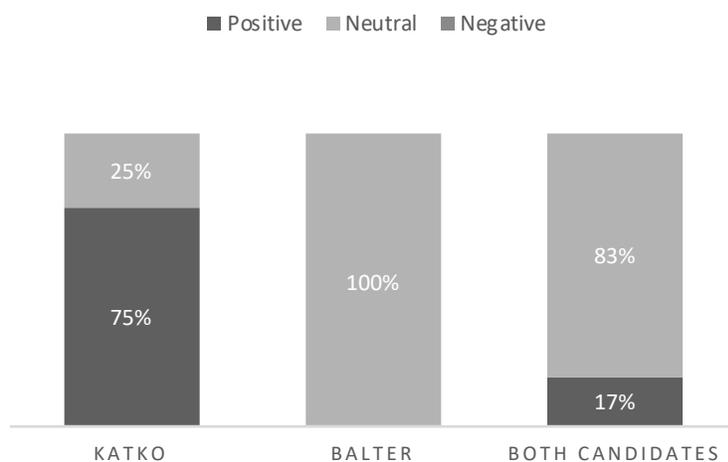


Figure 9: Percentage of stories using a positive, neutral, or negative frame around environmental issues, by candidate spotlighted in the headline or lede

Using a chi² test, there is not an association between the candidate in the article and the inclusion of criminal justice issues (p=0.704). This is also clear in the correlation matrix shown in Table 5, where the correlation with both candidates is below |0.1|. As a result, these two variables are independent from one another, meaning both candidates were similarly associated with criminal justice issues. There is also not an association between the newspaper and the inclusion of criminal justice issues in the story (chi² p=0.119) because the newspapers’ treatment of the issue

was not significantly different. Table 10 displays the proportion and count of stories that include criminal justice issues, by newspaper.

Table 10: Criminal justice issue coverage, by newspaper

Newspaper	% of stories	Number of stories	Total stories
<i>Post-Standard</i>	10%	4	42
<i>Oswego News</i>	18%	2	11
<i>Auburn Citizen</i>	4%	5	120

Based on a chi² test, the type of story (news, editorial, or LTE) is independent of whether or not criminal justice issues are mentioned in the story itself (p=0.755). However, there was a higher prevalence of mentions of criminal justice issues in news stories (N=10), as opposed to opinion pieces (LTE: N=1, Editorial: N=0).

Discussion of top five covered issues

The concept of salience as outlined by Kiousis (2004) is crucially important here. The external salience, or frequency of topic mentions, and the internal salience, or the frame, are both examined for all five issues presented above. These factors are both important in answering the first research question, regarding issue coverage.

A number of issues are discussed throughout the media coverage data, but five topics were the most frequent: health care, the economy, senior concerns, environmental issues, and criminal justice. The frequency of an issue being mentioned is also known as attention to the issue, or the external salience (Kiousis, 2004), and the attention devoted to an issue affects the public’s perception of how important it is. The idea set forth by McCombs and Shaw (1972) and extended by other researchers (Dunn, 2009; Fortunato and Martin, 2016; Shaw and Martin, 1992) argues

that the media serves an agenda-setting function. In the context of this specific election coverage, these articles provide a transfer of salience of these highlighted issues to the general public.

The significant difference in the number of stories focusing on health care and the economy indicates to readers that these are more important (Wanta and Wu, 1992). This results in readers perceiving these top issues as more important. Other authors have found that there is an observed connection between the prominence of an issue in newspaper coverage and its perceived importance amongst readers (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Iyengar and McGrady, 2007; Wanta and Wu, 1992). Though this study does not measure perceived importance of issues amongst readers, if this holds true in this study, there are important impacts of this issue coverage. Confirming this idea is an opportunity for further research.

The articles can also be understood to be representative of the issues that are most important to voters. The media coverage sets the agenda and the readers then interpret and discuss, thus continuing the cycle (Scheufele, 1999; McQuail, 1994). This reciprocal relationship can be seen in the results here where the issues that received the most coverage (health care and the economy) were also mentioned in more opinion pieces than the other top discussed issues. This coverage reflects public thought and discussion.

The internal salience is also understood as the frame in which that issue is presented (Kiousis, 2004). The utilized frame is an important consideration, for framing has been shown to have a significant effect on the readers (Nisbet, 2019; Kiousis, 2004). This is particularly true with environmental issues (Laykoff, 2010). The fact that the environment was not an issue of significant conflict and that it was most often portrayed in a neutral or positive frame is of some concern, as it suggests to the reader that there is no major issue in this realm. This differs from

other issues, like health care, the economy, and senior concerns, which were all sources of conflict between the candidates. All told, this suggests to the readers that there is not cause for concern around environmental issues in the context of this election.

To address the second research question, I turn to the specificities of included coverage of the environment. There is a lack of environmental issue coverage that typically demands the reader's attention. The type of environmental coverage that most persists in the media is alarmist and newsworthy (Downs, 1972; Nisbet and Scheufele, 2012). However, the environment was predominantly treated with a neutral frame and the specific issues that demanded the majority of coverage were not treated with extreme or alarming language in this content analysis.

Specifically, there was no context to this coverage. Stories about algal blooms in the lake were described as improving under current regulations, but the possible damage they can cause were not mentioned. Both candidates discussed their support of nuclear power because of the job opportunities it brings to the state, but there was no context to this issue or discussion of the consequences of nuclear power use. And as studies have shown, non-contextualized knowledge is less valuable to voters in elections or politics (Dalrymple and Scheufele, 2007). As such, although the environment was the fourth most discussed issue, the type of coverage generated was not particularly attention-grabbing. Finally, land management or conservation was not an issue of significant concern with only one story addressing it specifically.

Campaign attributes

This section addresses the third and final research question. The majority of the stories from each newspaper included coverage of issues or policy, but a significant portion of the stories instead focused solely on the campaign and the candidates without addressing any political or policy issue. Specifically, more than 35% of all stories in all three newspapers did not mention or

discuss any policy issue. Instead these stories focused on campaign or candidate attributes, describing personal feuds between the candidates or detailing the funds raised by each campaign. On the other hand, there were only four articles total that did not address or include any campaign or candidate attributes. This indicates the importance of the campaign and the candidates to the media coverage of the election, rather than the political issues at stake being the dominant and eclipsing focus in the coverage. Focusing upon polling numbers or the drama of a campaign has been observed in other academic studies looking at media coverage of campaigns (Graber, 2002; Iyengar, Norpoth, and Hahn, 2004). This focus on the campaign rather than the policy is more often observed in media coverage of non-presidential elections (Arnold, 2004).

The most prevalent attribute discussed in the campaign coverage was an attack on the candidate or a description of campaign drama (N=98) and the most prominent frame was negative. The majority of these mentions applied to Katko (N=41), which was far more than the number of stories that focused on attacks on Balter (N=18). The majority of these attacks on both candidates were brought up by the opposite campaign, not the newspaper itself. However a large number of stories had a neutral frame, meaning they simply focused on the drama of the campaign and presented both candidate perspectives (N=32). This frame was instigated by the newspaper itself, and its focus upon the dramatic aspects of the campaign, like which candidate had raised more money or the contested debate schedule. The prevalence of stories that focused on attacks on Katko, Balter, or both candidates is shown in Figure 10.

The coverage of the candidates and campaigns themselves have a proven relationship with the voters' perceptions of the candidates (Golan and Wanta, 2001). This data demonstrates that not only does media coverage have an agenda-setting effect on the readers in terms of issues, but also impacts their perception of the candidates themselves, in turn possibly affecting their vote.

However, considering Katko won the election the attacks on him as a candidate did not seem to matter enough to deny him his congressional seat.

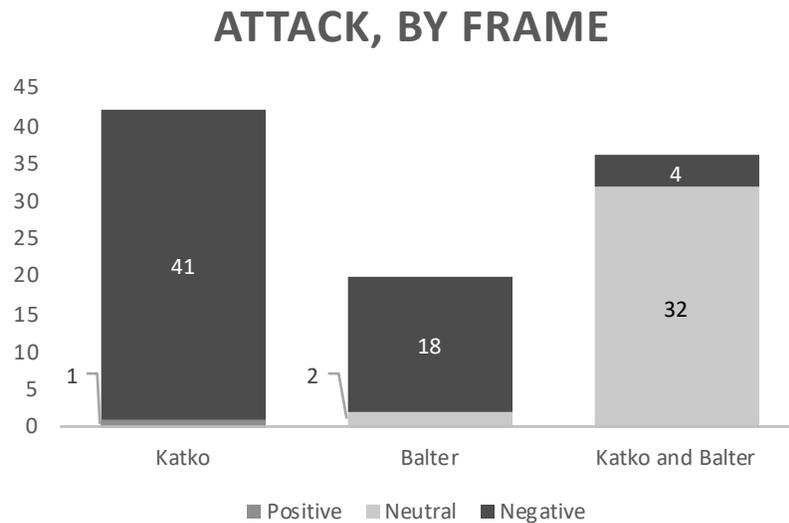


Figure 10: Number of stories detailing attacks on Katko, Balter, or both

The electability or an endorsement of the candidate was the second most prevalent attribute in the stories (N=86). These stories largely focused on groups and political endorsements of the candidate or a report about a candidate having a lead in the polls. The majority of these stories were in a positive frame for Katko (N=37), though Balter was associated with a similar number of stories with this code in the positive frame (N=31). The prevalence of stories that focused on the electability or endorsements for Katko, Balter, or both candidates is shown in Figure 11. This is interesting, considering the results of the study from Chiang and Knight (2011), which showed a causative relationship between newspaper endorsements and public support for the candidate. Both the *Post-Standard* and the *Auburn Citizen* formally endorsed Rep. John Katko, and he was the winner of the election.

ELECTABILITY OR ENDORSEMENT, BY FRAME

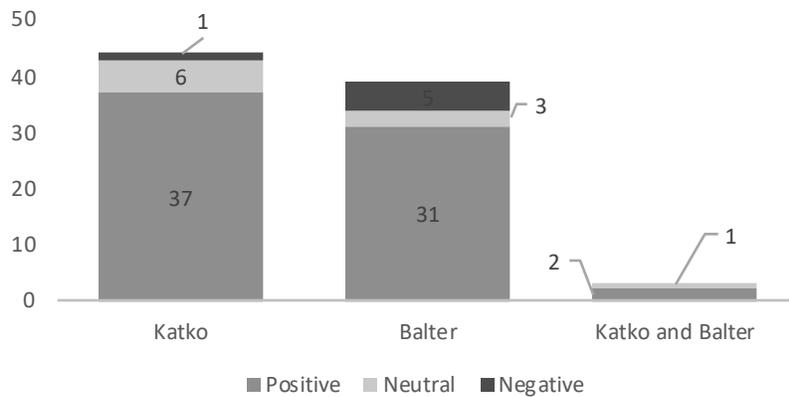


Figure 11: Number of stories about electability or endorsements for Katko, Balter, or both

In addressing the third research question, while the issue platforms of the campaigns and the candidates did dominate coverage, there was a large portion that discussed the drama of the campaign. These stories neglected to discuss or mention any policy at all. While this did not represent the majority of the coverage, it was significant. Iyengar, Norpoth, and Hahn (2004) found that readers are drawn more prevalently to stories about campaign strategy and the “horserace” of the election. Perhaps this is the trend these newspapers were responding to – in an election, stories about the horserace are more newsworthy to the readers.

Conclusion

There are several important takeaways that both confirm previous studies and inform our understanding of the coverage of congressional elections, the major contribution of this research to the academic literature. Overall, the environment was the fourth most discussed issue in the election coverage. The majority of these stories had either a neutral or positive frame around the environment. There was however a large gap between the environment and the three other most

discussed issues – health care, the economy, and senior concerns, respectively. In addition, the specific topics included in the environmental stories ranged widely, from water quality to climate change to energy policy. While the second research question was interested in the presence of environmental issues, its specific focus was on conservation and land management. The topic of land management, conservation, or public lands was rare in the election coverage, with only one story addressing the issue. This finding somewhat confirms the conclusion reached by Scheufele and Nisbet (2012) that there is a marked decrease in environmental reporting. Though the issue itself was not absent from coverage of the election, it was not particularly robust or dominant. Its presence is encouraging for those with a goal of increasing knowledge about environmental issues, as coverage has been associated with an increase in political knowledge amongst voters (Barakas and Jerit, 2004). However, its absence is not altogether surprising, as recent moves to declassify land protections are largely focused in the western U.S., making this issue less salient here in New York state.

The topics of health care and the economy dominated coverage about the election. The economy in particular was a source of major conflict and critique from the newspaper coverage, largely focusing on Rep. Katko's tax bill vote. This suggests that the issues that affect the everyday lives of New Yorkers overshadows other issues in this election, and understandably so. Perhaps the most apt way to generate more coverage in local election about other concerns, like the environment, is to frame them in such a way that they are linked to these more central or salient concerns of voters. Lakoff (2010) suggested doing just this, for cognizant and purposeful framing is unavoidable and completely necessary.

There were differences in coverage of the candidates themselves. The incumbent, Congressman Katko, received more coverage in these three newspapers, though a majority of the articles

(46%) also mentioned his opponent Balter in the headline or lede. Moreover, there was no significant correlation between the candidate mentioned in the headline or lede and the issues discussed in the story, including environmental issues. The three newspapers considered in the analysis ranged in stories published about the election, and there was an observed positive correlation with more robust coverage and higher voter turnout rates. Finally, while the majority of stories included some discussion of political or policy issues, a large proportion (35%) did not discuss *any* issue and rather solely focused on the election campaign or the candidates themselves. This suggests that the campaign itself was often the focus of coverage, as opposed to the specificities of the candidates' issue platform.

Based upon the findings of this content analysis, the environment as a political issue is not unimportant, but it does not dominate the newspaper coverage by any means. The issues that did dominate discussions were those that perceptibly affect the everyday lives of New Yorkers, like health care costs or tax bills. Moreover, coverage of the dramatic and close campaign often overshadowed the issues entirely. These two factors made it very difficult for environmental issues to gain traction, particularly at the local level in a congressional race where no major environmental problem was looming.

Opportunity for future research: Effect of coverage on the readers

In a social constructivist conceptualization of the mass media's effects on readers, it is important to both analyze the coverage and consider the readers' perspective. The latter is multi-faceted and diverse. The interaction or news processing level of the readers is important, as outlined by Kosicki & McLeod (1990). Additionally, as Fortunato and Martin (2016) posited, the audience's need for orientation to the topic also affects their interest and leads to that topic being sought out in media sources. Finally, the issue of selective perception, or seeking out information that are

ideological similar to our own, is an important consideration in our hyper-partisan political world. In their original and seminal study that helped to define the concept of agenda-setting, McCombs and Shaw (1972) found that voters paid attention to all news, not just what confirmed their world view. However, in a more modern study, Jerit and Barabas (2012) suggested that people have greater knowledge about facts that confirm their own partisan worldview, and less for facts that challenge that worldview.

News processing ability, orientation to a topic, and selective perception are all crucial considerations in media analyses, but this study was largely interested in a descriptive analysis of the election coverage. Therefore, the findings are not able to predict or speak to the outcome of this coverage on the readers. Many previous studies (Golan and Wanta, 2001; Jerit and Barabas, 2012; Kiouisis, 2004) took the content analysis one step further and compare the findings to survey data of the exposed population. The established connection between media coverage and political knowledge or participation is an important foundational consideration in this project. It is my assumption that salience of issues in the media translates to at least some demonstrated positive effect or correlation with increased political knowledge, interest, and participation. However, as this study only examines the salience of environmental issues in the media coverage around the NY-24 election, it is not possible to confirm that assumption within the scope of this research, a limitation of this study. This would be a crucial and interesting next step for this research, in measuring the impact, if any, of this media content on public opinion of voters in the NY-24 district, possibly in a future election.

Caveat: Relevance of news source type

The articles collected for this content analysis were sourced from the newspapers' online databases. This included stories that were published both online and in-print. As discussed

previously, the source of news, be it print, online, or social media, is highly relevant in its effects on the readers. Dalrymple and Scheufele (2007) found that online news is associated with higher levels of gained and contextual political knowledge, relative to print sources. This is largely because of the “clickability” of online news stories, where it is easy to gain a deeper understanding of a topic. The effects of news gleaned from social media are not consistent or fully understood in the academic literature (Fortunato & Martin, 2016; Boulianne, 2009). Because this study does not distinguish between the format of news consumption, it is not possible to make this distinction or surmise the absolute effect of the content on the readers. A more nuanced study that used databases which distinguished between news format would be beneficial to future studies.

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Chapter 4: Project Conclusion

At the outset of this project, I was fascinated by the seeming contradiction between the political positions and voting behavior of some Americans, and their simultaneous pride in their public lands. My research questions came from this more general one – do people simply not *care* about formal protections for the environment, or do they just not *think* about the environment or conservation when they vote? As these two manuscripts have shown, I found mixed results.

The first manuscript was entitled “Conservation or Conservative? The connections between environmental values and political subjectivity.” Using qualitative analysis based upon interview data with 20 politically active individuals in the NY-24 congressional district, it explored the connections these people drew between their own political subjectivity and environmental values around conservation. Although the political system in the U.S. is largely split down Democratic and Republican lines, there is massive nuance and variation in the ways political subjectivity plays out on an individual level. Interestingly, for a number of participants the imbibed values inherent to their political party were either more important than policy or affected their discussion of political issues. People who had more liberal beliefs spoke about the importance of environmental issues to them, but this was not intrinsic amongst all of these participants. For the majority of them, these issues were not the *most important* issue to them politically. While the environment was significant for the majority of participants when asked, it was not at the front of their minds when they went to the voting booth for the 2018 congressional election.

The second manuscript was entitled “Nature in the News: A content analysis of election coverage in Upstate New York local newspapers”. It used a content analysis to explore and analyze the trends present in the local media coverage of the NY-24 election, and I was specifically interested in the role environmental issues played in that coverage. I was surprised to

find that the environment was the fourth most discussed issue in this coverage, preceded by health care, the economy, and senior concerns. However, there were significantly more stories about health care and the economy than the environment. Yet, there were a significant number of stories that included no issue coverage at all, rather focusing on the candidates themselves or the drama of the campaign. This points to the idea that not only are environmental issues not highly important politically, but the issues themselves sometimes take a backseat to the drama of politics and elections altogether.

The results of both manuscripts complement and confirm one another in a few ways. One, the issues that are important to both the participants in this study and in the media coverage are those that affect people day-to-day: health care and the economy. Two, the partisan divides amongst voters and between the candidates in the election are not as clear cut as one might expect. There was heterogeneity amongst the Democrat perspectives with whom I spoke, and John Katko, the Republican candidate, was more highly and often associated with environmental issues than Dana Balter, the Democratic candidate. Three, while the environment is important and salient, it is far from the most prevalent or important issue in the context of the election.

Structural and hegemonic power

The first manuscript used the structural theory of Althusser (2008) to describe the interpolation of political subjectivities, and the ways these political subjects reinforce the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) that protect the State. Historical scholarship on mass media argues that the media also works to reassert the existing structural power in society. Hall (1978) posited that the media sources are most often those in power, thus reproducing the current power structures. Fortunato & Martin (2016) define modern political communication by five factors, one of which is “individuals and organizations with agendas to promote” (p. 129). The fact that journalists are

oftentimes working under a time clock, and that traditional norms give credibility to officials in power, these sources re-assert and maintain their own power through the media. Hallin (1989) argues that the journalistic norm of objectivity results in this hierarchal treatment of sources, favoring those that are deemed more legitimate by society. Herman and Chomsky (2002) posited a propaganda model about media in the U.S. due to the concentrated wealth and media conglomerations from which Americans get their news. This model essentially filters the news that reaches the American people in a way that serves political ends.

These ideas are reminiscent of Althusser (2008) and his theoretical argument that ISAs exist and reinforce the existing power structure of the State. These ISAs (i.e. family, the church, schools, the political system) overlap, clash, and shift, but all work to reinforce the foundational structure of society. In this case, it has been argued that political ISAs work to do just that, and it could be argued that the media ISA helps to reinforce that structural power as well. For Althusser, ISAs do important work. They indoctrinate individuals and groups with ideas and create social norms, becoming hegemonic in nature and thus largely unquestioned. ISAs are, simply put, mechanisms for social control. This idea is clear within the historical scholarship outlining the power of mass media. However, Althusser concedes that ISAs also provide the opportunity for change – the change is often slow, but it is change all the same. Through alternate forms of media communications within political coverage, like social media, this change from traditional media can be seen now. In this way, in the context of political coverage, the “media becomes both the arena on which the battle for social change is fought, and a player” (Lester, 2010, 52).

The structural theories posited by Althusser (2008) as a means of explaining the work these hegemonic political parties or the mass media do for the State is a crucially important conclusion for this project. It is vital to understand these ISAs and their underlying power. The way in which

political parties create and enforce political subjects support the dominant political powers in the U.S. The media creates and sustains a narrative about elections that then indoctrinate and inform readers. But there are also opportunities for change. In this case study, this was seen in voters' criticism for their own political party, or even moving away from their long-held political identity. It was seen in media coverage that subverted assumptions about the candidates in the election. These structures are strong, but they are not immovable.

Overcoming barriers to recruitment

At the outset of this project, I aimed to recruit interview participants that represented both liberal and conservative perspectives in equal number. However, this turned out to be logistically difficult, and as a result my final project has an unequal number of conservative or Republican perspectives, relative to other political identities. As was detailed in the first manuscript, I largely recruited interview participants through Facebook political groups. I posted on an equal number of Republican and Democrat focused group pages, and a number of non-partisan group pages. Participants were asked to fill out a screening survey, which ensured they were eligible to participate and asked their self-described political identity. Of the 49 people who filled out this survey, none identified as a Republican and only four identified as Independent. The majority of participants identified as Democrats.

This hurdle was frustrating as a researcher, for one of my chief goals was to remain ambiguous in my own political identity so as not to alienate any participants because I was highly interested in including Republican perspectives. In my recruitment post, I identified as a graduate student conducting research about the current congressional election and environmental views. After receiving no interest from Republican respondents, I edited my post to take out any mention of the environment. I then edited it further to mention my specific interest in Republican

viewpoints. My posts received comments like “It’s a trap” or other comments discouraging participation from others. In one case, my post was deleted altogether by page administrators.

The Republicans with whom I was able to interview were recruited individually. One interviewee was quite hostile when we spoke and asserted that it was unfair of me to accuse Republicans of wanting to destroy the environment (although I made no such claim). One interviewee was pleasant during the interview, and even offered to connect me with other Republicans to speak with – but after our interview, they blocked my phone number and did not respond to any of my later e-mails. Another interviewee was quite closed-off and short spoken during his face-to-face interview, and continually asked me questions in an apparent attempt to pin down my own political orientation.

It is difficult to identify exactly why I was met with such hostility or resistance from these participants. My assumption is that in a time of extreme polarization, people are actually afraid, nervous, or simply unwilling to speak with people with whom they disagree in a formal research project. During the course of my background research attending College Republican group meetings at Syracuse University, I heard members recount stories of others calling them “racist” or “sexist” when they simply publicly identified as a Republican. I could not help but think of these stories when facing such resistance from recruiting Republican participants.

In her book *Strangers in their Own Land*, Arlie Russel Hochschild (2016) writes,

“In 1960, when a survey asked American adults whether it would “disturb” them if their child married a member of the other political party, no more than 5 percent of either party answered “yes.” But in 2010, 33 percent of Democrats and 40 percent of Republicans answered “yes.” In fact, partyism, as some call it, now beats race as the source of divisive prejudice.” (p. 6)

I believe it is this “divisive prejudice” that I personally experienced during the course of this project, and it is what I believe the Republicans I attempted to recruit may have already experienced. The imposed partisan divides on Americans are unnatural, but they are very real. And it is part of the problem we face. It is my hope that this project works to illuminate the ways in which these divides play out in this community in Upstate New York, and possibly suggests a way forward.

Caveats and future research

With these findings and conclusions in mind, there are two interesting caveats to this project that is important to point out. First, as discussed in the introduction to this project and in the first manuscript, a weakness of this research was an underrepresentation of conservative or Republican viewpoints. When originally undertaking this research, one of my major goals was to learn more about Republicans and the apparent contradiction between their party platform and some of their personal values when it came to the environment. However, this portion of the project was not as robust as I had hoped.

Second, the content analysis used local paper coverage, but very few respondents with whom I spoke to during my interviews cited local papers as a major source of their political news. Only six interviewees discussed reading the local paper, which included three Republicans, two Democrats, and one Democratic Socialist, and only two of these people mentioned a paper by name, both saying the *Post-Standard*. Some were even critical of the coverage from these local newspapers – Hannah (72, Republican) said there was not much in the local papers about politics and Sydney (77, Democrat) said, “I don't trust the local paper. I think it's slanted.” This is interesting and complicates research that draws connections or even causation between political news and political knowledge (Dalrymple and Scheufele, 2007; Barabas and Jerit, 2009). As

such, it is perhaps more appropriate to treat this local media coverage as a version of reality that represents this moment in history in the NY-24 district (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998), rather than the voters' major source of political information.

The research presented in this thesis fill important gaps in the academic literature. One, a qualitative examination of environmental values, as many studies use positivist methods to explore these topics. Two, a media analysis of non-presidential elections because there are fewer than a dozen content analyses looking at local elections while presidential election coverage is more widely studied. Because this is a case study, additional research that focus on these topics would be of great benefit to further fill these gaps in the literature.

These two manuscripts are contextualized geographically and temporally. Together, they present a case study that intimately examines what is happening here and suggests what may be happening elsewhere, though not *everywhere*. So, with the findings of this case study in mind, it is interesting to now turn to the question: are these trends happening in other places? Is the environment consistently important to people, just not always politically the *most important*? If I undertook the same research project in Anchorage, Alaska in the fall of 2020 during the next election, would I find similar results? There is of course no way to know for sure until someone asks the question. But perhaps.

If this is the case, how do we, as environmentalists, move forward knowing that the environment or conservation issues have thus far failed to grasp the political conversation during elections? Does this mean that environmental policy is doomed, for it is not electorally important? I do not believe so. But adjustments need to be made, both on behalf of politicians running for office, the

media covering elections, and the voters demanding progress on issues like the protections of public lands or climate change or water quality. And on these stages, change is possible.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview recruitment statement

Are you interested in American politics? Are you willing to share your political views for an important research project? I am a graduate student at SUNY-ESF in Syracuse involved in a research project aimed at exploring political and environmental perspectives among voters in New York's 24th Congressional District.

We are looking for participants who reside in New York's 24th Congressional District to answer a brief questionnaire about their own political and environmental views. If you are interested in participating, please complete our short questionnaire today! If you have any questions or would like any additional information, please email crcoffma@syr.edu. You must be 18 years or older to participate.

Appendix B: Interview screening questionnaire

First and last name:

Email Address where you can be reached:

Phone number (not required):

1. What is your age?
2. Do you live in the 24th Congressional district?
 - Yes
 - No
3. With which of the following political parties do you identify?
 - Democrat
 - Republican
 - Independent
 - Other:
 - I do not associate with a political party
4. Do you consider yourself to be politically active or engaged in politics on the local, state or national level?
 - Extremely
 - Somewhat
 - Neutral
 - Not at all
 - Other:
5. Would you be willing to participate in short phone interview with me about your political views?
 - Yes
 - No

Appendix C: Informed consent document for interviewees

Thesis Title: Political partisanship and environmental valuation in New York State
Interview Consent

My name is Chloe Coffman, and I am a Master's student at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) in Syracuse working under Dr. Elizabeth Vidon. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study about environmental values and partisan identity. Involvement in the study is completely voluntary, which means you can choose whether or not to participate and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. This sheet will provide you with some information about the study and what your role in it will be should you choose to participate. If you have any questions at all about the study, my role, or your participation, please don't hesitate to ask and I'll be happy to offer additional information to clarify.

I am interested in learning more about how your partisan political identity informs or affects your environmental values. I am also interested in learning about what the environment means to you, and whether or not you consider it to be an important aspect of society.

Thus, for this project, we are asking people who are politically engaged to participate in a 30-60 minute interview to answer some questions about how they feel about these topics. All information will be kept confidential by the research team. This means that your name will not appear anywhere and your specific answers will not be linked to your name or any identifying information in any way. I will assign a number to your responses, and only my research team will have the key to indicate which number belongs to which participant.

Your participation in this study is strictly for the purposes of this research, and none of your personal or identifying information will be shared. The interview will be audio recorded in order to ensure that transcripts of the session are accurate for the purposes of data analysis. After sessions are transcribed, recordings will be destroyed. We will stop and/or erase the recording at any point upon request. Interview recordings will be stored in a password protected computer in the office of Dr. Vidon, accessible only to her and members of the research team. Any recordings will be kept for up to 2 years from the date of your interview and then erased. Transcripts will be stored in electronic form only, in password protected files on password protected computers in locked offices only accessible to the research team. Interview recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. Password protected transcript files will be retained indefinitely, in accordance with standard data requirements for social science research. Further, publications resulting from this study will contain no identifying information; pseudonyms will be used in the place of actual names. However, whenever one works with email or the internet; there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

There will be no direct financial or other benefit to you for taking part in this study.

The risks to you associated with participating in this study are minimal, and are no greater than risks ordinarily encountered in everyday life. If you do not wish to take part, you have the right to refuse to take part without penalty. If you decide to take part and later no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, also without penalty.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, contact Chloe Coffman at (260) 414-8942 or at ccoffma@syr.edu or Dr. Elizabeth Vidon at 315-470-6908 or at esvidon@esf.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

By continuing, I agree that all of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study.

Appendix D: Semi-structured interview questions

- 1) Do you identify with a political party?
 - If so, which one?
 - If not, how would you classify your political beliefs and values?
- 2) Are you politically active and/or engaged in politics on the local or state level?
 - How would you describe your political activity?
 - What about involvement in national politics?
- 3) How do you feel about the leadership of Congressman Katko here in NY-24?
- 4) Do you know who you are voting for in the 2018 Congressional election
 - If no: How will you decide who to vote for?
 - If yes: How did you make that decision?
- 5) How do you learn about politics in New York state or the country? How do you predominantly get your news?
- 6) What issues are most important to you personally?
- 7) Are environmental issues important to you when you vote in elections?
 - If not, what issues are more important to you when you vote?
 - Do you feel like your political leaders represent you, considering these issues that are most important to you?
- 8) Do you enjoy being in wilderness or nature? What sorts of activities do you enjoy when you are in wilderness?
- 9) Do you often participate in recreational activities in wilderness or nature?
 - What sorts of recreational activities do you like best?
- 10) Over the last century, the U.S. federal government has designated millions of acres of land as protected, often through mechanisms such as the Antiquities Act, which requires no Congressional approval and is seen by some as Presidential fiat. While these endeavors have historically been applauded by both conservationists and preservationists, the issue has become one of heated partisan contention in the last decade, particularly with the current administration's push to declassify, reduce, or rescind protections of many of these lands and open them up for resource extraction. With recent decisions such as the 85% reduction of the Bears Ears National Monument and increasing suggestions that these lands will be leased and drilled for oil and gas, the protected land issue only gets more and more fractious.
 - Have you been following this issue?
 - If so, how do you feel about this? Where do you stand on Federal protection of lands generally and through mechanisms like the Antiquities Act specifically?
 - How do you feel about the reduction and rescission of some of the National Monuments?

- Do you agree with opening these lands up for oil and gas drilling, or do you think they should be left wild? Or something else?

11) Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to add or to talk about further? Is there anything you'd like to return to that we didn't spend adequate time discussing?

Appendix E: Content analysis codebook

Variable	Category	Notes	Coding
Newspaper	1= Post-Standard, 2= Oswego News, 3= Auburn Pub	The newspaper where the article was published	1,2,3
Type of article	1 = News, 2 = Editorial, 3 = Wire story, 4 = LTE	The type of article is indicated on the story itself	1,2,3,4
Candidate mentioned in the headline or lede	John Katko	Article mentions Katko in headline or first paragraph	1
	Dana Balter	Article mentions Balter in headline or first paragraph	2
	Both	Article mentions both Katko and Balter in headline or first paragraph	3
Issue coverage (based on issues of interest amongst interviewees)	Abortion	Reproductive rights, Roe v Wade, abortion laws	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Criminal Justice	Prison reform, policing, drug reform	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Education	Local, state, or federal education issues	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Equality	Broad category to capture equality across sex, race, sexual orientation, or sociodemographic status	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Environment	Climate change, land management or public lands, energy, water quality	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Guns	Gun rights, laws, second amendment protection	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Healthcare	Health care system in NYS or the country, prescription drugs, high health care costs, Medicaid	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Immigration	Border security, the Wall, Sanctuary cities, immigrants, reform in policies	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Economy	Discussion of taxes, jobs, unemployment, economic health, economic development	0=Absent, 1=Present
	SCOTUS	Nominating individuals to the Supreme Court	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Senior Concerns	Medicare, Social Security, retirement	0=Absent, 1=Present
NONE	No mention of the issues, article is entirely focused on the campaign and the candidates (no frame analysis)	0=Absent, 1=Present	
Issue Frame	Positive	The frame of the issue coverage is supportive	1
	Neutral	The frame of the issue coverage is neutral, and purely fact	2
	Negative	The frame of the issue coverage is critical or negative	3

Content Analysis Codebook (cont.)

Campaign or candidate attribute coverage (Golan and Wanta, 2001)	Trust and availability	Trustworthiness of the candidate amongst the public, other officials, voting record; availability to prove that trust; Accountability	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Electability/Endorsement	The likeliness of the candidate winning or losing; demonstrated support for the candidate through an endorsement; a poll showing a candidate leading or falling behind	0=Absent, 1=Present
	On the attack	The candidate is being attacked or criticized; Discussion or description of the drama of the campaign	0=Absent, 1=Present
	Plan/vision	There is a demonstrated forethought on their plan for the future for the county, state, or country	0=Absent, 1=Present
Attribute Frame	Positive	The frame of the attribute coverage is supportive for the candidate	1
	Neutral	The frame of the attribute coverage is neutral, purely fact-based for the candidate	2
	Negative	The frame of the attribute coverage is critical or negative for the candidate	3
Candidate	John Katko	The attribute is about Katko	1
	Dana Balter	The attribute is about Balter	2
	Both	The attribute is about both candidates	3

Curriculum Vitae

CHLOE R. COFFMAN

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cell: (260) 414-8942

Education

SUNY-ESF (Syracuse, NY)

MS, Environmental Science – *Human Dimensions of the Environment*

Graduation: December 2019

Syracuse University (Syracuse, NY)

MPA, Master of Public Administration – *Financial Management*

Graduation: June 2019

New York University (New York, NY)

BA, Social and Cultural Analysis – *Urban Studies & Africana Studies*

Graduation: May 2014

Professional Experience

Chloe Coffman Designs (Syracuse, NY)

Freelance Graphic Designer | June 2017 - present

Duties include: Layout design and website development specialization; Represents complex data in visual infographics effectively; Independent organization of all projects and client communications

The Public Interest Network (Philadelphia, PA)

Design Associate | March 2015 - May 2017

Duties included: Produced member communications materials, creative products, and messaging; Effectively managed multiple team-wide projects and their budgets, including annual reports, newsletters, and the photography department

PennEnvironment (Philadelphia, PA)

Federal Field Associate | August 2014 – March 2015

Duties included: Organized local elected officials to build support for federal climate initiatives; Coordinated grassroots volunteers and media coverage for PennEnvironment campaigns; Recruited and interviewed new applicants for jobs with PennEnvironment

Fort Wayne Children's Zoo (Fort Wayne, IN)

Instructor | June – August 2011, 2012, 2013

Duties included: Led a group of 5 to 12-year-old campers on daily trips into the zoo with a co-counselor; Taught the campers about the zoo animals and their habitats; Managed a team of camp volunteers each week

**Research
Experience**

SUNY-ESF (Syracuse, NY)

Master's Thesis | December 2019

Completed manuscript style thesis to analyze the connections between a local congressional election and environmental values; Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews and media content analysis

Syracuse University (Syracuse, NY)

MPA Capstone | June 2019

Conducted a cost benefit analysis for photovoltaic installation versus increased insulation in new home construction to measure its effects on capital costs and energy use in the home; Used Department of Energy software *EnergyPlus+* to run simulations of home energy-use

AAG Annual Meeting (Washington, D.C.)

Conference presentation | April 2019

Presented preliminary findings about Master's thesis research at the American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting

PennEnvironment Research and Policy Center (Philadelphia, PA)

Policy research and recommendations report | March 2015

Researched and wrote report highlighting the threat of trains carrying Bakkan shale oil across the country, and specifically in Pennsylvania; Coordinated and assisted data collection and analysis from the FracTracker Alliance

**Teaching
Experience**

Public Speaking Lab at SUNY-ESF (Syracuse, NY)

Public Speaking Tutor | August 2019 – December 2019

Tutored students in one-on-one sessions to improve their public and class presentations and to decrease public speaking anxiety

SUNY-ESF (Syracuse, NY)

Graduate Assistant | August 2017 – May 2019

Served as the Teaching Assistant for SRE 325 (Energy Systems); SRE 422 (Energy Markets and Regulation); EST 231 (Environmental Geology); EST 321 (Government and the Environment)

Writing Resource Center at SUNY-ESF (Syracuse, NY)

Writing Tutor | January 2018 – May 2018

Tutored students in one-on-one sessions to improve their writing skills and edit written assignments

Skills

Software: Adobe Creative Suite – InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, Premiere Pro; Microsoft Excel; Stata

Leadership: Project management; Intern management

Communication: Effective and experienced public speaker

Languages: French (conversational); basic HTML coding