

# Understanding Our Enemies:

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## The Role of Implicit and Explicit Measures of Individual Conflict Orientation in Politics

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PRELIMINARY DRAFT: PLEASE DO NOT CIRCULATE WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR

Can discomfort with argument and disagreement lead to systematic differences in both individual levels of media consumption and political engagement? If citizens are aware of their reactions to argument, they can make clear choices to minimize discomfort in the presence of conflict or maximize the gains they draw from a combative environment. However, if conflict orientation is a less explicit psychological process, it becomes harder to control and can effect citizens who encounter conflictual situations on a regular basis. In this paper, I use a Brief Implicit Association Test (BIAT) and self-report measures of conflict orientation to examine the relationship between attitudes towards debate and individuals' decisions to engage in politics or acquire information from various types of media. While the BIAT suffers from design flaws that prohibit substantial interpretation of participants' results, analysis of the explicit measures suggest limited support for the hypothesis that increased conflict avoidance decreases political participation and that those who are most willing to engage in conflict are also the most likely to use certain types of media—specifically radio.

Inundated with negative advertising, antagonistic cable television programming and campaign attacks that emphasize candidates' personal lives over their issue positions, Americans are encouraged to embrace the metaphor of politics as war. With the media as a battlefield, politicians face off against one another in heated debates, pushing their party's policy positions and issues at the expense of their opponent. In this context, an individual's reaction to disagreement and debate—what I term their orientation towards conflict—becomes a vital element of their engagement with media and politics more generally.

The willingness to approach or avoid conflict-laden situations is a characteristic that varies across individuals; while some are extremely comfortable in confronting those close to them when there is disagreement and are the first to jump into heated debate, other citizens are more hesitant, and will withdraw from conversation all together before they will raise the specter of argument. In this paper, I examine individuals' awareness of their own conflict orientation through self-report measures and compare these responses to their implicit attitudes towards agreement and debate as measured through a Brief Implicit Association Test (BIAT). Results of these two tests suggest that there is a weak correlation between citizens' perceptions of their approach to and their implicit attitudes towards conflict—individuals frequently perceive themselves as being more conflict accepting than they are implicitly and frequently have mismatched implicit and explicit preferences. Furthermore, I find limited evidence for the relationship between either implicit or explicit measures of conflict orientation and participants' decisions to consume particular types of media or engage in particular types of political activity.

### *Individual Orientation towards Conflict*

Before discussing the ways in which individuals react to conflict, it is important to first understand what is meant by the term conflict itself. While conflict can manifest itself in a range of ways, I am concerned solely with communication conflict, characterized by opposition or incompatibility in the information being conveyed between two (or more) individuals. Harary and Batell (1981) argue that communication conflict can take two forms, directional and content. Directional conflict occurs whenever two communicative actions of the same form oppose one another. This type of conflict can be seen in the two debating political candidates who attempt to impress their opinions on one another while never listening to what their opponent is saying, or the girls and guys at a high school prom,

standing on opposite sides of the gymnasium hoping that someone will ask them to dance. Content conflict, on the other hand, occurs when the message transmitted by one individual is incompatible with that received by the second individual. In this case, conflict is manifest in the management's offer of reduced working hours when the union only wants to discuss higher wages, or the boss's praise that falls on the deaf ears of the eternal pessimist (Harary and Batell 1981).

Conflict can also grow out of nonverbal communication, including the physical distance between those interacting as well as actions such as eye-rolling and other gestures indicating a lack of respect. Physical distance between two people who disagree has been found to affect individual attitudes and reactions to that disagreement, with close, more intimate settings intensifying responses (Middlemist, Knowles and Matter 1976). Mansbridge (1983), too, points out that in situations of political conflict, bringing people closer together can increase feelings of aggression and anger. Furthermore, these reactions hold true not only in face-to-face interaction but also in individual reactions to televised events; conflict and incivility on television, coupled with camera angles that increase feelings of physical closeness to the subjects, have been found to decrease individuals' trust in government and their perception of opposing viewpoints as legitimate (D. C. Mutz 2007, Mutz and Reeves 2005).

While conflictual interactions may result in the increased likelihood of specific reactions from individuals, these responses are understood to be dictated by a combination of cultural and individual-level factors. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) distinguish between instrumental and expressive conflict, in which the former is marked by "opposing practices or goals," while the latter stems from a "desire to release tension or from hostile feelings," (154). They then dichotomize cultures into low- or high-context, arguing that low-context cultures like the United States or Germany characterize conflict as more instrumental, while high-context areas like China or Korea are more likely to see conflict as expressive and therefore have trouble separating the conflict event from their affective response. These cultural systems not only explain how citizens will respond to conflict, but also their attitudes towards controversy. Attitudes in the U.S., for example, are characterized by an action orientation, leading the players in a conflict to respond more directly and confrontationally to a difference of opinion. Ting-Toomey (1986) also acknowledges that within one type of culture, there can be sub-groups that take on the opposite characteristics. In a study of white and African American interpersonal communication, she finds that while whites exhibit the solution-oriented responses of a low-context culture, blacks reflect a high-context culture through their use of more controlling styles of communicating.

Cultural trends may affect the population mean for the standard reaction to a conflict situation, but there remain individual traits that can also affect responses to argument or disagreement. Graziano et al (1996) find that individual differences in agreeableness—one of the major dispositional personality traits incorporated into the Five Factor Model, “the most widely used and extensively researched measure of personality”—are systematically related to patterns of conflict and conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships. Specifically, individuals that received a low score on a scale of agreeable tendencies were also more likely than high-agreeable individuals to see “power-assertion” tactics as solutions to conflict. Similarly, Gerber et al (2010) found that Big Five traits were associated with likelihood of exposure to disagreement, in topics from politics to sports. Their findings that higher levels of agreeableness were weakly associated with increased willingness to engage in discussion provide a small measure of support to Graziano and his coauthors, but they also find robust effects of openness, another Big Five trait. A highly open person is more likely to engage in discussion when they know they’ll agree with their discussant, suggesting that increasing openness also increases an individual’s desire to avoid conflict.

### *Conflict and Politics*

Clearly, one’s orientation towards conflict is premised at least partially on culture and individual variation in disposition and personality. However, the response to a conflict situation is more important in some contexts than in others, and the situation itself can play a greater role than individual personality traits in the resulting behavioral response. Utle, Richardson and Pilkington (1989), for example, find that “although personality factors may play a role in response to conflict, one should also consider the importance of situational factors, particularly the target of the conflict interaction, in attempting to understand responses to conflict. While they determine that personality traits like high need for achievement or nurturance will systematically drive certain individuals to more constructive responses to conflict and individuals who report a high need for dominance or understanding will be more likely to respond in a dominating manner, Utle and her coauthors argue that the situational context shapes the relative evaluations of concern for self and other that determine the conflict management style ultimately used.

That being said, the political arena is premised on conflict over resources, policy outcomes, and the power to govern. Disagreement, a form of the content conflict outlined by Harary and Batell (1981), is a frequent topic of debate among democratic theorists, some of whom argue that it is necessary to a successfully functioning polity. Exposure to opinions that are different than one’s own, they argue, is

essential for the ability to understand contrasts between alternatives, and allows citizens to form valid opinions and appreciate others' views (Fishkin 1991, Arendt 1968). Alternatively, deliberation can enhance inequality between citizens who have unequal access to resources and talents that facilitate deliberate thought. Sanders (1997) points out that some Americans—whether by innate talent or education in the practice of argument—are likely to be more persuasive than others and that others are systematically less likely to be listened to, regardless of how well reasoned their arguments are. Finally, there are scholars who fear that encouraging adversarial perspectives not only breaks down feelings of community and civic engagement, but also beliefs about individual efficacy in changing situations or solving problems (Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words* 1998, Putnam 2000). We should be concerned, then, about the ways in which conflict manifests itself in democratic society and its potential to discourage engagement on the part of some citizens.

As Deborah Tannen argues, “When a certain kind of interaction is the norm, those who feel comfortable with that type of interaction are drawn to participate, and those who do not feel comfortable with it recoil and go elsewhere” (1998, 20). In American politics, conflict has become the norm, with the style of political discourse—particularly media discourse—and nature of the electoral campaign encouraging and highlighting disagreement and deadlock over compromise or similarity. Therefore, it follows that those who are more comfortable in conflict situations—individuals with an approach, rather than avoidant, orientation towards conflict—will be more likely to engage in politics, while those who are uncomfortable in the face of argument will withdraw (Ulbig and Funk, *Conflict Avoidance and Political Participation* 1999). In their examination of the relationship between conflict avoidance and political participation, Ulbig and Funk use data from the 1990 Citizen Participation Study to demonstrate that individual differences in conflict avoidance influence levels of participation in a variety of acts. Specifically, they find that while there is no relationship between the level of conflict avoidance and voting or contacting elected officials, those citizens with higher propensity to avoid argument are also significantly less likely to participate in political protest, support campaign activity and engage in political discussion. However, their measure of conflict avoidance is a three point scale that specifically asks respondents if they “try to avoid getting into political discussions because they can be unpleasant, whether they enjoy discussing politics even though it sometimes leads to arguments, or whether they are somewhere in between” (1999, 271-272). Based on this operationalization, it is unsurprising that they find the strongest correlation between whether respondents enjoyed political discussion and whether or not they actually talked about politics regularly.

### *Measuring Orientation toward Conflict*

To this point, the only data collected on individual orientation towards conflict as it relates to political phenomena have been extracted from laboratory experiments or a single scale in a few cross-sectional surveys (S. B. Goldstein 1999, D. Mutz 2006, Ulbig and Funk 1999). While much of this research emphasizes the decision to engage in political discussion as a way of evaluating one's interest in argument, Goldstein's (1999) Conflict Communication Scale emphasizes a broader range of conflict that is less tightly linked with discussion and political engagement.

While many of the psychological scales designed to assess individual responses to conflict situations are derived from research assessing dysfunctional domestic relationships or organizational behavior and managerial processes, the Conflict Communication Scale (CCS) is designed to assess cultural and individual differences in conflict communication style while maintaining reliability, validity and minimal sensitivity to social desirability biases. It contains five subscales measuring individual attitudes towards confrontation, public and private behavior, self-disclosure, emotional expression, and conflict avoidance and approach. The full scale consists of 75 questions, 15 within each subgroup, making it impractical for use in traditional political science survey research (S. B. Goldstein, Construction and Validation of a Conflict Communication Scale 1999). In a political application of this scale, Mutz and Reeves (2005) develop an abbreviated version in which respondents are asked to rank their level of agreement with the following statements: (1) I hate arguments. (2) I find conflicts exciting. (3) I enjoy challenging the opinions of others. (4) Arguments don't bother me. (5) I feel upset after an argument. These five statements are drawn exclusively from the conflict avoidance/approach subscale; however given that political conflict—particularly in a mediated context—is inherently public and social, I argue that elements of the public/private behavior subscale should also be considered: (1) I avoid arguing in public. (2) I feel uncomfortable seeing others argue in public. (3) It wouldn't bother me to have an argument in a restaurant. While individual response to argumentation is the primary concept of interest in this study, and therefore should be substantively represented in the operationalization of orientation towards conflict, the public nature of political conflict, particularly in the context of the media, is also essential to understanding variation in reactions.

Even in light of these additions to the Conflict Communication Scale, it is still possible that an explicit set of questions does not adequately capture individuals' true reactions to conflict situations. Given the societal tendency towards an "argument culture" articulated by both Tannen (1998) and Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), explicit measures of individual conflict orientation may fail to fully

capture the extent of citizens' aversion to or acceptance of political argument. The tension between personal discomfort with disagreement, the social expectation that Americans should confront issues in a forthright, assertive manner and the simultaneous emphasis on norms of inclusion and equality in conversation may not lead individuals to feel pressured to respond in a particular way to argument, but it may make it difficult for citizens be aware of their true feelings about conflict, whether face-to-face with their friends or when watching televised political debates (Eliasoph 1998). It is in light of this friction that this study also examines implicit attitudes towards conflict using a Brief Implicit Association Test (BIAT).

The concept of unconscious or implicit attitudes in psychology dates as early as Plato, but has become an increasingly popular area of social psychological research since the 1990s, when the discipline experienced the "implicit revolution" (Whyte 1962, Greenwald 2011). The term implicit social cognition, in turn, was developed to explain the finding that individuals held egalitarian explicit attitudes and beliefs but nonetheless demonstrated intergroup biases in their behavior (Nosek, Graham and Hawkins 2010). However, it has since been applied to a range of political phenomena, predicting voting behavior, and the desire to protect constitutional speech. Like ideological identification, where the association is difficult to articulate in self-report, individual conflict orientation is a construct that can be understood through the lens of implicit political cognition.

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is just one of many measures designed to assess individuals' implicit attitudes. It assesses the association between a target concept and an attitude through participant response times in categorizing a variety of stimuli displayed on a computer screen (Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz 1998). In one of the most familiar IATs, that measuring positive and negative associations with whites and African Americans, the procedure starts by assigning one category to a response using the right hand, and one to a response using the left. For example, "black" would be assigned to the left-hand key, and "white" to the right-hand key. When a stimuli appears on the screen (in this case, a picture of either a black or white person's face), the participant pushes the key that correctly categorizes the stimuli. The process is repeated for a series of stimuli related to the valence dimension—words associated with "pleasant" and "unpleasant". Finally, there are a series of trials in which the target concept (black-white) and the attribute dimension (pleasant/unpleasant) are combined, with the left key representing some combination of target concept and attribute (say, "black" and "pleasant") and the right key representing the alternative ("white" and "unpleasant"). These combinations are altered throughout a series of 4 trials. Those with an implicit bias towards whites will

have faster response times when “white” and “pleasant” are associated with the same key than when “black” and “pleasant” are associated. The “IAT effect” is defined as “the difference in mean latency between...two conditions,” and tends to result in large effect sizes (Cohen’s  $d=.78$ ) (Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz 1998).

The Brief Implicit Association Test (BIAT) contains the same four-category design and stimulus-response mappings as the standard IAT, but with substantially fewer trials. Furthermore, the BIAT focuses on just two of the block’s four categories, with the right-hand key used to indicate that a stimulus belongs in the two categories shown and the left-hand key signifying a stimulus that does not belong in either of the two categories shown on the screen (Sriram and Greenwald 2009). Using a BIAT rather than a traditional IAT substantially reduces the time a participant needs to complete the task and reduces spontaneous variation in their performance strategy. For example, while a participant can mentally prepare for all four response mappings in an IAT (*black-left, pleasant-left, white-right, unpleasant-right*), they may alternatively choose to focus on just two mappings—knowing *black* and *pleasant* will require a left-hand response and everything else will be right. The BIAT removes this source of variation by forcing all participants to take the second strategy (Sriram and Greenwald 2009).

### *Hypotheses*

Keeping in mind these related measures of implicit and explicit conflict avoidance, I hypothesize several relationships between conflict orientation, media consumption, and political participation, as well as between implicit and explicit attitudes towards conflict. First, I examine Tannen’s suggestion that American culture pushes citizens to at least appear to accept and be comfortable with conflict. If the “argument culture” is present, explicit measures of conflict should lean towards conflict acceptance, and they should do so more strongly than implicit measures, which may be less affected by this cultural influence.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Overall, explicit measures of conflict orientation will suggest a greater preference for approach over avoidance than will implicit measures.*

Furthermore, if there truly is this disjuncture between individual perceptions of conflict orientation and their implicit attitudes, individuals will fall into a 2x2 typology in which their implicit and explicit attitudes align or are mismatched, as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Alignment of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes**

		Explicit	
		Conflict Avoidant	Conflict Approaching
Implicit	Conflict Avoidant	Aligned	Unaligned—More conflict avoidant than one thinks
	Conflict Approaching	Unaligned—more conflict approaching than one thinks	Aligned

While I have no *a priori* hypotheses about whether individuals are more likely to have aligned or unaligned preferences, there should be some number of individuals in each of the quadrants above.

*H2: There will be individuals who have mismatched implicit and explicit orientations towards conflict in addition to those whose implicit and explicit orientations align.*

While ideology and some other political beliefs or attitudes are more accurately predicted by an individual's implicit attitudes than explicit self-report measures, I believe that implicit and explicit attitudes towards conflict will have differential effects on behaviors and attitudes. Explicit conflict orientation will drive behavioral outcomes, such as participation or the decision to watch a particular show. Implicit attitudes towards conflict, on the other hand, are more likely to explain the physiological or psychological response to engaging in that particular behavior.

For example, imagine Jeff has mismatched implicit and explicit conflict orientations. He believes himself to be conflict approaching, and is willing to debate the death penalty with his family over Thanksgiving and has frequently participated in protests of the war in Iraq. However, if Jeff was to take an implicit association test of his willingness to approach or avoid conflict, he would find that he is implicitly conflict avoidant. While this does not change his likelihood of participating in protests or debate, it does lead him to feel more anxious and stressed during these events. However, because this study only asks participants about their political behavior and not about their level of anxiety or stress while involved in those processes, I can only hypothesize about the *behavioral* impact of individuals' implicit and explicit attitudes.

*H<sub>3a</sub>. The greater an individual's explicit orientation toward conflict, the greater their likelihood of participating in political activity or consuming greater amounts of political news.*

*H<sub>3b</sub>. The greater an individual's implicit orientation towards conflict, the greater their likelihood of participating in political activity or consuming greater amounts of political news.*

## Methods

In order to test the hypotheses described above, approximately 1800 visitors to the Project Implicit<sup>1</sup> website were asked to complete a study that consisted of two parts—a series of explicit measures reporting conflict approach and avoidance (the CCS), media usage, and political participation, and a BIAT designed to capture implicit associations between the concept of *approach* and communication conflict.

The pool of participants on Project Implicit's research site is not a random sample of the U.S. population, raising concerns—similar to those raised about student samples—about the external validity of these findings (see Sears 1986 for concerns about student samples in experiments). However, these concerns are reduced through both randomization within the study itself and by a closer examination of importance of the sample in understanding the relationship of interest. First, those who do elect to participate in the organization's studies are randomly assigned among any of the projects running at that time. Elements of the study itself are also counterbalanced, so that participants are randomly assigned to see either the implicit or explicit measures first and then randomly assigned to see a particular set of categories within the BIAT first. Furthermore, much research has been done to establish the appropriateness and validity of other types of online samples (Berensky et al 2012, Chang and Krosnick 2009).

The BIAT compared participant response times in comparing four categories: *approach*, *avoid*, *agree*, and *debate*. Table 1 presents these categories and the stimuli shown for each category. Previous research suggests that a BIAT reacts in expected ways only when the positively valenced attribute is the focal category on the screen (Sriram and Greenwald 2009). Therefore, *approach*, rather than *avoid*, was chosen as the attribute classification to be displayed on the screen, while the concept classification (*agree* and *debate*) alternated across trials. Figure 1 shows both the instruction screen and an example of a participant's screen during the administration of the BIAT.

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<sup>1</sup> Project Implicit is a non-profit dedicated to investigating implicit social cognition that is run by Tony Greenwald (University of Washington), Mahzarin Banaji (Harvard University), and Brian Nosek (University of Virginia). For more information, visit <http://projectimplicit.net/about.html>.

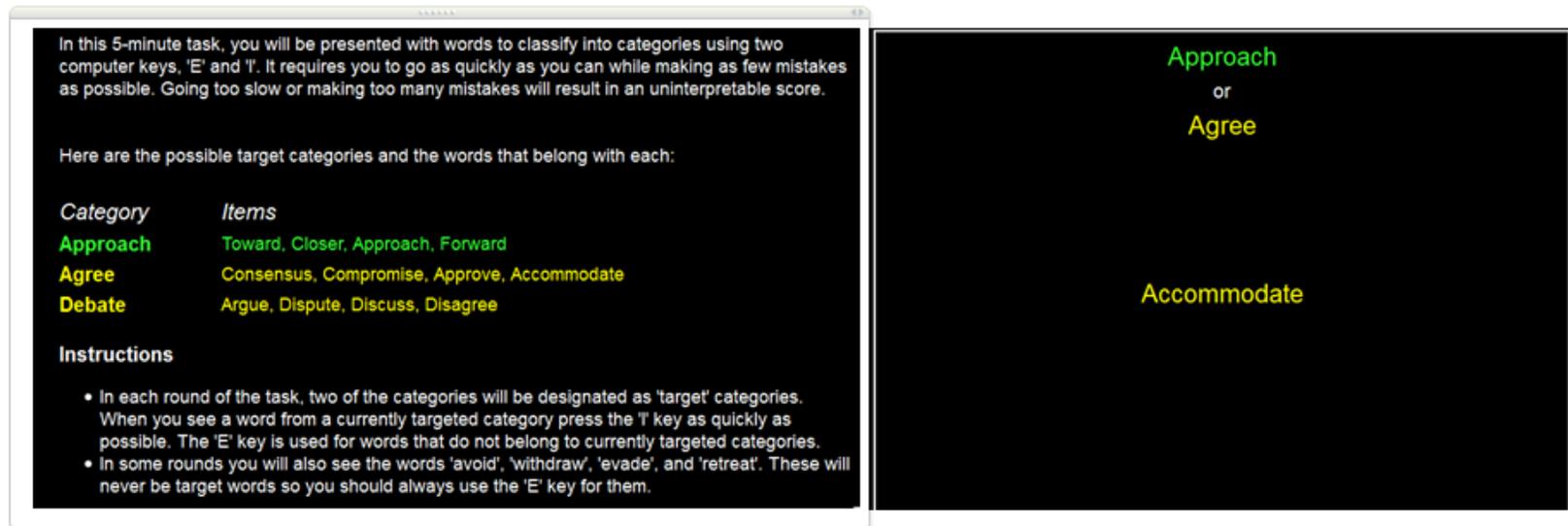
**Table 2: BIAT Categories and Related Items**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Debate</b>
Toward	Withdraw	Consensus	Argue
Closer	Evade	Compromise	Dispute
Forward	Retreat	Approve	Discuss
Approach	Avoid	Accommodate	Disagree

Why these four categories? A central component to the success of both the IAT and the BIAT is the ability of the participant to differentiate between the four categories; it should not be difficult to place the stimuli into their respective groups. The first iteration of the concept categories (agree and debate) used “agreement” and “disagreement,” which likely have a strong valence confound—agreement is seen as good while disagreement is bad. By transforming the “disagreement” category into “debate,” both concept categories are more likely to be seen as positive, and the stimuli therefore reflect positive spins on each concept.

The survey portion of the study contains two portions of the CCS discussed above—the Conflict Approach/Avoidance Scale and the Public/Private Behavior Scale—as well as NES questions about political participation, political ideology and partisanship, and media usage (see Appendix I for the detailed list of questions). Project Implicit also collects standard demographic information about all study participants, including age, race, education, and ideology.

Figure 1: BIAT Block Instructions and Stimuli

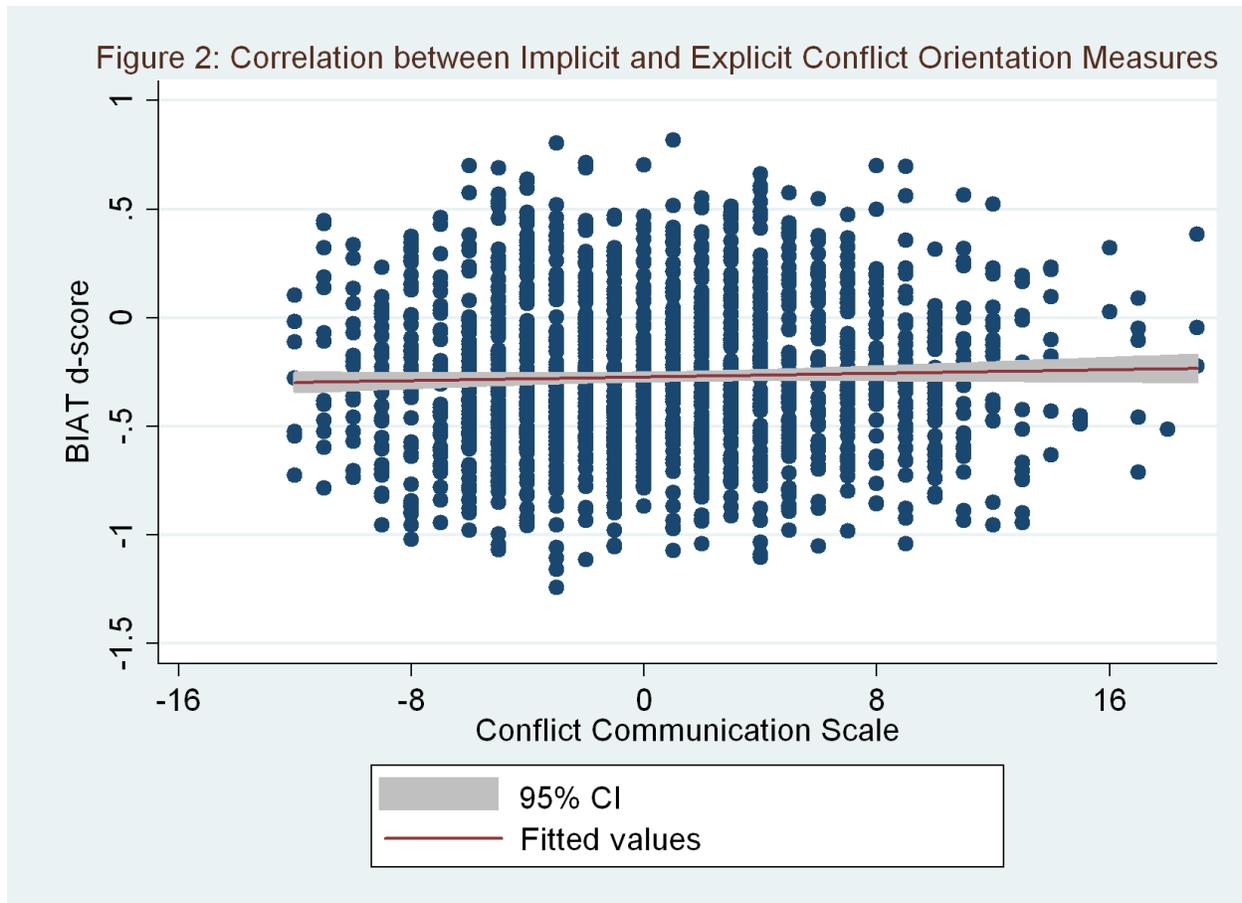


The first screen exemplifies the instruction screen at the beginning of each block, in which participants see the list of words associated with each category. The picture on the right demonstrates the screen a participant would see while taking the BIAT. Because the word “accommodate” is a stimuli for the “approach” category, the participant would press the right-hand, or “I,” key. If the displayed word had been “argue,” they would have pressed the “E,” or left-hand, key.

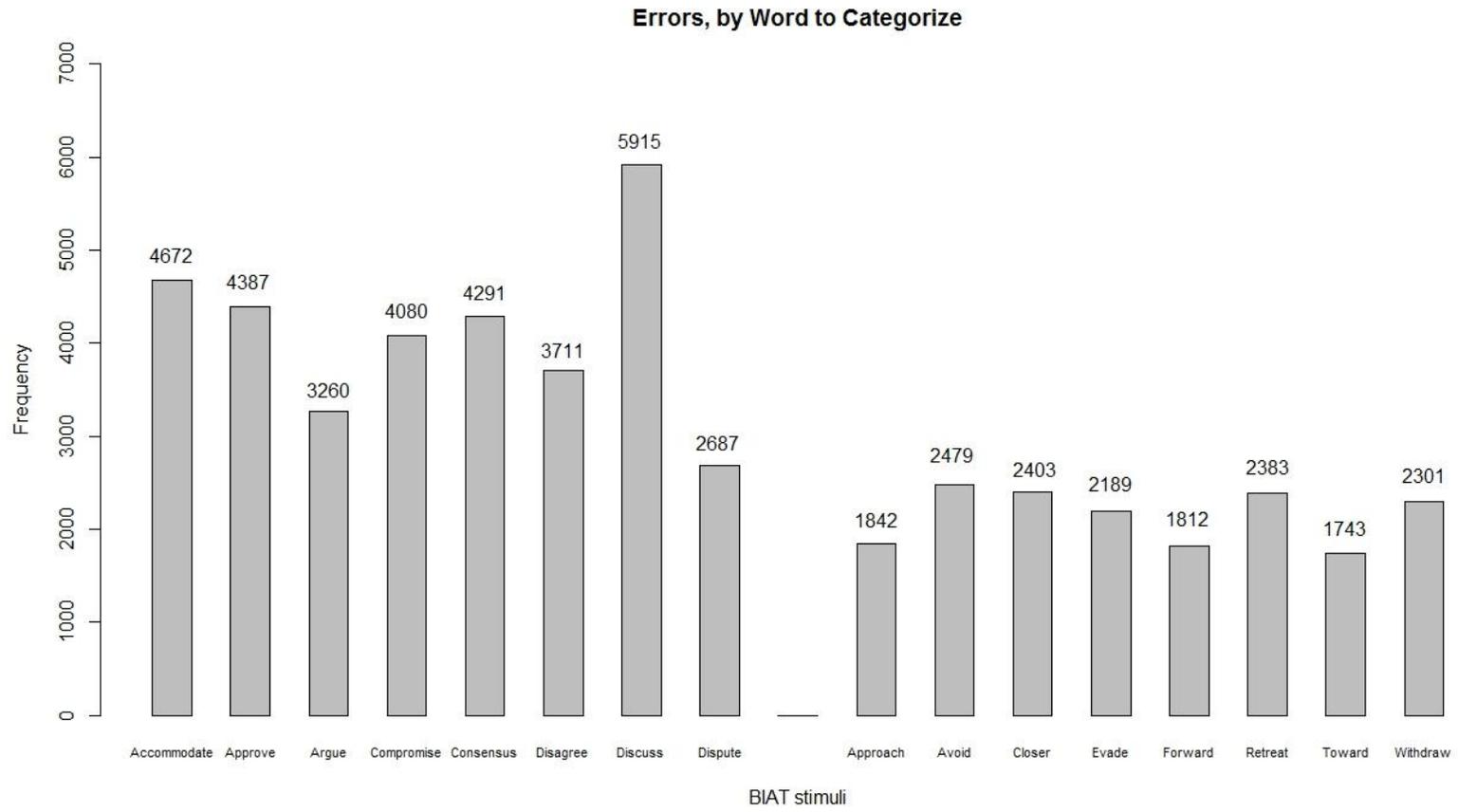
## Findings

Because the study was administered over the internet, participants were able to drop out of the study at any point. Furthermore, because much of the analysis conducted for this paper required measures of both implicit and explicit conflict orientation, participant responses were only included in the dataset if they completed both the BIAT and answered the Conflict Communication Scale (CCS) portion of the explicit questionnaire. Furthermore, respondents who had extremely fast and extremely slow BIAT response times to the trials (those below 300 milliseconds and above 10,000 milliseconds), as they were both theoretically uninformative and distort means and variances (Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz 1998). Removal of these responses left a total of 1834 individuals who had completed both sections. These respondents were more likely to be female (65 percent), leaned towards the Democratic Party and liberal ideology and had an average age of 33 (see Appendix I for full table of demographics).

Turning to respondents' implicit and explicit attitudes towards conflict, it is possible to examine the relationship between the two measures. Implicit attitudes are captured in the IAT d-score, a scoring algorithm based in the average response times to the set of trials. This score ranges from -2 to 2, with positive numbers indicating a greater preference for the congruent pair—association of *avoid* with *debate* (conflict avoidance). The Conflict Communication Scale is reflected in an additive scale centered on zero, with -16 representing self-report of extreme willingness to engage in conflict and 16 indicating extreme conflict avoidance. The average d-score for the sample was -0.27, while the average score on the combined CCS was a 0.52. Both the d-score and mean CCS score are significantly different from zero ( $t = -29.1, 3.8$ , respectively), suggesting that there actually might be a slight tendency towards acknowledgement of conflict avoidance in the sample, but implicit interest in engaging conflict. However, as can be seen in Figure 2, there is essentially zero correlation between the two measures ( $r = .032$ ).



A correlation of 0.032—essentially zero—between the two primary orientation measures is particularly weak in comparison to other implicit-explicit relationships explored using the IAT; Nosek (2007) finds that across 56 domains, the median implicit-explicit correlation is 0.46. So why the low correlation in this particular test? Investigation of the error rates—how frequently participants wrongly categorized words—for each stimulus indicate that the test was too hard for most participants, particularly when asked to categorize the agree/debate words (see Figure 3 for a breakdown by word). Because the implicit association test is not accurately measuring the appropriate concept, it is impossible to assess the relevant hypotheses (2 and 3b). Instead, I will focus on the relationship between explicit conflict orientation and engagement with the media and in politics.



**Figure 3**

While this particular iteration of the BIAT cannot offer much insight into Americans' orientations towards conflict, it is still important to note some key results from this sample in regards to explicit measures of attitudes toward conflict. While I expected explicit conflict orientation to be biased towards conflict approaching attitudes, the average score on the total CCS is basically zero, but tilts slightly towards conflict avoidance ( $\bar{x} = 0.52$ , when the scale runs from -16 to positive 16). When broken down into the two components—the conflict approach/avoidance scale and public/private behavior scale—participants respond in a more avoidant manner on the conflict approach/avoidance ( $\bar{x} = 1.67$ , scale from -10 to 10) but are more willing to tolerate or engage in public conflict ( $\bar{x} = -1.15$ , scale from -6 to 6). The difference between the two component scales suggests that each might differentially effect engagement and consumption, and therefore many models discussed below will examine the dependent variable of interest not only in conjunction with the full CCS scores but also with the component scales individually and in tandem.

Looking first at the relationship between conflict orientation and the decision to vote, it becomes clear that no matter how the measures of explicit conflict orientation are broken down, they have a statistically insignificant effect on participants' decisions to vote in the last election. However, more traditional predictors of likelihood to vote do play a role, with stronger partisans and those with a greater overall interest in politics responding that they were more likely to vote (see Table 3).

There are several possible explanations for the null effects of conflict orientation on participants' likelihood of voting, above and beyond a simple lack of relationship between the two variables. First, it is possible that there is less effect on political participation as manifest through voting because voting is a relatively easy and private act—one does not have to make their opinions known or risk disagreeing with someone over their choices when they enter a voting booth. Additionally, it is possible that the lack of relationship is a result of question-wording in the survey. The voting question asked "Did you vote in the last election," which suggests that the act of voting occurred before the measurement of conflict orientation. It is therefore theoretically possible (although, I would argue, somewhat unlikely) that the causal arrow goes in the opposite direction, or that there was some event between the decision to vote and the measuring of conflict orientation that could have altered participants' orientation at the time of their decision to vote and their responding to the questions asked as part of my study.

**Table 3: The Effects of Conflict Orientation on the Likelihood of Voting**

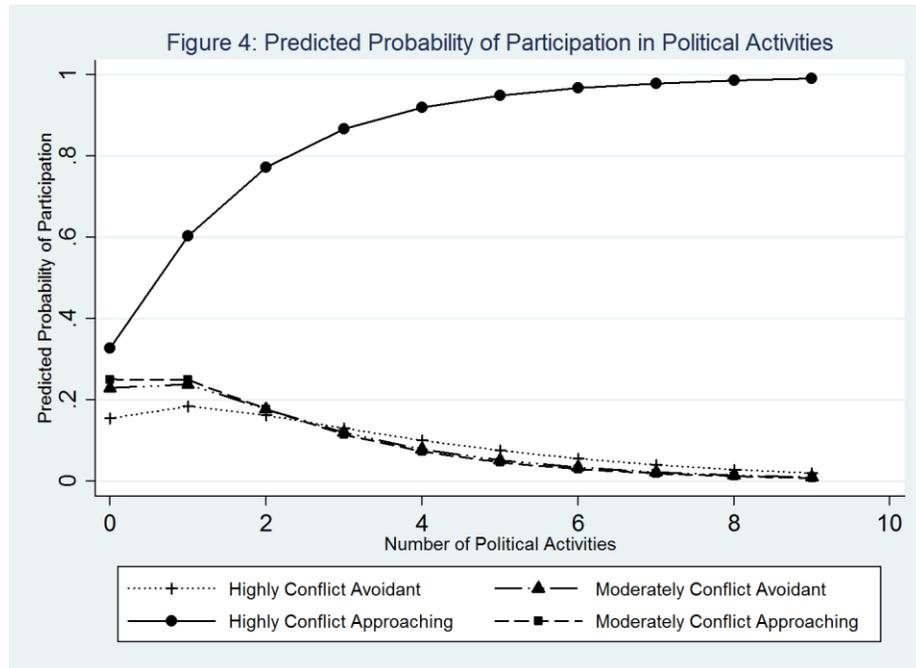
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Total Conflict Orientation	-0.0058 (0.0016)	--	--	--
Approach/Avoidance Orientation	--	-0.0011 (0.024)	--	-0.014 (0.028)
Public/Private Conflict Orientation	--	--	-0.0036 (0.036)	0.0076 (0.043)
Party ID	0.23 (0.16)	0.23 (0.46)	0.24 (0.16)	0.23 (0.16)
Party ID strength	0.46* (0.19)	0.46* (0.19)	0.46* (0.19)	0.45* (0.19)
Ideology	-0.025 (0.081)	-0.024 (0.081)	-0.026 (0.081)	-0.025 (0.081)
Political Interest	0.35* (0.10)	0.35* (0.10)	0.34* (0.099)	0.35* (0.10)
X <sup>2</sup>	417.4	417.4	417.2	417.5
N	1050	1050	1050	1050

Cell entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Logit models also controlled for a range of demographic features, including race, ethnicity, age, and gender. \*p<0.05

Even if the act of voting is less affected by an individual's conflict orientation, that orientation may influence other types of political participation, such as protest activities, writing one's congressman, or posting responses on political blogs. These activities will be considered on an individual basis below, but first it is possible to investigate whether conflict orientation has an effect on the overall number of activities a given individual chooses to participate in. Unlike the models for voting, models of conflict orientation and a count of participation in a range of political activities show a statistically significant, albeit small, relationship between the two key variables. However, the model indicates that there is a direct positive relationship between increased conflict avoidance and the number of political activities in which individuals are likely to participate. At first glance, this seems to go against my initial hypothesis that increased conflict avoidance will lead to decreased participation, but in examining the predicted probabilities of increased participation for different CCS scores it is clear the story is more nuanced.

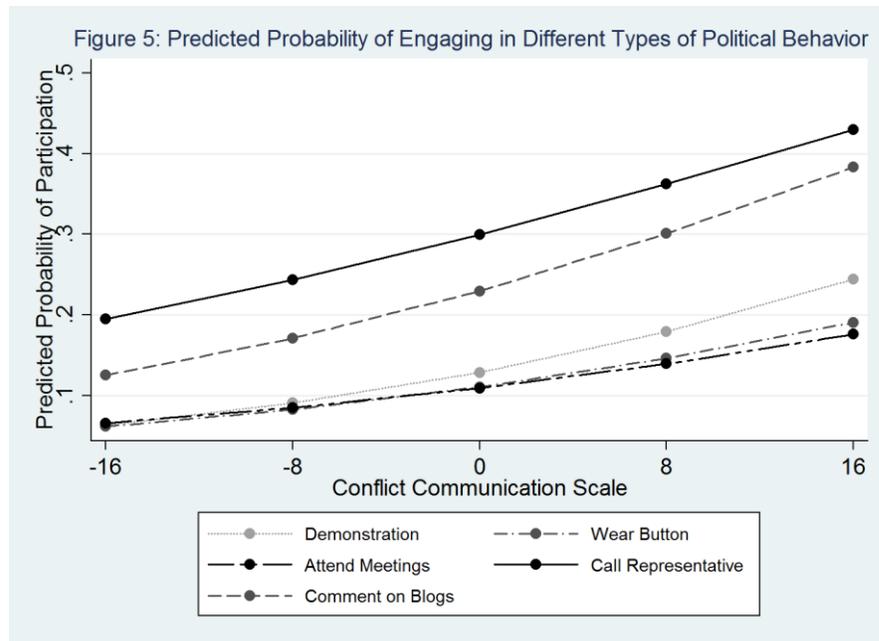
For the purpose of calculating the predicted probabilities, participants were categorized into one of four groups based on their score on the total CCS scale—those who were highly conflict avoidant (scores from 9-16), moderately avoidant (scores of 1-8), moderately approaching (-1 to -8) and highly approaching (-9 to -16). As is clear from Figure 4, for all four groups the probability of participating in

one political activities is greater than the probability of not participating in any; however, it is only for the highly conflict approaching that the probability continues to increase for participation in more than one event. Therefore, my initial hypothesis still holds—looking at it slightly differently, it appears that the most conflict approaching individuals are also the most involved in a variety of political activities.



Predicted probabilities are for a moderately liberal white male of average age and political interest, who votes Democratic.

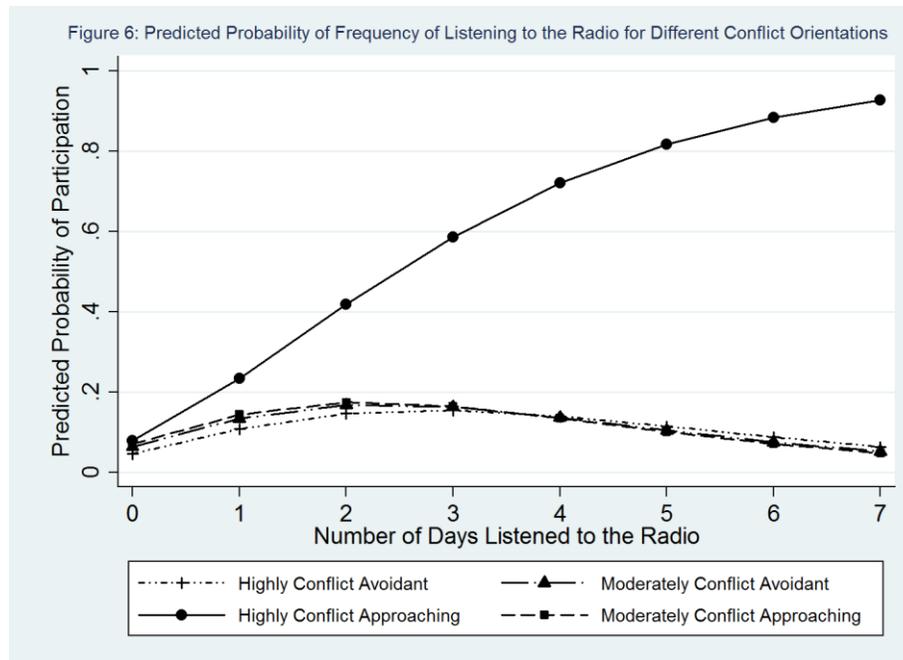
In addition to increasing the sheer number of activities individuals participate in, it is also possible that highly conflict avoidant individuals are less likely to participate in some activities than others. Figure 5 shows the predicted probability of participating in five of the nine events listed in the survey—the five for which the relationship between the Conflict Communication Scale and participation was statistically significant (Appendix I lists the regression tables for all nine activities). Unlike those from the count measure of political participation, the predicted probabilities for each activity individually indicate that highly conflict avoidant individuals are the most likely to participate in each.



Predicted probabilities are for a moderately liberal white male of average age and political interest, who votes Democratic.

Finally, I turn to the relationship between media consumption and conflict orientation. Because of the way the questions were asked, it is difficult to test whether individuals with certain orientations gravitate towards particular types of media. Furthermore, an attempt to run negative binomial regressions using the frequency of consumption as the dependent variable leads to statistically insignificant results for three of the five media—cable television, network television and newspapers—and the model fails to converge for a fourth—the internet. However, the relationship between radio usage and conflict orientation mirrors that of frequency of political participation. For liberal, Democratic white males of average age and political interest, those who were highly conflict approaching looked different from the rest of the groups, becoming substantially more likely to listen to the radio for a greater number of days per week (see Figure 6).

Therefore, there is limited evidence to support my hypothesis that conflict orientation affects an individual's decision to participate in politics or consume particular types of media—or at least listen to the radio. While orientation does not appear to lead to the choice of one political activity over another in predicted ways, it does influence how many different activities one might select. Furthermore, those who are the most conflict approaching—the most willing to engage debate and most comfortable arguing in public—are listening to political radio must more frequently than their peers.



Predicted probabilities are for a moderately liberal white male of average age and political interest, who votes Democratic.

### Conclusions/Discussion

While this paper fell short of the goal to investigate differences and relationships between implicit and explicit orientations towards conflict, it certainly opened up new avenues of improvement and additional research for future study. First and foremost, the BIAT needs to be adapted to make the task simpler for participants—either by reducing the number of stimuli for the agree/debate category or by changing them to pictures. Once the test has been improved, it will be possible to develop a clearer understanding of the effect of implicit attitudes on participation and media consumption.

Secondly, the questions asked to participations, particularly about their media usage, need to be changed in a myriad of ways. It is no longer sufficient to lump the range of media resources into five larger categories; they have become meaningless. After all, what does it mean to get your news from the internet? Does that mean social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, blogs or online-only sources like the Drudge Report and Huffington Post, or the websites of traditional media like the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*? The categories here represented blunt instruments; it is therefore unsurprising that there were few significant findings. Future research will drill down to gain a deeper understanding of what participants are using, asking them first about the broad categories, then for specific shows or resources, and then finally for the frequency with which they use those media.

In an era where partisans are quick to describe the other side in negative terms and to turn to impoliteness in their political discourse and social media usage, it is important to understand the differential effects that this type of communication might have on individuals and who might be seeking out rhetoric that could fuel polarization and claims of a polity divided (for example, see Washington Post, 8/21/2012 for use of negativity and Mashable.com, 8/22/2012 for the use of polite and impolite words on Twitter). This study makes a first step towards understanding how individual attitudes towards conflict—including non-political conflict—might influence their political decisions and lead to differing levels of engagement.

## Appendix I: Descriptive Statistics and Regression Tables

**Table 4: Demographics, by Percent of Sample**

	Percent of Sample
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	65.3
Male	35.7
<i>Party Identification</i>	
Democratic	46.8
Republican	14.1
Independent	21.9
<i>Political Ideology</i>	
Strongly conservative	2.9
Moderately conservative	7.7
Slightly conservative	6.0
Moderate/Neutral	28.0
Slightly liberal	10.5
Moderately liberal	27.3
Strongly liberal	17.6
<i>Education</i>	
Less than high school	5.8
High School graduate/some college	36.1
College Graduate	27.0
Advanced Degree	31.2
<i>Race</i>	
Native American/Pacific Islander	1.1
Asian	3.6
African-American/Black	8.0
White	76.9
Mixed Race	6.6
Other	3.9
<i>Ethnicity</i>	
Hispanic	9.1
Non-Hispanic	84.8
<i>Political Participation-- Individuals who:</i>	
Attend meetings	19.1
Protest	19.5
Write their Congressman	32.6
Work for a Candidate	6.7
Wear a campaign button	16.5
Comment on blogs	26.9
Donate Money	20.1
Voted in the last election	66.0

**Table 5: Average Political Participation and Media Consumption for the Sample**

	Mean
<i>Political Participation</i>	
Total number of activities	1.99
<i>Media Consumption (Number of days consumed)</i>	
Network Television	3.9
Cable Television	3.9
Internet	5.5
Newspaper	2.8
Radio	3.7

**Table 8: The Effects of Conflict Orientation on Involvement in Political Activity**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Total Conflict Orientation	0.017* (0.0047)	--	--	--
Approach/Avoidance Orientation	--	0.026* (0.0070)	--	0.025* (0.0083)
Public/Private Conflict Orientation	--	--	0.023* (0.010)	0.0023 (0.012)
Party ID	0.041 (0.060)	0.042 (0.060)	0.033 (0.060)	0.042 (0.060)
Party ID strength	0.097 (0.060)	0.10 (0.060)	0.085 (0.060)	0.10 (0.060)
Ideology	0.068* (0.027)	0.068* (0.027)	0.072* (0.027)	0.068* (0.027)
Political Interest	0.50* (0.033)	0.50* (0.033)	0.52* (0.032)	0.50* (0.33)
Alpha	0.195	0.195	0.202	0.195
LR X <sup>2</sup>	69.7	71.0	73.9	70.3
N	1051	1051	1051	1051

Cell entries are negative binomial coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Models also controlled for a range of demographic features, including race, ethnicity, age, and gender. \*p<0.05

**Table 6a: The Effect of Conflict Orientation on Participation in Specific Political Activities**

	Comment on Blogs	Donate Money	Call Representative	Display a Sign
Conflict Orientation	0.046* (0.014)	0.0089 (0.015)	0.035* (0.013)	0.021 (0.015)
Party ID	-0.041 (0.17)	-0.0025 (0.21)	0.063 (0.15)	-0.26 (0.20)
Party ID strength	0.11 (0.18)	0.17 (0.20)	-0.15 (0.16)	0.33 (0.20)
Ideology	0.15 (0.081)	0.34* (0.095)	0.16* (0.072)	0.19* (0.09)
Political Interest	0.86* (0.10)	0.76* (0.11)	0.65* (0.089)	0.66* (0.11)
LR X <sup>2</sup>	186.4	280.8	187.0	126.4
N	1051	1051	1051	1051

Cell entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Models also controlled for a range of demographic features, including race, ethnicity, age, and gender. \*p<0.05

**Table 6b: The Effect of Conflict Orientation on Participation in Specific Political Activities**

	Work for the Candidate	Protest	Wear a Button	Attend a Meeting	Persuade Others to Vote
Conflict Orientation	0.018 (0.021)	0.49* (0.015)	0.04* (0.015)	0.034* (0.016)	0.018 (0.013)
Party ID	-0.20 (0.30)	-0.056 (0.20)	0.36 (0.20)	0.16 (0.19)	0.074 (0.14)
Party ID strength	0.18 (0.29)	0.084 (0.20)	0.22 (0.19)	-0.54* (0.20)	0.51* (0.15)
Ideology	0.15 (0.13)	0.21* (0.091)	-0.0072 (0.087)	0.015 (0.088)	-0.0014 (0.068)
Political Interest	0.67* (0.16)	0.96* (0.11)	0.67* (0.11)	0.89* (0.11)	0.76* (0.087)
LR X <sup>2</sup>	67.0	191.5	117.6	142.1	203.1
N	1051	1051	1051	1051	1051

Cell entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Models also controlled for a range of demographic features, including race, ethnicity, age, and gender. \*p<0.05

**Table 9: Effect of Conflict Orientation on Frequency of Radio Use**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Total Conflict Orientation	0.0094* (0.0038)	--	--	--
Approach/Avoidance Orientation	--	0.015* (0.0056)	--	0.016* (0.0066)
Public/Private Conflict Orientation	--	--	0.011 (0.0084)	-0.0013 (0.0099)
Party ID	-0.016 (0.042)	-0.015 (0.042)	-0.020 (0.042)	-0.015 (0.042)
Party ID strength	0.038 (0.047)	0.042 (0.047)	0.032 (0.047)	0.043 (0.047)
Ideology	0.0035 (0.020)	0.0027 (0.020)	0.0056 (0.020)	0.0027 (0.020)
Political Interest	0.13* (0.025)	0.12* (0.025)	0.13* (0.024)	0.12* (0.025)
Alpha	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.158
LR X <sup>2</sup>	117.3	116.0	121.5	116.0
N	1051	1051	1051	1051

Cell entries are negative binomial coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Models also controlled for a range of demographic features, including race, ethnicity, age, and gender. \*p<0.05

**Table 9: Effect of Conflict Orientation on Frequency of Media Use**

	Radio	Cable Television	Network Television	Newspapers
Total Conflict Orientation	0.0094* (0.0038)	0.0017 (0.0037)	0.0020 (0.0036)	0.0049 (0.0043)
Party ID	-0.016 (0.042)	0.011 (0.040)	0.010 (0.039)	0.0049 (0.047)
Party ID strength	0.038 (0.047)	-0.023 (0.045)	-0.063 (0.044)	-0.058 (0.053)
Ideology	0.0035 (0.020)	-0.022 (0.019)	-0.046* (0.019)	0.0066 (0.023)
Political Interest	0.13* (0.025)	0.16* (0.024)	0.18* (0.023)	0.14* (0.028)
Alpha	0.16	0.15	0.14	0.20
LR X <sup>2</sup>	117.3	111.2	90.8	153.8
N	1051	1051	1051	1051

Results for frequency of internet use are omitted, as the model did not converge. Cell entries are negative binomial coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Models also controlled for a range of demographic features, including race, ethnicity, age, and gender. \*p<0.05

## Appendix II: Study Materials

### Conflict Communication Scale:

(Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree)

#### *Approach/Avoidance Scale*

1. I enjoy challenging the opinions of others.
2. I find conflicts exciting.
3. I hate arguments.
4. Arguments don't bother me.
5. I feel upset after an argument.

#### *Public/Private Behavior*

1. I avoid arguing in public.
2. I feel uncomfortable seeing others argue in public.
3. It wouldn't bother me to have an argument in a restaurant.

### Political Behavior:

1. During the past year did you... (check all that apply)
  - Attend local political meetings (such as school board or city council)
  - Go to a political speech, march, rally, or demonstration
  - Try to persuade someone to vote
  - Put up a political sign (such as a lawn sign or bumper sticker)
  - Work for a candidate or campaign
  - Wear a campaign button or sticker
  - Phone, email, write to, or visit a government official to express your views on a public issue
  - Comment on political blogs or online forums (not surveys)
  - Donate money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization
2. Did you vote in the last presidential election? (Yes/No)
3. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? (Democrat/Republican/Independent/Other/No preference)
4. [If answered Democrat or Republican] Would you call yourself a strong Republican/Democrat or a not very strong Republican/Democrat?
5. [If answered Independent, Other, or No preference] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party? (Democrat/Republican)
6. Some people don't pay much attention to politics. How about you? Would you say that you are:
  - Not at all interested in politics
  - Not very interested in politics

- Somewhat interested in politics
- Very interested in politics
- Extremely interested in politics

### Media Consumption:

(Choices range from 0 to 7)

1. During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, not including sports?
2. During a typical week, how many days do you listen to news on the radio, not including sports?
3. During a typical week, how many days do you watch to news on network TV, not including sports?
4. During a typical week, how many days do you read news in a printed newspaper, not including sports?
5. During a typical week, how many days do you watch news on cable TV, not including sports?

### Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI):

Next you will see a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

(Disagree strongly, Disagree moderately, Disagree a little, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree a little, Agree moderately, Agree strongly)

I see myself as:

1. Extraverted, enthusiastic.
2. Critical, quarrelsome.
3. Dependable, self-disciplined.
4. Anxious easily upset.
5. Open to new experiences, complex.
6. Reserved, quiet.
7. Sympathetic, warm.
8. Disorganized, careless.
9. Calm, emotionally stable.
10. Conventional, uncreative.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> TIPI scale scoring ("R" denotes reverse-scored items): Extraversion: 1, 6R; Agreeableness: 2R, 7; Conscientiousness: 3, 8R; Emotional Stability: 4R, 9; Openness to Experiences: 5, 10R. From

<http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/faculty/gosling/tipi%20site/tipi.htm>.

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Focusing first on media consumption, it is important to acknowledge that these measures of media usage serve as rather blunt instruments. Within each broader type of media discussed in this paper—internet, radio, cable television, network television, and newspaper—there are opinion and “factual” pieces, more or less explicitly partisan sources, and more or less argumentative programs. However, it also seems plausible that each of these types of media is generally associated with a particular amount of conflict; for example cable news is perceived as more antagonistic and partisan.