Why Do People (Sometimes) Become Selective About News? The Role of Emotions and Partisan Differences in Selective Approach and Avoidance

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Recent advances in partisan selective exposure research have provided compelling evidence for the distinction between selective approach and selective avoidance. Yet the questions of whether, how, and to what extent discrete emotions systematically shape either of these patterns has not been sufficiently addressed. This study explores the differential roles of fear, anger, and enthusiasm in selective approach to and selective avoidance of partisan news programs, focusing on partisan differences in regard to a person's general approach versus avoidance tendencies to external stimuli as a possible moderating mechanism. A secondary analysis of the 2012 American National Election Studies data suggested that fear and anger both significantly increased proattitudinal news exposure, whereas only anger decreased counterattitudinal news exposure. In addition, Republicans exhibit these patterns to a greater extent than Democrats. Furthermore, enthusiasm significantly predicted exposure to proattitudinal news for both Republicans and Democrats, whereas Democrats were significantly more likely than Republicans to increase their counterattitudinal news exposure as a function of enthusiasm. Theoretical and methodological implications are discussed.

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Partisan selective exposure, that is, the propensity of an individual to select information in a way that is congenial to his or her existing political beliefs and partisan predispositions (Festinger, 1957; Frey, 1986), has received considerable scholarly attention (Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Prior, 2013; Stroud, 2008, 2010). Partisan selective exposure has far-reaching implications for democratic theory and practice, and therefore sparks much debate among scholars regarding the nature and consequences of such exposure patterns (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010; Stroud, 2010).

Recent studies showcase compelling findings for politically motivated partisan selective exposure (e.g., Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2010). Moreover, empirical evidence suggests a discrepancy, or a separability, between selective approach and selective avoidance. That is, opinion-reinforcing information *seeking* does not necessarily promote selective *avoidance*—that is, the propensity to avoid attitudinally contradicting information (Garrett et al., 2013; Jang, 2014). The critical aspect of this distinction centers on differentiating between the respective psychological motivations that underlie pro- and counterattitudinal exposure. For instance, exposure to proattitudinal information may be driven by a person's subjective need to reaffirm his or her correctness (Garrett et al., 2013), by confirmation bias (Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012), and/or by defense motivations (Hart et al., 2009). In contrast, when anxiety (Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009) or an accuracy motivation (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989) is triggered, a person is less likely to be concerned with the congeniality of information.

Against this backdrop, the aim of the present study is twofold: First, focusing on the role of emotions (Marcus, 2000; Marcus, MacKuen, & Neuman, 2011; Nabi, 2003), this study attempts to offer another theoretical foundation for the distinction between selective approach and selective avoidance. Although the pervasive impact of emotions on a wide array of attitude-relevant phenomena are well documented, much of the mainstream thinking regarding partisan selective exposure is largely disconnected from theories of affect and emotions (for notable exceptions, see Brader, 2005; Valentino et al., 2009). Second, to further clarify the boundary conditions of selective approach and selective avoidance, this study also pays particularly close attention to partisan differences in general approach versus avoidance tendencies to external stimuli (Jost & Amodio, 2012; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009) as a possible moderating mechanism. This study therefore supports the argument that asymmetrical patterns of selective approach versus avoidance tendencies across partisans have important ramifications for our understanding of selective exposure phenomena and their democratic implications.

DIFFERENTIAL ROLES OF EMOTIONS IN PREDICTING SELECTIVE APPROACH AND SELECTIVE AVOIDANCE

As one of the most plausible motivational underpinnings of human behavior, emotions are believed to regulate future cognitive processes and behaviors related to fulfilling the specific needs and goals that are triggered by such emotions (the functional theory of emotions: Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 2003). For instance, fear or anxiety primarily stem from the perception of imminent harm from unexpected or unfamiliar sources. Further, a high level of anxiety or fear motivates individuals to be more risk averse and avoidance oriented (Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 2003). Following this logic, we would expect that anxious partisans would be more likely to avoid threatening information. At the same time, insecurity and threat may motivate a person to seek a sense of protection and reassurance from attitudinally congruent information.

As another negative emotional state, anger stems from a person's sense that he or she has been subjected to a demeaning offense by an external agent (Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 2003). From the perspective of functional theory, anger is an approach-oriented impetus "characterized by a willingness to engage with the source of the offense, often for the purposes of attack" (Arpan & Nabi, 2011, p. 7). Given that proattitudinal partisan media often provide relevant attributional information regarding the nature and extent of such demeaning offenses (that is often consistent with one's prior beliefs or opinions), an angry person may gravitate toward proattitudinal partisan news sources. In addition, anger tends to elicit much simpler cognitive-processing styles such as a heavy reliance on heuristics and limited attention to a broad pool of information (Lerner, Goldberg, & Tetlock, 1998). This leads us to expect anger to be positively related to selective approach to attitudinally congruent information.

A slightly different prediction can be formulated in light of affective intelligence theory (AIT: Marcus, Neuman, & Mackuen, 2000; see also Brader, 2005; Marcus et al., 2011). As with cognitive functional theory, AIT posits that people draw on their emotions in allocating attention and resources to the outside world. For instance, fear is induced by the surveillance system when an event occurs that is both novel (or relatively unfamiliar) and negative. However, contrary to the cognitive functional theory of emotions, AIT predicts that fear promotes effortful processing and deviation from a reliance on heuristics (MacKuen, Wolak, Keele, & Marcus, 2010; Marcus et al., 2011), such as increasing attention to relevant information (Brader, 2005). This implies that fear dampens a reliance on party heuristics, thereby promoting more even-handed, balanced exposure to available information (e.g., Redlawsk, Civettini, & Emmerson, 2010).

The dispositional system, in contrast to the surveillance system, is responsible for producing enthusiasm and anger (the latter is sometimes referred to as "aversion" in the literature: MacKuen et al., 2010; Marcus et al., 2000).

AIT postulates that anger arises when internally held goals or standards are threatened by an external agent (especially by a familiar disliked agent). In contrast, when such goals or standards are met, the dispositional system generates enthusiasm and relaxation (MacKuen et al., 2010; Marcus et al., 2000). As the dispositional system responds to an outside stimulus with reliance on heuristics rather than on a deliberative reconsideration (Marcus et al., 2000), anger and enthusiasm should both increase partisan selective approach to proattitudinal information. In line with this prediction, Brader's (2005) experiment showed that enthusiasm tends to increase voters' reliance on prior preferences rather than on new information in determining their candidate choices. This empirical regularity is echoed by Valentino et al.'s (2008) experiment, where they also found that anger diminishes a person's likelihood of seeking out new information.

From a perspective of equating selective approach with selective avoidance (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008), the discussion so far suggests that enthusiasm, as well as anger, should increase selective approach and avoidance simultaneously. However, from a perspective in which selective approach is differentiated from selective avoidance, a slightly different expectation can be formulated. According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), positive emotions such as enthusiasm are thought to increase approach-oriented exploration of goal-irrelevant stimuli, but not necessarily reinforce habitual behaviors. Instead, positive emotions are thought to extend a person's scope of attention, cognitive flexibilities, and openness to new experience. This implies that although enthusiasm may increase selective approach to proattitudinal information (which is consistent with AIT), enthusiasm could also increase exposure to counterattitudinal information (e.g., Valenzuela & Bachmann, 2015) by broadening a person's attention to goal-irrelevant stimuli.

The previous discussion provides compelling rationales for why selective approach and avoidance should be separately and independently associated with fear, anger, and enthusiasm. First, both the functional theory and AIT predict that *fear should be positively associated with selective approach to proattitudinal information* (H1), because of a person's desire either to seek protection and reassurance (functional theory) or to closely surveil the outside world (AIT). With regard to anger, the functional theory and AIT are consistent in positing that *anger is positively associated with* (H2) *selective approach to proattitudinal information* and (H3) *selective avoidance of counterattitudinal information*. However, the two frameworks slightly differ in predicting the role of fear, especially for selective avoidance. The functional theory predicts that fear, as a general avoidance tendency, is positively related to selective avoidance of counterattitudinal information. Meanwhile AIT predicts a negative relationship between fear and selective avoidance, because fear is expected to reduce a

person's reliance on partisan heuristics. Given these competing predictions, a research question is posed: RQ1: *What is the relationship between fear and exposure to counterattitudinal information?*

Theoretical expectations regarding the relationship between enthusiasm and selective approach versus avoidance patterns are less clear from a functional theory perspective. Yet, based on the broaden-and-build theory and empirical evidence from AIT (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Marcus et al., 2000), it is expected that *enthusiasm positively relates to selective approach* (H4) and *negatively relates to selective avoidance* (H5).

PARTISAN DIFFERENCES AS A FUNCTION OF A DISCREPANCY BETWEEN APPROACH AND AVOIDANCE

Most of the existing theoretical frameworks on mass political behavior implicitly assume that partisans of both sides behave in an identical fashion in response to external stimuli. However, research suggests that political conservatives respond differently to uncertainty and threats than do liberals. The motivated social cognition approach (Jost & Amodio, 2012; Jost et al., 2009) assert that conservatives are characterized by a need for order, having an aversion to uncertainty, ambiguity, and threat. In contrast, liberals are often characterized by cognitive complexities, tolerance of uncertainty, and tolerance of social change (Jost & Amodio, 2012). Research suggests that conservatives are more likely to adopt avoidance strategies (Garrett & Stroud, 2014) whereas liberals exhibit more approach-oriented behaviors in exploring novel stimuli (Shook & Fazio, 2009). Similarly, research on the Big Five personality traits has documented that liberals score higher on the Openness to Experience dimension than conservatives, whereas conservatives consistently score higher on the Conscientiousness dimension than liberals (e.g., Mondak, 2010).

How would such intrinsic differences regarding approach and avoidance tendencies interact with discrete emotions? First, Republicans (i.e., conservatives) are expected to be disproportionately affected by fear and anger, but only in predicting selective avoidance. If Republicans respond more aversively to external threats and danger than do liberals (Jost & Amodio, 2012), then it stands to reason that the former may tend to avoid exposure to counterattitudinal information as a function of fear and anger. Therefore, *the effect of fear on predicting selective avoidance will be greater for Republicans compared to Democrats* (H6). Likewise, the *effect of anger on predicting selective avoidance will be greater for Republicans than for Democrats* (H7), whereas no such differences are anticipated in the relationship between selective approach and either fear or anger. In regard to enthusiasm, as Democrats' intrinsic affinity to

openness to experience and cognitive complexities suggest, it is expected that *enthusiasm will reduce selective avoidance of counter-attitudinal information for Democrats* (H8).

METHOD

Data and Measures

This research relies on the 2012 American National Election Studies (ANES). The data were collected during the 2012 presidential election cycle, tracking a representative sample of 5,914 respondents (AAPOR RR1: 38%). As both media exposure and emotion measurements were administered only in the prewave survey in the 2012 ANES, the present study is limited to a cross-sectional analysis. All eligible prewave respondents are included in the analysis.

Discrete Emotions.   The 2012 ANES asked four substantive questions regarding emotional responses toward major presidential candidates ("*How often would you say you've felt … afraid, angry, proud*, and *hopeful*?") followed by a prompt whereby respondents were asked to think about the candidate or something that the candidate has done. The measures of *fear* (*afraid; M* = 3.42, *SD* = 1.52, range = 1–10) and *anger* (*angry; M* = 3.87, *SD* = 1.54, range = 1–10) were derived by summing the respective reactions to the Republican and Democratic Party presidential candidates (e.g., $\text{Anger}_{total} = \text{Anger}_{Dem} + \text{Anger}_{Rep}$).[1] The measure for *enthusiasm* (*M* = 4.09, *SD* = 1.28, range = 1–10) was derived by averaging the ratings for *proud* and *hopeful*, again across all the candidates. Combining emotional reactions toward all candidates is expected to capture general emotional activation levels rather than substantive evaluations or mere likes/dislikes of specific candidates or parties (Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, & Hutchings, 2011). In addition, prior research suggests that although fear and anger tend to produce distinctive behavioral consequences, pride and hopefulness often load on a common dimension. Therefore, two positive emotional reactions (i.e., *pride* and *hopefulness*) were averaged to represent a single *enthusiasm* dimension, whereas the distinction between *fear* and *anger* was retained.[2]

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[1] The initial response option (from 1 [*always*] to 5 [*never*]) was reversed prior to summing the items so that a higher value represents a higher activation level for respective emotions.

[2] Such treatment, including combining the emotional responses to all the candidates, is a standard technique in studies on emotions in the literature (Valentino et al., 2011; also see Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus et al., 2000; Rudolph, Gangl, & Stevens, 2000). A series of supplementary analyses was also conducted (available upon request) by estimating a number of comparative fit analyses to compare the alternative measurement strategies for emotions. Using an alternative measurement did not change the substantial conclusions reported in this study.

Party Identification and the Strength of Party Identification. Each respondent's party identification (PID; $M = 3.53$, $SD = 2.12$) was anchored on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strong Democrat*) to 7 (*strong Republican*). This was mean-centered (around the value of 4 [*moderate*]) before the analysis. The strength of PID was created by folding the original PID measure over the middle point of the scale, such that Independents were assigned to 1 and strong partisans were assigned to 4. This was later rescaled to a 0-to-3 range ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.05$).

Exposure to Pro- and Counterattitudinal Partisan Media Programs. Based on the program-listing technique (Dilliplane, Goldman, & Mutz, 2013), the 2012 ANES asked whether respondents "regularly" watched a series of media programs. Among those, 30 were classified as either liberal leaning or conservative leaning based on their public reputation and classification in prior studies (e.g., Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2011), as presented in Table 1.[3]

Based on the list of liberal- and conservative-leaning media programs identified, *the number of proattitudinal* ($M = 1.54$, $SD = 2.36$, ranging from 0 to 14) and *counter-attitudinal partisan news programs* ($M = .46$, $SD = 1.05$, range = 0–12) were created. This method is expected to reveal a more nuanced picture of selective approach and avoidance patterns than traditional "days per week" exposure measures, which are typically bound to more general media outlets rather than to specific news programs. The "breadth" of exposure (i.e., the number of news programs that a person regularly watches) is arguably an important dimension of media exposure that is relatively underexplored in the literature (Wonneberger, Schoenbach, & Van Meurs, 2013).[4]

Controls. Several demographics factors were controlled, including gender (1 = female; 51.74%), age ($M = 49.73$, $SD = 16.75$), two race dummies for White (73.61%) and Black (19.17%), household income ($M = 13.54$, $SD = 8.16$, from 1 [*less than $5,000*] to 25 [*more than $250,000*]), education ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.15$, from 1 [*less than high school*] to 5 [*graduate degree*]), and a dummy variable for "working full time" (55.9%).

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[3] All the entertainment and network news programs were excluded from this partisan categorization. In addition, several cable, radio, TV programs, and newspapers (including their websites) were dropped from the analysis, as they were ambiguous in terms of partisanship leaning; the inclusion of such programs would have led to an overestimate of the degree of partisan-oriented selective exposure (see Stroud, 2008, for a similar argument).

[4] Regarding moderates who do not lean toward either party, if a respondent felt positive toward the Democratic candidate, then his or her exposure to liberal- (conservative-) leaning programs was considered proattitudinal (counterattitudinal) exposure. It is expected that arbitrary exclusion of a moderate category might artificially increase selective exposure estimates (e.g., Feldman et al., 2013). Excluding moderates from analyses did not substantially change the results and conclusions reported here.

TABLE 1
A List of Liberal- and Conservative-Leaning News Programming and Their Viewership

Programming	N	(%)
Liberal leaning		
Anderson Cooper 360	658	12.5
Chris Matthews Show	340	6.4
Colbert Report	465	8.8
Daily Show with Jon Stewart	549	10.4
Frontline	364	6.9
Talk of the Nation	332	11.4
All Things Considered	473	16.2
CNN.com	679	24.5
Huffingtonpost.com	430	15.5
MSNBC.com	567	20.4
New York Times	166	5.6
Nytimes.com (sample split)	302	10.9
Nytimes.com (split)	246	8.3
Washington Post	191	6.9
Washingtonpost.com (split)	58	2.0
Washingtonpost.com (split)	139	2.4
Conservative leaning		
Fox Report	1,031	19.5
Fox News Hannity	424	8.0
Fox News Huckabee	314	5.9
Fox News Van Susteren	368	7.0
O'Reilly Factor	652	12.3
Special Report with Bret Baier	321	6.1
Glenn Beck	210	7.2
Laura Ingraham	108	3.7
Mark Levin Show	128	4.4
Rush Limbaugh Show	431	14.8
The Savage Nation	112	3.8
Hannity	313	10.7
Fox News	487	17.6
Drudge Report	175	6.3
Wall Street Journal	151	5.1
Online.wsj.com	116	3.9

Note. Source: The 2012 American National Election Studies data.

The respondents were also asked how many days in a typical week they (a) view news on the Internet ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 2.73$), (b) watch news on television ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 2.56$), and (c) listen to news on the radio ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 2.57$). These measures were included in part to help account for depth of exposure ("days per week") relative to breadth of exposure (Prior, 2013). All the media exposure measures were based on an 8-point scale from 0 (not at all) to 7 (every day). Finally, political interest ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .1.09$, range = 1–5) and a

composite scale for attention to news (M = 2.95, SD = 1.10, Cronbach's α = .796) were controlled.

Analysis Strategy

Given the overdispersion of the count-dependent variable, a series of zero-inflated negative binomial regression models were specified and tested. The key idea underlying this analysis is that the variable of interest (in this case, the count of pro-or counterattitudinal news programs) follows a branching process: The zero-inflated component models the value of the dependent variable as zero with probability P_0 and the count component models the full range of counts (any integer value including a zero count) with probability $(1 - P_0)$ under the negative binomial model (for a detailed discussion, see Hilbe, 2011). Therefore, all the coefficients reported in the count component represent the impact of the predictor variables in explaining the raw counts of pro- and counterattitudinal news programs, whereas the coefficients reported in the inflation component represent the impact of the regressors in terms of explaining the *absence* of such exposure. The analyses were performed in *Mplus* 7.0, and all the focal predictors and their product terms were mean-centered prior to the analyses.

RESULTS

Effects of Fear and Anger on Selective Approach and Selective Avoidance

The first two hypotheses posit that fear (H1) and anger (H2) each positively predict exposure to proattitudinal partisan news. Panel A of Table 2 reports the results of such analyses.

The first column of Panel A shows that fear significantly and positively predicted proattitudinal partisan news program exposure (b = .035, SE = .017, p < .05; incidence ratio = 1.035). That is, as a respondent's level of fear increases, he or she is 3.5% more likely to "regularly" watch one more propartisan news program. Similar to fear's effect, the third column of Panel A shows a significant and positive anger effect (b = .064, SE = .020, p < .01; incidence ratio = 1.066), such that a respondent is 6.6% more likely to watch one more propartisan news programs "regularly" as his or her anger level increases, supporting H1 and H2.[5]

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[5] The nonsignificant interaction term makes the emotion coefficient consistent with a partial regression coefficient without the interaction term (for fear: b = .035, SE = .017, p < .05). The effect of anger (b = .064, SE = .020, p < .01) and of enthusiasm (b = .043, SE = .022, p = .057) also followed this pattern.

TABLE 2
Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression Moderation Models Predicting Proattitudinal and Counterattitudinal News Exposure

	Fear		Anger		Enthusiasm	
	Count	Inflated	Count	Inflated	Count	Inflated
Panel A: Proattitudinal						
Focal predictors						
Fear	.035 (.017)*	-.054 (.058)	.035 (.018)*	-.067 (.063)	.033 (.017)	-.054 (.054)
Anger	.062 (.021)**	.002 (.081)	.064 (.020)**	-.008 (.068)	.061 (.020)**	-.019 (.066)
Enthusiasm	.045 (.023)*	-.140 (.071)*	.040 (.023)#	-.147 (.070)*	.050 (.024)*	-.121 (.080)
PID	.082 (.018)***	.211 (.108)#	.068 (.016)***	.168 (.073)*	.061 (.014)***	.163 (.057)**
Interactions						
Fear × PID	-.007 (.009)	-.023 (.039)	—	—	—	—
Anger × PID	—	—	.008 (.007)	.016 (.027)	—	—
Enthusiasm × PID	—	—	—	—	.018 (.010)	-.033 (.034)
LL	-7,622.825		-7,622.563		-7,618.227	
N adjusted BIC	15,453.759 (N = 4,983)		15,453.235 (N = 4,983)		15,444.563 (N = 4,983)	
Panel B: Counterattitudinal						
Focal predictors						
Fear	.004 (.030)	.057 (.116)	.008 (.030)	.219 (.144)	.003 (.030)	.070 (.115)
Anger	-.068 (.032)*	.115 (.180)	-.072 (.032)*	-.124 (.123)	-.079 (.032)*	-.165 (.129)
Enthusiasm	.011 (.031)	-.301 (.162)#	.014 (.032)	-.262 (.151)#	.030 (.036)	.017 (.219)
PID	.059 (.025)*	-.948 (.112)***	.054 (.024)*	-.924 (.103)***	.061 (.025)*	-.923 (.108)***
Interactions						
Fear × PID	-.033 (.011)**	.054 (.052)	—	—	—	—
Anger × PID	—	—	-.030 (.011)**	.034 (.050)	—	—
Enthusiasm × PID	—	—	—	—	-.031 (.015)*	.081 (.057)
LL	-4,285.659		-4,286.601		-4,288.054	
N adjusted BIC	8,774.090 (N = 4,983)		8,775.976 (N = 4,983)		8,778.880 (N = 4,983)	

Note. All analyses control for gender, age, education, income, race (White and Black), employment status, political interest, TV news use, Internet news use, radio news use, media attention, and strength of party identification (full tables are available upon request). Robust standard errors are in parentheses. PID = party identification; LL = log-likelihood; BIC = Bayesian information criterion.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

The second and fourth columns of Panel A present the zero-inflated components predicting the probability of *no exposure* of proattitudinal news programs as a function of identical predictor variables. As can be seen in the zero-inflated columns, neither of the two negative emotions were significantly related to the absence of proattitudinal exposure, nor did significant moderating effects of PID emerge. This suggests that (a) neither fear nor anger makes people completely withdraw from proattitudinal partisan news program exposure, and more importantly that (b) there is no discernable partisan difference between Republicans and Democrats regarding how likely they are to *not* be exposed to proattitudinal partisan news.

It was also predicted that anger would be significantly and *negatively* associated with the likelihood of respondents' counterattitudinal exposure (H3). In addition, RQ1 inquired about the possible relationship between fear and exposure to counterattitudinal partisan news programs. Further, within the context of predicting counterattitudinal exposure, it was also predicted that the effects of fear (H6) and anger (H7) in counterattitudinal exposure would be greater among Republicans than among Democrats.

As can be seen in Panel B of Table 2, the conditional effects of fear were not significant in the count component ($b = .004$, $SE = .030$), suggesting that fear alone is not related to the increase of counterattitudinal news exposure. Yet as predicted in H3, the conditional effect of anger on exposure to counterattitudinal partisan news programs was found to be significant (the third column in Panel B: $b = –.072$, $SE = .032$, $p < .05$). A respondent is estimated to be 6.94% less likely to watch one more counterattitudinal partisan news program as his or her anger level increases, largely confirming H3. Also, as predicted in H6 and H7, PID significantly moderates the effect of fear ($b = –.033$, $SE = .011$, $p < .01$) and anger ($b = –.030$, $SE = .011$, $p < .01$), suggesting that the associations between these two emotions and counterattitudinal news exposure are more pronounced among Republicans than Democrats.

Although specific hypotheses were not offered, the inflation columns of Table 2 offer additional evidence for the separability of selective approach and avoidance. Because the inflation component estimates the *absence* of exposure, it provides a more powerful test of selective *avoidance* of counterattitudinal exposure, as a function of specific emotions vis-à-vis proattitudinal exposure. The findings suggest that there is a systematic tendency for a *complete avoidance* of counterattitudinal news exposure neither as a function of fear ($b = .057$, $SE = .116$, *ns*) nor as a function of anger ($b = –.124$, $SE = .123$, *ns*). Consistent with previous results, there was also no evidence of partisan differences in *complete avoidance* of counterattitudinal exposure as a function of fear or anger—as indicated in the null interaction effects in two inflation columns. Coupled with prior findings predicting proattitudinal exposure, this bolsters the argument that selective exposure and selective avoidance are driven by substantially different dynamics.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 present Johnson–Neyman (J-N) plots depicting the regions of significance (see Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006, for a detailed discussion) in predicting the impact of fear and anger on exposure to counterattitudinal partisan
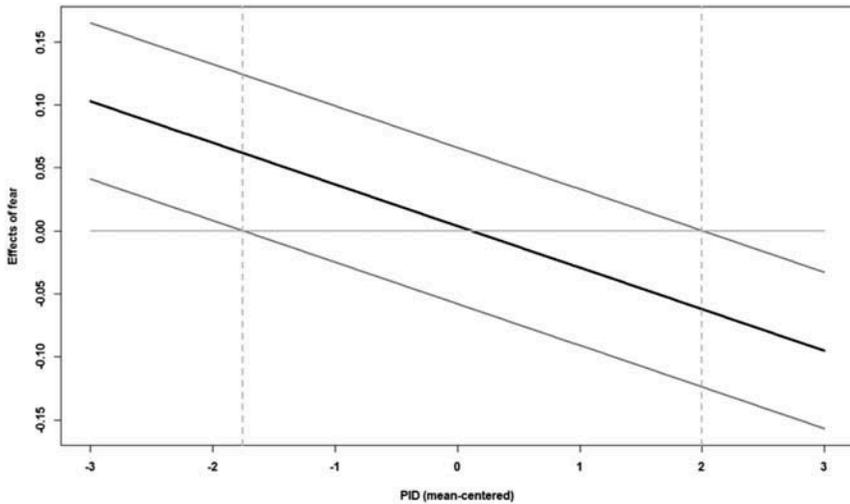
FIGURE 1 The Johnson–Neyman plot for the simple effects of *fear* at values of moderator for counterattitudinal partisan news program exposure.

Note: The *x*-axis represents values of moderator (mean-centered partisan self-identification), and the *y*-axis represents the regression coefficient of fear (i.e., conditional effects of fear). PID = party identification.

news programs (as presented in count models) as a function of PID. The regions of significance ranged outside of –1.75 and 1.99 (based on mean-centered values), suggesting that although weak to strong Democrats (equivalent to a moderator value of –1.75 or lower) actually increase their exposure to counterattitudinal partisan news programs, weak to strong Republicans (a moderator value of 1.99 or higher) are more likely to avoid counterattitudinal partisan news programs as a function of fear. However, this effect is not statistically significant in the remaining categories (Figure 1). Therefore, in answer to the research question, the effect of fear on counterattitudinal partisan news exposure seems to become more pronounced as one's PID becomes stronger.

Regarding anger's influence as a function of PID (Figure 2), the regions of significance ranged from –.333 to the highest value, wherein the simple slopes of anger were entirely below zero. This result suggests that the aversive effect of anger on counterattitudinal partisan news program exposure was strongest among Moderates (moderator value of –.333 or higher) and conservative-oriented people—from Republican leaners to strong Republicans (moderator values of up to 3)—but not in any category of Democrats. As predicted, Republicans were more likely to reduce
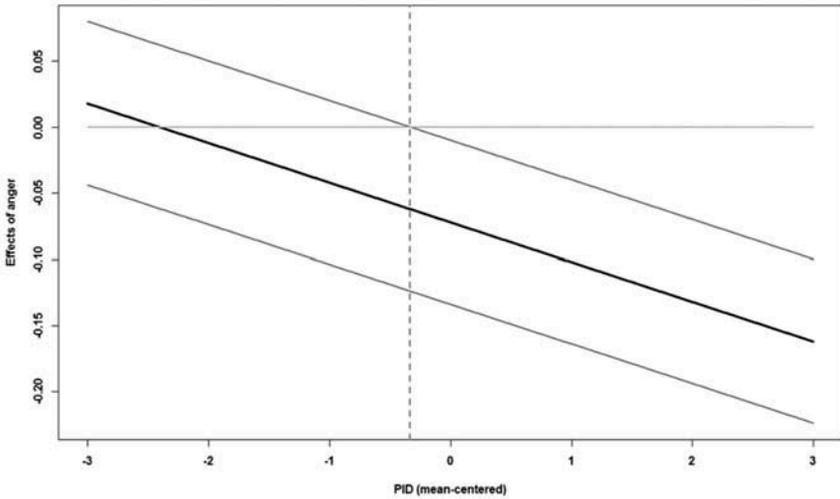
FIGURE 2 The Johnson–Neyman plot for the simple effects of *anger* at values of moderator for counterattitudinal partisan news program exposure.
Note: The *x*-axis represents values of moderator (mean-centered partisan self-identification), and the *y*-axis represents the regression coefficient of anger (i.e., conditional effects of anger). PID = party identification.

exposure to counterattitudinal programs as their anger level increased, yet there is no evidence that Democrats also turned away from counterattitudinal partisan news media as their anger level increased. Thus, H6 and H7 are both strongly supported.

Effects of Enthusiasm on Selective Approach and Selective Avoidance

The next set of hypotheses posited that as a person's enthusiasm increases, the more likely an increase in both proattitudinal (H4) and counterattitudinal (H5) partisan news program exposure. In particular, the effect of enthusiasm on exposure to counterattitudinal partisan news programs was predicted to be more pronounced among Democrats than among Republicans (H8). The results of these analyses are presented in the last two columns of Panel A and Panel B.

The results confirm the initial proposition set out in H4. The conditional main effect of enthusiasm on exposure to proattitudinal partisan news programs (the third count column of Panel A: $b = .050$, $SE = .024$, $p < .05$) was statistically significant. Yet the magnitude of this effect was rather nuanced. Its predicted interaction effect

with PID ($b = .018$, $SE = .010$, $p < .10$) was *not* statistically significant (although trending to the expected direction), suggesting that the effect of enthusiasm on proattitudinal exposure is not likely to differ strongly across partisans.

Per counterattitudinal partisan news exposure (see Panel B of Table 2), there was a small and insignificant trend in the expected direction for the conditional main effect of enthusiasm (the count model in Table 2: $b = .030$, $SE = .036$, *ns*). Therefore, the result failed to provide evidence for H5. However, the interaction effect with PID ($b = -.031$, $SE = .015$, $p < .05$) was statistically significant, such that the effect of enthusiasm on exposure to counterattitudinal partisan news programs attenuated as PID moved toward "strong" Republican, confirming H8. A subsequent J-N analysis revealed that the regions of significance on the moderator were -1.032 or lower, suggesting that Democrats increased in counterattitudinal exposure as a function of enthusiasm, whereas Moderates and Republicans were not affected by enthusiasm.[6] This empirical pattern is consistent with broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) and with recent evidence pertaining to associations between psychological traits and ideological orientations (Jost & Amodio, 2012; Shook & Fazio, 2009; also see Garrett & Stroud, 2014). It is worth noting here that AIT generally predicts that enthusiasm reinforces existing behaviors by promoting a reliance on heuristics, which appears to contradict the empirical patterns reported here. However, this diverging pattern regarding the impact of enthusiasm on proattitudinal and counterattitudinal partisan news exposure should be considered as additional evidence for the separability of selective approach and selective avoidance (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Jang, 2014). That is, enthusiasm promotes exposure to proattitudinal partisan news by activating the dispositional system and reinforcing existing behavioral tendencies (which is also confirmed here). Furthermore, this enthusiasm also appears to be capable of promoting exposure to counterattitudinal information. However, this latter effect does not appear to be universal; instead, it appears to be conditioned upon individual differences related to general approach–avoidance tendencies (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Jost & Amodio, 2012; Jost et al., 2009).

Contrary to the result of the count component, the inflation component of the model predicting proattitudinal exposure (the last column in Panel A of Table 2) suggests that enthusiasm does not inhibit exposure to proattitudinal partisan news programs ($b = -.121$, $SE = .080$, *ns*), as the nonsignificant enthusiasm and its interaction term demonstrate. Similarly, the zero-inflated component predicting counterattitudinal exposure was not significant (the last column in Panel B of Table 2: $b = .017$, $SE = .219$, *ns*), which suggests that enthusiasm does not promote reliance on partisan heuristics, and therefore avoidance of counterattitudinal exposure. Nor was there evidence that this effect is contingent on partisan difference, as the nonsignificant interaction term between enthusiasm and PID in the inflation column indicates ($b = .081$, $SE = .057$, *ns*). In sum, the data demonstrate that selective approach to proattitudinal information and selective avoidance of counterattitudinal information are theoretically and empirically distinct phenomena.

DISCUSSION

Building on recent scholarship, which argues that selective approach and selective avoidance are theoretically and empirically distinct phenomena (Garrett et al., 2013; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Jang, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012), this study explored the potential role of three discrete emotions relative to partisan selective approach and avoidance. In addition to providing additional support for the proposition that partisan selective approach and avoidance are better represented as a bivariate structure rather than a bipolar continuum, the current study demonstrates that discrete emotions can systematically predict partisan selective approach and selective avoidance in predictable ways. The results also suggest that psychological differences with regard to one's general approach–avoidance tendencies across partisans of both sides can further condition patterns of proattitudinal and counterattitudinal exposure.

Several methodological issues deserve careful attention. First and foremost, the correlational nature of the data raises the important question of causal directions of influence, because emotional reactions to presidential candidates are, at least in part, likely to be endogenous to news media exposure (although news exposure is not the only source of such emotions). Although definitive conclusions cannot be drawn solely based on the current study, experimental evidence to date suggests that discrete emotions can causally predict selective exposure patterns (MacKuen et al., 2010; Valentino et al., 2009). Most important, the discrete emotions in the present study were operationalized such that all emotions would not be conditioned on specific positive–negative evaluations of in- and out-party candidates (by averaging the items across all candidates). Assessing selective exposure via unobtrusive, direct observations in experimental settings would bolster our understanding of the causal directions of influence. Findings from such studies would not be without their own limitations, however, in terms of generalizability and external validity (see Clay, Barber, & Shook, 2013, for a review). The results of the present study therefore can be viewed as augmenting existing experimental evidence by replicating a similar pattern in a more realistic setting using representative samples. Nonetheless, potential endogeneity concerns are not easily resolved using a cross-sectional data set such as that used herein. Furthermore, it is important for future research to explore possible reciprocal dynamic processes over time (Slater, 2007) to fully tease out causal directions of influence and a more nuanced role of emotions in such processes.

It is also worthwhile to question the reliability and validity of the self-reported measures, both for discrete emotions and media exposure. A person's emotions are likely to shift over a short time span, yet the emotion measures employed here reference past states ("How often would you say you've felt . . . ?"). Therefore, it is reasonable to

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[6] The J-N plot for the simple effects of enthusiasm was largely consistent with previous plots.

question whether a person can reliably and accurately report an emotional state experienced in the past. However, research suggests that self-reported emotions can constitute a valid approximation of a person's emotional state, and this is even more likely to be the case when a person is asked about integral emotions that are centrally relevant to judgmental tasks (e.g., Robinson & Clore, 2002). Nevertheless, it is possible that more transient, incidental emotions also influence a person's behavior (Brader, 2005; Schwarz & Clore, 1983).

It is often argued that, in comparison with aggregated behavioral data, self-reported media exposure measures are plagued by overreporting bias (Prior, 2013). Nonetheless, studies suggest that despite its overreporting bias, self-reports of media exposure measures are reliably related with news consumption measures that rely on passive tracking data (Guess, 2015; LaCour & Vavreck, 2014; Wonneberger et al., 2013). Nor is there not convincing evidence to date demonstrating that survey responses differ radically from behavioral and experimental results (Garrett et al., 2013) or that such data are plagued by systematic distortions in their depictions of exposure patterns. Nevertheless, future studies would benefit from a continued effort to improve media exposure measures (Guess, 2015).

To date, the dominant stream of thought in the literature has been driven by what can be called a "consistency-based" principle (Holbert, Weeks, & Esralew, 2013; Pavitt, 2010)—that is, people use media primarily as a mean of reinforcing their existing beliefs and values. The logical consequence here is the pessimistic view that people do not waver from a practice of selectively avoiding counterattitudinal news programs (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). With the recent proliferation of partisan media that fosters easy self-selection and avoidance (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008), scholars have repeatedly expressed concerns about the potential of partisan selective exposure undermining the democratic ideal of a well-informed citizenry.

Extant research suggests that there are, indeed, general preferences toward politically motivated selectivity (Donsbach, 1991; Garrett et al., 2013; Sears & Freedman, 1967). However, the results of the present study—along with results reported in recent research (Garrett et al., 2013; Jang, 2014)—suggest that selective approach is not the same as selective avoidance. More specifically, prior research suggests that people may selectively turn to, or at least not entirely shun, media outlets that run counter to their prior beliefs and values based on information utilities (Garrett et al., 2013; Valentino et al., 2009) or accuracy motivations (Hart et al., 2009). In line with such perspectives, the results of this present study offer another set of important predictors of counter-attitudinal news exposure: fear and enthusiasm. These findings are largely consistent with the claim that specific emotional states may further activate a person's desire to accurately perceive and evaluate relevant information, irrespective of its congeniality with an existing attitude. In sum, established theoretical perspectives and recent empirical evidence—including the evidence reported herein—suggest that people's desire for "understanding" (Holbert et al., 2013; also see Holbert et al., 2010) is also an

important foundation of selective exposure phenomena vis-à-vis consistency-based explanations.

In consideration of this study's findings, the nonsignificant effect for the three emotion variables along with their insignificant interactions in the zero-inflated columns begs a further explanation. First, the null effects of emotions on an *absence* of proattitudinal news exposure (as estimated in the zero-inflated columns) are indeed quite intuitive; because the three emotions increase proattitudinal news exposure, the same predictor variables cannot simultaneously increase news exposure *and* the absence of news exposure. Second, given that the inflation components estimate the probability of an *absence of exposure*, if observed, any positive and significant effect of predictor variables on the inflation components in counterattitudinal exposure would imply that such predictor variables are responsible for selective *avoidance*. However, the results here suggest that this is not the case. There was no evidence that the three discrete emotions cause people to selectively avoid counterattitudinal news, nor does there exist a systematic partisan difference thereof as a function of those emotions. This may be seen as additional (albeit indirect) evidence that selective approach and selective avoidance are theoretically and empirically distinctive phenomena (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Jang, 2014).

The consistent and robust empirical patterns of partisan differences across the results highlight another important theoretical mechanism. That is, partisans on either end of the political spectrum may substantially and systematically differ in terms of how they approach and avoid partisan-laden information (e.g., Jost et al., 2009; Shook & Fazio, 2009). Consistent with prior evidence in different contexts (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Peifer & Holbert, 2015; Weeks, 2015), the present study highlights that, under certain conditions, Republicans avoid potentially aversive information in response to negative affective states. Democrats, in contrast, are characterized as more approach oriented in their counterattitudinal partisan news exposure and were positively affected by enthusiasm. In addition, Democrats are typically not adversely affected by anger in terms of predicting counterattitudinal news exposure. Prior studies using the motivated social cognition approach suggest that an individual's sensitivity to threat and anxiety, which predicts conservative ideology, is highly predictive of one's closed-mindedness and need for cognitive closure (Jost & Amodio, 2012; Jost et al., 2009). The aforementioned evidence appears to be consistent with the result reported herein: Republicans are more likely to reduce their counterattitudinal exposure than Democrats as a function of negative emotions.

From the perspective of deliberative democratic theories, this may be seen as both reassuring and troubling. Democratic theorists have long contended that more balanced exposure is vital for a healthy functioning democracy, yet studies often show that news programs from cable and online news sources—all of which are important sources for becoming more informed about politics—exhibit a relatively strong ideological bias (e.g., Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Holtzman, Schott, Jones,

Balota, & Yarkoni, 2011). Although the contemporary media landscape affords partisans on both sides of the ideological spectrum abundant partisan news programming options, the results of this study suggest that there is little evidence that people turn themselves away completely from counter-attitudinal news. Given that people also regularly consume more nonpartisan, centrist news programs (Pew Research Center, 2014), the worry that political news exposure can create ideological "echo chambers" appears to be less warranted than is often assumed. In contrast, a relatively stable and discernible partisan difference, especially regarding the avoidance-oriented behaviors of Republicans, may be an indication that not all people are equally exposed to opposing viewpoints in their day-to-day media diet. Moving beyond simple exposure, such partisan differences are also likely to affect the way people selectively attend to, process, and retrieve relevant information. Indeed, researchers have suspected that compared to liberals, conservatives are more likely to hold factually inaccurate beliefs (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010) and to engage in biased reasoning (Kahan, 2013) partly because of their avoidance-oriented behaviors toward aversive political information. Addressing the full range of ramifications of such "processing" strategies for the quality of democracy certainly requires further research.

Although many questions remain, the results of this study suggest that different emotions may systematically shape selective approach and avoidance patterns, and that partisans on both sides substantially differ from each other with respect to how they react to such emotions. To date, scholarship has generally not paid close attention to such double-asymmetrical patterns. As a result, empirical regularities have often been regarded as inconsistent or ambiguous. Addressing such double-asymmetries of approach–avoidance tendencies in selective exposure patterns is an important theoretical refinement, clarifying the potential boundary conditions within which partisan selective exposure and avoidance patterns may operate.

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