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The formation of issue publics during the Great Recession: examining the influences of news media, geography, and demographics

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THE FORMATION OF ISSUE PUBLICS DURING THE GREAT RECESSION:

EXAMINING THE INFLUENCES OF NEWS MEDIA, GEOGRAPHY, AND

DEMOGRAPHICS

by

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PH.D. THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Experiences during the Great Recession varied greatly due to the geographical and demographical disparities that were a major part of the financial and mortgage crises of 2008. The Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), which allowed the U.S. government to purchase equity and assets from distressed financial institutions in order to keep them solvent, was among the first legislative responses to these crises. However, the underlying economic events that precipitated the legislative intervention, including rising foreclosure rates in some states and not in others, had been disproportionately affecting Americans months before the bill was signed into law.

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine the parameters of the issue public that was supportive of TARP by studying how demographic and geographic disparities of the recession were related to selective exposure to news media and the formation of this issue public. This involved three main approaches: 1) analyzing television news coverage of the economy in the months prior to and up until the passage of TARP in October 2008; 2) assessing the influence of demographic characteristics, geographic proximity to the foreclosure crisis, partisanship affiliation, media exposure, and economic attitudes on opinion toward the proposed bailout legislation; and 3) examining the relative obtrusiveness of the economic crisis by determining if attention to specific television news outlets and frequency of watching those networks had more influence on economic attitudes and opinions than an individual's proximity to foreclosures and likelihood of being affected by the unfolding crises.

The theoretical frameworks of selective exposure, agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, and priming, which predict the ways in which news media can affect public opinion, informed the execution of this research. Additionally, this dissertation drew upon the public opinion process and the concept of issue publics, in particular state-

specific issue publics, which allowed for the study of the formation and parameters of economic public opinion in 2008.

This dissertation entailed two research approaches: a content analysis of national television news six months prior to and up until the passage of TARP in early October 2008, and a secondary analysis of select data from the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey, a rolling cross-sectional phone survey conducted from late 2007 until Election Day 2008.

Results from the content analysis study suggest national television news of the economy in 2008 predominantly covered the presidential election, the economic attributes of taxes and inflation, and presented the economic crisis as a national issue. As for the public opinion study, economic attitudes were predictive of support for TARP, but exposure to the news was not associated with support for TARP. Furthermore, demographic variables, including race, partisan identification, income, employment status, and geography, were also not associated with support for TARP.

Overall, the unfolding recession was not frequently covered on national television news in 2008, and support for TARP was found to be mostly determined by individuals' attitudes as opposed to demographic identities or geographic locations. The findings suggest that attribute agenda-setting effects were most apparent for individual views of blame for the crisis. Additionally, the issue public that was supportive of TARP appeared to be based upon economic attitudes, with minor differences apparent among respondents with different levels of education.

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INTRODUCTION

The impending economic crisis in the United States was almost impossible to deny by the fall of 2008. Foreclosures, bankruptcies, unemployment, and prices were all increasing. Only the stock market appeared immune to the economic troubles that were brewing, but that ended on September 29. On that day, anchor Katie Couric of the *CBS Evening News* said of Wall Street "the closing bell didn't ring today, it tolled for stock losses totaling seven percent" ("Dow," 2008, para. 1). Just days before, on CNN's *The Situation Room*, anchor Wolf Blitzer told viewers of "a disturbing new warning today of economic gloom and doom, if, if [*sic*] Congress fails to approve the biggest financial rescue since the Great Depression" ("Sarah Palin," 2008, para. 7). Summing up the results of that failed vote, anchor Brian Williams of *NBC Nightly News* described September 29 as "a wild and harrowing and history-making day and we still don't know how this ends" ("Bailout," 2008, para. 1). Although Congress approved the legislation days later, the recession continued to worsen throughout October and into 2009. In fact, the economic turmoil became so severe that it was compared to the Great Depression, leading scholars and the Associated Press (AP) alike to eventually refer to the crisis as "the Great Recession" (Grusky, Western, & Wimer, 2011; Schlisserman, 2010).

The Great Recession began in the United States sometime in late 2007, unfolded throughout 2008, and ultimately ended in mid-2009 (National Bureau of Economic Research [NBER], 2008, 2010). Although U.S. economic activity – including retail sales, gross domestic product (GDP), employment, and income levels – peaked in late November 2007, the housing and mortgage market had been collapsing since late 2006 and thus precipitated the overall recession (Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; NBER, 2010). As banks and other financial institutions began to panic in 2007, access to short- and long-term credit locked up, and consumers and businesses alike

stopped spending (Fligstein & Goldstein). Despite numerous efforts throughout 2008, including bank takeovers as well as the unprecedented Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), the U.S. federal government failed to avert the looming recession. Consequently, consumer confidence reached a record low, the unemployment rate doubled, the housing market collapsed, the stock market plummeted, and corporate as well as personal bankruptcies dramatically increased (Grusky et al.; NBER, 2010; Reddy, 2008; Siegel, 2008; Twin, 2008). Although NBER did not predict how long the recession would last, it ultimately spanned 18 months in the United States, making it the longest period of declined economic activity in the United States since World War II (NBER, 2008, 2010).

<u>Purpose</u>

The economic distress and unparalleled bailout during the second half of 2008 were historical and in many ways exceptional. The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze U.S. public opinion and news media content from 2008 to a) examine how attribute agenda setting and priming effects of news media were related to the formation of economic issue publics, and b) determine the parameters of these publics in terms of likelihood of being affected by the recession, geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis, partisan affiliation, and selective exposure to national television news. The theoretical frameworks of selective exposure, agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, and priming, which predict the ways in which news media can affect public opinion, informed the execution of this research. Additionally, this dissertation drew upon the public opinion process and the concept of issue publics, which were utilized to study the formation and parameters of economic public opinion in 2008.

This study involved three main approaches: 1) analyzing television news coverage of the economy in the months prior to and up until the passage of TARP in October 2008; 2) assessing the influence of demographic characteristics, geographic proximity to the

foreclosure crisis, partisanship affiliation, media exposure, and economic attitudes on opinion toward the proposed bailout legislation; and 3) examining the relative obtrusiveness of the economic crisis by determining if attention to specific television news outlets and frequency of watching those networks had more influence on economic attitudes and opinions than an individual's proximity to foreclosures and likelihood of being affected by the unfolding crises. Overall, this dissertation discerned the parameters of the issue public(s) that was supportive of TARP by studying how demographic and geographic differences during the recession were related to selective exposure to news media and how these factors, individually or collectively, influenced the formation of this issue public.

This dissertation is important because the recession and debate over the recession is ongoing. For one, the general public has been unable to come to a consensus about what caused the recession, who or what was to blame, and how it might be fixed or avoided in the future (Kenworthy & Owens, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2010). Public opinion research suggests that in 2010, two years after the recession began, Americans still had differing perspectives on the state of the economy (Pew Research Center). Additionally, the Great Recession was the most extensive economic downturn in the United States in more than 60 years, with some economists even arguing that the Great Recession was the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression (Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; NBER, 2010). Concerns have also arisen over the ways in which the younger generation was impacted by the 2008 recession, specifically in terms of political views and economic aspirations (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). There was also evidence in 2013 that middle-aged Americans were now facing economic hardships, in terms of home ownership, financial security, and employment (Norris, 2013; Rampell, 2013).

Although public debate over the causes of the recession has decreased considerably, certain regions and groups of people were more affected than others were,

with some groups even targeted by questionable banking practices prior to the recession (Grusky et al., 2011; Rugh & Massey, 2010). Evidence indicated that the recession in 2008 eventually brought about the largest transfer of wealth in U.S. history, as income and wealth disparities in the United States have dramatically expanded since then (Grusky et al.). Furthermore, in 2013 the housing market was showing the first signs of recovery, with home values increasing and the national rate of foreclosures reaching its lowest level since 2007 (Carrns, 2013; RealtyTrac, 2013; Simon, 2013; Timiraos, 2013). Along with ongoing governmental investigations into possibly illegal banking and trading practices that might have contributed to or exacerbated the economic meltdown of 2008, several mortgage firms have reached legal settlements with the federal government for their role in the foreclosure crisis (Eavis, 2013; Sparshott, 2013; Zibel, Moyer, & Philbin, 2013).

Background

Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP)

On September 29, 2008, as Congress debated the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), the Dow Jones industrial average (DJIA) posted a single-day point loss of 777.68, breaking the previous record set on September 17, 2001, after the stock market reopened following the events of September 11 (Twin, 2008). According to some accounts, this severe downturn was directly related to Congress's initial rejection of TARP, which caused investors and stock traders to panic and, in turn, alerted the general public to impending consequences should the government fail to act (Burtless & Gordon, 2011; Murray & Kane, 2008; Weisman, 2008). The U.S. House of Representatives at first refused to pass TARP as Democrats and Republicans, disagreeing along partisan and ideological lines, deliberated the potential effectiveness and primary beneficiaries of the bailout policy (Eggen & Abramowitz, 2008; Pearlstein, 2008). In general, liberal Democrats argued that the bailout was in favor of Wall Street and not "Main Street," as

the bailout would not provide any financial relief or protection to homeowners potentially facing foreclosure; on the other hand, conservative Republicans argued that TARP was socialist and an attempt to nationalize the banking system (Robert, 2008). Nonetheless, TARP became the largest corporate bailout in history when it was approved by Congress on October 3, 2008, and signed into law by President George W. Bush that same day (Grusky et al., 2011; Twin).

TARP was the federal government's first major response to the events that would lead to the Great Recession, particularly the mortgage and housing crises, as it would allow the government to keep distressed financial institutions solvent by purchasing equity and assets from them (Burtless & Gordon, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011). Prior to the passage of TARP, however, the U.S. Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve had either rescued or nationalized several investment firms, including Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, and AIG, as well as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, because of "toxic" assets that were a strain on the banks' financial resources (Grusky et al.). Although the bailout was designed to increase banks' financial liquidity, some Americans may have been more likely than others to favor or support TARP, including working families, individuals nearing retirement, business owners, and investors, as these people in particular were being affected by the stock market and a lack of available financial capital (Burtless & Gordon; Robert, 2008). Yet, despite TARP and the financial capital it provided, banks did not lend the bailout funds and instead sat on them, further locking up access to credit for consumers and businesses alike (see Burtless & Gordon). Consequently, the remainder of 2008 proved to be even more tumultuous as unemployment dramatically worsened, foreclosures continued to spike, and the DJIA ultimately posted nine more record losses (Grusky et al.).

Effects of the Great Recession

Most American citizens experienced some aspect of the Great Recession firsthand, via the stock market, housing market, or employment. However, the recession – including the mortgage and foreclosure crisis – affected certain demographic groups and geographic areas more than others (Douglas & Browne, 2011; Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; Wolff, Owens, & Burak, 2011). Furthermore, due to differences in political orientation, economic experiences, and perceptions of how a federally mandated bailout might be beneficial (or harmful) for the national economy, various individuals and groups had diverse reasons to either support or disapprove of TARP. The housing and mortgage market is of particular interest to this dissertation as the influence of the housing market on the Great Recession was unprecedented, and individual experiences with the foreclosure crisis varied greatly (Fligstein & Goldstein; Grusky et al.). Most Americans likely had some sort of an encounter with the housing market crisis, whether it was being foreclosed on, having a relative or friend foreclosed on, or simply seeing signs on foreclosed properties. At the same time, some Americans may have learned about the crisis primarily through news media reports, while other Americans may not have had any direct encounter with the housing crisis but were affected in other ways, such as by the stock market crash or unemployment.

The Great Recession was largely driven by a financial crisis within the mortgage securitization industry, which had been collapsing since late 2006 and, by 2008, "threatened the existence of the entire banking system in America" (Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011, p. 21; Grusky et al., 2011). Although the mortgage market was in distress as early as 2006, by late 2007 the national rate of foreclosures began to dramatically increase (Fligstein & Goldstein). At the state level, however, the rate of foreclosures was inconsistent, with some states having average rates of foreclosures above or below the national mean. States with foreclosure rates well above the national average in 2008 were Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan,

Nevada, and Ohio, whereas Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New

Jersey, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia had rates at or near the national

average (Fligstein & Goldstein; RealtyTrac, 2009). The remaining 31 states had

foreclosure rates well below the national average. These geographical differences imply

that some individuals were closer in proximity to the foreclosure crisis, suggesting that

the crisis was more obtrusive to some people than others.

Along with geographical differences, the recession and closely related foreclosure

crisis disproportionately affected some groups of people. Scholars have demonstrated

how the recession eventually affected a broad spectrum of socioeconomic groups, from

ultra-rich to working-class individuals (Grusky et al., 2011; Wolff, Owens, & Burak,

2011). Nonetheless, during the beginning of the recession in 2008, certain demographic

groups were more likely to experience economic troubles than others were, in terms of

employment, housing, and general financial security (Douglas & Browne, 2011; Grusky

et al.; Mendenhall, 2010; Rugh & Massey, 2010; Squires, 2011). In particular, because of

the recession, Hispanics were more likely to face unemployment, whereas Whites were

more likely to lose money on the stock market or experience reduced incomes (Petev,

Pistaferri, & Saporta-Eksten, 2011). However, investigative news stories and scholarly

articles alike have pointed out that, in general, Black Americans were most likely to

experience hardship during the Great Recession (Douglas & Browne; Mendenhall; Rugh

& Massey; Squires).

While certain individuals and groups were more or less likely to struggle during

the recession for different reasons, the foreclosure crisis in particular disproportionately

affected individuals who were not White. Although income, debt, and credit scores are

the typical criterion used by banks when evaluating loan and mortgage applications,

Blacks as well as Hispanics were more likely than Whites to receive subprime loans prior

to 2008, which are characterized by high interest rates and less favorable terms

(Demyanyk & Van Hemert, 2009; Rugh & Massey, 2010; Smeeding et al., 2011). Blacks

and Hispanics were also more likely to be behind on mortgage payments and potentially face foreclosure (Grusky et al., 2011; Wolff et al., 2011). This was likely due to the stratification of U.S. society and the fact that individuals of races other than White continue to face barriers to resources and economic limitations that White individuals generally do not (see Charles, 2003; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Snipp, 2003). Ultimately, various groups had different likelihoods of being affected by the recession, and, along with geographical proximity to foreclosures, this could have been related to media selective exposure and economic perceptions during the economic crises of autumn 2008.

Since 2008, Americans have not reached a consensus as to the exact causes, duration, and magnitude of the Great Recession and related economic crises (see Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; Kenworthy & Owens, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2010). This discord might be due to many factors, including partisan and political disagreements, disparities along demographic and/or geographic lines in terms of how the recession inconsistently and disproportionately affected diverse groups, or even differences in how various news media covered the crises.

<center>News Media and the Great Recession</center>

The severity and magnitude of the Great Recession may have been surprising to many people as the news media generally paid little attention to home loan practices that were commonplace in the early 2000s but eventually played a crucial part in causing the recession (see Lewis, 2010; McCombs et al., 2011; Sandvoss, 2010). Early warnings from knowledgeable experts about the risks of unregulated mortgage markets went largely unheeded because these sources were "outside the coterie of experts favored by the mainstream political and media establishment" (Lewis, p. 163). Although the news media may not have scrutinized the financial and mortgage practices that contributed to the Great Recession and led to the foreclosure crisis, public opinion polls from 2008

reveal how much attention both news outlets and news consumers were paying to the crises unfolding that year.

According to the Pew Research Center (2008b), interest in news coverage of the economic crises of September 2008 was comparable to the amount of attention Americans paid to news about the 1986 Challenger disaster, the 1989 San Francisco earthquake, 9/11 in 2001, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Furthermore, an examination of Pew's weekly news interest index from September to October 2008 reveals that for several weeks the economy competed with the 2008 presidential campaign for both audience attention and news coverage (see Pew Research Center, 2008b). Most notably, the weekly news interest index demonstrated that up until late September most Americans, as well as the American news media, were generally not concerned with the economy and unraveling mortgage and housing markets, but were instead predominantly interested in the presidential election. Furthermore, television ratings data from 2008 showed that Americans paid an increasing amount of attention to national network and cable news over the course of the second half of 2008, with the largest increase in attention to national TV news occurring in September (Pew Research Center, 2008a; Project for Excellence, 2009a, 2009b). Thus, it seems that U.S. national news outlets along with the American public debated the seriousness and potential causes of the recession and related foreclosure crisis, but only once the economy was severely slowing down.

Ratings and survey data from 2008 show that television news was a major source of news for many Americans, with 57% of Americans tuning in to TV news on any given day (Pew Research Center, 2008a). Additionally, in 2008 cable news attracted a larger audience than network news (Pew). Although the network news audience continued a shrinking trend that began with the advent of cable news (see McCombs et al., 2011), ratings increased from mid-2008 through the election in November (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009b). Cable news viewership was stable from April to June,

but increased from June to August followed by an even greater increase in viewership from August to November (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a). Fox News had the highest ratings overall in 2008, but in terms of cumulative viewers, CNN was on average the most-watched cable news source at any time (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a). Finally, while age was the strongest predictor of network or cable news viewership, partisan affiliation was also significantly correlated with preferences for specific outlets. According to the Biennial News Consumption Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2008a), Fox News viewers were 39% Republican, 33% Democrat, and 22% independent; CNN viewers were 18% Republican, 51% Democrat, and 23% independent; and nightly network news viewers were 22% Republican, 45% Democrat, and 26% independent.

The recession affected people and regions in various ways, but the news media potentially offered much-needed information and/or different perspectives about the recession, especially for some individuals and groups. In this way, news media provided a constructed and, in all likelihood, limited view of the events that were unfolding in 2008. In the news, for example, the phrase "subprime mortgage market" connoted failure on the part of consumers to make their obliged payments (Sandvoss, 2010). In contrast to "subprime mortgage market" was the terminology of "predatory lending," which may better describe the situation in which banks marketed mortgages to people who could not afford them (Sandvoss). Presumably, different news media outlets discussed the recession in varying ways, which would suggest that audiences received specific information based on their selection of and exposure to particular news outlets, which could have been largely determined by how much experience individuals were having with the crisis, how unsure they felt about the crisis, or their desire to know more. Thus, perceptions of the 2008 crises may have largely depended on what media individuals consumed, where they lived, and/or who they were demographically.

Theoretical Perspective

This dissertation contributes to theoretical literature on issue publics, public opinion, and news media effects as well as offer practical knowledge on the relationship between the financial crisis of September 2008 and economic news leading up to the crisis. Agenda-setting research traditionally focuses on the news media's ability to teach news consumers about issues (McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011); this dissertation adds to this literature by examining the ways in which news media may have informed opinion and perceptions during the economic crises of 2008. Specifically, this research examined whether attribute agenda setting can produce or influence particular publics by studying how the principal aspects of economic news coverage, selective exposure to specific news media outlets, and frequency of watching television news were related to the formation and parameters of issue publics during the economic crises of 2008.

This dissertation studied agenda-setting effects during the economic crises of September 2008 by examining the extent to which individuals selected news media primarily based on proximity to foreclosures as well as the likelihood of being affected by the recession. In particular, this study tested two propositions: 1) the foreclosure crisis was a concrete issue (in that it is easy to relate to being forced from one's home), but that it was probably more obtrusive to some individuals, depending on who they were and where they lived; and 2) the potential outcomes of TARP were abstract and unobtrusive, but that public favorability of TARP might not have been shaped exclusively by selective exposure to news media but also by proximity to the foreclosure crisis as well as likelihood of being affected by the recession. Agenda-setting research has explicated the differences between issue abstractness and obtrusiveness, especially economic issues, and found that agenda-setting effects are generally more apparent with unobtrusive, concrete issues, or those issues that do not obtrude into daily life and are easier to comprehend (McCombs, 2004; Yagade & Dozier, 1990). Therefore, agenda-setting effects in the context of the economic situation of September 2008 should theoretically be observable

with those individuals who spent more time with the news as well as those individuals who were further in proximity from foreclosures but also potentially less likely to be affected by the recession, based on the assumption that the crises will be relatively unobtrusive to these individuals. Thus, proximity to foreclosures and likelihood of being affected by the recession were used as predictors of selective exposure to news media, which in turn should be predictive of agenda-setting effects. However, this research also examined how those geographically closer to foreclosures and more likely to be affected were supportive of TARP, regardless of media exposure, and in comparison to a) individuals who were not in close proximity to foreclosures and less likely to be experiencing effects of the recession, and b) individuals who spent more time with television news.

Very few studies have examined how news media content and selective exposure to specific media outlets can influence the formation of opinions and issue publics, especially economic opinions and publics (Gil de Zuniga, Correa, & Valenzuela, 2012; Son & Weaver, 2005). Along these same lines, agenda-setting research has generally examined the relationship between news media and public opinion; yet, most agenda-setting studies do not examine how exposure to news media is directly related to the formation of issue publics and opinions on specific issues (Son & Weaver). This dissertation also contributes to theoretical understandings of the parameters of issue publics as public opinion scholars and researchers continue to refine their understanding of the definition, formation, and make-up of issue publics (Price, 2008). In particular, the emerging public opinion concept of state-specific issue publics was tested by examining the extent to which economic issue publics were formed or based on geographical differences, which were a unique facet of the Great Recession and foreclosure crisis (Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011).

While many studies have examined the relationship between news media, the economy, demographics, and public opinion, little research has scrutinized the potential

influence of geography on public opinion about an economic downturn (see Hagen, 2008; Hester & Gibson, 2003). Accordingly, this dissertation examined how proximity to foreclosures influenced individual opinions of the economy and accounted for demographic differences that also might have influenced the formation of economic opinion. The major focus of this research, then, was the formation and parameters of economic issue publics in relation to the demographic and geographic aspects of the foreclosure crisis. However, this dissertation also considered whether these factors predicted selective exposure to television news and subsequent agenda-setting effects, as research has demonstrated the agenda-setting potential of television news, including economic news, with TV having a relatively quick impact on public opinion due to the limited time and information capacity of televised news (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011). Additionally, scholars have found that the news media can directly influence public opinion about economic issues (see Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hagen; Hester & Gibson; McCombs et al., 2011; Stevenson, Gonzenbach, & David, 1994; Wu et al., 2002).

In essence, this dissertation examined differences in perceptions of obtrusiveness of the foreclosure crisis. In other words, was the issue public in favor of TARP primarily composed of those individuals close to foreclosures and likely to experience the recession's effects, or those individuals paying extensive attention to television news? Television news ratings from this time frame demonstrated that individuals were flocking to cable and network television news (Pew Research Center, 2008a; Project for Excellence, 2009a, 2009b), yet questions remain as to why. This dissertation determined the extent to which geographical and demographic differences tied to the economic crises were specifically related to selective exposure to television news as well as the formation of the issue public supporting TARP. To test these propositions, and in line with comprehensive agenda setting and public opinion studies (see McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Schulz, 2008), the findings from the first study of this

dissertation, a content analysis of television news, were integrated with a secondary analysis of survey data from 2008.

Methodological Approach

This dissertation utilized two research methods: 1) a content analysis, and 2) a secondary analysis of national survey data. The content analysis examined a random sample of television news coverage of the economy. Specifically, broadcast and network television news prior to and until the passage of TARP was analyzed to study how national news coverage of the economy emphasized the foreclosure crisis and specific geographic and demographic aspects of that crisis. National television news, and not local television news, was the focus of this analysis as one of the major purposes of this study was to determine the extent to which national news outlets covered a national issue that was playing out differently in specific states, and how individual attention to national news coverage influenced perceptions of the economy, especially for individuals residing in states where the rate of foreclosures was below the national average. This analysis looked at differences between broadcast and cable news, as well as how this coverage changed over time, especially as the foreclosure crisis worsened and as the introduction of TARP approached in late September. Identifying the major differences between these news sources allowed for an examination of how selective exposure to specific television news media may have influenced individual economic attitudes and opinions of TARP.

The survey data under analysis were from the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), a rolling cross-sectional (or trend) phone survey conducted from late 2007 until Election Day 2008. This dissertation utilized measures of demographics, geography, political orientation, news media exposure, and economic attitudes in order to predict economic opinions, specifically assessments of the proposed bailout legislation (TARP). In particular, this study determined the boundaries of the issue public that was supportive of TARP by analyzing the extent to which ethnicity, economic status

measures, partisan affiliation, geographic proximity to foreclosures, and selective exposure to television news was related to the formation of this public. The content analysis study was integrated with this data analysis by determining whether those individuals who paid extensive attention to specific television news sources expressed attitudes reflective of the news coverage seen on that outlet. This enabled an examination of the relative obtrusiveness of the foreclosure crisis as it was related to the formation of economic issue publics during the crisis of September 2008.

By examining survey research conducted during September and October 2008, this study shed light on the relationship between public opinion, the news media, the economic crisis, circumstances related to the crisis, and potentially the 2008 election. Although there are anecdotal explanations concerning the links between news media, the 2008 economic crisis, and public opinion, this relationship has not yet been empirically examined (see McCombs et al., 2011). Additionally, by analyzing news coverage of the economy on both cable and network news, this study offers findings that will further mass communication researchers' understandings of the differences that can exist among news coverage from various news outlets. Along these same lines, this research provides insight to how U.S. news media covered the unfolding economic crisis throughout 2008, in terms of the sources that were interviewed, the dominant issues and issue aspects covered, as well as the extent to which demographic and geographic differences of the foreclosure crisis were discussed.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This dissertation begins by explicating the theoretical framework that guides the execution of this research. Specifically, the public opinion concepts of issue publics and state-specific issue publics are described in detail. Additionally, theoretical literature on the public opinion process is reviewed, especially in relation to the economy and news media. The theoretical framework section concludes with agenda setting and priming,

specifically attribute agenda setting and attribute priming. The research questions and hypotheses for the first study are posed in Chapter 2. The methods, findings, and discussion of the first study of the dissertation, a content analysis, are contained within Chapter 3. The research questions and hypotheses for the second study of this dissertation are posed at the end of Chapter 3. Chapter 4 details the methods and findings of the second study, a secondary analysis of survey data. Finally, the dissertation concludes with a discussion of the findings, theoretical implications, limitations of both studies, and suggestions for future research in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Great Recession and related foreclosure crisis, despite being national issues, disproportionately affected certain individuals and geographic regions because of a variety of factors, such as the distribution of certain groups in geographical areas and the tendency for banks to offer subprime loans to specific people in particular states (Demyanyk & Van Hemert, 2009; Rugh & Massey, 2010; Smeeding et al., 2011). Although specific groups of people, depending on who they were and where they lived, may have been more or less likely to attend to news coverage during the economic crisis, research has not yet determined the extent to which national television news in the U.S. covered and explained the Great Recession as it unfolded throughout 2008 (see McCombs et al., 2011), let alone how people perceived its effects on them.

Along with proximity to the aspects of the crises as well as likelihood of being affected, selective exposure to specific news outlets likely had varying impacts on public opinion during the Great Recession, especially if different news sources covered issues in dissimilar ways. Thus, economic public opinion and perceptions during the Great Recession were inevitably shaped by a number of factors, including selective media exposure, economic attitudes, demographic likelihood of being impacted, and geographical proximity to hard-hit areas. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine national news coverage of the economic crises that unfolded throughout 2008, and to discern how selective exposure to the news, as well as economic attitudes, geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis, and demographic likelihood of being affected by the recession, shaped the formation and parameters of different economic issue publics.

This dissertation draws on the theoretical framework of the public opinion process and the public opinion concept of issue publics, in particular state-specific issue publics, as the Great Recession disproportionately affected U.S. states and regions (Fligstein &

Goldstein, 2011). Additionally, this dissertation explicates the theoretical perspectives of agenda setting and media priming, including attribute agenda setting and attribute priming, in relation to public opinion and economic news. Altogether, these theoretical perspectives and concepts guided and informed the execution of this research.

<center>The Public Opinion Process:</center>

<center>The Formation and Parameters of Issue Publics</center>

Public opinion scholars have made it clear that public opinion is a dynamic, collective, and reactive process, in which collective opinion emerges, expresses, and eventually wanes as individuals and collectivities (or publics) exchange, communicate, and gradually legitimate perceptions and ideas (Crespi, 1997; Perrin & McFarland, 2011; Price, 1992, 2008). The theoretical model of the public opinion process explains the various factors that influence the formation of public opinion and outlines theoretical components related to the formative contours of opinions and issue publics (Crespi; Hoffman et al., 2007).

When studying public opinion as a process, researchers focus on the ways in which individual opinions align with collective opinions by analyzing the varied influences or moderators that individuals encounter in their own environment. Individualistic attitudinal predispositions, interpersonal communication, perceptions of social reality, and the mass media – in particular, news media – are the key components of the public opinion process (Hoffman et al., 2007). Together, these factors influence people as they move from being individuals with their own attitudes and opinions to a collective group of shared attitudes and opinions. Although public opinion and survey research generally includes measures of attitudes, interpersonal communication, and media exposure, the focus of this study will be attitudinal predispositions and media exposure as these two components in particular play a crucial role in the formation of opinions, especially economic opinion. Interpersonal communication was omitted from

this study, however, as the purpose of this dissertation is to determine if individual experiences during the Great Recession predict media exposure and economic attitudes and opinions, not the extent to which individuals discussed the recession and the effects of that discussion on public opinion. Media and public opinion scholars have repeatedly demonstrated that news media exposure, as opposed to interpersonal communication, can have substantial effects on the formation of public opinion, especially in terms of the economy and economic public opinion (Erbring et al., 1980; Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Wu et al., 2002). Furthermore, interpersonal communication variables were omitted as research has demonstrated that survey measures of interpersonal communication are often unreliable (see Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hagen, 2008; Hoffman et al.; Hutchings, 2003; Price & Zaller, 1993). Additionally, the survey data utilized for this dissertation did not include relevant measures of discussion about the economy or economic crises of 2008.

<div align="center">Attitudes and Public Opinion</div>

Attitudes and attitudinal predispositions substantially influence the formation of public opinion. Attitudes are enduring covert and psychological feelings, tendencies, or orientations (Price, 1992). In the simplest of terms, attitudes can be described as evaluations, or likes and dislikes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Scholars have toiled over the differences between opinions and attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken; Price; Zaller, 1992), but have traditionally agreed that attitudes are composed of at least two separate internal structures: the cognitive component that consists of beliefs and the affective component that consists of feelings (Tourangeau & Galesic, 2008). Contemporary conceptualizations of attitudes have elaborated on the traditional perspective by pointing out that attitudes are predispositions that are mentally accessible and guide both perceptions of issues and behaviors in relation to them (Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Tourangeau & Galesic).

Essentially, attitudes motivate opinions as individual differences in political values and other predispositions together form the contours of public opinion (Zaller).

The influence of attitudes on the formation of opinion and issue publics cannot be understated. As Zaller (1992) succinctly put it, "every opinion is a marriage of information and predisposition" (p. 6). Of most significance to this study are political and economical predispositions. Predispositions at least partly depend on an individual's social and economic location (Zaller). However, according to Zaller, political predispositions are "the critical intervening variable between the communications people encounter in the mass media, on one side, and their statements of political preferences, on the other" (p. 23). In terms of public opinion and survey research, political predispositions such as ideology and partisan affiliation are grounded in attachment and identification with "certain groups and symbols as well as in rather general moral preferences and commitment to values" (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 145). In fact, Zaller wrote that partisanship and political ideology are so closely related that partisanship can be used instead of political ideology when studying opinions and perceptions of political policies. In light of this scholarship, and given the increasingly partisan nature of U.S. television news media and the electorate public (Aday, Livingston, & Herbert, 2005; Bartels, 2000; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Roper, 2013), partisan affiliation is utilized as an independent variable in this study to predict opinions on economic legislation during the financial crisis of September 2008. As TARP was legislation debated in Congress and eventually signed into law by President Bush, it seems logical that an individual's identification with a political party had some role in the opinion formation process.

News Media and Public Opinion

Scholars have generally researched the interaction between public opinion and the media in broad, theoretical ways (i.e., Lippmann, 1922). Other studies have examined

more specific relationships, such as the coverage of local issues and local public opinion (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002), the interaction between political or election news coverage and public opinion (see Goidel & Langley, 1995; King, 1997; McCombs et al., 1997), or the relationship between the press and elites and how this influences the general public (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003). Although scholars have long argued over whether "news media mould or mirror public opinion" (Schulz, 2008, p. 348), there is general agreement that the news media, in the context of public opinion, essentially provide a unified (albeit limited) worldview and indirectly inform individuals about the opinions of others (Erbring et al., 1980; Kepplinger, 2008; Noelle-Neumann, 1984, 1991; Price, 2008).

     News effects research, in relation to public opinion, is essentially about the transfer of salient issues from news media content to news media consumers, and how the prominent issues and aspects (or attributes) of those issues can influence subsequent evaluations (Kepplinger, 2008; Roessler, 2008). Price (2008) explained that by attending to some issues and not others, and by consistently covering these same issues, the news media suggest which issues are most important and which issues do not matter whatsoever. Kepplinger reaffirmed this point by stating that news effects theories explain the ways in which the mainstream press and society come to agree on what issues are most important. Although the news media are not a form of persuasive media, scholars have argued that the news media can create a limited and extremely focused worldview, particularly for those individuals who pay a great deal of attention to the news (see Erbring et al., 1980; Noelle-Neumann, 1984, 1991; Patterson, 2008; Price). This is a key consideration for any public opinion study as the news media have always had a peculiar relationship with public opinion and survey research, especially in the context of economics. However, the potential effects of news media are contingent upon and a result of an individual's selective exposure to the media.

Selective Exposure to News Media and Public Opinion

　　　　Research has found that television news networks, by covering issues in certain ways, attract specific audiences based on partisan and ideological predispositions (see Aday, Livingston, & Herbert, 2005; Baum & Gussin, 2008; Coe et al., 2008; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Prior, 2007). Additionally, researchers have investigated differences among television news networks, specifically how cable and broadcast news differ in use of sources, presentation styles, topics, as well as audiences (see Aday et al.; Bae, 2000; Baldwin, Barrett, & Bates, 1992; Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012). In a study that looked at differences between cable and broadcast news story topics, Bae discovered that cable news featured more government, politics, and feature stories, whereas network news covered more health and welfare stories. Aday et al. found that the coverage of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq was more pro-Bush on Fox News than on CNN, ABC, CBS, and NBC. Cable and broadcast TV networks also seem to differ in their use of sources. Zeldes et al. studied differences between broadcast and cable news coverage of the 2008 presidential campaign and established that the reporters and sources in both formats were predominantly White males. Yet, major differences were found to exist between network news on the one hand and cable news on the other, as Fox News and CNN election coverage had more female sources as well as sources of different races (Zeldes et al.). These findings were inconsistent with what Zeldes and Fico found in their examination of news coverage of the 2004 election, when network news coverage of the election featured stories with more female and nonpartisan sources.

　　　　Along with differences in presentation and foci of coverage, research has examined how network and cable news audiences vary. Overall, network news continues to face a shrinking audience as individuals seek out news increasingly online but also on cable news networks (see McCombs et al., 2011; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a). The best predictors of network news consumption are generally age and gender,

with older individuals and men being more likely to watch network news and television news in general (Mares & Sun, 2010; McCombs et al.). However, the general audience of cable news is notably different in comparison to the general audience of network news. One study found that cable news viewers tend to consume more news than network news viewers did and that cable news viewers are much more likely to watch cable news during a crisis than network news viewers are (Baldwin et al., 1992).

While individual differences largely determine how people selectively expose themselves to different media outlets, research has demonstrated that with cable television news the most important individual trait is partisan affiliation (Baum & Gussin, 2008; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; McCombs et al., 2011; Stroud, 2010; Stroud & Lee, 2013). In fact, scholars have found evidence for partisan selective exposure, especially with political issues and selective exposure to television news and cable television news in particular (Gil de Zuniga et al.; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Stroud, 2008, 2010; Stroud & Lee, 2013). However, recent research by Garrett (2009a, 2009b) and Garrett, Carnahan, and Lynch (2013) has disputed the notion of partisan selective exposure. Although the researchers found that strong partisans and ideologues are more likely to selectively expose themselves to information that is agreeable or in line with preexisting views, these same individuals did not completely disregard or ignore information with which they disagree.

The selection of, and subsequent exposure to, specific news media content is a major, if not dominant, influence and moderator of individual opinions and perceptions. Research has demonstrated that individuals selectively expose themselves to certain news outlets, specifically television news networks (see Baum & Gussin, 2008; Chaffee et al., 2001; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Knobloch, Carpentier, & Zillmann, 2003; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Stroud, 2008, 2010; Stroud & Lee, 2013). Selective exposure is the idea that individuals tend to expose themselves to messages that are consistent with their preexisting attitudes and

beliefs in order to avoid cognitive dissonance (see Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). Attention to certain news providers can have different effects on public opinion and the opinion formation process (see Gil de Zuniga et al.; Son & Weaver, 2005; Stroud & Lee; Zeldes, Fico, & Diddi, 2012). Individuals learn about different groups and opinions through media exposure and then evaluate these individuals and groups to determine whether they agree or disagree (Joslyn, 1999; Nir, 2011). Although individuals also communicate with close others and thus consider the perspectives of other individuals along with the media perspective (Hagen, 2008; Roessler, 2008), news media nonetheless exercise substantial influence on public opinion. Accordingly, media exposure measures, in terms of selective exposure to specific television news outlets as well as frequency of watching television news, are utilized as independent variables in this dissertation.

Research on partisan selective exposure has found, however, that even if individuals do expose themselves to specific media information based on partisan or political ideological preferences, they do not necessarily ignore oppositional information or even exclusively retain information from attitude-consistent sources. Garrett (2009a) found no evidence that individuals simply abandon stories that contain information they disagree with. Additionally, Garrett (2009b) found that although individuals who strongly identify with a political party do increase their exposure to information with consistent views, this does not occur at the expense of information with counter views. Finally, Garrett, Carnahan, and Lynch (2013) found that exposure to agreeable media content was positively correlated with exposure to disagreeable content, such that individuals who sought out information that was in line with their preexisting views still exposed themselves to attitudinally challenged information, albeit less frequently than they expose themselves to agreeable information.

Only a few studies have examined the association between public opinion and news effects in terms of how different media sources and selective exposure to specific news media can directly shape the formation of opinions. Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey

(1987) studied the relationship between different news sources and public policy preferences, finding that dissimilar news sources had unequal influences on public opinion. Building from that study, Son and Weaver (2005) examined how exposure to different news outlets was related to public opinion about presidential candidates of the 2000 election. They found that increased emphasis on and favorable presentation of specific candidates was predictive of increased public support for that candidate. Notably, Son and Weaver also observed that "news from different sources tended to have effects of different degrees and directions of influence on public opinion" (p. 190). In a study of the interaction between political ideology, selective exposure to either Fox News or CNN, and attitudes toward immigration, Gil de Zuniga et al. (2012) discovered that Fox News viewers were predominantly conservative Republicans. They also found that Fox News viewers, whether conservative or liberal, generally had negative perceptions of immigrants and were more supportive of restrictive immigration policies. These studies suggest that selective exposure to specific media outlets and content can influence the formation of opinion and issue publics.

Research has demonstrated that the public opinion formation process is substantially influenced by attitudinal predispositions as well as selective attention and exposure to specific media outlets and content. However, attitudes and media exposure are major influences not only on public opinion about political or social issues, but also economic issues. Along with an individual's likelihood of being affected by and geographic proximity to an economic issue, media exposure and attitudes predominantly influence the formation of economic opinions and perceptions. These factors are explicated in the next section.

Public Opinion and the Economy:

Attitudes and the News Media

The economy and public opinion are intricately involved with one another, such that public sentiment (opinion and attitudes) of the economy can directly determine the performance of the economy (mass behavior; Hagen, 2008). Studies have examined the influence of both real-world experience and media use in relation to economic opinion, with economic indicators in reality sometimes driving shifts in opinion, or shifts in media coverage of the economy, influencing changing perceptions of the economy (Erbring et al., 1980; Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Wu et al., 2002). Stevenson, Gonzenbach, and David (1994) found that news media coverage of the economy was first influenced by public opinion, in that the media were responding to a rapid rise of interest and concern over the economy. However, the subsequent coverage that resulted from the increase in concern ended up influencing opinion, such that the researchers observed what they called a cyclical effect (Stevenson et al.).

Studies have also found that the news media slightly influence public opinion more so during a recession (Blood & Phillips, 1995; Wu et al., 2002). In a study that looked at economic news coverage about a recession, Blood and Phillips found that while presidential approval had more influence on the number of recession headlines than real-world economic issues, the number of article headlines that contained the word "recession" was a significant predictor of consumer attitudes and sentiment. In particular, the researchers discovered that as the number of recession headlines increased, consumer confidence subsequently decreased. Put simply, economic issues can and frequently do drive public opinion (Hagen, 2008). Thus, the relationship among media coverage, real economic indicators, and shifts in economic opinion is not necessarily guaranteed such that one factor consistently predicts or influences another. However, research has demonstrated that news coverage has direct consequences on individual assessments of the economy (Goidel & Langley, 1995; Wu et al.).

Although the news tends to follow economic indicators, often economic news is more negative than necessarily warranted (Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Stevenson et al., 1994; Wu et al., 2002) and that at times the media may be more influenced by the public on economic issues than vice versa (Erbring et al., 1980; Stevenson et al.). Negative news in particular can exert significant influence on individual assessments of the economy (Goidel & Langley; Hester & Gibson), which in turn influences economic behavior (Hagen, 2008). In examining whether negatively framed messages correlated with consumer confidence measures, Hester and Gibson found that media coverage had an influence on economic expectations. Specifically, they wrote that negative attributes of economic news coverage "may have serious consequences for both expectations of and performance of the economy" (p. 85). Finally, in a similar study, Goidel and Langley (1995) studied a decade of economic news in *The New York Times*, finding that the newspaper tended to follow negative economic news rather than positive news. The negative news coverage specifically had the potential to exert considerable influence on public opinion, as media coverage of the economy is inevitably a reflection of real economic issues that individuals experience in their own lives.

News Media Sources and Economic Public Opinion

Along with the effects of economic news, scholars have examined journalistic sourcing in general news but also in economic news specifically. Previous research on economic news stories and sources of information has demonstrated that the major news outlets in the U.S. prefer expert, accredited, elite sources to unaccredited or unaffiliated, non-elite, average people (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). News stories tend to be weighted towards the perspective of elites and give disproportionate attention to public figures who have either political or economic power (Cross, 2010). Furthermore, various studies have illustrated that not all news sources are treated equally or have the same degree of access

to the news media (Cross; Gans, 1980; Hackett, 1985; Hall et al., 1978). Hall et al. were among the earliest scholars to analyze news sources and demonstrated that news media have a tendency to rely on what they called "primary definers of topics," or accredited representatives of major social institutions (p. 58). Finally, agenda-setting research has also examined how specific sources, such as politicians and other political experts, can exert influence over the shaping of the media agenda (McCombs, 2004).

<div align="center">News Effects Theories</div>

Mass media have long been recognized as having a major role in the public opinion process and the formation of public opinion. Notably, three theoretical frameworks offer different explanations as to how news media can inform or even shape public opinion considerations. Agenda setting, priming, and framing constitute a body of literature on media effects that seeks to clarify the relationship between public opinion and the news. Each of these theories describes a unique facet or effect of news media. Agenda setting looks at how news media tells people *what to generally think about*, in terms of broad issues that are perceived to be more important than others based on how much coverage an issue receives (McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Framing considers how the media can influence *how people might think about issues,* by intentionally or unintentionally crafting media messages that may lead to or suggest possible interpretations (Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1991; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007). Priming is the cognitive process in which *ideas or words become associated with other ideas or words and subsequently used in the evaluation of issues* (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Scheufele & Tewksbury). Of primary interest to this dissertation are agenda setting and priming for reasons explicated below.

A clear distinction exists between a) agenda setting and priming, and b) framing. Agenda setting and priming are compatible hypotheses, with some scholars even arguing that priming can be considered an extension of agenda setting (Scheufele, 2000;

Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Scheufele and Tewksbury succinctly wrote that "by making some issues more salient in people's mind (agenda setting), mass media can also shape the considerations that people take into account when making judgments about political candidates or issues (priming)" (p. 11). Similarly, Iyengar (1991) wrote that "agenda-setting reflects the impact of news coverage on the perceived importance of national issues, priming refers to the impact of news coverage on the weight assigned to specific issues in making political judgments" (p. 133). Framing research, though, usually looks at media content in relation to either how news organizations organize or present information in news stories or how audiences interpret the story based on how the story is framed. Furthermore, while some scholars have conceptualized framing as a single paradigm that encompasses several different conceptualizations of frames, framing, and framing effects (see Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999), D'Angelo (2002) argued that these perspectives are actually distinct, and this has "led to a comprehensive view of the framing process, not fragmented findings in isolated research agendas" (p. 871).

Scholars have toiled over the differences between all three concepts and have largely concluded that agenda setting and priming are compatible or complementary to each other as they are memory- or salience-based models of information processing, whereas framing is a separate concept as it focuses on interpretative schema (Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Reese, 2007; Scheufele, 1999, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In other words, agenda setting and priming are both about the weight given to objects/issues and their respective attributes based on emphasis in the media and attention by audiences (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002), but framing, on the other hand, is about differences in the mode of presentation of information (Scheufele & Tewksbury). Essentially, agenda setting and priming are considered second-order effects that explain attitude accessibility, whereas framing is a first-order effect that explains how individuals perceive attributes of issue objects as applicable or pertaining to other objects and attributes, or even attitudes and opinions.

Public opinion and news effects research often utilizes the frameworks of agenda setting and priming as it explains how individuals learn about issues from the media and often come to rely on this information when forming their own opinions. Additionally, rather than study how journalists crafted messages, or how individuals potentially interpreted news messages, which are the two main approaches of framing research (Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), this dissertation studies the presence or absence of certain issues and certain aspects of those issues. Accordingly, agenda setting and priming, as well as attribute agenda setting and attribute priming, informed this research and are explicated in the remainder of this chapter.

Agenda Setting and Attribute Agenda Setting

McCombs and Shaw (1972) first developed the agenda-setting function of the news in their landmark study of the 1968 presidential campaign in which they compared what voters identified as the major issues of the campaign to what the news media presented as the major issues. One of the findings was that the media spent more time analyzing the campaigns rather than the issues at hand. However, McCombs and Shaw still found that the media appeared "to have exerted a considerable impact on voters' judgments of what they considered the major issues of the campaign" (p. 180). Additionally, although the presidential candidates themselves differed on emphasis of certain issues, "the judgments of the voters seem to reflect the *composite* of the mass media coverage" (p. 181, emphasis in original). Although several earlier studies explored notions similar to what would later be understood as agenda-setting effects (see Cohen, 1963; Lang & Lang, 1959; Long, 1958), McCombs and Shaw were the first scholars to label this possible function of the news media as "agenda setting."

The original agenda-setting study also introduced the concepts of attention and emphasis. McCombs and Shaw (1972) plainly pointed out that people "vary greatly in their *attention* to mass media political coverage" (p. 176, emphasis added). However,

along with attention, audiences learn "in direct proportion to the *emphasis* placed on the campaign issues by the mass media" (p. 177, emphasis added). Based on the media's emphasis and an individual's attention to the news, items on the news agenda then become more or less salient in the minds of news consumers. Thus, the fundamental argument of agenda setting is that the news media, by emphasizing some issues and disregarding others, influence the considerations made by individuals, especially those who pay a great deal of attention to the media, by making specific issues seem more important or salient. Although demographic traits, such as age, income, education, and political orientation, only have minor roles in minimizing or enhancing potential agenda-setting effects (McCombs et al., 2011; McCombs & Shaw, 1972), research has found several contingent factors that frequently influence the likelihood of an agenda-setting effect occurring.

Along with attention, emphasis, and salience, media scholars have developed the concepts of obtrusiveness and need for orientation, which are important considerations for this dissertation. The relative obtrusiveness of a given issue determines the news media's ability to teach news consumers about certain issues, most especially economic issues (Zucker, 1978). Researchers have consistently found that agenda-setting effects are much less likely to occur with obtrusive issues and more likely with unobtrusive issues (McCombs, 2004; Shaw & Slater, 1988; Zucker). Essentially, obtrusiveness is operationalized as the likelihood or ability of an individual to experience something in reality, with obtrusive issues (or those that one can experience) not setting an agenda, and unobtrusive issues (or those that one cannot directly experience) much more likely to exhibit an agenda-setting effect (McCombs et al., 2011; Zucker). Closely related to the idea of obtrusiveness are considerations of the concreteness or abstractness of an issue, with concrete issues, or issues that easy to relate to and comprehend, working in the way agenda setting predicts, and abstract issues, or issues that are difficult to make sensible, possibly not working at all (Yagade & Dozier, 1990). For example, Behr and Iyengar

(1985) looked at news coverage of and public concern for a handful of issues, including unemployment. They found that news coverage was less likely to be influenced by changes in opinion and more so by actual events.

Another important concept for this research is an individual's need for orientation or information, which posits that different individuals will have differing desires to know more about a given issue (Weaver, 2007). Not all individuals consider the same information as important, nor are all individuals equally impacted by a story's prominence and presentation (Weaver). Need for orientation is driven by a desire to avoid cognitive dissonance, in which individuals will seek different amounts of information based on a) how uncertain they feel about an issue, b) how much ambiguity surrounds the issue, and c) in direct proportion to the number of sources of information about the topic/issue at hand (Hagen, 2008; Kepplinger, 2008; Weaver). Accordingly, individual perceptions of issue importance influence not only agenda-setting effects but also need for orientation, with news coverage of specific issues potentially enhancing agenda-setting effects and desires for information among individuals who perceive those same issues as more important (Erbring et al., 1980; Hutchings, 2003). Thus, when investigating potential agenda-setting effects of the news media, individual differences, media characteristics, and the nature of issues must be considered simultaneously.

Based on the relative obtrusiveness of an issue and individual's needs for orientation, various groups will likely pay differing amounts of attention to the news media, which is essentially the first step in the agenda-setting process. In the context of this research, an individual's proximity to and likelihood of experiencing aspects of the fall 2008 economic crises could have directly shaped different perceptions of obtrusiveness, which in turn could have influenced individual needs for orientation as well as news media exposure habits. If the obtrusiveness of an economic issue is the strongest factor in determining whether individuals will turn to the news media for information, then in this case those individuals less likely to be affected and not in close

proximity to the foreclosure crisis should pay more attention to media coverage of the foreclosure crisis, as it will be unobtrusive to them. Theoretically speaking, these same individuals will be more influenced by news content concerning the crisis than those individuals who are more likely to be affected and/or in closer proximity to the foreclosure crisis. Along these lines, this dissertation tests the assumption that the foreclosure crisis was more unobtrusive for some individuals and that these individuals in particular paid more attention to the news.

The agenda-setting theoretical framework is a well-established approach for analyzing the relationship between news media and public opinion. Along with selective exposure, the concepts of need for orientation and obtrusiveness detail the contingent factors that can increase or decrease the likelihood of an agenda-setting effect. However, agenda setting only allows for predictions of how the media conveys general information to the public at large. Attribute agenda setting is an offshoot of agenda setting that looks at how news media can influence the ways publics think about issues, rather than simply addressing which issues are most important. Attribute agenda setting is explicated in the next section.

<u>Attribute Agenda Setting</u>

While traditional agenda-setting research examines the extent to which issues in the news media become perceived by the audience as important, a branch of agenda setting known as second-level, or attribute, agenda setting looks at the ways in which news coverage can influence *how* audiences think about issues. Attribute agenda setting considers how the news media can portray issues as objects of salience themselves and as objects with specific attributes. According to McCombs (2004), attribute agenda setting clarified the understanding of "how news media shape public opinion on the issues of the day" (p. 78). McCombs identified this distinction as the first and second levels of agenda setting, with the first level simply about the transfer of object salience and the second

level as the transfer of attribute salience. Put simply, attributes are the traits and properties that characterize broader issues (often referred to as objects in relation to attributes) (McCombs). Both objects and the attributes of objects vary in salience, and, just as objects can constitute an agenda, there is an agenda of attributes (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001).

Most research on attribute agenda setting has looked at political candidate images (McCombs et al., 2011). Erbring et al. (1980) and Weaver et al. (1981) were among the first to study attribute agenda setting despite the fact that the theoretical conception of second-level agenda setting had yet to be conceived. In studying the 1995 and 1996 Spanish elections, researchers found significant correlations between news media portrayals of candidate attributes and the public's perceptions of candidate attributes (McCombs et al., 1997; McCombs et al., 2000). Other research, though, has examined the second-level agenda-setting effects of financial reporting (Hester & Gibson, 2003), international news coverage (Wanta et al., 2004), and the September 11, 2001, attacks (Craft & Wanta, 2004), as well as coverage of local issues (Kim et al., 2002). Golan, Kiousis, and McDaniel (2007) examined the agenda-setting effects of political advertising during the 2004 presidential election, finding that the first-level agenda-setting effect of political advertisements was much stronger than the second-level agenda-setting effect, suggesting that the attribute agenda setting might not always occur. However, research on the association between attribute agenda setting, selective exposure to media, and the formation of opinion and issue publics is rare, especially in relation to the economy and economic issues (see Gil de Zuniga, Correa, & Valenzuela, 2012; Son & Weaver, 2005).

An important facet of attributes is that they have both substantive and affective elements. Substantive attributes are aspects of messages that aid in the cognitive organization of issues and topics, whereas affective elements "deal with the positive, neutral, or negative tone present in communication messages" (McCombs et al., 2011, p.

85). According to McCombs et al., substantive attributes basically are sub-areas of issues, especially in the case of economic issues. However, McCombs (2004) wrote that attributes of a given issue can and do change over time, and this is specifically true with the economy and economic issues. Of most interest to this dissertation are substantive attributes, as the economic crisis of September/October 2008 is an issue object that encompassed several substantive attributes, including the foreclosure crisis, the performance of the stock market, and rising unemployment. Generally, the economy itself constitutes an object, with attributes of the economy including sub-areas such as unemployment, economic stimulus programs, inflation, and budget deficits (McCombs; McCombs et al.).

Overall, the theoretical framework of agenda setting and attribute agenda setting focuses on the salience of issues and aspects of issues. Salience is largely determined by media emphasis to certain issues as well as individual's attention and exposure to media sources. Along with perceived issue importance, obtrusiveness and need for orientation are contingent factors of agenda-setting effects, especially with economic issues. However, agenda setting fails to explain how some issues and attributes become more memorable than others and are even used in subsequent individual evaluations. This process is understood through the theoretical framework of media priming, which is explicated in the next section of this chapter.

<div align="center">Priming and Attribute Priming</div>

Media priming emerged from experimental research examining agenda-setting effects but is generally considered a specific and distinct type or component of agenda setting (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982). Put simply, priming is a cognitive-based process of information reception that considers how cues in media content can trigger reactions, memories, attitudes, or even behaviors that are or have become associated with the original cue. Iyengar et al. introduced priming as "a different though equally

consequential version of agenda setting. By attending to some problems and ignoring others, media may also alter the standards by which people evaluate government" (p. 849). Basically, media priming can be described as the idea that even the most motivated citizens cannot consider all that they know when evaluating complex issues and instead consider the things that come easily to mind, or "those bits and pieces of political memory that are accessible" (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010, p. 114). Priming thus builds on agenda setting by explaining how certain individuals come to rely on information made salient from the media, which in turn can greatly influence opinions and evaluations of issues closely tied to what they learn from the news media.

Iyengar and Kinder (2010), in describing the theory of priming, also set out to understand whether certain individual characteristics make people more or less susceptible to a priming effect. In their original conception, Iyengar and Kinder analyzed three variables in particular: education, partisanship, and political involvement. These traits, and not others, were selected because they have been demonstrably important in determining if an agenda-setting effect occurs (Iyengar & Kinder). In the end, Iyengar and Kinder found that television news equally primed both the politically involved and the politically disinclined. This finding contrasted with the fact that the agenda-setting effect is most pronounced for individuals *less* interested in politics, and thus serves as a point of separation for the two theories. Recent research has even demonstrated that when it comes to media priming, individuals with moderate amounts of knowledge are at the most risk of being primed as they do not have enough information to compare the media information to what they know and therefore rely on (or give more weight to) the media coverage than do individuals who either basically don't care or already know about the issue (Valenzuela, 2009).

Priming has also been the subject of varied criticisms. For example, Pan and Kosicki (1997) argued that priming as a media effect is weak in relation to other influences that can be easily demonstrated. Holbert et al. (2003) wrote that different

priming studies have found different people are more or less susceptible to a priming effect, thus "mass communication scholarship finds the picture of what type individual is most likely to be primed rather muddy" (p. 429). Although Iyengar and Kinder (2010) did not look at demographic differences in determining the extent of a priming effect, other individual traits, such as demographics as well as geographical proximity to specific issues, can influence the extent to which an individual is or is not primed by media content.

Attribute Priming

Along with attribute agenda setting, researchers and scholars have investigated attribute priming. Essentially, attribute priming describes how "shifts in the salience of attributes of topics in the news affect public evaluations concerning those same topics" (McCombs et al., 2011, p. 104). In terms of public opinion specifically, McCombs (2004) explained that the objects and attributes made salient in the minds of individuals by the news media (first- and second-level agenda setting) in turn determine "the criteria – sometimes the single criterion – on which an opinion is based" (p. 122). Clearly, attribute priming is an extension of priming, just as attribute agenda setting is an extension of agenda setting. In sum, attribute priming is simply about how both objects and attributes of the media agenda can come to serve as the foundation for individual assessments of issues, based on what becomes easily accessible in the minds of individuals. Overall, then, priming attempts to explain the cognitive mechanisms and processes that enable agenda-setting effects.

News Effects Study Research Questions and Hypotheses

With these considerations in mind, the first goal of this dissertation is to examine how network and cable news potentially influenced the formation and parameters of issue publics. This entailed an analysis of television news coverage of the economy prior to and up until the passage of TARP in late September 2008 in order to identify the major

issue objects and attributes, primary sources and their characteristics, as well as differences between cable and broadcast media outlets. Additionally, the content analysis will inform the survey data analysis by determining if certain networks emphasized blame for the crisis and the extent to which the crisis was presented as frightening. The following research questions and hypothesis guide the content analysis research portion of this dissertation.

RQ1a: What are the primary issue objects, such as the economy, the election campaign, or legislative debates, in television news seven months before and up until the passing of TARP?

RQ1b: To what extent was the economy presented as a main issue object?

RQ2: In terms of the economy, what attributes were most common, including blame for the crisis, economic legislation, unemployment, the budget deficit, bankruptcies, inflation, and governmental regulation of the economy?

RQ3a: To what extent did television news suggest who or what was to blame for causing the crisis?

RQ3b: To what extent did television news suggest that the crisis was frightening or something to be feared?

RQ4a: To what extent did television news highlight geographical aspects of the unfolding foreclosure and financial crisis?

RQ4b: To what extent did television news highlight demographic aspects of the unfolding foreclosure and financial crisis?

H1: Coverage of the economy will feature predominantly negative news as opposed to positive news, focusing on issues such as the foreclosure crisis, rising unemployment, bankruptcies, and declines in economic measures like the stock market and consumer confidence.

H2: The majority of sources in the news stories will be experts or other accredited individuals, as opposed to average citizens or unaccredited sources.

RQ5: How did network and cable news coverage differ from March to October 2008, in terms of 5a) the primary issue objects and attributes, 5b) selection of sources, 5c) inclusion of demographic and/or geographic aspects, and 5d) suggesting optimism, fear, and blame?

RQ6: Based on the differences that existed between network and cable news, how did coverage of the economy on ABC News, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NBC News differ?

RQ7: Did television news coverage of the economy change with time, in terms of 7a) the primary issue objects and attributes, 7b) selection of sources, 7c) inclusion of demographic and/or geographic aspects, and 7d) suggesting optimism, fear, and blame?

H3: The coverage of TARP and economic legislation will increase with time as October approaches.

Issue Publics

Some of the earliest concepts to emerge from the beginnings of public opinion research were ideas about the differences between levels of social organization, i.e., crowds, publics, and masses (see Almond, 1950; Converse, 1964). As opposed to crowds or masses, specific publics were characterized as usually forming around an issue, attitude, or behavior, which usually leads to discourse and deliberation among diverse individuals (Price, 1992; Price et al., 2006). Publics are thought to be fluid, changing not only in size but also member composition over time (Price et al.). Furthermore, publics contain political actors and spectators, or people who actively try to influence political affairs (actors) and those (spectators) who only watch from a distance (Converse; Price).

Altogether, these groups of acting and spectating individuals share some commonality, such as interest in politics, political behaviors, agreement on a specific value or idea, or concern over an issue. The significance of publics is that there are many different types, all of which function uniquely or form under very different circumstances.

Publics were initially conceptualized as particular groups of individuals, located within the general population, that share some commonality, such as specific behaviors, beliefs, characteristics, interests, and even locations. This definition of publics essentially divided the population at large along geographical, political, or demographic lines, with publics identified in terms of their racial, partisan, attitudinal, or communal composition (see Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Krosnick, 1990; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993). However, focusing exclusively on individual characteristics such as demographics tends to overestimate or underestimate the actual size of a given public, as these attributes account for only one aspect of publics (Kim, 2009).

Initial publics often were based on geographical, demographical, and political characteristics or similarities, but specific types of publics have also been conceptualized due to the limitations of defining publics solely in terms of shared individual characteristics and traits. One of the most commonly referenced publics is the voting or electorate public, or those individuals who are most likely to vote regularly in elections (Converse, 1964; Krosnick, 1990; Price, 1992; Price et al., 2006). Other publics include the attentive public, or groups of individuals who are highly attentive to politics and public affairs, as well as the active public, or groups of individuals who are informed about public affairs but also actively engaged in politics or political activism of some form (Anand & Krosnick, 2003; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Price).

This dissertation, however, focuses on the issue public. Issue publics are comprised of groups of individuals who share agreement on the importance of a specific issue, but do not necessarily agree on the best way to approach or resolve a given issue

(Althaus, 2003; Converse, 1964; Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990; Iyengar et al., 2008; Price, 1992; Price et al., 2006). Issue publics are distinct from other publics as identification with an issue public, as opposed to other publics, is common and not exclusive or restrictive. Different individuals belong to distinct issue publics simply by taking a side of an issue or holding an opinion, whereas membership in other publics, such as the voting public or attentive public, is essentially dependent upon a specific behavior. This is not to say that all individuals belong to the same issue publics or will care about the same issues as everyone else; rather, identification with an issue public is much more likely and relatively easier than identification with other publics because of the pervasiveness and assortment of different issues that form the basis of issue publics. Converse, who is often credited for coining the term "issue publics," proposed that "different controversies excite different people to the point of real opinion formation" (p. 245). Thus, whether the decision to identify with an issue public is deliberate or not, most individuals inevitably are members of some issue public.

Different issue publics include the pro-life and pro-choice movements, or advocates of gun control as opposed to supporters of the Second Amendment. As these exemplars demonstrate, individuals and groups often have sharp divisions of interest, which "are part of what the term 'issue public' is intended to convey" (Converse, 1964, p. 245). Additionally, issue publics vary in size, with some individuals identifying with overlapping publics and others identifying with very few publics or even none at all (Converse; Krosnick, 1990; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Price et al., 2006). The roots of these divisions, though stemming from different individual or group motivations, can generally be tied to perceived issue importance (Hutchings, 2003; Price et al.).

Scholars have taken varied approaches toward identifying and defining issue publics. Some of the earliest studies looked at issue publics in terms of individuals with differing attitude importance and stable opinions on particular issues (Anand & Krosnick, 2003; Krosnick, 1990; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Price et al., 2006). Other studies

examined issue-public membership in terms of demographics such as partisanship, race, age, income, employment, and education (Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Krosnick & Telhami; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993). However, scholars have argued that the most theoretically sound approach to identifying issue-public members is through individual self-reports of issue importance (Kim, 2009). Accordingly, this dissertation defines issue public members as individuals who consider an issue personally important. In the context of this dissertation, this entailed the identification of those individuals who favored or supported the passage of TARP in September and October 2008.

Defining issue publics as groups of individuals who perceive specific issues as more important than other issues is arguably more in line with the original theoretical concept, which posited that individuals are concerned about different issues due to varying interests and that these divisions can influence the opinion-formation process (Converse, 1964). Furthermore, this definition is compatible with the idea that most Americans are generalists, and not specialists, of political knowledge. Despite possessing a wide range of knowledge (Althaus, 2003; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), individuals can still perceive some issues as more important than others, depending on identification with various groups as well as individual experiences, values, media exposure, and communication with others (Hutchings, 2003; Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990; Price & Zaller, 1993).

Although research on the formation and parameters of issue publics is ongoing (Price, 2008), scholars have generally found support for the issue-public concept, or the idea that people are concerned about some issues more than other issues (see Althaus, 2003; Iyengar et al., 2008; Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990; Price, 2008; Price & Zaller, 1993). Although most individuals are moderately informed about politics (Althaus; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), perceived issue importance varies among individuals and is determined by a number of different factors. Issue public members typically have similar

characteristics and commonly have a direct interest or stake in the issue at hand (Hutchings, 2003; Krosnick). However, individual values, beliefs, as well as media exposure can also influence individual perceptions of issue importance, even if self or group interests are not immediately apparent (Hutchings; Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Nonetheless, individuals are generally selective about the issues they care most about and concentrate on a narrow range of issues because it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to keep up with all major issues and current events (Converse, 1964; Hutchings; Iyengar, 1990; Krosnick; Price et al., 2006; Price & Zaller, 1993).

Identification with an issue public in itself can foster selective exposure to media as perceptions of issue importance among individuals and groups can be influenced by several factors, including media exposure. Research has demonstrated that issue-public members tend to be extremely selective in the information they consume, especially in comparison to attentive and active publics (Hutchings, 2003; Iyengar et al., 2008; Kim, 2009; Nir, 2011; Price, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993). Along these lines, issue-public members are generally not influenced by news media content, as they feel strongly about the issue at hand and might be selectively exposing themselves to media content that is in agreement with their preexisting views (Iyengar et al.; Price).

The focus of this dissertation is the formation and parameters of an issue public that was supportive of the passage of TARP. In order to study the formation and identify the parameters of this public, several variables were utilized, including attitudinal measures and media exposure measures. However, public opinion scholars have also examined how the parameters of issue publics can vary in terms of geography and demographics, specifically among individuals of different economic statuses and races. In line with this research, demographic and geographic variables were utilized as well. The next two sections describe how demographics and geography can influence the formation and parameters of issue publics.

Demographics and Issue Publics

An individual's economic status, such as income and employment status, can influence how he or she perceives the importance of certain issues and, by extension, the formation and parameters of issue publics. In several studies of survey data, Iyengar (1990) demonstrated how older respondents generally were more knowledgeable and concerned about the economy, whereas low-income respondents were less informed about the economy. Similarly, Iyengar and Kinder (2010) found that individuals who were likely to have some experience with certain issues, such as unemployment or higher costs of living, were more likely to perceive those issues as important and in turn attend to media coverage of those issues. Finally, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) examined how political knowledge and issue importance was distributed across the citizenry of the United States, finding that individuals of various incomes, races, ages, and levels of education were likely to possess differing levels of political knowledge, which implied that these groups had inconsistent perceptions of issue importance and how to best address those issues. Clearly, issue publics – or individuals who perceive certain issues as personally important – can vary in terms of socioeconomic demographics and can form in direct relation to the experiences individuals have in everyday life.

In terms of economic issues and the public opinion process, economic realities, proximity to economic issues, and the likelihood of an individual experiencing economic issues also influence the formation of opinion (Hagen, 2008). Put simply, an individual's real-world economic situation, as well as his/her proximity and likelihood of being affected, greatly influences individual perceptions of the economy (Erbring et al., 1980; Hagen; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Wu et al., 2002). Proximity to aspects of an economic downturn essentially involves geographical variables, which were operationalized in this study based on the dispersed geographical impact of the foreclosure crisis. On the other hand, an individual's likelihood of being affected is essentially determined by demographic characteristics, such as race, age, gender, income, employment, and

education. The individual traits and attributes that constitute demographics have historically served as axes of inequality and the basis for the stratification of society in the United States. U.S. Census data consistently reveal that an individual's age, gender, economic resources, and race are the main predictors of personal well-being (Snipp, 2003). Similarly, public opinion research has demonstrated how the formation of opinions and issue public can also be shaped by different demographics (see Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Erbring et al., 1980; Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995, Page & Shaprio, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993). Thus, along with geography, this dissertation utilizes measures of race and economic status, specifically income and employment status.

Race and Issue Public Formation

Along with economic status demographics, scholars have examined racial differences in issue publics, specifically how race can be related to perceived issue importance as well as the parameters of issue publics (see Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980; Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010). Different racial groups can perceive certain issues as more important and possess more knowledge on that issue depending on how the issue affects or is related to the group. For example, research has demonstrated that Blacks are more likely than Whites to be concerned about and knowledgeable of issues pertaining to race relations and civil rights (Erbring et al.; Iyengar; Iyengar & Kinder). However, public opinion on matters of race also can depend on the issue at hand as well as different individuals' or groups' material interests, sympathy or resentment towards certain groups, and political principles (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). The formation of opinion on racial topics can be especially dependent upon the given issue, as some groups are more likely to be affected by or be concerned about certain problems than other groups. An example of this would be near universal concern for higher costs of living, as opposed to unequal access to job

opportunities or unfair housing practices, which are much more likely to affect people of color.

Issues that are directly associated with racial differences and groups generally lead to issue publics that form along racial lines. Kinder and Sanders (1996) examined racial divisions that exist in public opinion and among different issue publics, finding that although differences in opinion among different racial groups largely depend on the issue at hand, generally the racial divide is connected to history and historical events and circumstances, with major rifts existing between the opinions of Whites and Blacks. Specifically, Kinder and Sanders looked at the issue publics that favored equal access to opportunities, federal assistance programs for minorities, and affirmative action. What they found were "two utterly dissimilar publics" in that more Blacks were in favor of these issues and more Whites were opposed, with the differences becoming even more apparent when controlling for interviewer and respondent race interactions (p. 27). Additionally, when looking at implicit or veiled racial issues, or issues with racial implications, Blacks were still more likely to be concerned than Whites were. Thus, Kinder and Sanders pointed out that opinion differences between Blacks and Whites are not constrained to racial matters, as the racial divide "is also apparent on issues where the racial implications are unstated and covert, on the desirability of the American version of the modern welfare state and on distrust of the government" (p. 31). Along these same lines, other scholars have identified how historical relations, circumstances, and situations have influenced the formation of issue publics along racial lines (see Converse, 1964; Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010).

Americans of races other than White continue to encounter barriers to economic mobility that most White Americans do not (see Grusky et al., 2011; Petev et al., 2011; Smeeding et al., 2011; Wolff et al., 2011). In particular, people of color, perhaps most significantly Black Americans, have historically faced discrimination and prejudice in hiring practices, occupations, residential choices, as well as in access to and availability

of social, financial, and educational services (see Charles, 2003; Feagin, 1991; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Massey, 1999; Massey & Denton, 1993; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Wilson, 1996). Additionally, Asian, Hispanic, and Black Americans in particular have been segregated from Whites in residential neighborhoods, especially in major cities, which has only further limited minorities' economic mobility (Charles; Massey & Denton; Rugh & Massey, 2010). In fact, Rugh and Massey argued that racial residential segregation fueled the foreclosure crisis of the Great Recession.

Racial residential segregation, especially in the case of Black Americans, resulted from the deliberate and purposeful behavior of White Americans to distance themselves from Blacks such that each race was severely isolated from the other (Massey & Denton, 1993). Related to this was discriminatory institutional arrangements and processes, including unfair banking and mortgage conventions like "redlining," which is the practice of charging more for or denying certain services based on an individual's race (Massey, 1999; Massey & Denton; Wilson, 1996). Redlining has been illegal since the 1970s, yet scholars have argued that it still occurs – specifically with insurance, mortgage, and employment applications – but is simply less overt (Massey; Wilson). Although an applicant's debt, income, and credit score were used by banks and lending firms when evaluating mortgage loan applications prior to the foreclosure crisis (Demyanyk & Van Hemert, 2009), scholars have argued that race was also a factor, albeit indirectly. Specific groups, predominantly Blacks and Hispanics, were the principal recipients of subprime mortgage loans throughout the 2000s (see Douglas & Browne, 2011; Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; Mendenhall, 2010; Rugh & Massey, 2010; Smeeding et al., 2011; Squires, 2011; Wolff et al., 2011). In light of this disparity, scholars have even contended that subprime lending was a racialized process that directly benefited from racial residential segregation (Rugh & Massey).

Despite scholarly and governmental attention to the economic and social inequalities inherent in and resulting from racial residential segregation (Massey &

Denton, 1993), it remains unresolved and arguably worsened throughout the 1990s and 2000s (see Been, Ellen, & Madar, 2009; Charles, 2003; Massey, 2004; Rugh & Massey, 2010). Home ownership among minorities did increase during this time, but it occurred primarily in the context of housing segregation and because of subprime mortgage lending (Been et al.; Rugh & Massey). Specifically, Rugh and Massey have demonstrated that residential segregation, along with a historical lack of access to credit for particular racial groups in urban metropolitan areas, significantly contributed to the likelihood of Hispanics and especially Blacks receiving subprime loans, which consequently led to higher rates of foreclosure in some areas, in particular Phoenix, Las Vegas, and South Florida. Not surprisingly, Arizona, Nevada, and Florida were among the nine states to have foreclosure rates well above the national average in 2008 (RealtyTrac, 2009). Thus, individuals who were not White may or may not have been targeted by unfair banking practices, but they were more likely to receive subprime loans due to the economic disparities that remain rampant in the United States because of racial stratification and residential segregation.

While racial attributes underlay the Great Recession and the foreclosure crisis in particular, other demographic characteristics overlapped with race, especially in the context of the economic crises that were unfolding in autumn 2008. Research has examined how racial attributes might interact or intersect with other individual characteristics, including gender, income, class, and education (i.e., Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Greenman & Xie, 2008; McCall, 2001, 2005). Scholars have also argued that race cannot be studied in terms of causality, as race is primarily a societal construction that all individuals experience differently; in light of this, race should be discussed as only being related to certain outcomes (see Morning, 2009; Snipp, 2003; Zuberi, 2003). In line with this research, other independent variables in this study, namely geography, partisanship, and economic-status demographics, were

tested for how they interact with race, and race was discussed as being correlated with survey responses.

In sum, specific racial groups were more likely than others to be affected by the foreclosure crisis in 2008, which did lead to higher rates of foreclosure in some states, but other individuals, including White Americans, were also feeling the impact of the unfolding recession. At the same time, Blacks and Hispanics were not the only individuals facing foreclosure, and not all Blacks and Hispanics were ultimately affected by the foreclosure crisis. Furthermore, individuals who did not potentially face foreclosure could still have been affected in other ways or even doubly affected. This is an important consideration in that individuals of any race may have been impacted by the foreclosure crisis as well as in other ways, such as by unemployment, decreased salary, or the stock market crash. Thus, even though Hispanic and Black Americans were the main recipients of subprime loans that increased the likelihood of foreclosure, White Americans – especially younger individuals with lower incomes – also could have potentially been facing foreclosure. Accordingly, this dissertation utilizes measures of income, employment, and race as variables that altogether encompass an individual's likelihood of being affected by the economic crises of autumn 2008 in some way. In addition to these demographic measures, however, geographic variables were also developed in order to account fully for how economic opinions and attitudes varied during autumn 2008.

Geography and Issue Publics

This dissertation attempts to identify how issue public membership varied among different racial and economic groups as well as across different states. The geographically dispersed impact of the Great Recession and mortgage crisis in particular suggests that issue publics for this study could vary by individual states, such that state-specific issue publics might be identified. One of the defining aspects of the Great

Recession was the widespread but disproportionate impact across different groups as well as geographical areas. Simply put, some states were hit harder by the recession than other states, with some states having higher unemployment rates, higher bankruptcies, as well as higher rates of foreclosures (see Demyanyk & Van Hemert, 2009; Grusky et al., 2011; Rugh & Massey, 2010; Smeeding et al., 2011; Wolff et al., 2011). This implies that some individuals were geographically closer to the some of the effects of the Great Recession, including the foreclosure crisis, which suggests that the crisis was more likely to be experienced by some people. Coupled with the fact that certain groups were also more likely to be affected by the Great Recession, geography was another factor that determined the extent an individual was affected by the crisis.

The concept of state-specific issue publics encompasses the general idea of issue publics but posits that publics can form differently from state to state, based on how perceived issue importance can vary among residents in different states. Essentially, research on state-specific issue publics examines the extent to which geography and geographical aspects of an issue are related to the formation and parameters of issue publics. In terms of this study, the idea is that different individuals, despite their demographic likelihood of being affected by the foreclosure crisis, might have been concerned about the subprime mortgage crisis because of their geographic proximity to foreclosures. Given that some states had a foreclosure rate well above the national average in 2008, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, and Ohio, residents in these nine states might have been more concerned with the foreclosure crisis than residents in the remaining 41 states, where the foreclosure rate was near or below the national average. In turn, residents in those nine states might have been more supportive of TARP, especially if they believed that the legislation would help to end the foreclosure and subprime mortgage crises.

Research on state-specific issue publics has focused on the impact of state ballot measures on voters' opinions of national and local candidates (Nicholson, 2005; Smith &

Tolbert, 2010). This line of research has essentially tried to account for how federal issues can play out differently in the individual states, based on the salience and significance of a federal issue to individuals in a specific state. Measuring differences among state-specific issue publics entails a comparison of responses from individuals in different states that have been operationalized in relation to a national issue unfolding disproportionately on the state level (Smith & Tolbert). Related research has also found that news media coverage of issues can differ geographically (i.e., Bendix & Liebler, 1999; Grimm, 2009; Liebler & Bendix, 1996) and that individuals' exposure to and selection of news media outlets can vary from state to state (Althaus, Cizmar, & Gimpel, 2009).

Issue Publics and the Public Opinion Process: Summary

The public opinion process is a theoretical model that examines the various influences that shape the formation of public opinion and issue publics, which are groups of individuals that share concern over a specific issue but do not necessarily have the same stance on said issue. Specifically, economic public opinion is predominantly shaped by media exposure and attitudes as well as individual economic experiences and proximity to aspects of the economy and economic downturns. Although the impact of news media on public opinion is substantial, it cannot be fully accounted for without considering how individual selectively expose themselves to news content, and how this in turn can shape differences in attitudes, perceptions, and opinions. Economic public opinion, however, is especially responsive to news content, most especially with economic issues that individuals cannot directly experience.

In line with this scholarship, self-reports of economic attitudes and opinions toward TARP were examined to determine the parameters of economic issue publics and whether these publics were significantly influenced by news media exposure, geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis, as well as specific demographic

variables that encapsulate the likelihood of an individual being impacted or experiencing hardship during the 2008 economic crises. Additionally, this dissertation analyzes how proximity to the foreclosure crisis and likelihood of being affected are predictive of selective media exposure, and whether media exposure or proximity and likelihood are better predictors of economic attitudes and opinions.

<div align="center">Public Opinion Study Research Questions and Hypotheses</div>

The goal of this study was to determine how the contours and boundaries of issue publics concerning the bailout were shaped by various components. This involved an assessment of the influence of and relationship between traditional demographics, geography, economic demographics, partisan affiliation, race, media selective exposure, time spent with media, and economic attitudes as well as opinions of the proposed bailout legislation. This was accomplished through an examination of preexisting survey data. Specifically, this analysis tested a predictive model that accounts for the ways in which race, geography, partisanship, media exposure, and economic attitudes are related to the prediction of individual opinions toward TARP (see Appendix A). The following research questions and hypotheses were designed to test the validity of this proposed model as well as the relative obtrusiveness of the economic crisis. However, additional hypotheses and research questions may be added based on the findings of the content analyses.

In line with prior research, the demographic variables of age, sex, and education were used as control variables. The geographic proximity variable, as defined by a respondent's state of residence, was used as a criterion variable by limiting the selection of cases to specific regions in order to compare how respondents differed geographically. However, demographic characteristics of race and partisan identification as well as economic demographics of employment status and income were used as independent variables. Media selective exposure, in terms of whether respondents paid more attention

to network or cable news, and time spent with television news were both used as independent variables. Economic attitudes, in particular respondents' views of responsibility for causing the crisis, optimistic outlook, and reported feelings of fear, were used as independent and dependent variables. Lastly, opinions of TARP were used exclusively as a dependent variable.

The following collection of hypotheses and research questions examined the relationship between these demographics and news exposure as well as how attitudes towards the economy and opinions of TARP varied from state to state. This section is extremely important for this study as it will be the first step towards examining the relative obtrusiveness of the foreclosure crisis, based on geographic proximity to and demographic likelihood of being affected by the foreclosure crisis.

H4a: White respondents will spend more time with the news compared to respondents of races other than White.

H4b: Income will be positively related to time spent with the news, as higher income respondents will spend more time with the news compared to respondents of lower incomes.

H4c: Employed respondents will spend more time compared to unemployed respondents.

RQ8: What is the relationship between partisan affiliation and time with news?

RQ9: What is the relationship among the demographic variables of race, income, employment status, and partisan identification and selective exposure to network and/or cable news?

To examine the relationship between media exposure and economic attitudes and opinions, specifically the extent to which economic perceptions are predicted by a) exposure to network and/or cable news and b) time spent with television news, this dissertation utilized findings from the content analysis study to develop research

questions and hypotheses for this study. Approaching the research in this fashion allowed for informed predictions concerning the ways in which selective exposure to news media and time spent with television news potentially influenced feelings of fear and optimism as well as views of blame for the crisis. This section could only be finalized after the data analysis of the content study was completed, and thus these research questions and hypotheses can be found at the beginning of the secondary analysis study in Chapter 4.

<u>Summary</u>

Research has demonstrated that network and cable news outlets attract different audiences and cover a range of diverse issues in dissimilar ways. Scholars have also explicated the public opinion process, which elaborates on several factors that can shape the formation of opinions and issue publics. These factors include media exposure, attitudes, and real-world experiences, as shaped by individuals' demographic characteristics. Demographics as well as geography are especially important considerations in relation to the formation of economic issue publics and public opinion. However, research has also demonstrated how exposure to the news media can have significant influences on public opinion, both in general and in terms of the economy specifically. The news effects theoretical perspectives of agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, and priming posit that the news media can influence individual considerations and perceptions on important issues and aspects of issues. Thus, attitudinal predispositions, real-world experiences, demographics, and media exposure all have the potential to influence individual perceptions of issue importance, which could lead to the formation of issue publics. Although one factor may be more influential than other factors, it is possible that these factors could simultaneously influence the formation of economic public opinion and issue publics, such that perceived issue importance is shaped not only by media exposure but also attitudes or real-world experiences.

This dissertation therefore draws from several theoretical frameworks, namely issue publics, the public opinion process, selective exposure, agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, priming, and attribute priming, in order to study how attitudes, demographics, geography, and exposure to television news may have influenced the formation and contours of issue publics concerning TARP and the related economic crises of 2008. Furthermore, this dissertation investigates the relative obtrusiveness of the foreclosure crisis and the financial crisis by determining if a) media exposure or b) demographics and geography, in relation to the economic crisis, had a more pronounced influence on the formation of issue publics. Issue obtrusiveness, in relation to issue publics, has important implications for this dissertation as the formation and subsequent parameters of economic issue publics in autumn 2008 may have been significantly influenced by individual perceptions of obtrusiveness. Specifically, individual perceptions of issue importance in autumn 2008 may have depended on whether an individual perceived the crises as obtrusive or not, as some individuals likely had more direct experience with the crises while others could have been more likely to seek out information about the unfolding economic events because they did not have any direct experience with the crises. Thus, the first step in this dissertation was to analyze national television news coverage of the economy to discern the extent to which the unfolding economic crisis was covered and how it was covered in order to determine how exposure to this media content might have influenced individual attitudes, perceptions, and opinions in autumn 2008.

CHAPTER 3

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The first study in this dissertation was a content analysis of television news coverage of the economy prior to the major economic events of autumn 2008. The purpose of this study was to examine how U.S. national news media covered the unfolding economic crises in order to determine if individuals who paid more attention to the news were more likely to have economic opinions and attitudes that were reflective of the national news content they consumed. The news effects theories of agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, and priming predict that individuals who increasingly attend to news content are more likely to share opinions and attitudes that match those expressed in news content. This has been demonstrated to be especially true with unobtrusive issues, or those issues with which individuals do not have direct experience.

However, before any news effect can occur, individuals must be exposed to news media. The conceptual framework of selective exposure and, more specifically, partisan selective exposure (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett et al., 2013; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2013; Stroud, 2008, 2010; Stroud & Lee, 2013), predicts that individuals are selective about the news media they consume, which can lead to opinions and attitudes that differ significantly from individuals who either pay less attention to the news or selectively expose themselves to different news outlets. Additionally, different news outlets often cover issues in various ways, cover these issues to varying extents, and use a number of sources to help tell the story. Nonetheless, exposure to specific news outlets and the time spent with the news are substantial factors in the formation of public opinion and issue publics (Crespi, 1997; Hoffman et al., 2007; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011), but in order to assess the potential effects of the news in the process, the news content in question must first be analyzed in depth.

This chapter details the methods and findings of the content analysis study. In particular, this study analyzed national television news coverage from 2008 in order to identify the prevalent issues, issue attributes, and sources of this news content. Additionally, this study examined the extent to which geography and demographics were discussed in the context of the unfolding recession. The focus of this analysis was nightly newscasts on broadcast and cable news networks, specifically *The Situation Room* on CNN*, Fox Special Report* on Fox News, *ABC World News*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *CBS Evening News*. MSNBC was excluded as prior research has found that the majority of news content on MSNBC is commentary and opinion discussion, or overlaps with NBC News coverage (see Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012). Although the CNN and Fox programs were an hour long and the CBS, NBC, and ABC programs a half-hour, all of the programs aired at the same time (6 p.m. Eastern time). Furthermore, only stories that aired Monday through Friday were selected for analysis as weekend news coverage is not consistent with weekday newscasts within networks, often overlaps with weekday news coverage, and weekend news audiences are often different from weekday news viewers (see Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005; Zeldes & Fico; Zeldes et al.). The following sections of this chapter explicate the methods and findings of the content analysis study.

Methods

Population and Sample

The population of the content analysis portion of this study was composed of national cable and broadcast television news coverage of the economy in 2008. Television news in particular was the focus as television news continues to draw millions of national viewers (see McCombs et al., 2011; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2013). Furthermore, ratings from this period demonstrate that Americans were increasingly attending to television news (see Pew Research Center, 2008a, 2008b; Project for Excellence, 2009a, 2009b). Television news stories, specifically broadcast and

cable news, were analyzed to ensure that a demographically diverse audience could have accessed the media content under study and to develop a representative body of content that was consistent nationally.

In order to examine how news coverage potentially changed over time, this study looked at TV news content on the economy over a span of seven months, as research has demonstrated that it can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months before the influences of agenda setting on public opinion are discernible (see McCombs, 2004). Of particular interest is news content from March until early October 2008, when TARP was signed into law. Although the mortgage securitization and related foreclosure crisis began in late 2007 (NBER, 2008), the economy first showed explicit signs of a recession in March 2008, with unemployment, foreclosures, and bank failures all beginning to increase at this time (see Grusky et al., 2011; NBER, 2010; Reddy, 2008; Siegel, 2008; Twin, 2008). Therefore, this study determined the extent to which national cable and broadcast television news media covered the crisis as it worsened over the course of 2008. Lexis-Nexis Academic was used to find coverage of the economy from ABC News, CBS News, NBC News, CNN, and Fox News Network in the form of transcripts. In particular, this study excluded weekend coverage and any repeat stories in order to ensure that a unique and broadly representative sample was drawn from the population.

The population was identified by first selecting one of the five networks and then searching for news stories with the keywords "U.S." and "economy," limiting the acceptable dates from March 1 to October 3, 2008. The search was also limited by searching only for stories that aired on each of the networks' respective nightly news programs. This search yielded 248 ABC News (18.6%) stories, 174 CBS News (13.0%) stories, 402 CNN (30.1%) stories, 201 Fox News network (15.1%) stories, and 312 NBC News (23.4%) stories, totaling 1,334 cases. After deleting repeats and weekend stories from CNN, NBC, and ABC, the final sampling frame was 930 stories. The final story

count for each network was 174 ABC (18.7%), 174 CBS (18.7%), 149 CNN (16.0%), 201 Fox (21.6%), and 232 NBC (24.9%).

The sample of news from each network was randomly selected from the sampling frame with a systematic sampling design. The overall target sample size was roughly one-third of coverage from all networks, or approximately 307 total stories. In order to draw a sample from each of the five networks that was proportional to the target of 307 total stories, roughly 61 stories were selected from each network. A starting point for each sample was selected at random using the website www.random.org (Haahr & Haahr, 2012), with every kth unit sampled, as determined by the sampling interval for each network (computed by dividing the population size by the desired sample size). For ABC, the number 3 was randomly selected on random.org, and thus every third story was selected (174 divided by 61) for a total of 57 stories. For CBS, the number 2 was randomly drawn from random.org, with every third story selected (174 divided by 61) for a total of 58 stories. For CNN, the number 2 was randomly drawn from random.org, with every other story selected (149 divided by 61) for a total of 74 stories. For Fox, the number 1 was randomly drawn from random.org, with every third story selected (201 divided by 61) for a total of 67 stories. Finally, for NBC, the number 4 was randomly drawn from random.org, with every fourth story selected (232 divided by 61) for a total of 58 stories. Overall, the final sample to be coded consisted of 314 cases, or 33.8% of the sampling frame.

Coding Procedures and Categories

The unit of analysis for this content analysis was individual transcripts of televised economic news stories. These stories were examined for a number of different variables, which were operationalized according to the theoretical frameworks of the public opinion process, selective exposure, agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, and issue publics. Overall, the purpose of this analysis was to examine how national

television news covered the unfolding recession in 2008, specifically the extent to which demographic and geographic disparities were covered, what aspects of the recession were predominantly featured, what sources were used to tell the stories, and how the coverage differed among networks and changed over time. The complete codebook is included in Appendix B.

Coders first identified the network on which the story aired as well as the date of broadcast for each story. News source was coded as ABC News (1), CBS News (2), CNN (3), Fox News (4), or NBC News (5). The date of the story was recorded as the day and month of broadcast. This enabled an analysis of how coverage changed over time as well as a comparison of the differences in coverage between broadcast and cable news outlets. This dissertation predicted that coverage of the recession would change over time, in particular that the discussion of TARP and economic legislation would increase as October approached. Analyzing the differences among networks was necessary in order to discern how coverage of the recession differed among the five news outlets. Any differences that are found could have implications for how selective exposure to news media during 2008 influenced the formation and parameters of economic public opinion and issue publics.

Next, each story was coded for explicit discussion of demographics and/or geography in relation to the economic crisis. Altogether, the purpose of these variables was to determine the extent to which national television news covered the demographic and geographic aspects of the Great Recession. Specifically, geography encompassed coding four different variables, the first of which was whether the story cut to a journalist on location. This measure was designed to look at whether news coverage was cutting to journalists in geographic areas that were hard-hit or being impacted by the unfolding recession. Coders were instructed to record 1 for stories that did cut to a journalist outside the studio in a specific location, and 0 if the story did not cut to a journalist or if it was unclear where the journalist was.

The next variable was whether the situation in two different geographic locations was compared. In order to code for geographic location, coders were instructed that two conditions should be met: a) the economic situations in specific areas are described, and b) the situations in two or more areas are described. Furthermore, coders were told to only code for economic conditions and situations, not just comparisons of states or different geographical areas.

The geographic orientation of the story was coded as small town (1), metropolitan/city (2), state (3), regional (4), and national (5). Coders were instructed to code for the geographical orientation of story by determining if the story focused on a specific geographic level, region, or area. Each of the codes included specific instructions. The national level encompassed stories that presented issues as national concerns or stories about the United States as a whole, whereas the regional level included stories that mentioned a region or regions (i.e., Midwest, Southwest, New England) by name, or named three or more states. For the state level, a story had to focus on a specific state or two states, which had to be named within the story. Finally, the metropolitan/city level included stories that specifically named cities or described issues facing a city, whereas the small town/rural level was for any story about an area or town that was not large or very well known or recognizable. However, once the analysis was completed, the rural/small town level ($n = 1$) for geographic orientation was merged with the city/metropolitan level. Another geographic orientation variable was also created due to low frequencies of occurrence, which merged the town/city ($n = 10$), state ($n = 42$), and regional ($n = 5$) levels together as "not national level" in order to analyze either nationally oriented stories or stories oriented at any level other than national.

Along with these measures of geography, the state where the journalist was located was coded as well as any specific state that was named. The purpose of this variable was to identify discussion of states that were particularly impacted by the crisis. These states were coded 1 through 51, with a numerical code assigned to each state in

alphabetical order, including Washington, D.C. If a story cut to a reporter in the field or providing coverage from outside the studio, then coders were instructed to record the state where the reporter was. For geographic conditions in states, coders were instructed to code for any states where the economic conditions or situation was explicitly mentioned in the story. Furthermore, for both of these variables, coders were told that if a city was mentioned, then to code for the state in which that city is located.

As for demographics, coders were instructed to code for any discussion of the economic situation facing specific demographic groups, as well as if the situation of two or more demographic groups was compared. To code for demographics, the conditions facing individuals with a similar demographic trait (i.e., income level, race, or employment status) must have been discussed in the story. If the story compared, described, or mentioned the situations of two or more demographic groups in the story, then coders were instructed to code yes (1) for demographic comparison (absence was coded as 0). In particular, two conditions had to be met for a demographic comparison: 1) the economic situations or hardships facing a specific group must be described; and 2) two or more groups must be explicitly mentioned or described.

Demographics also included coding yes or no for mentioning "homeowners," as homeowners were potentially facing foreclosure during this time and constitute a demographic group that differs from groups that rent a residence. Coders searched each story for the word "homeowner" and then coded 1 if the word was included in the story, or 0 if not.

Each case was also analyzed for presence (1) or absence (0) of issue objects (i.e., economy, election, energy) and attributes (i.e., stock market, foreclosures, unemployment, inflation, subprime loans, bailout, etc.) that were presented in news stories concerning the economy (see Appendix B). Coders identified issue objects and attributes by reading, observing, and counting the words and phrases in each story that were denotative of specific issues and aspects of economic issues (see McCombs, 2004).

The purpose of the issue object and attribute variables was twofold: first, to identify how often national television news outlets covered the economic crisis and aspects of the crisis, and second, to identify the dominant attributes of the economy that may or may not have influenced the formation of public opinion and issue publics during the economic crisis of autumn 2008. As explicated by attribute agenda setting, individuals can perceive specific issues and issue attributes as more important than other issues and attributes, depending on the attention to the issues in the news and an individual's exposure to and time spent with the news (McCombs; McCombs et al., 2011).

Issue objects was coded as "all objects that apply," with coders instructed to select for all the issues that were covered in a story. Concrete details were included for each issue to help coders discern if a specific issue was included in a story. To code for each issue object, the issue had to be explicitly mentioned or overtly discussed within the story. A second variable required the coder to select the main issue object by selecting the one issue that was the focus of the story. Coders were instructed to select for the main issue object by looking closely at the introduction and ending of the story, and by determining how often a specific issue was discussed in the story, with the most frequently mentioned issue constituting the main issue object. Coders were instructed to code for "other" for cases in which the main issue did not match one of the possible categories, and "none" if there were cases in which the main issue object could not be discerned. However, once the analysis was completed, the main issue object category was collapsed due to small n sizes. Specifically, geography ($n = 1$), demographics ($n = 1$), and partisanship ($n = 2$) were all recoded as "other main object."

The coding process identified the attributes of coverage concerning the economy in a similar fashion, with coders first selecting all the attributes that were included (each coded as 1 to indicate the presence of an attribute) and then selecting the main attribute. The codebook included specific details for each attribute to help coders determine if a particular economic attribute was mentioned in a story. Similar to the issue objects, an

economic attribute had to be explicitly mentioned in order to be coded. For main attribute, the option of "indiscernible" was included in cases where there was either no main attribute or too many attributes to determine which the main attribute was. However, this option was not included for main issue object because the codebook examined fewer issue objects than attributes, thus reducing the likelihood of the main issue object being indiscernible due to the presence of too many issues. Furthermore, news stories generally present several attributes of an issue but will focus on only a couple of issue objects, with one issue presented as the main issue object of the story (see McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011).

Several of the main attribute categories had low n sizes and thus were recategorized after finishing the data collection. This process was guided by statistically significant Pearson correlations and their magnitudes. Bankruptcy ($n = 2$) was merged with the financial crisis ($r = .22$, $p < .001$), as was the stock market ($n = 5$; $r = .50$, $p < .001$). Loans ($n = 8$) was merged with the housing crisis ($r = .44$, $p < .001$). Consumer confidence ($n = 7$) was merged with inflation and rising prices ($r = .11$, $p < .05$). Trade ($n = 8$) was merged with jobs and employment ($r = .16$, $p < .01$). Economic regulation ($n = 4$) was merged with economic legislation ($r = .19$, $p < .01$). Lastly, government budgets and deficits ($n = 5$) were merged with taxes ($r = .36$, $p < .001$), along with income and wealth ($n = 3$; $r = .17$, $p < .01$).

Stories were also coded for fear of the crisis, optimism or pessimism about the future of the economy, and blame for the crisis. Fear, optimism, and blame all have implications for agenda setting and the formation of issue publics and public opinion. Specifically, this dissertation predicted that individuals who paid more attention to the news would be more likely to agree with the news media perspective on how scary the crisis was, how quickly the crisis could be resolved, and who or what was to blame for causing the crisis. However, in order to confirm or reject these predictions, this

dissertation first had to determine the prevalence of these variables as well as how the coverage of these variables may have differed among the five news outlets.

Fear of the crisis in each case was coded as yes (1) or no (0), depending on whether or not the story explicitly described the economic situation as frightening or scary. More specifically, coders were instructed to look for descriptions of the economy, situation, or crisis that used the words "fear," "afraid," "scary," "fearful," "worried," "frightening," or "worrisome" and their derivatives.

Optimism and pessimism were coded as a single variable. In order to be optimistic or pessimistic, a story must have discussed the economic situation as well as the future of the economy. Optimism/pessimism were determined by looking at the language of the story to determine if the story suggested "hope" or "confidence" that the crisis would end soon. Coders were instructed to look for phrases like "no recovery in sight" or "hopeless situation" (pessimistic) or "hopeful/things should get better" (optimism). Thus, the presence of optimism was coded (1), along with the presence of pessimism (-1) as well as the absence of either optimism or pessimism (0).

Blame was coded in two variables, similarly to issue objects and attributes, with coders instructed to check all the parties that were blamed for the crisis (1), and then to select the one party that was predominantly blamed in the story as a separate variable. In order to identify blame, a connection between the economy/economic crisis and potential causes must have been explicit or overt, in that the speaking source or journalist/anchor specifically said the crisis was caused by something, that something caused the crisis, or that something was to blame for causing the crisis. Main blame was coded similarly to main issue object and main attribute, with coders instructed to determine if any one cause was overtly or more frequently blamed for causing the crisis. In cases where no causes were suggested, or if the story seemed to equally blame more than one cause, an option for "does not seem to suggest blame" was included. Upon completion of the study, though, main blame was recoded, with blame on individuals ($n = 1$), blame on lack of

economic regulation ($n = 1$), and blame on politics and partisanship ($n = 1$) merged into "other."

Finally, the number of sources included in each story was coded. Sources were operationalized as any individual, including journalists and anchors, who were directly quoted in the story. Paraphrasing and other indirect citations were not counted as sources – individuals must have had a speaking part in the story. Additionally, the credentials, expertise, or nature of each source was coded. Overall, the purpose of the speaking source variables was to determine the sources that were used to explain the unfolding recession and various economic events of 2008. Prior research has demonstrated that journalists rely on experts and accredited individuals when citing sources, and that average citizens are most often cited to provide perspective or humanize a story (Cross, 2010; Gans, 1980; Hackett, 1985; Hall et al., 1978; McCombs, 2004; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Thus, speaking sources in the stories were coded as journalists, politicians, candidates, pundits, partisan individuals, economists, big business affiliates, small business owners, interest group members, celebrities, social scientists, and citizens. The total number of speaking sources was counted and coded, followed by the number of specific speaking sources. Specific criteria were included to help coders discern how to code each speaking source (see Appendix B). Overall, coders were instructed to look for specific titles or to analyze how the journalist or anchor referred to or identified the speaking source.

However, upon completion of the analysis, the "Other" category ($n = 78$) was broken into more specific variables based on the nature of the sources that were initially coded as other. In particular, a category was created for soldiers and law enforcement individuals ($n = 14$), narrators/announcers ($n = 14$), and unidentified sources ($n = 41$), which were individuals who were described as either "unidentified man" or "unidentified woman" in the story. These individuals were grouped into their own variable because it was impossible to determine whether they were in fact citizens or individuals with some

expertise or credential. The remaining sources initially coded as "other" ($n = 4$) were merged with individuals coded as celebrities ($n = 2$). Finally, for further analysis of how often all experts were cited over citizen sources, an "all experts" variable was created by combining candidates, politicians, political experts, pundits, economic experts, big business affiliates, as well as other individuals representing a specific interest ($n = 484$).

Citizens, or any individual who a) did not meet the definition of another category and/or b) was not clearly attributed with some form of expertise or credentials, was coded, and then the demographic characteristics of these citizens was coded, specifically race, employment status, age, sex, state of residence, and occupation. Coders were instructed to select one option for each of these variables. However, in order to code for each of these variables as present (1), the information had to be explicitly and readily apparent. Coders were instructed to specifically not make an inference or guess an individual's race, gender, age, or employment status based solely on the individual's name or other minute detail. Rather, these specific demographic traits, along with state of resident and occupation, had to be specifically included in the story as a detail or description of the individual. If the information was not immediately apparent, then coders were instructed to code that given variable as absent (0).

The coding process for the content analysis was guided by the codebook, which is included as an appendix to this dissertation (see Appendix B). In order to test the reliability of the operational definitions comprising the codebook, two coders together reviewed the basics of the coding procedures outlined in the codebook and then individually coded a secondary sample of stories pulled from the main sample but for use only in the intercoder test.

Intercoder Reliability

Measures of percent agreement and Scott's pi were used to measure the reliability of the agreement between coders in order to provide a more balanced perspective on

intercoder reliability. According to Neuendorf (2002), one way to approach measuring agreement between coders is to utilize simple agreement, though a major drawback of percent agreement is that it fails to account for chance agreement between the coders. As some portion of intercoder agreement inevitably occurs by chance, researchers have developed other measures designed to account for chance agreement, including Scott's pi (Scott, 1955, 1969), Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960, 1968), and Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 1970, 1980), among others (Neuendorf; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). In terms of communication and media studies, Scott's pi and Krippendorff's alpha are among the most commonly used and recommended measures of intercoder reliability (Zhao, Liu, & Deng, 2010).

This study utilized Scott's pi, in conjunction with percent agreement, because of the conservative nature of the Scott's pi statistic. Research has demonstrated that Scott's pi is more conservative than Cohen's kappa (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002; Neuendorf, 2002; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Zhao, Liu, & Deng, 2010). Furthermore, Krippendorff's alpha, which is often more liberal than Scott's pi, is better suited for content analyses with multiple coders and variables with multiple values (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein; Zhao et al.).

However, Scott's pi has been criticized for being *too* conservative and over-correcting for chance agreement, which can be especially problematic when a variable has very few coding options (see Neuendorf, 2002; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). In fact, Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, and Krippendorff's alpha have all been criticized for being flawed or misleading in some way. Zhao et al. (2010) studied several agreement indicators, including Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, and Krippendorff's alpha, finding that "the indices produce different – often drastically different – results for the same underlying agreements" (p. 422). With Scott's pi in particular, Zhao et al. demonstrated that despite a high percent of agreement, Scott's pi is almost always much lower than expected, or even negative. Additionally, there can be radical shifts in Scott's pi with even the smallest

change in percent agreement. Ultimately, Zhao et al. argued that a new index of reliability is needed, as well as guidelines for when to use which measure of agreement. Until these developments are finalized, Zhao et al. suggest that content analysis researchers utilize both a conservative measure and a liberal measure. Thus, in Table 3.1, percent agreement (a liberal measure) and Scott's pi (a conservative measure) are reported for each variable.

Stories coded for intercoder reliability came from a separate sample of cases that were not included in the study's actual sample. Twelve stories from each network were randomly selected for the first intercoder analysis, providing 60 total cases for analysis. Although an acceptable reliability measure of Scott's pi (>.70) (see Lombard et al., 2002, 2003) was achieved for a number of variables after the first round of coding, a second intercoder test was needed to achieve reliability for variables in which there were not enough observations in the initial coding set -- the geographic level, geographic comparisons, demographic comparisons, issue objects, main issue objects, attributes, main attribute, blame, main blame, fear, optimism, and political pundit source variables. Additionally, following the first test, the pundit variable (related to sources) was divided into two separate measures, one for *pundits*, or any individual who was a political expert or scientist but not a current or former politician, and another for *partisans*, or any individual having some tie or affiliation to a political party. A second independent random sample was drawn for this second round of coding, with six more stories from each network being selected, totaling 30 more stories. The findings from the second round were combined with the data from the first round. Intercoder reliability was calculated using the ReCal website (Freelon, 2010, 2011, 2013). At this point, all of the variables had an acceptable Scott's pi reliability score greater than .70. Notably, although there was relatively high agreement between coders in terms of specific issue objects and issue attributes, agreement was lower with the main issue object and main attributes, which was likely due to the multiple coding options or more subjective nature of the main

object or attribute variables. The intercoder reliability scores can collectively be found in Table 3.1.

Data Analysis

Data analysis mirrored the order of the study's research questions and hypotheses. Frequencies, chi-square cross-tabulations, t-tests, and analyses of variance (ANOVA) guided the examination of data from the content analysis. Frequencies looked at the stories' issue objects and main issue objects (RQ1), the stories' attributes and main attribute (RQ2), the extent to which the news stories suggested who or what was to blame and whether the crisis was something to fear (RQ3), and how often geography and demographics were mentioned (RQ4). Further analyses of the issue objects and attributes were conducted utilizing chi-square, specifically to see how all issue objects was associated with main issue object (RQ1) and how all attributes was associated with main attributes (RQ2).

Along with a consideration of these findings, correlations determined the extent to which news coverage of the economy could be construed as negative (H1). Although negative news itself was not a variable, the data analysis examined how fear and pessimism were correlated with the economic crisis as an issue object and the economic attributes that were measured, specifically the financial crisis, the housing crisis, unemployment, and inflation. Altogether, these analyses determined the negative or positive connotation of the news coverage by looking at how often the news covered the economic crisis, what aspects of the economy were most often covered, if the conditions in hard-hit states were discussed, and how the affective perceptions of the economy, specifically fear and pessimism, correlated with the economic issue objects and attributes.

Frequencies were used to examine the sources used and which sources were included most often (H2). Chi-square tests determined the association between the categorical dependent variables and the medium of the news outlet (RQ5). To examine

differences between the cable outlets and the network outlets (RQ5), *t*-tests were utilized.
Based on the significant findings of these tests, chi-square and ANOVA tests allowed for
an analysis of the association between all five news outlets and the dependent variables
(RQ6). Finally, chi-square and ANOVA tests examined how the news coverage changed
over time, specifically in terms of issue objects and attributes, sources, demographics,
geography, and suggesting blame, fear, and optimism (RQ7, H3). The results of this
study are listed below in the order of the research questions and hypotheses.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The first research question concerned the primary issue objects in television news
in the seven months prior to the passing of TARP and the extent to which the economy
was presented as a main issue object. Overall, more than three-fifths of the cases
discussed the economy; however, the election was discussed in almost half of all stories,
followed by the economic crisis and then energy. When it came to the main issue object,
as opposed to all issue objects mentioned within a case, the election was the focus of
more than one-third of all stories. The economic crisis and economy, respectively,
followed coverage of the election, with just over a quarter of stories focusing on the crisis
as the main issue object (see Table 3.2).

Chi-squares looked at the relationships between the main issue object and the
individual issue objects of the economy, χ^2 (5, 314) = 207.49, $p < .001$, $V = .81$; economic
crisis, χ^2 (5, 314) = 178.52, $p < .001$, $V = .75$; election, χ^2 (5, 314) = 202.77, $p < .001$, $V =$
.80; politics, χ^2 (5, 314) = 91.00, $p < .001$, $V = .54$; and energy, χ^2 (5, 314) = 93.56, $p <$
.001, $V = .55$. When the economy was the main issue object of the story, nearly a quarter
of stories included energy as an issue object, followed by politics and the economic crisis
in that order (see Tables 3.4, 3.6, and 3.7). Additionally, more than three-quarters of the
stories that focused on the election included the economy as an issue object, yet the
election was an issue object in less than one-tenth of stories in which the economy was

the main issue object (see Tables 3.3 and 3.5). Almost half of the stories that were coded as featuring the economic crisis as the main issue object also discussed politics, with nearly a quarter of these stories also discussing the election (see Tables 3.5 and 3.6). Finally, when energy was the main issue object, the majority of cases also discussed the economy, with only 6% ($n = 2$) discussing the economic crisis (see Tables 3.3 and 3.4). Thus, for RQ1, findings indicated that the economy was primarily associated with energy when the economy was the main issue object, whereas the economic crisis was primarily associated with politics when the crisis was the main issue object. When the economy was mentioned as an issue object in a story but was not the main issue object, the economy was primarily associated with energy followed by the election. When the economic crisis was an issue object but not the main issue object, it was primarily associated with politics.

The second research question concerned the most common attributes of the economy. Overall, the most frequent attributes were inflation and rising prices, with nearly a third of all stories mentioning this attribute. Taxes were the second most frequent of all the attributes, as just over a quarter of all cases mentioned taxes. The financial crisis, jobs, the housing crisis, and economic legislation in that order were also frequently discussed (see Table 3.8). As for the main attribute, although 26% of stories ($n = 82$) had an indiscernible main attribute, inflation was the most frequent, as nearly a fifth of all stories focused mainly on inflation and rising prices. Taxes were the main attribute in about 15% ($n = 48$) of the stories. Jobs, the housing crisis, the financial crisis, and economic legislation in that order were also frequently coded as the main attribute (see Table 3.8).

Chi-squares looked at the relationship between the main attribute of a story and the individual attributes of the housing crisis, χ^2 (6, 314) = 89.34, $p < .001$, $V = .53$; financial crisis, χ^2 (6, 314) = 97.82, $p < .001$, $V = .56$; economic legislation, χ^2 (6, 314) = 121.43, $p < .001$, $V = .62$; and inflation/rising prices, χ^2 (6, 314) = 127.99, $p < .001$, $V =$

.64. In stories that did not have a clear main attribute, nearly one-fifth discussed the foreclosure crisis, and another 16% ($n = 13$) discussed the financial crisis (see Tables 3.9 through 3.10). When the housing crisis was the main attribute, more than two-fifths of stories also discussed the financial crisis (See Table 3.10). However, when the financial crisis was the main attribute, only a quarter of stories also discussed the foreclosure crisis, while nearly 29% ($n = 8$) discussed economic legislation (see Tables 3.9 and 3.11). In stories that focused on economic legislation as the main attribute, more than half discussed the financial crisis, and almost 30% ($n = 7$) discussing the housing crisis (see Tables 3.9 through 3.10). Finally, when taxes was the main attribute, nearly 30% ($n = 14$) of stories also mentioned inflation and rising prices (see Table 3.12). For RQ2, then, the most important findings are that when the foreclosure crisis was the main attribute, it was primarily associated with loans, whereas when the financial crisis was the main attribute, it was primarily associated with the stock market. Additionally, when taxes were the main attribute, it was primarily associated with budgets followed by inflation, and consumer confidence was primarily associated with inflation when it was the main attribute.

RQ3 concerned the extent to which television news blamed certain groups or parties for the crisis as well as the extent to which the crisis was presented as something to fear. Republicans were the most frequent target of blame and were most commonly coded as main blame, with Republicans being blamed in half of the stories that suggested blame. Additionally, the crisis was presented as scary in almost 15% ($n = 46$) of all stories, whereas the crisis was presented pessimistically in nearly 26% ($n = 81$) of stories and optimistically in just 6% ($n = 19$) of all stories. Although banks and Wall Street were blamed about 3% of the time ($n = 10$), the remaining variables were all mentioned less than 2% of the time. Of the stories that suggested blame, almost two-fifths blamed banks and Wall Street (see Tables 3.13).

RQ4a concerned the extent to which geographical disparities of the financial and housing crises were discussed, whereas RQ4b examined the extent to which the stories highlighted demographic aspects of the unfolding economic crisis. Geography and geographic differences were rarely discussed, and demographics were slightly more likely to be mentioned, although demographic comparisons were also sparse. The most common geographical orientation of the stories was the national level, with nearly 82% ($n = 257$) of the stories oriented at the national level. Roughly 13% ($n = 42$) of the stories were oriented at the state level, with the city/town level 3% ($n = 10$) of all stories and the regional level making up less than 2% ($n = 5$) of all stories. Geographic comparisons occurred in almost 4% ($n = 12$) of all stories. When it came to descriptions of the economic conditions in specific states, the conditions in California ($n = 7$) were the most frequently described, followed equally by both Ohio and Florida ($n = 4$). However, the conditions in Nevada, Illinois, and Michigan were all mentioned three times each, and the conditions in Massachusetts, Missouri, Washington, Arizona, New York, and Texas were all described two times each.

As for demographics (RQ4b), the inclusion of demographic groups, such as income, employment, and race, was measured by determining if the economic conditions of particular groups were discussed within the story. Income was the most frequently mentioned, with 12% ($n = 39$) stories discussing the conditions of income groups. Partisan identification was discussed in almost 7% ($n = 21$) of all stories, while 5% of stories mentioned age ($n = 17$), employment ($n = 15$), race ($n = 15$), and sex ($n = 13$). Finally, roughly 3% ($n = 9$) of all stories included education levels as a demographic, and only 5% ($n = 16$) of stories compared the situation or circumstances of two or more demographic groups.

The first hypothesis predicted that most of the economic news would be negative. Overall, this hypothesis was supported. Although in general the economy was more prevalent as an issue object than the economic crisis, the economic crisis was the second

most frequent main issue object. The most frequent attribute was inflation and rising prices, with the financial crisis, housing crisis, and unemployment also frequently being mentioned. Furthermore, while nearly 15% ($n = 46$) stories included the adjectives related to scary or frightening, more stories were pessimistic than optimistic, with nearly 26% ($n = 81$) of stories pessimistic, 6% ($n = 19$) of stories optimistic, and 68% ($n = 214$) of stories neither pessimistic nor optimistic.

Furthermore, significant Pearson correlations between specific variables lend support to H1. In particular, pessimism was negatively correlated with the economic crisis ($r = -.36$, $p < .001$), the financial crisis ($r = -.25$, $p < .001$), the foreclosure crisis ($r = -.18$, $p < .001$), and stocks ($r -.26$, $p < .001$). Pessimism and optimism were different choices on the same variable, with pessimism coded as -1 and optimism coded as 1, and a story was coded as 1 if a specific issue object or attribute was mentioned. Thus, these findings demonstrate that pessimism was significantly more likely to be suggested in stories that discussed the economic crisis, the financial crisis, the foreclosure crisis, and stocks. Fear was also negatively correlated with the economic crisis ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$), the housing crisis ($r = -.19$, $p < .001$), the financial crisis ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$), and stocks ($r = -.35$, $p < .001$). Given that fear was coded as -1, these findings demonstrate that fear was more likely to be suggested in stories that mentioned the economic crisis, the housing crisis, the financial crisis, and stocks.

Additional support for H1 comes from the fact that the economic conditions in hard-hit states were more frequently discussed than the conditions in less impacted states (see RQ3). In terms of sources, the states of the quoted politicians and/or candidates offers some support for this hypothesis, as 8.9% ($n = 28$) of stories included the state of the politician or candidate, and hard-hit states composed 25% ($n = 7$) of those 28. Lastly, some of the demographic details of the citizen sources support this hypothesis, with 14.7% ($n = 14$) of the sources from California, 6.3% ($n = 6$) from Florida, and 4.2% ($n = 5$) from Nevada.

The second hypothesis predicted that the majority of sources in the stories would be experts or other accredited individuals as opposed to regular citizens. Overall, this hypothesis was supported. There was a total of 1,253 speaking sources in the stories ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 2.25$), with the maximum number of sources in one story 14 and the minimum 1. The most frequent number of sources was 2 and 6. Journalists were the most frequent source, followed respectively by politicians and political candidates, with less than a quarter of all sources being politicians or candidates. Citizens were found to comprise almost 8% ($n = 97$) of all sources (see Table 3.14). However, although economic experts, big business affiliates, and interest group representatives individually made up less than 5% each of all sources, together they accounted for a combined 10% ($n = 126$) of all sources. Altogether, experts and accredited sources – which includes politicians, candidates for office, political party representatives, pundits, economic experts, big business affiliates, as well as other individuals representing a specific interest – constitute a total of 39% ($n = 484$) of all sources cited. Furthermore, a paired-samples t-test between all expert sources and citizen sources was significant, t (313) = 12.67, $p < .001$, with all experts ($M = 1.54$, $SD = 1.49$) more likely to be cited in the stories than citizens ($M = .31$, $SD = .77$).

<div align="center">Cable and Network News</div>

RQ5 concerned differences in coverage between cable and network newscasts. Specifically, RQ5a examined differences in coverage of issue objects and attributes, RQ5b looked at differences in sources, RQ5c concerned the inclusion of demographic and geographic aspects of the recession, and RQ5d examined differences in suggesting blame, fear, and optimism. Overall, cable and network news differed significantly in terms of main issue object, attributes, discussing income as a demographic group, some use of the sources, and fear. However, network news and cable news did not significantly differ in terms of individual issue objects, geographic orientation of the news coverage,

and suggesting optimism and blame. To look at the differences between network and cable news coverage, chi-square and t-tests were utilized. The findings below are organized in the order of RQ5a through RQ5d.

There was a significant association between the medium of the news outlet and the main issue object (RQ5a), χ^2 (5, 314) = 20.18, $p < .001$, $V = .25$, with nearly half of cable stories focusing on the election, and just over a quarter of network stories focusing on either the economic crisis or the election (see Table 3.15). Main attribute was significantly associated with the medium of the sources (RQ5a), χ^2 (6, 314) = 33.42, $p < .001$, $V = .33$, with the highest percentage of cable stories focusing on taxes and the highest percentage of network stories focusing on inflation (see Table 3.16). As for individual issue objects and attributes (RQ5a), network and cable outlets were significantly different in terms of employment as an attribute, t (312) = 2.49, $p < .05$; the financial crisis as an attribute, t (312) = 2.21, $p < .05$; taxes as an attribute, t (312) = 3.59, $p < .001$; and inflation as an attribute, t (312) = 2.43, $p < .001$. Employment was more often an attribute in cable news ($M = .30$, $SD = .46$) than in network news ($M = .18$, $SD = .39$), with more than a quarter of cable stories discussing employment. The financial crisis, however, was more often an attribute on network news ($M = .28$, $SD = .45$) than cable news ($M = .18$, $SD = .38$), as more than a quarter of network stories discussed the financial crisis. Cable news ($M = .36$, $SD = .48$) focused on taxes more than network news ($M = .18$, $SD = .39$), as more than a third of cable stories covered taxes. However, network news ($M = .38$, $SD = .49$) focused more on inflation than cable news ($M = .25$, $SD = .43$), with almost two-fifths of network stories including inflation as an attribute.

Significant differences were also found between the medium of the news outlets and the sources cited within the stories (RQ5b). Notably, cable and broadcast news outlets significantly varied in terms of economic experts, t (312) = 2.77, $p < .01$; big business affiliates, t (312) = 3.82, $p < .001$; small business affiliates, t (312) = 3.02, $p < .01$; and citizens, t (312) = 3.54, $p < .001$. Economic experts were more likely to appear

on network news (*M* = .24, *SD* = .57) than cable news (*M* = .09, *SD* = .41) and were cited in nearly a quarter of network stories. Big business affiliates were also more likely to appear on network news (*M* = .22, *SD* = .55) than cable news (*M* = .04, *SD* .19), as more than one-fifth of network stories cited a big business source. Additionally, network news (*M* = .14, *SD* = .47) quoted small business affiliates more often than cable news (*M* = .02, *SD* = .15), with less than one-sixth of network stories citing a small business source. Finally, citizens were more likely to appear on network news (*M* = .45, *SD* = .92) than cable news (*M* = .14, *SD* = .49), appearing in just under half of network stories.

Only one significant difference was found between cable and network news in terms of covering demographic and geographic aspects of the recession (RQ5c). Specifically, cable news (*M* = .18, *SD* = .39) was more likely to discuss income as a demographic, *t* (312) = 2.95, *p* < .01, than network news (*M* = .08, *SD* = .26), as just under one-fifth of cable news stories included income as a demographic.

Finally, there were no significant differences in terms of how cable and network news suggested blame and optimism (RQ5d). However, cable and network news outlets significantly differed in suggesting fear (RQ5d), *t* (312) = 3.14, *p* < .01. Network news (*M* = .20, *SD* = .40) was more likely to suggest fear than cable news (*M* = .08, *SD* = .27), as one-fifth of network stories suggested fear.

RQ6 concerned differences in coverage among ABC News, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NBC News newscasts. The analysis for this research question was guided by the significant differences that were found between cable and network news. Based on the findings from RQ5, chi-square and ANOVA tests looked for differences in terms of main issue object, main attribute, suggesting fear, and coverage of economic attributes, sources, and income as a demographic. Among the five outlets, there were significant differences in terms of issues, attributes, sources, income as a demographic, and suggesting fear.

Chi-square and ANOVA tests looked for significant associations between all five news outlets and the issue objects and attributes. There was a significant association between the outlets and the main issue object of the story, χ^2 (20, 314) = 45.68, $p < .001$, $V = .19$, with the election the most frequent main issue object of CBS News, CNN, and Fox News, the economic crisis the most frequent main issue object of ABC News, and the economy the most frequent main issue object of NBC News (see Table 3.17). There was also a significant association between the outlets and the main attribute, χ^2 (24, 314) = 43.75, $p < .001$, $V = .19$, with inflation the main attribute of ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News, while taxes was the main attribute of CNN and Fox News (see Table 3.18). In terms of individual attributes, there were significant differences among the networks and coverage of taxes, F (4, 309) = 3.40, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$, and coverage of inflation, F (4, 309) = 2.69, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$, with about a third of both Fox News and CNN stories covering taxes, and just under half of all stories on NBC News covering inflation (see Table 3.20). Post-hoc analysis found that the differences among networks in coverage of inflation as an attribute approached significance ($p = .052$), with NBC differing from Fox News. However, post-hoc analysis did not find significant differences among networks and coverage of taxes.

There were also significant differences among the news outlets in terms of the speaking sources in the stories, most notably with economic experts, F (4, 309) = 3.64, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$, and citizens, F (4, 309) = 5.65, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Economic experts were most common in ABC stories followed by CBS stories, while CBS News most frequently included citizens followed by ABC News (see Table 3.21). In terms of the demographics, income varied significantly among the outlets, F (4, 309) = 3.49, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$, with CNN being the most likely to include income in news stories, as almost a quarter of CNN stories mentioned income as a demographic (see Table 3.22). A post-hoc analysis utilizing Tukey's HSD test found that the differences among the networks approached significance ($p = .057$), with CNN different from the other four outlets. Finally,

significant differences were present among all five news sources and fear of the crisis, F (4, 309) = 2.49, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Both NBC News and CBS News suggested fear most often, in about a fifth of those stories, followed closely by ABC News (see Table 3.23). Post-hoc analyses utilizing Tukey's HSD test did not find significant differences among the means and inclusion of any of the sources or suggestion of fear.

<div align="center">Changes over Time</div>

RQ7 concerned how the coverage changed over time, specifically in terms of geography, demographics, issue objects, attributes, blame, fear, and sources. Overall, and most notably, the coverage changed over time in terms of issue objects, attributes, fear, and sources cited. In particular, coverage of the economy, economic crises, election, energy, and inflation changed over time, along with the use of citizens. Additionally, H3 predicted that discussion of economic legislation, specifically TARP, would increase with time as October approached. H3 was supported, as discussion of economic legislation most often occurred in October followed closely by September.

Chi-square was used to examine the association between time and the categorical dependent variables. Time was significantly associated with the main issue object, χ^2 (35, 314) = 88.89, $p < .001$, $V = .24$, with the election the main issue object predominantly in August, followed respectively by March, May, April, and July. Energy was the main issue object predominantly in October, followed respectively by September and June (see Figure 3.1). Time was also significantly associated with the main attribute, χ^2 (42, 314) = 160.14, $p < .001$, $V = .29$, with inflation the main attribute predominantly in April, followed by July and June in that order. Both taxes and inflation were the main attributes predominantly in May, followed closely by August. The housing crisis was the main attribute predominantly in March. Finally, the financial crisis as well as economic legislation was the main attributes predominantly in September and then October (see Figure 3.2).

ANOVA allowed for an examination of how geography, demographics, issue objects, attributes, blame, fear, and sources changed over time, with each month (March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October) serving as the independent variables. In terms of demographics, employment was discussed to different extents over time, $F(7, 306) = 2.04$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$, as was race, $F(7, 306) = 2.11$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Employment status was mentioned in almost one-fifth of stories in October as well as one-tenth of stories in both March and July, whereas race was most often mentioned in stories from March to May, with roughly one-tenth of stories in March, April, and May discussing the economic conditions of specific racial groups (see Figure 3.3). Notably, several of the issue objects were significantly different from month to month, including the economy overall, $F(7, 306) = 9.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$; economic crisis, $F(7, 306) = 9.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$; and energy, $F(7, 306) = 5.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. The economy was an issue object of stories most often in May, as almost all the stories covered the economy that month. Most stories mentioned the economic crisis in October, with almost three-quarters of stories in October covering the crisis, followed by September and March in that order. Lastly, energy was the most frequently an issue object in June and May, as about half of the stories in these months covered energy (see Figure 3.4). Post-hoc analyses utilizing Tukey's HSD test did not find any significant differences among the networks in terms of coverage of demographics or issue objects.

Similar to the issue objects, several of the attributes significantly varied from month to month, including foreclosures and the housing crisis, $F(7, 306) = 3.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$; banks and the financial crisis, $F(7, 306) = 8.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$; economic legislation, $F(7, 306) = 8.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$; and inflation, $F(7, 306) = 4.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Foreclosures and the housing crisis were mentioned in almost two-fifths of stories in March, followed by a little more than a third of stories in September. The financial crisis was an attribute in over half of the stories in October and September, and almost one-third of stories in March. Economic legislation was an

attribute in more than 40% of the stories in both October and then September. Lastly, inflation was most frequently discussed in April and July, as more than 40% of the stories in both of those months included coverage of inflation, followed closely by June (see Figure 3.5). Post-hoc analyses utilizing Tukey's HSD test did not find any significant differences among the networks in terms of coverage of attributes.

Fear was mentioned to significantly different extents over time, F (7, 306) = 2.86, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Fear was most apparent in October, with more than a third of stories in October suggesting fear, followed respectively by September, with more than one-fifth of stories suggesting fear that month, and then both July and March (see Figure 3.6). However, Tukey's HSD post-hoc test did not find significant differences among the networks and suggesting fear. In terms of sources, only the number of citizen sources significantly changed over time, F (7, 306) = 2.20, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$. October featured the most citizen sources as almost three-quarters of the stories that month cited citizens (see Figure 3.7). However, this finding is somewhat skewed in that the analysis looked at only 11 stories from October, and a total of 8 citizens were quoted in all 11 stories from October. Nonetheless, almost half of all stories in March and more than two-fifths of stories in July also quoted citizens (see Figure 3.7). A post-hoc analysis utilizing Tukey's HSD test approached significance ($p = .054$), with October differing from all other months.

Discussion

This content analysis of TV news coverage of the U.S. economy in 2008 was based on the theoretical perspectives of agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, and priming. The findings presented here serve as the basis for examination of potential differences among national TV news audiences in terms of selective exposure as well. Accordingly, the focus of the remainder of the chapter is on how the content analysis findings influenced the second study of this dissertation, which examines public opinion

directly. The substantive findings that have direct implications for the public opinion study are summarized after this discussion.

In order to determine how news coverage of the Great Recession might have influenced the formation of economic public opinion and issue publics, this dissertation analyzed U.S. national television news coverage of the unfolding Great Recession. Specifically, this study examined the extent to which the crisis was discussed as well as how demographics and geography were discussed in the context of the various economic crises. Overall, this study found that television news coverage of the unfolding recession was generally negative, relied predominantly on experts and accredited sources, did not elaborate on the demographic and geographic disparities of the recession, and focused mainly on the upcoming presidential election but also discussed energy issues and the economy, with inflation and taxes the most commonly covered economic attributes. Coverage of the crisis occurred mostly in March, September, and October. Other attributes of the economy were also covered but not to the extent of inflation and taxes, despite the numerous economic events that occurred throughout 2008. There were also significant differences between cable and network news outlets, and among all five networks, specifically in terms of covering the election, economy, economic crisis, taxes, and inflation, as well as suggesting fear, quoting certain sources, and covering income as a demographic group. These findings are discussed in depth in the next two sections.

Coverage of the Economy and Economic Crisis

RQ1 concerned the issue objects that were presented in national television news from March to October 2008, and specifically the extent to which the economy and economic crisis was covered. This study found that, overall, the election was a frequently discussed issue and most often presented as the main issue in national TV news stories, though the economy, economic crisis, and energy were also frequently discussed issues. The prevalence of coverage of the election is not surprising, given that the U.S. news

media extensively covers elections, especially presidential elections (McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011). Additionally, the 2008 presidential election was historical for a number of reasons, with Barack Obama running as the first African American presidential candidate on a major party ticket and Sarah Palin running as the first female Republican vice-presidential candidate. Furthermore, the popularity of President George W. Bush was at a record low, and the economy was beginning to show warning signs of an impending crisis (see NBER, 2008, 2010; Presidential approval ratings, 2013; Rooney, 2008a, 2008b). The Great Recession, which was not defined by a single economic crisis and instead consisted of several interrelated and simultaneous downturns, unfolded in the middle of a presidential election unlike any the United States had yet seen. Several of these economic events occurred over the course of 2008, explaining why the economy and energy were frequently covered in national television news from March to October.

The summer of 2008 saw gas prices soar to record highs, with the national average reaching four dollars a gallon for the first time in history (see Hargreaves, 2008). In March, news agencies first suggested that a recession had begun as the housing market began to show signs of stress, with foreclosures increasing (RealtyTrac, 2008; Rooney, 2008a, 2008b). Starting in April, the national unemployment rate began to creep up, reaching 6% in July, 7% in November, and ending the year above 7% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Finally, although only two banks failed between January and March, by the end of the year a total of 25 banks had failed (FDIC, 2013). These major economic occurrences, along with the historical presidential election, explain why the economy, election, economic crisis, and energy were the most frequently covered issues and most common main issues. Nonetheless, the election was the most common main issue object and second most frequent issue object – second only to the election – suggesting that the majority of news coverage on the economy was tied to the election and candidates' plans for the economy.

However, according to the findings for RQ7, the economic crisis was mentioned most often in March as well as September and October, whereas the economy was mentioned most often in May and August, and energy was most often mentioned in June, September, and October. Thus, it appears national television news outlets either did not provide substantial coverage of the crisis until autumn of that year, or the coverage that was provided focused more so on energy and other, more positive news about economy, or rather how the presidential candidates were talking about the economy and their plans should they be elected president. The implications of these findings for the public opinion study are that individuals who were attending to news coverage of the economy were more likely to hear about the election and the economy in relation to the election, as opposed to receiving in-depth information about the economic crisis.

To understand what aspects of the economy and economic crisis were covered, attributes of the economy that were present in national U.S. television news from 2008 were also analyzed. RQ2 examined the attributes of the economy, and this study found that inflation and taxes were the most commonly covered economic attributes, as opposed to the financial or housing crises, economic legislation, or unemployment. Furthermore, inflation was most often the main attribute of the news coverage. Of the 14 different attributes that were coded, the top six (inflation, taxes, the financial crisis, jobs, the housing crisis, and economic legislation) are especially interesting in the context of this study, as all of these issues except for taxes were attributes that together defined the Great Recession.

The most frequently covered economic attribute as well as the most common main attribute was inflation and rising prices, especially on network news, suggesting that national television news predominantly focused on the weakening dollar and rising prices of consumer goods in 2008. Considering that this study also found that energy was a frequently covered issue, it seems that the real implication is that economic news from this time mostly covered rising gas prices. Unemployment was another substantially

covered attribute of the economy, which was not surprising as the unemployment rate began to climb dramatically in 2008 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Overall, the finding that national television news frequently covered employment issues along with rising prices – specifically gas prices – was reflective of the news media's desire to appeal to the concerns of their audiences (see Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012).

However, the finding that taxes were both a frequently covered attribute and a common main attribute is intriguing. Specifically, national television news frequently covered taxes even though there were numerous other economic events that were equally (if not more) newsworthy, including rising unemployment, the foreclosure crisis, bank closures, bankruptcies, the financial crisis, and economic legislation. While taxes constitute an attribute of the economy, it is nonetheless surprising that taxes were so frequently discussed, as taxes were not a contributing factor to the unfolding recession. Thus, it appears there is another explanation for why taxes were a common main attribute. Given the findings of this study, specifically that the election was another frequently discussed issue object, the discussion of taxes likely resulted from this coverage. At the same time, coverage of taxes was one of the few economic attributes that was covered differently across national television news outlets.

According to RQ5, cable outlets were much more likely than network outlets to include tax as an attribute, whereas network outlets were more likely to cover inflation than cable outlets. This finding could be reflective of the older, typically more partisan audience that cable news was attracting at that time (see Pew Research Center, 2008a; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a). Additionally, the discussion of taxes was likely to the presidential election, as taxes often are major issues debated during elections, including the 2008 election. Furthermore, RQ6 found that CNN and Fox News equally discussed taxes and that both CNN and Fox News covered the election more

frequently than other issues, with nearly 50% of all cable news stories focusing on the election.

In terms of the public opinion study, the finding that network news and cable news differed in coverage, specifically of taxes and inflation, has implications for individuals who exhibited selective exposure in autumn 2008. Research on selective exposure has demonstrated that individuals generally attend to one news source over others in order to avoid cognitive dissonance, which in turn can potentially limit an individual's understanding of an issue (see Baum & Gussin, 2008; Chaffee et al., 2001; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Knobloch et al., 2003; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Stroud, 2008, 2010; Stroud & Lee, 2013; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). Thus, depending on whether individuals spent more time with cable or network news, they likely perceived one of these two issues – taxes and inflation – as more important than the other.

In spite of these findings, overall, national U.S. television news did provide considerable coverage of both the financial and housing crises, as well as proposed economic legislation. The financial crisis was a more frequent attribute than the housing crisis, but when it came to main attributes, the housing crisis was more often coded as the main attribute than the financial crisis. Furthermore, this dissertation accurately predicted that coverage of the financial crisis and foreclosure crisis would increase with time. However, coverage of the foreclosure crisis was most common in March and September, which means that agenda-setting effects in terms of the foreclosure crisis might have occurred in March but also possibly in October. Yet, according to findings for RQ5 and RQ6, all five news outlets covered these crises almost equally, and no significant differences were found among the five outlets or between cable and network outlets in terms of coverage of the housing and financial crises. The most frequently covered economic attributes were inflation and taxes, with network news focusing on inflation and cable news focusing on taxes. Again, these findings are likely reflective of the

audience of each of the networks as well as the broadcasting mode of the networks (Pew Research Center, 2008a; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a).

Overall, these findings demonstrate that national television news in 2008 did not provide a great deal of coverage of two of the most severe aspects of the Great Recession, instead focusing on election issues and rising prices. Thus, individuals who were attending to news coverage of the economy in order to learn more about the various unfolding crises instead received information about the election and different candidates' plans for the economy. More specifically, depending on when individuals were watching the news, they likely were hearing more about some issues and less about others. In terms of the foreclosure crisis, although it is possible that exposure to the news shaped perceptions in October, it is also very likely that the news was influencing perceptions as early as March or April. To summarize, based on the theoretical framework of agenda setting, individuals who increasingly spent more time with the news in 2008 were less likely to perceive the economic crisis and its various aspects as important issues, and more likely to perceive the election as an important issue. However, given that news coverage of TARP and the foreclosure crisis was brief and occurred simultaneously with the legislative debate over TARP, the news media may not have been a major source of information about the unfolding crises in autumn 2008, and thus agenda-setting effects might have occurred either later or earlier in 2008.

RQ3 looked at fear, pessimism, as well as who or what was predominantly blamed for the crisis. Additionally, the first hypothesis predicted that the majority of the news coverage on the economy would be negative, and this hypothesis was supported. The crisis was more often presented as scary and the future pessimistic as opposed to optimistic. There were no differences between cable and network news outlets in terms of pessimism, but network news was more likely than cable news to suggest the crisis was scary, with NBC and CBS News coverage most frequently suggesting fear. Additionally, fear was most often suggested in stories from September and October. Given the

numerous severe economic events of 2008, these findings are not surprising, especially because the crisis worsened substantially over the course of 2008 and ultimately climaxed in October with the stock market tumbling, large financial institutions folding, and foreclosures dramatically increasing (see Grusky et al., 2011; NBER, 2010; Reddy, 2008; Siegel, 2008; Twin, 2008).

Additionally, although blame was rarely suggested, this study found that generally Republicans were most often blamed for causing the unfolding economic crises. However, there were no differences between cable and network news outlets in terms of blame. This result might be due to the fact that blame was so infrequently implied, with only 16% of all stories suggesting any causes of the crisis. However, it is also possible that national television news networks did not differ in suggesting different causes of the unfolding recession, either because the coverage was focused on other issues or because the news media did not know who or what to blame.

Altogether, these findings are in line with prior research on economic news. Public opinion and media researchers have found that news coverage of the economy is predominantly negative, even if the tone is not necessarily warranted (see Erbring et al., 1980; Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Stevenson et al., 1994; Wu et al., 2002). Economic news, but most especially negative economic news, can have severe effects on public opinion and consumer confidence, as economic news has the potential to influence individual assessments of the economy and in turn influence individual behaviors (see Erbring et al.; Goidel & Langley; Hagen, 2008; Hester & Gibson). Thus, the findings of this study, considered in terms of prior research on economic news and public opinion, suggest that negative news coverage of the economy in 2008 could have significantly influenced economic attitudes and opinions, which in turn could have affected individual economic behaviors. This implication carries substantial weight considering research has found that economic news can influence public opinion even more during a recession or periods of economic uncertainty (see Blood & Phillips, 1995;

Wu et al.). Altogether, though it is difficult to know whether the economy influenced news coverage, or vice versa, scholars have demonstrated that the economy and news about the economy are frequently interlinked, and that often it is impossible to determine if one factor is more influential than another (Erbring et al.; Hagen; Stevenson et al.). This appears to be the case in 2008 as well – as the economy continued to deteriorate, public concern about the economy increased, until the federal government intervened with TARP in autumn of that year.

The second hypothesis, which predicted that the news coverage would most often quote or cite expert and accredited sources, as opposed to average citizens, was also supported. Specifically, political and economic experts were much more likely to be quoted in national television news stories than average citizens or other individuals. This finding was in line with previous research on news media sources, which has found that journalists tend to rely on experts and accredited sources when gathering information for a news story (see Cross, 2010; Gans, 1980; Hackett, 1985; Hall et al., 1978; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Interestingly, citizen sources were most often cited in October, followed by March and July. This finding lends support to research that has found average individuals are often included in news stories for the purpose of providing a humanistic context to news content (see McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011; Shoemaker & Reese). However, these findings also have implications for the formation of public opinion and issue publics. As agenda-setting research has demonstrated how specific sources, such as politicians and other political experts, can exert influence over the shaping of the media agenda (McCombs, 2004), the implications of these findings are that individuals – depending on their selective exposure habits and news outlet tendencies – received different information from very different sources. In particular, individuals who were mostly exposed to news citing experts likely perceived the economic crisis and roots of the crisis differently than individuals who were mostly exposed to news that was more likely to cite an average citizen, such as coverage on CBS News or ABC News.

The third and final hypothesis of this study predicted that coverage of TARP and economic legislation would increase over time, and this hypothesis was supported. This finding is important for the public opinion study as it implies that individuals who increasingly attended to national television news coverage of the economy in autumn 2008 did learn about TARP. Based on this study, though, it is unclear what the tone of this coverage was. Nonetheless, this finding also demonstrates that national television news did cover TARP as well as the legislative and political debate concerning TARP.

Other aspects of national television news coverage changed over time, including the coverage of issue objects and attributes, with coverage of the economic crisis in particular occurring mostly in March, September, and October. Other differences were found in suggesting fear, with fear most common in October and September, as well as citizen sources, with citizens most often cited in October, March, and July. Overall, there are two major implications of these findings. For one, the fact that coverage changed in such dramatic ways over time, specifically in terms of the economy and economic crisis, is in line with prior research that has found the economy and news interact and react to each other as the economy and/or public opinion about the economy changes (see Erbring et al., 1980; Hagen, 2008; Stevenson et al., 1994). Secondly, and specifically in terms of the public opinion study to follow, individuals received different information depending not only on what news outlet they selected but also when they attended to economic news. Coverage of the economy and the various aspects of the economic crisis shifted over the course of the year, thus individuals received information on different issues depending on when they were attending to the news.

However, with TARP in particular, individuals watching the news in late September and early October were inevitably exposed to one or more stories about the heavily debated economic legislation. Yet, these stories focused almost entirely on the partisan and political debate over the legislation, rather than the purpose or potential effect of TARP. As a result, individuals who saw this news coverage probably learned

more about the partisan dispute over the legislation instead of its intended outcome. In terms of the public opinion study, then, news media may have played only a minor role in shaping public opinion and issue publics concerned with TARP, and instead reinforced partisan attitudes and informed viewers of how their respective political party perceived TARP.

To summarize, U.S. national television news coverage of the economy in 2008 varied extensively in terms of sources, issue objects, economic attributes, and suggesting blame, fear, and optimism. The variety of issues and attributes that were covered seem to imply that certain issues and newsworthy events sometimes are just not covered, no matter how important the issue may be. At the same time, journalists in 2008 may not have known how significant the economic events of 2008 would be and thus did not think to cover the crisis differently or more extensively. Furthermore, rather than simply disregarding some issues, these results suggest that often times there may be too many newsworthy events to cover and that news agencies must be extra selective in choosing what to cover and what not to cover.

Nonetheless, differences in coverage were even more pronounced depending on which network an individual selectively watched and when an individual attended to news coverage of the economy. These findings support prior research that has investigated differences among television news networks, specifically how cable and broadcast news differ in use of sources, presentation styles, topics, as well as audiences (see Aday et al., 2005; Bae, 2000; Baldwin et al., 1992; Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012). In line with the theoretical frameworks of agenda setting and selective exposure, individuals inevitably received different information and perspectives on the unfolding economic crisis of 2008, depending on what news outlet they attended to and the amount of time spent with a specific news outlet. Moreover, the formation of economic public opinion and issue publics in 2008 was in all likelihood substantially influenced by the news media, but even more so an individual's selective exposure to

news. However, some individuals likely used more than one news outlet, even if other outlets were not television news (see Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett et al., 2013).

Based on the findings of this study, individuals were more likely to receive information concerning the election, taxes, and inflation, rather than the economic crisis, the foreclosure crisis, and even the financial crisis. Furthermore, given that the news coverage was more often pessimistic than optimistic and suggested fear mostly in September and October, individuals likely began to worry about the economy even if they were not directly affected by job loss or foreclosures, which in turn could have shaped economic attitudes and possibly even support for TARP. Finally, although blame was a relatively rare occurrence, the news media blamed Republicans more often than any other group, and thus individuals who increasingly attended to the news throughout 2008 might be more inclined to say that Republicans were to blame for causing the crisis.

However, when it comes to economic perceptions and attitudes, individuals are not only influenced by the media but also by their own individual experiences and likelihood of being affected by the economy. Accordingly, this dissertation also examined the extent to which the demographic and geographic disparities of the Great Recession were present in economic news from 2008. The next section elaborates on these findings and the implications of these findings for the public opinion study.

<center>Coverage of Demographic and Geographic Disparities</center>

A unique aspect of the Great Recession was the fact that certain demographic groups, including Black Americans and Hispanics, were more likely than other groups, such as White Americans, to experience hardship or be severely affected by the Great Recession (Douglas & Browne, 2011; Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; Wolff, Owens, & Burak, 2011). Additionally, there were several states, namely California, Arizona, Nevada, and Florida, that were impacted by the recession more so than other states, such as Vermont, Montana, North Carolina, and Texas (Fligstein &

Goldstein, 2011; RealtyTrac, 2009). This dissertation analyzed news coverage from 2008 in order to understand the extent to which national television news in the U.S. discussed the demographic and geographic disparities that were an inextricable part of the unfolding Great Recession. According to this study, demographic and geographic aspects of the Great Recession were very rarely discussed by U.S. national television news in 2008. The implications of these findings are discussed in this section.

RQ4 was composed of two separate but related parts: a) the extent to which geographical disparities of the financial and housing crises were discussed in national television news, and b) the extent to which national television news highlighted demographic aspects of the unfolding economic crisis. Despite the dispersed and unequal geographic and demographic impact of the Great Recession, the findings of this study demonstrate that national television news mostly presented the unfolding crises as national issues, with little to no focus on the varied impact of some of the crises, such as the foreclosure crisis. Although the news specifically discussed conditions in states that were especially hard hit, including California, Nevada, and Arizona, the most common geographic orientation was at the national level, followed by the state level and city level. Additionally, geographic comparisons occurred in only 4% of all the news transcripts.

Overall, these findings suggest that the issues being covered in national television news – including the election, energy, economy, and economic crises – were often presented as national issues, as opposed to more regional or state-specific issues. Although gas prices and, to some extent, unemployment were more nationally oriented crises, other aspects of the Great Recession, namely the foreclosure crisis, played out very differently across geographical areas. According to the findings of the content analysis study of this dissertation, national television news media generally disregarded these differences, instead portraying the unfolding recession overall as a national issue. One rather obvious explanation for this finding is that this study analyzed national news. Another possible explanation for this finding is the simultaneous presidential campaign

along with the massive economic bailout known as TARP, which was designed to alleviate strains on national banks and not state or regional financial institutions (Burtless & Gordon, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011). On the other hand, it is also possible journalists could not recognize the magnitude of these events as they were occurring and simply did not cover them. Thus, some issues are never covered to the extent researchers would expect them to be, even if the issues are blatantly important. The implications of these findings, in terms of the public opinion study, are discussed below.

Along with disproportionate geographic impacts, the Great Recession and various crises that defined the recession affected demographic groups unequally. Demographic differences were covered more frequently than geographic disparities, although only slightly more so. Specifically, comparisons of different demographic groups were very rare, and income was the most frequently discussed demographic, followed by partisan identification and then age. Based on these findings, only specific demographic inequalities were discussed, as income was the most frequently mentioned demographic or demographic trait of an entire group of people. Cable news was more likely to provide coverage of income as a demographic group, with CNN the single network providing the most coverage. Given the findings that cable news overall was also providing substantial coverage of taxes and inflation – two economic attributes with direct links to an individual's income – this finding is not terribly surprising.

Nonetheless, national television news coverage appeared to have largely disregarded the more significant and telling demographic differences that were playing out, namely with race and education levels. However, this finding is in line with prior research. Specifically, prior research has found that lack of coverage of racial injustice issues is a common occurrence in U.S. media (see Chiricos & Escholz, 2002; Dixon, 2008a, 2008b; Entman & Gross, 2008; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Holt, 2013; Holt & Major, 2010). Other scholars have demonstrated that economic news generally focuses on prominent economic events that are tangibly discussed in the context of a news story,

rather than discussing economic inequalities and disparities that may be exasperating or underlying the economic events (Entman & Gross; Entman & Rojecki; Goidel & Langley, 1995; Holt, 2013; Holt & Major, 2010; Wu et al., 2002). Finally, prior research on the Great Recession has found that news media rarely discussed the underlying causes of the recession, including racial inequalities and disparities in home loans and ownership (Lewis, 2010; McCombs et al., 2011; Sandvoss, 2010). At the same time, journalists may not have been fully aware of the underlying racial issues of the unfolding crises or became aware of them later. It is possible that coverage of the demographic disparities was more common in the rest of the year and possibly into 2009, which would suggest that journalists learned of the disparities after the tumultuous events of autumn 2008.

Instead of discussing race, education, or even employment status, this study found that partisan and political ideology was the second most discussed demographic. These results support the idea that the news media were predominantly interested in covering the election and partisan disputes that went along with the passage of TARP, rather than bringing to light the severe and unjust demographic differences in terms of race and education. These results also seem to imply that journalists and their respective news network were largely focused on the election and issues related to the election. This might explain why coverage of the crisis was less frequent than coverage of the election, and why the demographic disparities were rarely discussed. Nonetheless, given the historical nature of the presidential election of 2008, specifically that a major political party for the first time was nominating a Black candidate, it is actually somewhat surprising race was not more frequently discussed. Overall, the lack of coverage on race, in terms of either the election or the economy, might have been due to the sensitive nature of race, which may have encouraged journalists to avoid altogether discussing it.

Despite the fact that some states and individuals of specific racial and ethnic backgrounds were disproportionately affected by the unfolding economic crisis, national television news in the U.S. generally did not call attention to these disparities. More

specifically, this study found that the demographic disparities were more often discussed than the geographic disparities. Overall, these findings support prior research on news coverage of the Great Recession, which has found that U.S. news media did not cover the underlying causes of the crisis or the racial inequalities that marked the Great Recession (see Lewis, 2010; McCombs et al., 2011; Sandvoss, 2010). The reasons for this lack of coverage remain unclear, and it is possible journalists either avoided the topic or were not aware of the demographic disparities and thus did not cover them. Nonetheless, the results of this study do match the findings of prior research. The implications of these findings, in terms of the following public opinion study, are that individuals who paid increasingly more attention to the news did not learn about the varied, unequal, and dispersed impact of the unfolding economic crisis. Accordingly, selective exposure to the news in all likelihood would not have shaped individual perceptions of the demographic and geographic disparities that marked the Great Recession.

Another implication of these findings is that an individual's demographic likelihood of being affected and geographic proximity to aspects of the crisis may have been more influential in shaping economic attitudes and opinions than were the news media. In particular, individuals who paid increasingly more attention to the news over 2008 were not more likely to know that the crisis was affecting different groups of people in various ways, and, thus, if economic issue publics in 2008 formed along demographic lines it would probably have been due to individuals' real-world experiences and not because of information received from the news media. Research has found that the parameters of issue publics can vary not only along demographic lines but also based on geography, even to the extent that state-specific issue publics can be identified (see Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Nicholson, 2005; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993; Smith & Tolbert, 2010). Thus, although economic issue publics in 2008 were not primarily shaped by demographics, geography possibly still played a role in the formation of these publics.

The results of this study altogether imply that there were too many events to cover, and that journalists were selective in deciding which issues were most important. Thus, even if certain issues and events become historical, they may not be covered adequately at the time they are occurring, either because other events may be perceived as more important or because journalists simply do not cover them. Overall, it appears individuals who spent any amount of time with national television news in autumn 2008 did not learn much, if anything, about the demographic and geographic aspects of the unfolding crisis. Yet, even if individuals did not learn about these disparities, an individual's geographic proximity to the crisis and demographic likelihood of being affected could still potentially shape selective exposure and agenda-setting effects. According to the theoretical framework of agenda setting, individuals were more likely to be influenced by news coverage of the crisis if the crisis was unobtrusive to them and if they had a higher need for orientation (see Hagen, 2008; Kepplinger, 2008; McCombs, 2004; Shaw & Slater, 1988; Weaver, 2007; Zucker, 1978). In the context of the unfolding crisis of autumn 2008, obtrusiveness and need for orientation could have been influenced by individuals' likelihood of being affected and proximity to the crisis. However, regardless of selective exposure, individuals – whether they were close to the crisis or more likely to be affected – unlikely received any meaningful information from the news concerning the disparities of the unfolding crisis.

Economic news coverage on national television news in 2008 likely did not provide much information on the various crises, and it almost certainly did not provide insight into the geographic and demographic disparities that were inherently a part of the Great Recession. U.S. national television news instead focused on the 2008 political campaigns and election, the economy, and energy, despite the numerous and major economic events that unfolded throughout the year. When the economy and economic crisis were covered, the focus was on inflation and taxes, although some coverage was provided of other aspects of the recession, including the foreclosure crisis, financial

crisis, and economic legislation. The implications of these findings, combined with the results of the public opinion study, are further discussed in Chapter 5. However, the implications of these findings for the methodology and actual second study of this dissertation are detailed below.

<center>Implications for Public Opinion Study</center>

Several of the results of this study were important for the second study of this dissertation, a secondary analysis of nationwide survey data. In line with agenda-setting research, findings from this content analysis study directly informed the second study. Specifically, the content analysis study findings were used to develop hypotheses concerning the secondary analysis study, and these hypotheses are posed below. The secondary analysis study was guided by a theoretical model that investigated and predicted the parameters of economic issue publics in autumn 2008 (see Appendix A). While the initial steps of the model were outlined in Chapter 2, the remaining components relied on the findings from this study. In particular, the findings of this study directly informed selective exposure to media, which in turn might have shaped individual attitudes.

Based on this research approach, several of the findings have direct implications for the next study. In particular, although blame was suggested in only 16% ($n = 50$) of all stories, national television news most often blamed Republicans for causing the crisis, but there were no significant differences among the networks or between cable and network news in terms of blame. Thus, although Republicans were the primary target of blame, the lack of differences between cable and network news will not allow for the development of a specific hypothesis based on blame and an individual's selective exposure to different news media.

However, given that pessimism and fear were common than optimism in national news coverage of the unfolding recession, with fear significantly more likely to be

suggested on network news, individuals who paid more attention to the national TV news in general might have been more afraid and pessimistic compared to individuals who paid less attention to the national TV news in general. Specifically, given that network news significantly suggested fear more often than cable news, it is possible that individuals who watched network news more than cable news were more likely to perceive the crisis as scary. Yet, given the few significant differences between cable and network news in terms of blame and optimism, it is unclear how selective exposure to news media might have influenced perceptions of the severity of the crisis and the future of the economy. Nonetheless, given that the news media did cover economic legislation more often in September and October than they had previously, it is possible that individuals who spent more time with the news had different opinions of TARP than individuals who spent less time with the news.

Finally, this study found that the demographic and geographic disparities of the recession were rarely discussed in national television news from March to October 2008. Although the news media did not frequently elaborate on the geographic and demographic aspects, an individual's geographic proximity to the crisis and demographic likelihood of being affected could still potentially shape selective exposure and agenda-setting effects.

Specifically, an individuals' perception of the obtrusiveness of the crisis and need for orientation could have been influenced by their likelihood of being affected and proximity to the crisis. According to agenda setting, these individuals would be less likely to rely on the media for information about the recession, as it would be obtrusive to them, therefore reducing their desire to know more about the crisis. Thus, it is still possible that the formation and parameters of economic issue publics in autumn 2008 varied along demographic and geographic lines, specifically in terms of individuals who were more likely to be affected and closer in proximity to aspects of the crisis. However, as the demographic and geographic aspects of the unfolding recession were rarely

discussed, it appears unlikely that the news media and selective exposure to the news fostered the formation of issue publics along demographic or geographic lines, such that individuals who were affected or closer in proximity to the recession unlikely experienced any reinforcement of their individual experiences from exposure to national television news.

To summarize, this content analysis provided findings that suggest selective exposure and time spent with the news media could have influenced individual attitudes concerning specific aspects of the unfolding crisis as well as the formation and parameters of economic public opinion and issue publics in autumn 2008. In line with these findings, additional research questions and hypotheses for the secondary analysis study are now posed.

Additional Research Questions and Hypotheses

Along with H4, RQ8, and RQ9, this study tested four more hypotheses and investigated six more research questions using secondary analysis of nationwide survey data. In line with agenda setting and public opinion research, this study utilized findings from the content analysis study from this chapter to inform the secondary analysis of survey data (see McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Schulz, 2008). Agenda-setting studies in particular often utilize data from analyses of relevant news content along with survey data (McCombs; McCombs & Shaw). According to Schulz, research on the relationship between news media content and public opinion will benefit from increased validity "if, in addition to content analysis results, information is available about the public's exposure to media" (p. 351). Accordingly, this section of the dissertation was finalized only after the data analysis of the content study was completed.

The hypothesis and research questions from Chapter 2 (H4, RQ8, RQ9) concerned the relationships between demographics – specifically economic demographics, race, and partisan affiliation – and media exposure, particularly time

spent with media and exposure to either cable or network news. Based on the theoretical framework of agenda setting, this dissertation predicted that the unfolding recession of autumn 2008 would be less obtrusive to some individuals, and that as a result certain people would be more likely to watch the news than other individuals would. Specifically, H4 was composed of three separate predictions: a) White respondents will spend more time with the news than respondents of other races; b) higher income respondents will spend more time with the news than lower income respondents; and c) employed respondents will spend more time with the news than unemployed respondents. These hypotheses stemmed from the likelihood of certain individuals paying more or less attention to the news based on the probable obtrusiveness of the crisis; respondents who were not White, lower-income, and unemployed individuals were more likely to be affected by the various crises that were unfolding in autumn 2008 and therefore less likely to need to rely on the news media for information (see Douglas & Browne, 2011; Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; Rugh & Massey, 2010; Wolff, Owens, & Burak, 2011). RQ8 concerned the relationship with partisan affiliation and time spent with the news, while RQ9 examined the relationship between exposure to either cable or network news and the demographic variables of employment status, income, race, and partisan affiliation. Research has not yet sufficiently elaborated on the relationships among these variables such that hypotheses can be developed. Additionally, the historical circumstances in which these variables are being studied do not lend themselves to the development of hypotheses.

<u>Media Exposure and Attitudes</u>

The first set of additional hypotheses and research questions analyzed the relationship between media exposure and economic attitudes and opinions, specifically the extent to which economic perceptions were predicted by exposure to network and/or cable news, and time spent with television news. Essentially, this section investigated the

role the news media played in shaping attitudes concerning the economy and opinions toward TARP by identifying potential agenda-setting and priming influences as well as further examining how different levels of obtrusiveness informed economic attitudes and opinions. This section also examined how selective exposure to news media may have shaped different economic opinions and attitudes. Research has demonstrated that individual media use habits can have major implications for the formation of opinions and issue publics: individuals exercise selective exposure when consuming news content, and individuals who pay a great deal of attention to news content are increasingly likely to rely on the information from the news when forming an opinion on a given issue, especially with those issues that cannot be experienced in everyday life (see Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011; Son & Weaver, 2005; Stroud & Lee, 2013; Zeldes et al., 2012).

Accordingly, this first set of hypotheses and research questions were informed by the theoretical framework of attribute agenda setting, attribute priming, and selective exposure, as well as the content analysis findings. Of particular interest were the findings concerning a) the differences between cable and network news outlets in terms of blame and fear, and b) the prevalence of coverage that was pessimistic, fearful, and c) suggesting that the Republican Party caused the crisis.

H5a: Time spent with news media will be positively associated with fear, with respondents who spend more time with the news being more afraid compared to respondents who spend less time with news media.

H5b: Time spent with news media will be positively associated with pessimism, with respondents who spend more time with the news being more pessimistic compared to respondents who spend less time with news media.

H6: Based on the content analysis findings that both cable and network news most often blamed the Republican Party for causing the economic

crisis, respondents who spend more time with the news will be more likely

to blame Republicans compared to respondents who spend less time with

the news.

Based on the content analysis findings that network news was significantly

more likely to suggest that the crisis was scary,

H7: Selective exposure to network news will be more predictive of fear of

the crisis than exposure to cable news.

RQ10: What is the relationship between selective exposure to cable and/or

network news and optimism about the economy?

RQ11: What is the relationship between selective exposure to cable and/or

network news and blame for the crisis?

Parameters of Economic Attitudes and Support for TARP

Finally, to test the proposed model and determine which factor(s) –

demographics, media use, or attitudes – most influenced the formation of economic

attitudes and the parameters of the issue public that supported TARP, three more research

questions and two more hypotheses were posed. These research questions and hypotheses

were informed by the historical circumstances of the unfolding recession as well as the

theoretical frameworks of the public opinion process and issue publics, as opposed to the

findings from the content analysis study. Research has demonstrated that individuals,

depending on who they are, experienced the Great Recession in various ways (Grusky et

al., 2011). At the same time, the Great Recession – and more specifically the foreclosure

crisis -- was spread out geographically such that certain states were more impacted than

others were (Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011). Accordingly, some people were more likely to

be affected by the recession whereas others were closer in proximity to the foreclosure

crisis. Thus, this study analyzed the development and contours of the issue public that

supported TARP to determine the extent to which membership in this public was

influenced by the demographic and geographic differences that underscored the economic crises of autumn 2008. Additionally, the influence of media exposure was scrutinized, in terms of how these differences might have shaped media exposure and whether this had any discernible influence on the formation of the public.

Attitudes and Support for TARP

Public opinion scholars have elaborated extensively on the significance of attitudes in shaping public opinion (see Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Price, 1992; Tourangeau & Galesic, 2008, Zaller, 1992). Specifically, when it comes to the formation of public opinion and issue publics, researchers have found that attitudes rival the influence of interpersonal communication, media use, and individual experiences (Crespi, 1997; Hagen, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2007; Hutchings, 2003; Price et al., 2006). In line with this scholarship and the historical circumstances of autumn 2008, the following hypothesis and a research question examined the extent to which economic attitudes predicted opinions of TARP.

> H8a: Affective attitudes will be predictive of opinions of TARP, with respondents who are scared of the crisis being more supportive of TARP.
>
> H8b: Affective attitudes will be predictive of opinions of TARP, with respondents who are pessimistic about the future of the economy being more supportive of TARP.
>
> RQ12: What is the association between cognitive economic attitudes and opinions of TARP?

Parameters of Issue Public Favoring TARP

The next research question was designed to determine whether a) attitudes about the economy or b) likelihood and proximity better predict opinions of TARP. Specifically, was support for TARP based on how obtrusive the foreclosure crisis was perceived to be? The purpose of this research question was two-fold: to determine the

obtrusiveness of the crisis, and to outline the parameters of the issue public that supported TARP. Scholars have explicated the various influences on the formation of issue publics and demonstrated how the parameters of public opinion and publics can vary demographically, attitudinally, geographically, and based on media use (see Anand & Krosnick, 2003; Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar et al., 2008; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Kim, 2009; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Krosnick, 1990; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Price et al., 2006; Price, 2008; Price & Zaller, 1993). The circumstances surrounding the crisis of autumn 2008 informed this question, along with the theoretical frameworks of agenda setting and selective exposure as well as scholarship on the public opinion process and issue publics.

RQ13: Did a) media exposure or b) demographic likelihood of being

affected better predict economic attitudes and opinions of TARP?

Geography and Support for TARP

The final research question investigated the extent to which opinions of TARP varied geographically. Research on state-specific issue publics has found that the formation and parameters of public opinion and issue publics can vary geographically when national issues play out differently in regional areas or specific states (Nicholson, 2005; Smith & Tolbert, 2010). To investigate this research question, the overall model was tested with views of TARP and then tested exclusively among respondents in regions where the rate of foreclosure was above, near, or below the nation rate of foreclosure. However, based on the premise that individuals may have perceived TARP as being tied to the foreclosure crisis and possibly even a solution to the unfolding housing crisis, the final hypothesis predicted that respondents who lived in states where there foreclosure rate was higher than the national average would be more likely to support TARP. Given that some states had a foreclosure rate well above the national average in 2008, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, and Ohio,

residents in these nine states might have been more concerned with the foreclosure crisis than residents in the remaining 41 states, where the foreclosure rate was near or below the national average. In turn, residents in those nine states might have been more supportive of TARP, especially if they believed that the legislation would help to end the foreclosure and subprime mortgage crises.

RQ14: Did national TV news media exposure and economic attitudes significantly vary geographically?

H9: Respondents who are geographically closer in proximity to the housing crisis will be more supportive of TARP than respondents who are further in proximity, regardless of exposure to news coverage.

These research questions and hypotheses, in addition to the research questions and hypothesis from Chapter 2, provided the rationale for the second study of this dissertation.

Table 3.1 Intercoder reliability scores for all variables.

Variables	Percent agreement	Scott's pi
Journalist on location	90.0	.76
Geographic orientation/level	88.9	.72
Geographic comparison	96.7	.88
States	93.3	.86
Age – Demographic	100.0	1.00
Race – Demographic	100.0	1.00
Sex – Demographic	100.0	1.00
Education – Demographic	98.3	-0.01
Income – Demographic	96.7	.84
Employment – Demographic	100.0	1.00
Party identification – Demographic	98.3	.79
Other – Demographic	96.7	-0.02
Demographic comparison	96.7	.88
Economy – Object	95.6	.89
Economic crisis – Object	93.3	.87
Election – Object	96.7	.93
Politics – Object	94.4	.85
Partisanship – Object	97.8	.74
Geography – Object	95.6	.84
Demographics – Object	97.8	.92
Energy – Object	96.7	.92
Other – Object	98.9	.79
Main object	77.8	.71
Foreclosure/housing crisis – Attribute	98.9	.97
Loans – Attribute	96.7	.78
Banks/financial crisis – Attribute	88.9	.71
Economic regulation – Attribute	93.3	.76
Economic legislation – Attribute	93.3	.81
Jobs/employment – Attribute	92.2	.76
Stock market – Attribute	94.4	.71

Table 3.1 Continued

Budget/deficits – Attribute	100.0	1.00
Tax – Attribute	96.7	.78
Inflation and prices – Attribute	90.0	.78
Income and wealth – Attribute	100.0	1.00
Trade – Attribute	96.7	-0.02
Bankruptcy – Attribute	100.0	1.00
Consumer confidence – Attribute	91.1	.77
Other – Attribute	100.0	1.00
Main attribute	80.0	.70
Banks/Wall St. – Blame	95.6	.82
Toxic assets – Blame	100.0	1.00
Individuals – Blame	100.0	1.00
Lack of regulation – Blame	97.8	.89
Partisanship – Blame	100.0	1.00
Republicans – Blame	97.8	.86
Democrats – Blame	100.0	1.00
Other – Blame	95.6	.79
Main blame	90.0	.82
Fear	96.7	-0.02
Optimism	84.4	.75
Number of sources	96.7	.96
Candidates	96.7	.92
Politicians	96.7	.92
State of candidates and/or politicians	98.3	-0.01
Partisans	96.7	.92
Pundits	93.3	.76
Economic experts	95.0	.89
Big business	95.0	.75
Small business	96.7	.85
Social scientist	100.0	1.00
Celebrities	100.0	1.00
Interest group	96.7	.78

Table 3.1 Continued

Journalists	98.3	.96
Citizens	95.0	.89
Other Source	96.7	.84
Number of citizens	93.3	.86
Sex of citizen	97.5	.86
Age of citizen	100.0	1.00
Race of citizen	98.3	.91
Residence of citizen	96.7	.79
Job of citizen	95.8	.89
Homeowners mention	100.0	1.00

Note: When occurrences of a variable are skewed, Scott's pi can decrease while percent agreement increases (see Neuendorf, 2002; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Zhao et al., 2010).

Table 3.2 Frequencies of issue objects and main issue objects.

Topics	Issue object		Main issue object	
	n	Percent*	*n*	Percent**
Economy	202	64.3	54	17.2
Election	151	48.1	116	36.9
Economic crisis	122	38.8	82	26.1
Energy	88	28.0	32	10.2
Politics and government	82	26.1	17	5.4
Geography	66	21.0	0	0
Demographics	49	15.6	0	0
Partisanship	28	8.9	0	0
Other	9	2.9	13	4.1
Total	797	253.7	314	99.9

* Each story was coded for multiple objects and therefore the total does not add up to 100%.

** Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 3.3 Occurrence of main issue objects and economy as an object.

| Variables | Main issue object | | | | | | Total |
	Economy	Economic crisis	Election	Politics	Energy	Other	
Economy was not an object	0	82	21	4	2	3	112
Economy was an object	54	0	95	13	30	10	202
Total	54	82	116	17	32	13	314

χ^2 (5, 314) = 207.49, p < .001, V = .81.

Table 3.4 Occurrence of main issue objects and economic crisis as an object.

| Variables | Main issue object | | | | | | Total |
	Economy	Economic crisis	Election	Politics	Energy	Other	
Crisis was not an object	48	0	91	13	30	10	192
Crisis was an object	6	82	25	4	2	3	122
Total	54	82	116	17	32	13	314

χ^2 (5, 314) = 178.52, p < .001, V = .75.

Table 3.5 Occurrence of main issue objects and election as an object.

| Variables | Main issue object | | | | | | Total |
	Economy	Economic crisis	Election	Politics	Energy	Other	
Election was not an object	49	63	0	16	24	11	163
Election was an object	5	19	116	1	8	2	151
Total	54	82	116	17	32	13	314

χ^2 (5, 314) = 202.77, $p < .001$, $V = .80$.

Table 3.6 Occurrence of main issue objects and politics as an object.

| Variables | Main issue object | | | | | | Total |
	Economy	Economic crisis	Election	Politics	Energy	Other	
Politics was not an object	47	45	108	0	22	10	232
Politics was an object	7	37	8	17	10	3	82
Total	54	82	116	17	32	13	314

χ^2 (5, 314) = 91.00, $p < .001$, $V = .54$.

Table 3.7 Occurrence of main issue objects and energy as an object.

| Variables | Main issue object | | | | | | Total |
	Economy	Economic crisis	Election	Politics	Energy	Other	
Energy was not an object	41	69	94	13	0	9	226
Energy was an object	13	13	22	4	32	4	88
Total	54	82	116	17	32	13	314

χ^2 (5, 314) = 93.56, $p < .001$, $V = .55$.

Table 3.8 Frequencies of issue attributes and main issue attributes.

Attributes	Issue attribute		Main issue attribute	
	n	Percent*	*n*	Percent**
Inflation and prices	100	31.8	64	26.1
Taxes	84	26.4	48	15.3
Banks/financial crisis	74	23.6	28	8.9
Jobs/employment	73	23.2	36	11.5
Foreclosure/housing crisis	69	22.0	32	10.2
Economic legislation	53	16.9	24	7.6
Loans	40	12.7	N/A	N/A
Economic regulation	31	9.9	N/A	N/A
Consumer confidence	29	9.2	N/A	N/A
Budget deficits	23	7.3	N/A	N/A
Income and wealth	15	4.8	N/A	N/A
Trade	15	4.8	N/A	N/A
Bankruptcy	7	2.2	N/A	N/A
Stock market	5	1.6	N/A	N/A
No main attribute	N/A	N/A	82	26.1
Total	618	196.4	314	105.7

Note: Issue attributes with low *n* sizes were collapsed into other main issue attribute categories based on statistically significant Pearson *r* correlations.

* Each story was coded for multiple attributes and therefore the total does not add up to 100%.

** Total does not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Table 3.9 Occurrence of main attribute and housing crisis as an attribute.

Variables	None	Housing crisis	Bank crisis	Econ. law	Jobs	Taxes	Prices	Total
			Main attribute					
Housing crisis was not an attribute	67	5	21	17	33	43	59	245
Housing crisis was an attribute	15	27	7	7	3	5	5	69
Total	82	32	28	24	36	48	64	314

χ^2 (6, 314) = 89.34, $p < .001$, $V = .53$.

Table 3.10 Occurrence of main attribute and bank crisis as an attribute.

Variables	None	Housing crisis	Bank crisis	Econ. law	Jobs	Taxes	Prices	Total
			Main attribute					
Bank crisis was not an attribute	69	18	5	11	35	43	59	240
Bank crisis was an attribute	13	14	23	13	1	5	5	74
Total	82	32	28	24	36	48	64	314

χ^2 (6, 314) = 97.82, $p < .001$, $V = .56$.

Table 3.11 Occurrence of main attribute and economic law as an attribute.

| | Main attribute | | | | | | | |
Variables	None	Housing crisis	Bank crisis	Econ. law	Jobs	Taxes	Prices	Total
Economic law was not an attribute	77	23	20	2	34	43	62	261
Economic law was an attribute	5	9	8	22	2	5	2	53
Total	82	32	28	24	36	48	64	314

χ^2 (6, 314) = 121.43, $p < .001$, $V = .62$.

Table 3.12 Occurrence of main attribute and prices as an attribute.

| | Main attribute | | | | | | | |
Variables	None	Housing crisis	Bank crisis	Econ. law	Jobs	Taxes	Prices	Total
Prices was not an attribute	71	25	22	23	32	34	7	214
Prices was an attribute	11	7	6	1	4	14	57	100
Total	82	32	28	24	36	48	64	314

χ^2 (6, 314) = 127.99, $p < .001$, $V = .64$.

Table 3.13 Frequencies of blame and main blame.

Reasons	Blame		Main blame	
	n	Percent	*n*	Percent
Republicans	18	36.0	13	46.4
Banks/Wall St.	10	20.0	5	17.9
Lack of regulation	6	12.0	0	0
Partisanship	5	10.0	0	0
Toxic assets	5	10.0	4	14.3
Democrats	4	8.0	2	7.1
Individuals	2	4.0	0	0
Indiscernible	0	0	4	14.3
Total	50	100.0	28	100.0

Table 3.14 Speaking sources frequencies.

Variables	*n*	Percent
Journalists	557	44.5
Politicians	157	12.5
Political candidates	155	12.4
Citizens	97	7.7
Economic experts	54	4.3
Big business	43	3.4
Unidentified source	41	3.3
Interest group	29	2.3
Small business	28	2.2
Partisans	27	2.2
Pundits	19	1.5
Narrator/announcer	14	1.1
Soldiers/law enforcement	14	1.1
Social scientist	11	1.0
Other source	6	0.5
Total	1,252	100.0

Table 3.15 Occurrence of main issue objects on cable or network news.

Variables	Economy	Economic crisis	Election	Politics	Energy	Other	Total
			Main issue object				
Network news	38	51	51	6	16	11	173
Cable news	16	31	65	11	16	2	141
Total	54	82	116	17	32	13	314

χ^2 (5, 314) = 20.18, p < .001, V = .25.

Table 3.16 Occurrence of main attributes on cable or network news.

Variables	None	Housing crisis	Bank crisis	Econ. law	Jobs	Taxes	Prices	Total
				Main attributes				
Network news	53	17	18	12	18	10	45	173
Cable news	29	15	10	12	18	38	19	141
Total	82	32	28	24	36	48	64	314

χ^2 (6, 314) = 33.42, p < .001, V = .33.

Table 3.17 Occurrence of main issue objects by five news outlets.

	Main issue object						
Network	Economy	Economic crisis	Election	Politics	Energy	Other	Total
ABC	10	19	14	2	6	6	57
CBS	9	18	21	3	6	1	58
CNN	9	14	40	2	8	1	74
FOX	7	17	25	9	8	1	67
NBC	19	14	16	1	4	4	58
Total	54	82	116	17	32	13	314

χ^2 (20, 314) = 45.68, p < .001, V = .19.

Table 3.18 Occurrence of main attributes by five news outlets.

	Main attribute						
Network	None	Housing crisis	Bank crisis	Econ. law	Jobs	Taxes	Prices	Total
ABC	19	8	6	4	6	1	13	57
CBS	14	4	6	5	9	5	15	58
CNN	16	8	3	7	11	19	10	74
FOX	13	7	7	5	7	19	9	67
NBC	20	5	6	3	3	4	17	58
Total	82	32	28	24	36	48	64	314

χ^2 (24, 314) = 43.75, p < .001, V = .19.

Table 3.19 Coverage of issue objects per story by network.

Issue object	Network	n	Frequency	Mean	SD
Econ. crisis[a]	ABC	57	28	.49	.50
	CBS	58	29	.50	.50
	CNN	74	22	.30	.46
	FOX	67	26	.39	.49
	NBC	58	17	.29	.46
Election[b]	ABC	57	19	.33	.48
	CBS	58	24	.41	.50
	CNN	74	58	.78	.41
	FOX	67	29	.43	.50
	NBC	58	21	.36	.49

[a]$F (4, 309) = 2.64, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03.$

[b]$F (4, 309) = 10.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12.$

Table 3.20 Coverage of attributes per story by network.

Attribute	Network	n	Frequency	Mean	SD
Inflation[a]	ABC	57	19	.33	.48
	CBS	58	18	.31	.47
	CNN	74	19	.26	.44
	FOX	67	16	.24	.43
	NBC	58	28	.48	.50
Taxes[b]	ABC	57	10	.18	.38
	CBS	58	13	.22	.42
	CNN	74	27	.36	.49
	FOX	67	24	.36	.48
	NBC	58	9	.16	.37

[a]$F (4, 309) = 2.69, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03.$

[b]$F (4, 309) = 3.40, p < .01, \eta^2 = .04.$

Table 3.21 Use of sources per story by network.

Source type	Network	n	Frequency	Mean	SD
Economists[a]	ABC	57	19	.33	.72
	CBS	58	16	.28	.56
	CNN	74	3	.04	.20
	FOX	67	9	.13	.55
	NBC	58	7	.12	.38
Big business[b]	ABC	57	16	.28	.56
	CBS	58	11	.19	.61
	CNN	74	5	.07	.25
	FOX	67	0	.00	.00
	NBC	58	11	.19	.48
Small business[c]	ABC	57	6	.11	.41
	CBS	58	11	.19	.51
	CNN	74	1	.01	.12
	FOX	67	2	.03	.17
	NBC	58	8	.14	.48
Citizens[d]	ABC	57	23	.40	.78
	CBS	58	39	.67	1.28
	CNN	74	14	.19	.59
	FOX	67	6	.09	.34
	NBC	58	15	.26	.48

[a]$F (4, 309) = 3.64, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05.$

[b]$F (4, 309) = 4.29, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05.$

[c]$F (4, 309) = 2.69, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03.$

[d]$F (4, 309) = 5.65, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07.$

Table 3.22 Coverage of income demographic per story by network.

Network	n	Frequency	Mean	SD
ABC	57	4	.07	.26
CBS	58	4	.07	.26
CNN	74	18	.24	.43
FOX	67	8	.12	.33
NBC	58	5	.09	.28

$F(4, 309) = 3.49$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$.

Table 3.23 Coverage of fear per story by network.

Network	n	Frequency	Mean	SD
ABC	57	11	.19	.40
CBS	58	12	.21	.41
CNN	74	5	.07	.25
FOX	67	6	.09	.29
NBC	58	12	.21	.41

$F(4, 309) = 2.49$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$.
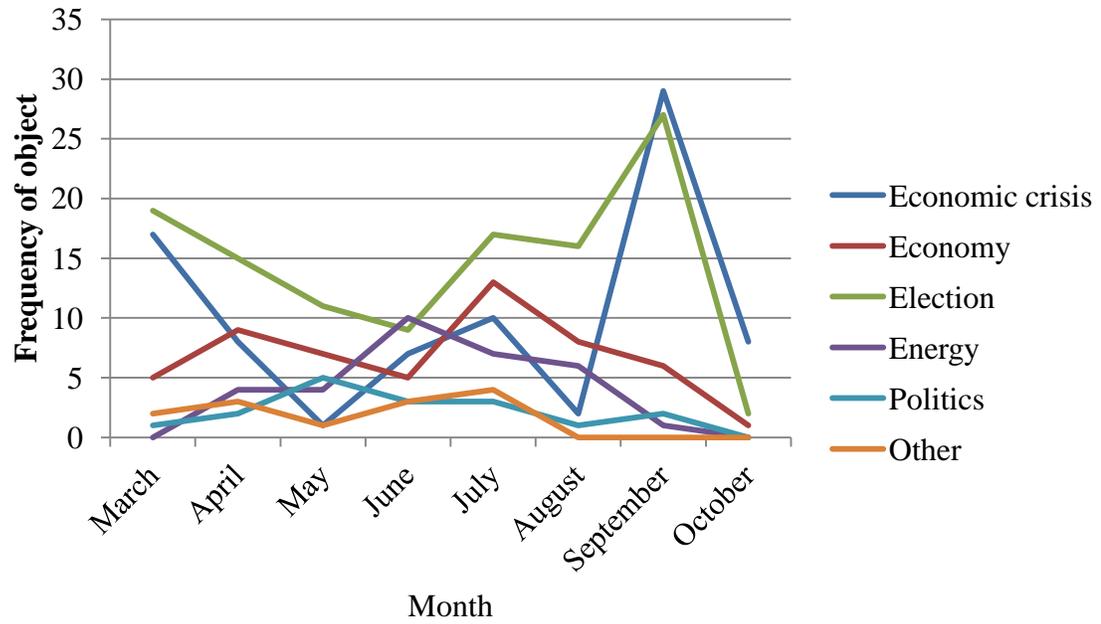
Figure 3.1 Frequency of main issue objects over time.
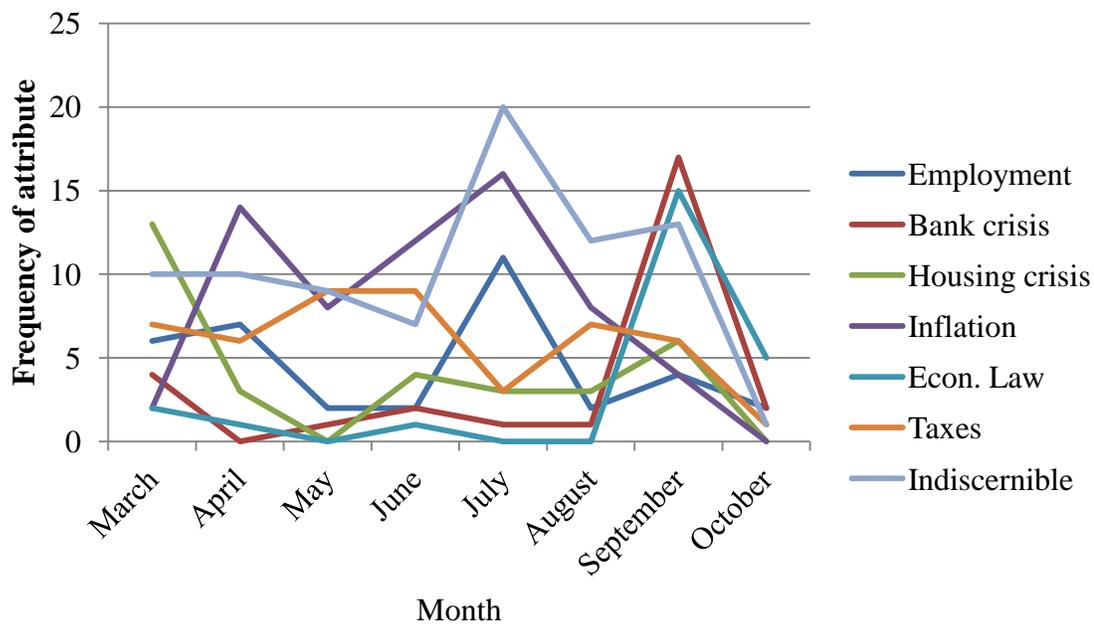
Figure 3.2 Frequency of main attributes over time.
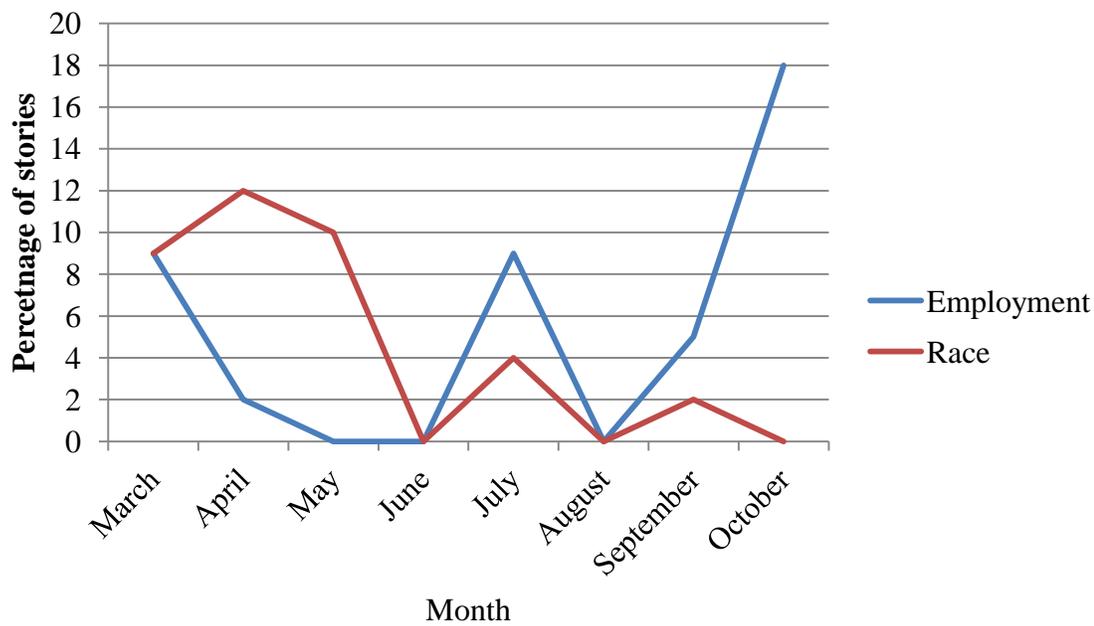
Figure 3.3 Frequency of mention of demographics over time.
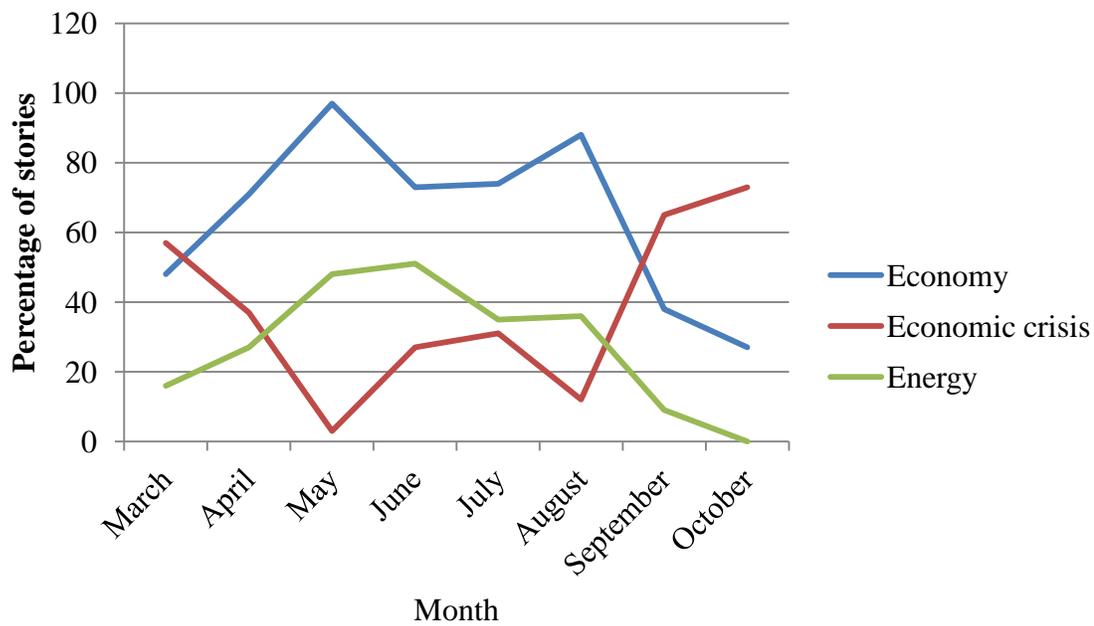
Figure 3.4 Percentage of story types including specific issue objects over time.
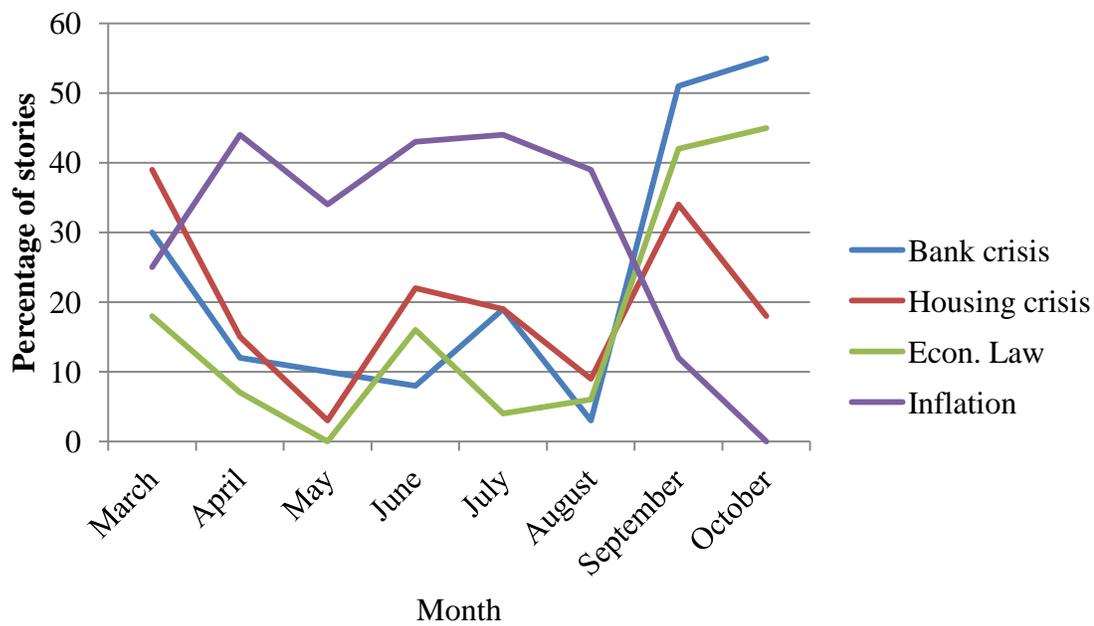
Figure 3.5 Percentage of story types including specific attributes over time.
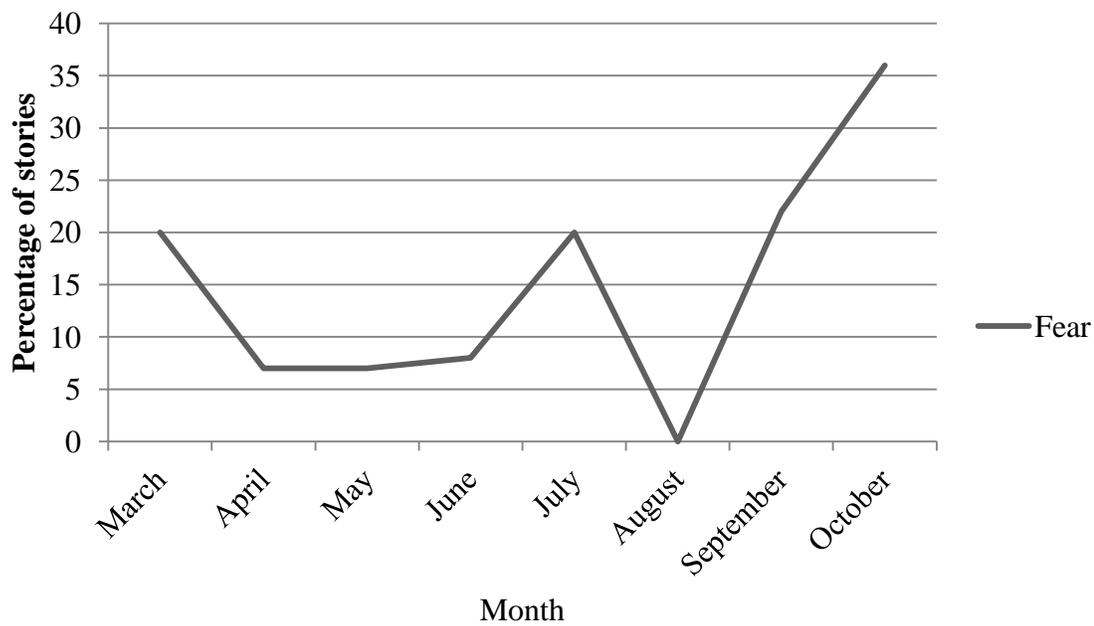
Figure 3.6 Percentage of stories including fear over time.
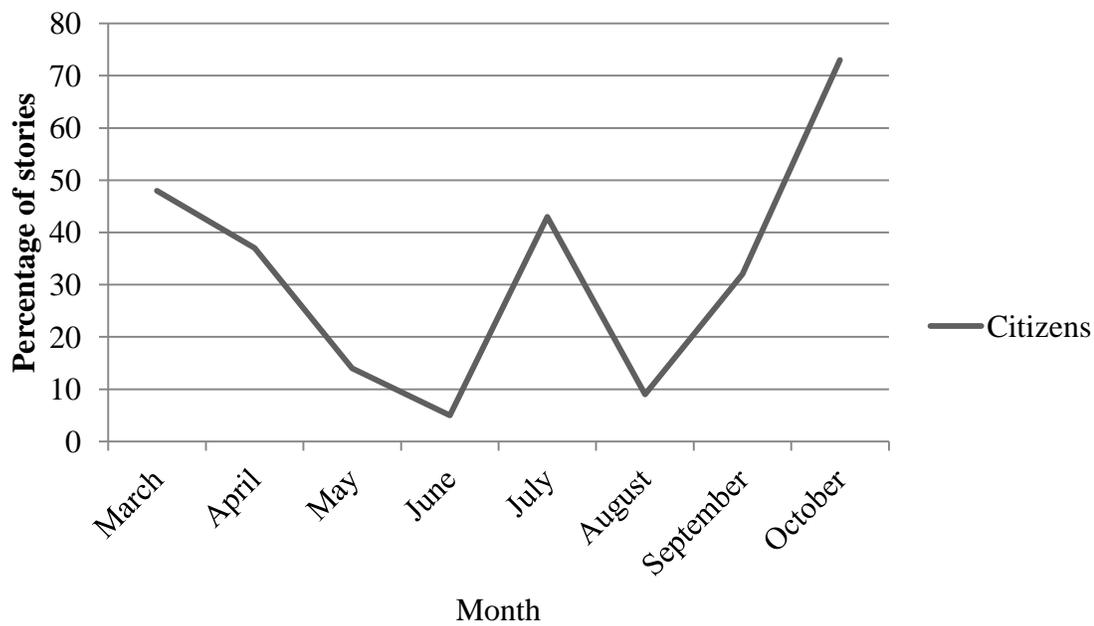
Figure 3.7 Percentage of stories including citizens as sources over time.

CHAPTER 4

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

The second study of this dissertation was a secondary analysis of survey data from autumn 2008. The purpose of this study was to determine the relative obtrusiveness of the 2008 economic crises, the various influences on public opinion at this time, and the parameters of the issue public that supported the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). The public opinion process specifies that the formation of economic publics and public opinion is significantly shaped by individual's attitudes, news exposure, experiences, and proximity to aspects of the economy and economic downturns (Crespi, 1997; Hagen, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2007). Agenda-setting theory predicts that the effects of news consumption, depending on an individual's time spent with news media, are most substantial with unobtrusive issues, which are issues that cannot be directly experienced by individuals in their everyday lives (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011; Shaw & Slater, 1988; Zucker, 1978). In the context of this study, the foreclosure crisis and other related aspects of the Great Recession may have been more or less obtrusive to individuals, depending on whom they were and where they lived. At the same time, the relative obtrusiveness of the various economic crises may have influenced individual behaviors of selective exposure to news content as well as economic attitudes and opinions, including support for TARP. In sum, this study examined survey data from September and October 2008 to determine a) the various factors that influenced economic attitudes and opinions at this time and b) the parameters of the issue public that was supportive of TARP.

To establish the extent to which news exposure may have influenced public opinions and attitudes, this study utilized findings from the content analysis study of this dissertation. The news content analyzed in the first study was broadcast prior to the dates on which the survey interviews were conducted. Furthermore, the secondary analysis

study utilized survey measures of media exposure, specifically hours per day with television, days per week watching the news, and exposure to either network or cable news. Conducting the secondary data analysis in this way ensured that this study met two critical and fundamental requirements of agenda-setting research: a) the news content that potentially influenced the formation of public opinion and issue publics was broadcast nationally 6 to 8 weeks prior to the national survey, and b) media exposure variables from the survey that measured attention to the relevant news content were utilized (see McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Schulz, 2008).

The research questions and hypotheses guiding this study are posed at the end of Chapter 2 and at the end of Chapter 3. Based on the theoretical frameworks of agenda setting and selective exposure as well as the historical circumstances of the Great Recession, the first set of RQs and Hs from Chapter 2 examine the relationship among demographic variables, selection of either cable or network television news, and time spent with television. The RQs and Hs from Chapter 3, while also informed by theory and historical circumstances, were developed based on the findings of the content analysis of national television news. The content analysis study was completed first in order to allow the study's findings to inform the research approach of this study, a secondary analysis of survey data. Specifically, these questions and predictions examined the relationship among selection of either cable news or network news, time spent with the news, economic attitudes, and public approval of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). The final set of RQs and Hs also examined the parameters of economic issue publics in 2008 by analyzing the validity of a proposed model (see Appendix A). Thus, the purpose of this study is twofold: a) to examine how demographics, media exposure, and economic attitudes were associated, and b) to determine the parameters of economic issue publics in 2008, in terms of demographics, economic status measures, race, partisan identification, geographic proximity to the foreclosure crisis, selection of either cable or network news, time spent with the news, and economic attitudes.

This chapter details the methods used to conduct the secondary analysis as well as an overview of the study's findings. The study's methods are explicated first, followed by the results, with the implications of this study discussed in Chapter 5. The results of both studies are also discussed in Chapter 5.

Methods

Data

The data for this component of the study come from the nationwide 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania. In particular, this dissertation utilized the rolling-cross sectional (trend) phone survey (NAES08-Phone). The survey was designed and managed by the APPC, with sampling and interviewing conducted by Abt SRBI of New York under the direction of APPC. The variable codebook was more than 200 pages long, while the length of the questionnaire varied as the survey was conducted in several phases. However, the survey data did not provide a measure of how long each interview was, so descriptive statistics concerning the length of interviews cannot be provided. Multiple waves of the survey were conducted consistently between December 17, 2007, and November 3, 2008, with respondents asked about a range of topics, including the election campaign, the importance of a variety of issues, media exposure, political perceptions, political orientation, social group perceptions, and demographics.

Survey research, like all research methods, has a variety of strengths and weaknesses. Arguably, the most substantial weakness of survey research is non-response, in which some respondents refuse to answer some or all questions of a survey. Non-response has serious implications for survey research, such that some populations may be underrepresented (Brick et al., 2006; Couper, 2011; Groves, 2011; Presser, 2011; Price, 2011). Non-response issues can also increase the likelihood of errors in survey research or lead to biased results (Brick et al.; Couper). Overall, non-response undermines

probability sampling as individuals who refuse to respond to a survey or survey question have been randomly selected to ensure the results of the survey are generalizable and therefore cannot be replaced with another individual who might be more inclined to respond (Brick et al.; Couper; Groves). Other weaknesses of survey research include measurement issues, the length of individual interviews, the length of the survey questionnaire as well as how questions are worded and the order in which questions are asked (Couper; Jamieson & Waldman, 2003; Price).

As for strengths, survey research is recognized as being one of the best research methods for describing a population that is too large to observe directly (Brick et al., 2006; Groves, 2011; Price, 2011). Additionally, if a survey interviews a probability-based sample, the results are generalizable within a margin of error (Brick et al.; Price). Along these same lines, survey research excels at measuring attitudes, perceptions, and orientations among individuals in a large population (Couper; Groves; Price). Finally, using standardized questionnaires can strengthen the reliability of survey research as all respondents are asked the same set of questions and all responses are imputed in exactly the same way (Couper; Presser, 2011; Price).

Overall, using survey data for this study was sensible, as the purpose of this study was to examine the formation and parameters of national public opinion. Specifically, this study was focused on measures of attitudes and perceptions among individuals in the U.S. population at large. Thus, survey data was a logical choice for this study as again survey research excels at measuring attitudes and orientations of individuals in a large population. However, non-response issues and other issues related to the design of the survey and data collection process cannot be reconciled. Nonetheless, this study benefited from the generalizable nature of survey data and the large, national sample that was interviewed during the data collection process of the NAES.

Sample

A total of 57,967 randomly selected adults were interviewed in the NAES08-Phone survey, with up to 300 interviews completed daily during peak campaign periods (APPC, 2010). The sample for this study was composed of an aggregation of single-day interviews completed between Wednesday, September 24, and Friday, October 3, 2008, yielding a total of 10 days' worth of interviews, or 4.3% of the entire sample ($N = 2,493$; $M = 249.30$, $SD = 12.43$). These dates are tied to the legislative debate over TARP as well as the limited period of time in which the NAES08-Phone survey asked respondents about their perceptions of the economic crises. It should be noted that causality cannot and will not be inferred in this study, as the survey did not utilize a panel sample.

Measures

This portion of the study was constrained by the fact that this is a secondary data analysis. Several shortcomings of secondary analyses of survey data have been elaborated by scholars, including the availability of applicable data, errors made in the original research process, measurement issues, sample issues, and data quality issues (see Hyman, 1972; Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985; Smith, 2008). Specifically, secondary analyses of survey data are limited in terms of the validity of concepts under study, as surveys do not always include measures that a secondary researcher is seeking, and, even when there are relevant variables, it is difficult to determine how precise the measures are, or if the variables were properly or poorly operationalized (Kiecolt & Nathan). Despite the limitations, secondary data analyses allow researchers to posit and test theories empirically and can even advance and inform survey research and data collection practices (Smith). Furthermore, scholars have recommended that secondary analyses be approached with appropriate skepticism, account for potential limitations, and, in order to avoid trivial or problematic findings, be guided by theory and utilized along with other research methods (Hyman; Kiecolt & Nathan; Smith). Thus, the availability and

subsequent selection of variables for examination was limited by the measures included in the NAES08-Phone survey.

The survey data provided relevant measures of demographics, political orientation, news media exposure, geography, and economic perceptions, which constituted the control, independent, and dependent variables for this portion of the dissertation. All of these variables were derived from the study's research questions, hypotheses, and proposed model, which were examined and tested with analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and linear regression analyses. In particular, linear regression analyses were utilized in order to determine how demographics, media exposure, and attitudes influenced economic attitudes and opinions of TARP.

However, in order to conduct these analyses, many of the variables needed to be recoded. The first step for several of the variables (race, partisan identification, selection of news outlet, and blame for the crisis) was to account for open-ended responses that were provided by respondents but coded as "other." Next, three of the variables (race, partisan identification, and income) were constructed based on combining two measures. The final step was to recode each variable appropriately. This entailed a) recoding responses differently into the same variable, b) recoding responses differently into a new variable, and/or c) recoding responses into a new dummy variable. Prior research on regression analysis using ordinal and categorical variables guided the construction of the dummy variables, which essentially are two or more binary measures created from a single source variable (see Cohen et al., 1983; Kaufman & Sweet, 1974; Serline & Levin, 1985; Wendorf, 2004). The details of this entire process are described in the next two sections. The original frequency counts for all the variables, prior to being recoded, are reported in Appendix C, whereas the frequency counts of recoded variables are reported in either the next two sections of this chapter or a table at the end of this chapter.

Independent Variables

The independent variables of this study consisted of measures of demographics, geography, and news media exposure. Of particular interest were measures of respondents' state of residence as well as demographic characteristics of race, employment status, income, and partisan identification. These variables encompassed the likelihood of an individual experiencing hardship during the autumn 2008 economic downturn as these characteristics consistently predict individuals' economic experiences and outcomes (see Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Greenman & Xie, 2008; McCall, 2001, 2005; Snipp, 2003). Additionally, partisan affiliation was utilized in order to see how identification with a specific political party might have shaped media preferences as well as attitudes towards the economy and opinions of legislation being debated at that time. All of these measures were recoded appropriately in order to conduct ANOVAs as well as linear regression analyses.

Controls

Gender was measured by utilizing respondents' answers to the close-ended question of whether a respondent was male or female. Responses included only male or female. This variable was unaltered but recoded with female respondents as 0 ($n = 1{,}412$) and males as 1 ($n = 1{,}081$). This variable was used consistently as a measure of an individual's biological sex, specifically in the linear regression models.

Age was measured by utilizing respondents' answers to the open-ended question "what is your age." This variable was unaltered as it was coded during the survey as a continuous variable. Responses were recorded in years ($M = 52.60$; $SD = 17.26$), ranging from 18 to 97. The median age was 54. Respondents who did not provide their age were coded as missing ($n = 48$) on the variable. Age was entered as it was coded in the survey, and the frequency counts of age groups organized by increments of 10 are reported in

Appendix C. This variable was consistently used as a measure of an individual's age in years, specifically in the linear regression models.

Education was measured by utilizing respondents' answers to the close-ended question "what is the last grade or class you completed in school." This variable was coded appropriately in the survey and was unaltered for this study's analysis. Education was coded as 1 for 8th grade or lower, 2 for some high school but no diploma, 3 for high school diploma or equivalent, 4 for technical or vocational school after high school, 5 for some college but no degree, 6 for associate's or two-year college degree, 7 for four-year college degree, 8 for graduate or professional school after college, and 9 for graduate or professional degree. Respondents who did not provide their last completed grade were coded as missing ($n = 70$) on this variable. The frequency counts of the education variable are reported in Appendix C. This variable was used consistently as a measure of an individual's level of education, specifically in the linear regression models. Based on prior research, age, gender, and education level were used as control variables (see Dalrymple & Scheufele, 2007; Delli-Carpini & Skeeter, 1993, 1996; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Verba at al., 1995).

Economic Status

Income was measured by utilizing respondents' answers to two close-ended questions, which were worded in exactly the same fashion but provided respondents with slightly different responses. The question asked respondents "last year, what was the total income before taxes of all people living in your house or apartment," with the first version (asked between December 17, 2007, and September 28, 2008) offering nine possible responses, and the second version (asked between September 29, 2008, and November 3, 2008) offering ten possible responses. Essentially, the major difference between the two versions was that the latter allowed respondents to select a) $150,000 to less than $250,000 or b) $250,000 or more, whereas the first version only allowed for

$150,000 or more. The frequency counts for both income variables are reported in Appendix C.

To reconcile this issue, the responses to both questions were combined into a single variable, with respondents who said $150,000 or more to both questions combined. The frequency counts for the recoded income variable are reported in Table 4.1. However, income was collapsed and recoded into a new five-point scale to more closely approximate interval measurement (see Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). Specifically, income was coded with 1 for less than $10,000 to $15,000, 2 for $15,000 to $35,000, 3 for $35,000 to $75,000, 4 for $75,000 to $150,000, and 5 for $150,000 or more. Respondents who did not provide their income were coded as missing ($n = 337$). The frequency counts for the collapsed categories income variable are reported in Table 4.2. This variable was used consistently as a measure of individual's annual income, specifically in linear regression analyses and Pearson correlations.

Employment status was measured by utilizing respondents' answers to the open-ended question "are you working full time or part time." If respondents did not say full time or part time, interviewers were instructed to probe for an answer. All of the answer options are listed and the frequency counts reported in Appendix C. However, in order to look at differences only among respondents who were employed full-time and respondents who were not employed full-time, *employment status* was recoded for this study, with full-time employed respondents as 1, all other responses as 0, and "don't know" and "no response" as missing. The frequencies for this variable are reported in Table 4.3. This variable was used consistently as a measure of an individual's employment status, specifically in linear regression analyses and *t*-tests looking at differences in mean scores among respondents with different employment statuses.

Partisanship

   Partisan identification was measured with a five-point scale created by combing

the measures of partisan identification and partisan identification strength (see Dalrymple

& Scheufele, 2007; Delli-Carpini & Skeeter,1993, 1996; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000;

McLeod et al., 1999; Verba at al., 1995). Partisan identification was measured by

utilizing responses to the question "generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself

as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else," whereas strength of

identification was measured by utilizing responses to the close-ended question "do you

consider yourself a strong or not a very strong Republican/Democrat/Independent." This

combined measure allowed partisan identification to be measured as an ordinal variable.

The frequencies for these variables, including all open-ended responses provided by

respondents, are reported in Appendix C.

   Partisan identification was significantly associated with strength of partisan

identification, χ^2 (2, 2,160) = 14.15, p < .001, V = .08. Specifically, 63% of Republicans

(n = 406) said they strongly identified with the Republican Party, whereas 70% of

Democrats (n = 578) said they strongly identified with the Democratic Party (see Table

4.4). Respondents who said they strongly identified with the Democratic or Republican

Party were then recoded respectively as either strong Republican or strong Democrat.

Respondents who did not strongly identify with a political party were coded respectively

as either Democrat or Republican, whereas all respondents who identified as Independent

or other political party were coded into a single category, regardless of the strength of

their identification. Based on this data, a new, ordinal measure of partisan identification

was created, with strong Republicans as -2, Republicans as -1, Independents/other party

as 0, Democrats as 1, and strong Democrats as 2. Respondents who did not specify their

partisan identification were coded as missing. Partisan affiliation was coded in this

fashion in order to focus only on those respondents who identified strongly or not

strongly with one of the two major political parties. The frequencies for this combined

measure are reported in Table 4.5.This variable was used consistently as the measure of an individual's partisan identification, specifically in linear regression analyses and ANOVAs looking at differences in mean scores among respondents with different partisan affiliations.

Race

$Race$ was measured by creating a combined measure of race and Hispanic origin. Race was measured by utilizing responses to the close-ended question "what is your race," with respondents selecting one answer, ranging from 1 for White or white Hispanic; 2 for Black, African American, or black Hispanic; 3 for Asian, 4 for American Indian; 5 for Hispanic; 6 for mixed race; and 7 for "other." The open-ended data for respondents who said they were "other" race contained respondents who answered the question generally with a nationality and not a race, and were therefore left coded as "other." Additionally, Hispanic origin was measured by utilizing responses to the close-ended question "are you of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent." Hispanic origin was coded as yes (1), no (2), don't know (998), or no answer (999). The frequency counts of these original variables are reported in Appendix C.

In order to get the best possible read on racial differences, the race variable and the Hispanic origin variable were combined, such that nearly 97% of respondents ($n =$ 147) who said they were of Hispanic descent were recoded into the race variable as Hispanic. An exploratory chi-square cross-tab found that race was significantly associated with Hispanic origin, χ^2 (6, 2,402) = 492.38, $p < .001$, $V = .45$ (see Table 4.6). Of interest were respondents who said they were of Hispanic origin ($n = 152$) but answered the race question with another race, specifically a portion of White respondents ($n = 94$), Black respondents ($n = 19$), American Indian respondents ($n = 2$), and respondents of mixed races ($n = 5$). Approximately one-fifth of respondents who identified as being of Hispanic origin ($n = 32$) said their race was Hispanic. Based on the

historical premises of the Great Recession and specifically the foreclosure crisis, a new race variable was constructed from these two measures (see Table 4.7). All respondents who said they were of Hispanic descent were recoded as Hispanic, with the exception of the five mixed-race respondents. Essentially, respondents who said they were of Hispanic descent as well as White, Black, or American Indian were all recoded as Hispanics in the race variable, while mixed-race individuals were not recoded nor were respondents who self-identified as Hispanic and being of Hispanic descent. Thus, with 32 respondents already coded as Hispanic, and five respondents coded as mixed race, a total of 115 respondents were recoded as Hispanic, bringing the total number of Hispanic individuals to 147 (see Table 4.7). Mixed-race respondents were not recoded as being of Hispanic or Latino descent because they identified as being of mixed races. Altogether, the purpose of this recoding procedure was to ensure that individuals of Hispanic descent were fully accounted for, as Black and Hispanic individuals were more likely than White individuals to be affected by the Great Recession (see Douglas & Browne, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; Mendenhall, 2010; Petev et al., 2011; Rugh & Massey, 2010; Squires, 2011). This variable was used to create dummy variables for each race and to look at differences in means among different racial groups.

For linear regression analyses, due to its nominal nature, race was also transformed into dummy variables. The dummy variables were created using the recoded race variable described above. Essentially, each race was transformed into its own variable, such that each variable was a measure of whether respondents said they were or were not of a specific racial background.

However, as Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites were the primary groups of interest due to the historical circumstances of the Great Recession, all other racial groups (Asians, American Indians, mixed race, other race) were combined into a single variable (all other races). Though Blacks and Hispanics were both negatively affected by the economic crises, Black respondents and Hispanic respondents in this study were treated as separate

groups because exploratory *t*-tests found Blacks and Hispanics significantly differed in days per week with the news, t (312) = 3.51, $p < .001$; hours per day with television, t (314) = 4.62, $p < .001$; blaming Republicans, t (278) = 2.12, $p < .05$; and optimism, t (294) = 3.29, $p < .001$. Specifically, in terms of time with the news, Blacks ($M = 5.77$, $SD = 2.18$) spent more days per week with the news than Hispanics ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 2.89$). Blaming the Republican Party for causing the crisis was more common among Blacks ($M = .68$, $SD = .47$) than Hispanics ($M = .55$, $SD = .50$). Finally, Blacks ($M = -.89$, $SD = .46$) were more pessimistic than Hispanics ($M = -.65$, $SD = .76$).

Based on these results, three new dummy variables were created: Blacks ($n = 171$), Hispanics ($n = 147$), and Whites ($n = 1,977$). Respondents who said they were a given race (i.e., Black or White) were coded as 1, and respondents who were not of that given race coded as 0. Coding the variables in this way transformed race into a categorical variable that allowed for race to be entered into the linear regression models and treated each racial group equally (see Cohen et al., 1983; Kaufman & Sweet, 1974; Serline & Levin, 1985; Wendorf, 2004). These variables were used in linear regression analyses.

Geography

Geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis was constructed by grouping respondents from certain states into specific groups, as defined by a state's rate of foreclosures in comparison to the national average. Respondents' answers to the question regarding state of residence were used to create this variable. This variable was operationalized as an individual's proximity to the foreclosure crisis and was used for the creation of dummy variables. Essentially, respondents in different states were grouped into one of three different categories depending on the states' foreclosure rate in comparison to the national foreclosure rate. The theoretical framework of state-specific issue publics informed the operationalization of this variable, as state-specific issue

publics describes the ways in which issue publics can form differently from state to state depending on how a national issue is playing out at the state level (Nicholson, 2005; Smith & Tolbert, 2010). Thus, in order to see how issue publics varied in states where a national issue was occurring differently, this study grouped all 50 states and Washington, D.C., into three categories – foreclosure rate above national average, foreclosure rate at or near national average, and foreclosure rate below national average.

According to RealtyTrac (2009), in 2008 California, Nevada, Arizona, Florida, Colorado, Georgia, Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio had foreclosure rates well above the national average, while Utah, Tennessee, Indiana, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Virginia, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Maryland, and Idaho had foreclosure rates at or near the national average, whereas the remaining 31 states, along with Washington, D.C., had rates below the national average. In line with this data, a new variable was created that divided states into three groups (above average, average, below average) based on the rate of foreclosures. Respondents in states with a foreclosure rate above the national average comprised 35.5% ($n = 884$) of the sample and were coded as -1, with 17.5% ($n = 436$) of the sample in states at or near the national average and coded as 0, and 47.1% ($n = 1,173$) of the sample in states with a foreclosure rate below the national average and coded as 1. Using the recoded geographical proximity variable (described above), dummy variables for each group were created. Thus, there was a variable for respondents in states where the foreclosure rate was above the national average, a variable for respondents in states where the foreclosure rate was at or near the national average, and a variable for respondents in states where the foreclosure crisis was below the national average. These dummy variables were constructed because of the categorical nature of the geographical proximity to foreclosure variable and used exclusively in the linear regression models.

Media Use

  Time spent with the news was measured by utilizing responses to the open-ended question "thinking about the past week, how many days did you see information on broadcast or cable television about the 2008 presidential campaign." Respondents were told to include seeing programs on television, the internet, cell phone, or tablet device, with answers coded as 0 to 7 for days exposed to campaign information on broadcast or cable television. All other responses ($n = 32$) were coded as missing. This variable was consistently used as a measure of an individual's days per week with cable or broadcast news in the past week ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 2.33$), specifically in linear regression analyses as well as ANOVAs utilizing days per week with the news as a dependent variable. This variable was limited in that it specifically asks about campaign information instead of information about the economy. However, it did specifically ask about cable or broadcast television news and is inextricably tied to the media exposure measure of the survey, which was also utilized in this study. Additionally, the content analysis study of this dissertation found that the election was an issue object in almost 50% of stories analyzed and the most frequent main issue object in the stories. Thus, respondents likely encountered some information about the economy even when solely seeking news coverage of the election.

  Selective exposure to specific networks was measured utilizing responses to the open-ended question "in the past week, from what television program did you get most of your information about the 2008 presidential election." Respondents were only asked this question if they watched television news for campaign information in the past week. Although tied to the campaign and not to national news or economic news in general, this question was the only television news exposure variable that was available in the survey, and thus it provided a limited but relevant measure of news exposure during the unfolding economic crisis of autumn 2008, especially in relation to the question concerning days per week with the news.

Respondents provided a variety of answers to this question, and the frequency counts of all the original responses are reported in Appendix C. Additionally, some responses were collapsed into collective categories, including comedy news (i.e., *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *Real Time with Bill Maher*, *Late Night with David Letterman*), Spanish language news (i.e., Univision, Telemundo, Galavision), international news (i.e., BBC), and other networks (i.e., BET, MTV, TruTV, TV Land). Nonetheless, a new nominal variable was created for exposure to news media, with respondents who predominantly selected network news (NBC, ABC, CBS, PBS) coded as 1 ($n = 558$), respondents who predominantly selected cable news (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, CNBC, Headline News, Bloomberg) coded as -1 ($n = 1,085$), other responses coded as 0 ($n = 300$), and don't know and no answer coded as missing ($n = 550$). The other category was not utilized during data analysis and was used only to account for all possible answers to this question, as some responses were not traditional cable or network news outlets.

Exposure was coded in this fashion in order to focus on the differences between respondents who primarily watched either cable or network news. Furthermore, rather than focusing on just the news outlets that were included in the content analysis, this variable encompassed all news-oriented cable and network news outlets, excluding C-SPAN, comedy news, Spanish language news, international news, and other networks because of the varied or inconsistent news coverage provided on these outlets. The frequency counts for this variable are reported in Table 4.8. This variable was used to create dummy variables and to look at differences in means among individuals with different news outlet selections, specifically between cable news viewers and network news viewers. Additionally, due to the nominal nature of the media selection variable, two dummy variables were constructed depending on whether the respondent watched cable news ($n = 1,085$) or network news ($n = 558$). These variables were used in linear regression analyses.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables of this study were economic attitudes and individual opinions about TARP. The NAES08-Phone survey included questions specifically about the financial crisis of late September-October 2008, all of which were used in this study. Two of these questions, specifically whether respondents were scared by the financial crisis as well as who/what they deemed responsible for the crisis, were utilized as attitudinal measures along with optimism about the future. All three of these variables were divided into two separate groups: affective attitudes and cognitive attitudes. Affective attitudes were those associated with feelings and included measures of fear during the crisis as well as optimism about the future of the economy. Cognitive attitudes were those associated with knowledge and cognition and thus entailed a measure of perceptions of blame, in terms of whether the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or another factor (including Wall Street, bankers, and/or irresponsible individuals) was responsible for causing the economic crisis.

Fear of the crisis was measured by utilizing respondents' answers to the question "would you say the problems currently facing financial institutions and the stock market make you feel scared, or do you feel concerned but not scared, or are you not concerned by the crisis." Respondents were asked to pick from those options. This variable was unaltered but recoded, with respondents who said they were not concerned coded as 1 ($n = 180$), respondents who said they were concerned coded as -1 ($n = 1,638$), respondents who said they were scared coded as -2 ($n = 654$), and all other responses coded as missing ($n = 21$). The frequencies for this variable are reported in Appendix C.

Optimism was measured by utilizing respondents' answers to the question "do you feel things in this country are generally going in the right direction, or do you think things are seriously off on the wrong track." Respondents were asked to choose from the right or wrong direction, with respondents who said the right direction coded as a 1 ($n = 251$), respondents who said the wrong direction coded as -1 ($n = 2,003$), and all other responses

coded as missing ($n = 239$). Coding these variables in this way was designed to focus only on respondents who explicitly answered the questions. The original frequency counts for these variables are reported in Appendix C.

Fear and optimism were used in linear regression analyses. Furthermore, although optimism and fear were both used as independent variables in relation to opinions of TARP, they were also used as dependent variables and individually analyzed in relation to the proposed model.

As for cognitive attitudes, *blame* was measured by utilizing responses to the question "Who is more responsible for the current financial crisis facing the United States: the Democrats in Congress or the Republicans in Congress." Despite the fact that the question was close-ended and specifically operationalized in terms of which political party caused the crisis, respondents provided a variety of answers. All of the answers that were provided by respondents were collapsed into three main categories, with the frequency count for all responses reported in Appendix C. Specifically, blaming Republicans (including the Republican Party and President George W. Bush) were collapsed into one category ($n = 923$), blaming Democrats (including the Democratic Party, Barack Obama, and Bill Clinton) collapsed into one category ($n = 455$), and all other responses (including neither political party, bankers, Wall Street, and irresponsible individuals) collapsed into one category ($n = 1,115$). In order to focus just on the views of which political party caused the crisis, blame was transformed into four dummy variables. Utilizing the collapsed category blame variable, four new variables were constructed, specifically blame Republicans ($n = 923$), blame Democrats ($n = 455$), blame both parties ($n = 608$), and blame "other" ($n = 217$). As with optimism and fear, the blame dummy variables were used in linear regression and correlational analyses.

The final dependent variable of this study was respondents' *favorability of the Troubled Asset Relief Program* (TARP). This was measured by looking at responses to the question:

> "This week the government announced a plan for the government to take over bad mortgages and other troubled investments from financial firms. This plan will cost billions of dollars and would aim to bring stability to the stock market and put big financial institutions on better financial footing. Do you approve or disapprove of this plan?"

Respondents were asked to pick approve, disapprove, or depends, but they were told, "if you do not know enough about this to have an opinion, please just say so." The frequency counts for this variable are reported in Appendix C. This dissertation primarily focused on responses to this dependent variable, as the purpose of this study is to examine the parameters of the issue public the supported TARP. In order to focus on respondents who explicitly approved or disapproved of the legislation, this variable was recoded such that respondents who said they approved of TARP were coded as 1 ($n = 753$), respondents who said they disapprove coded as -1 ($n = 956$), respondents who said it depends as 0 ($n = 116$) and all other responses coded as missing ($n = 668$). This variable was used exclusively as a dependent variable of a linear regression model.

Data Analysis

ANOVAs, t–tests, Pearson correlations, and linear regression analyses were utilized to examine the research questions and hypotheses of this study and test the validity of the proposed model (see Appendix A). ANOVA, t–tests, and correlations allowed for comparisons among respondents of different incomes, employment statuses, races, and party identifications, as well as among respondents who watched different amounts of television news and predominantly watched either cable or network news (H4, H5, H6, H7, RQ8, RQ9, RQ10, RQ11). These tests were conducted prior to testing the linear regression model analyses and are therefore reported first in the results section below.

The regression model analyses entailed the organization of a singular model that was tested with the dependent variables of economic attitudes and opinions of TARP. This analysis utilized linear regression. However, logistic regression could also have been

used given that the majority of variables were coded as binary measures, and thus linear regression was not the exclusive or best analytical approach for this study. Nonetheless, this study tested the proposed model (see Appendix A) with linear regression analysis with variables entered in blocks in order to see how the variables as a group influenced each of the dependent variables. This model was based on the proposed linear regression model (see Appendix A). These analyses determined the extent to which demographics, geography, media exposure, and attitudes were predictive of blame for the crisis (RQ14), fear of the crisis (RQ14), optimism (RQ14), and approval of TARP (H8, H9, RQ12, RQ13, RQ14). In accordance with the proposed model, control variables of age, gender, and education were entered first (demographic control variables), followed by race, income, employment status, partisan identification, and geography variables (demographic independent variables), followed by selective exposure to news outlets, days per week watching television news, and hours per day with television (media exposure variables), and finally affective and cognitive attitudinal measures (attitudinal variables), with opinions of TARP as the dependent variable. The same model was then tested again with the three economic attitude measures (blame, fear, optimism) as dependent variables.

Results

Demographic and Media Use Differences

The first hypotheses of this study (H4a, H4b, H4c) predicted that respondents who were more likely to be affected by the economic crisis would spend less time with the media, specifically in terms of race, income, and employment status. These hypotheses were based on the historical context of the Great Recession and the theoretical framework of agenda setting, which predicts that individuals will be more likely to seek and remember information about unobtrusive issues (see Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011; Shaw & Slater, 1988; Zucker, 1978). Individuals who were

Black, Hispanic, working class, or unemployed were most likely to be affected and severely affected by the Great Recession. Therefore, this dissertation predicted that White respondents would spend more time with the news (H4a), as would higher income respondents (H4b) and employed respondents (H4c), based on the premise that the crisis was less obtrusive to these individuals. Overall, these hypotheses were not supported, with the exception of H4a and H4b, which found some evidence that White respondents and those with higher incomes did spend more time with the news.

H4a was tested with ANOVA utilizing the recoded race variable in order to look at differences among Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites in terms of the two measures of time with the news. This hypothesis was mostly supported as White respondents spent the most days with television news. There were significant differences among Black, Hispanic, and White respondents and days per week with television news, F (2, 2,263) = 15.94, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$. According to this result, Whites spent the most days per week watching television news, while Hispanics watched the fewest days per week (see Table 4.9). However, post-hoc analyses utilizing Tukey's HSD tests did not find any significant pairwise differences between groups with the days per week with the news variable. Thus, H4a was supported by this finding as White individuals spent more time with television news than Hispanics and Blacks.

H4b was tested with correlations utilizing the recoded scale variable of income. Income was significantly and positively, though lowly, correlated with days per week with the news, r (2,156) = .13, $p < .001$. According to this finding, income was positively correlated with days per week with the news, such that as an individual's income increased so did days per week with the news media. This finding provides support for H4b, which predicted that higher income respondents would spend more days with the news.

H4c was tested with t-tests, utilizing the recoded binary variable of employment status and comparing the means of news media viewing between respondents employed

full-time and respondents not employed full-time. Employment status was significantly

correlated with days per week spent with the news, r (2,418) = -.05, $p < .05$. According to

these findings, respondents who were not employed full-time were more likely to spend

more time with the news than respondents employed full-time. Furthermore, there were

significant differences among respondents with different employment statuses and days

per week watching television news, t (2,411) = 2.35, $p < .05$, with respondents employed

full-time spending fewer days per week attending to television news ($M = 5.63$, $SD =$

2.37) than respondents not employed full-time ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 2.27$). These results

demonstrate that full-time employed respondents spent less time with the news than

respondents not working full-time did. This result did not support H4c, which predicted

that employed individuals would spend more days with the news.

RQ8 concerned the relationship between partisan identification and time spent

with the news. Utilizing the recoded scale variable of partisan identification, this research

question was examined with ANOVA. Partisan identification was significantly associated

with days per week with the television news, as there were significant differences among

respondents with different partisan identifications and days per week with the news, F (2,

2,345) = 3.23, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Based on these results, strong Republicans said they

spent the most days with television news, followed closely by Republicans and

Democrats (see Table 4.10). Post-hoc analyses utilizing Tukey's HSD tests did not,

however, find any significant pairwise differences between groups with these variables.

Nonetheless, strong Republicans spent the most days with the news, followed by

moderates of both political parties.

RQ9 concerned the relationship between demographics and selection of either

cable or network news. This research question was examined utilizing ANOVAs, t-tests,

and correlations. Overall, there were significant differences in news exposure among

respondents with different incomes, partisan identifications, and races. Specifically,

Hispanics were less likely than other racial groups were to select cable news. Higher

income respondents were more likely to pick cable news, whereas lower income respondents were more likely to pick network news. Finally, strong Republicans were mostly cable viewers, whereas network viewership was mixed among Republicans, Democrats, and strong Democrats. However, employment was not significantly correlated with selecting cable news or network news.

The relationship between race and selection of news outlet was analyzed with ANOVA. Similar to the analyses of time spent with news, the recoded race variable focusing on Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites was utilized to look at differences in the selection of cable or network news. There were no differences in selection of network news, though Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites did differ in selection of cable news, F (2, 1,798) = 7.79, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$. According to this result, fewer Hispanics selected cable news than Whites and Blacks, with more than 50% of both Whites and Blacks selecting cable news (see Table 4.9). However, a post-hoc analysis utilizing Tukey's HSD test did not find that means of these groups were significantly different.

The relationship between selection of news outlet and income were examined with Pearson correlations using the recoded scale variables. Income was significant correlated with selection of cable news, r (1,702) = .10, $p < .001$, and selection of network news, r (1,702) = -.06, $p < .05$. According to this result, income was positively correlated with selection of cable news, suggesting that as income increased so did use of cable news. In other words, higher income respondents were more likely than lower income respondents to select cable news. However, income was negatively correlated with selection of network news, such that as income increased selection of network news increased. In other words, lower income respondents were more likely than higher income respondents were to select network news.

The relationship between partisan identification and selection of news outlet was examined with ANOVA. There were significant differences among respondents with different partisan identification and selection of cable news, F (4, 1,875) = 9.84, $p < .001$,

$\eta^2 = .02$, and selection of network news, $F (4, 1,875) = 4.51, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$. The largest group of cable viewers was strong Republicans, as the majority of strong Republicans picked cable news. As for network news, more Republicans than any other group picked network news, with Democrats and strong Democrats close behind. Specifically, nearly three-quarters of strong Republicans said they choose cable news, whereas nearly half of every other group said they choose cable news (see Table 4.10). As for network news, 35% of Republicans selected network news, followed by almost one-third of Democrats and strong Democrats (see Table 4.10). However, post-hoc analyses utilizing Tukey's HSD tests did not find any significant pairwise differences between groups with these variables.

H5 predicted that time spent with media would be predictive of fear and optimism, with those respondents spending more time with the media more fearful (H5a) and pessimistic (H5b). These hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlations. Overall, neither of these hypotheses were supported. Days per week with the news was not significantly correlated with optimism, thus H5b was not supported. However, days of the week spent with the news was significantly correlated with fear, $r = -.09, p < .001$. According to this finding, fear was negatively correlated with days per week with television news, such that respondents who spent fewer days with the news were more likely to say they were afraid of the crisis. Thus, H5a was not supported as this finding contradicts the hypothetical prediction.

H6 predicted that respondents who spent more time with the news would be more likely to blame the Republican Party for causing the crisis. This hypothesis was tested with Pearson correlation. Days per week with the news was significantly correlated with blaming something other than the Republican Party or Democratic Party, $r = -.05, p < .05$. According to this result, days per week with the news was negatively correlated with blame on other causes, such that as days per week with the news increases, blame on other causes decreases. In other words, respondents who spent more days with the news

were less likely to blame other possible causes of the recession. Overall, this result does not support H6.

H7 predicted that respondents who predominantly watched network news would be more afraid than respondents who predominantly watched cable news. This hypothesis was tested with Pearson correlations utilizing the media selection dummy variables and the fear variable. Overall, there was no support for this hypothesis. Selection of cable news or network news was not significantly correlated with fear.

RQ10 and RQ11 concerned the relationship between selection of news outlet and blame as well as optimism. These relationships were analyzed with *t*-tests comparing just cable viewers and network viewers. Overall, cable and network viewers differed in terms of blame and optimism. Cable viewers were more likely than network viewers to be optimistic, whereas network viewers were more likely than cable viewers to be pessimistic. Cable viewers also mostly blamed Republicans for causing the crisis, but so did respondents watching other news networks or no news at all.

News outlet selection was significantly correlated with optimism. There were significant differences in optimism among respondents who picked cable or network news, t (1,496) = 3.36, $p < .001$. Network viewers were generally more pessimistic ($M = -.85$, $SD = .53$) than cable viewers were ($M = -.74$, $SD = .68$). Thus, it appears network viewers were more pessimistic than cable viewers were.

Selection of cable news was significantly associated with blame, as there were significant differences between respondents who picked either cable or network news, in terms of blaming Democrats, t (1,483) = 5.25, $p < .001$, and blaming Republicans, t (1,483) = 2.91, $p < .01$. Cable viewers ($M = .26$, $SD = .44$) were more likely than network viewers ($M = .14$, $SD = .35$) to blame Democrats. However, network viewers ($M = .46$, $SD = .50$) were more likely than cable viewers ($M = .38$, $SD = .49$) to blame Republicans. Altogether, these results suggest that more cable viewers blamed Republicans than

Democrats. Furthermore, the majority of respondents who did not watch the news or watched another source of news blamed Republicans for the crisis.

<div align="center">Linear Regression Models</div>

The validity of the proposed predictive model as well as the remaining hypotheses (H8, H9) and research questions (RQ12, RQ13, RQ14) of this study were examined with linear regression models. The models were run for all four dependent variables, namely opinions of TARP, optimism, blame, and fear. The findings are broken down below by each model's corresponding dependent variable.

<u>TARP Model</u>

The first model looked at support for TARP, with the control variables entered first, followed by demographics, the news media use measure, and economic attitudes. The model was significant, $F (19, 1,055) = 2.08$, $p < .01$. The model ultimately explained nearly 2% of the variance in support for TARP. This model was designed to examine H8, H9, RQ12, RQ13, and RQ14. Overall, there were very few significant relationships. Specifically, education was predictive of support for TARP, as was fear, blaming Republicans, and blaming other causes. The control block of variables accounted for almost 1% of the variance, and the attitudes block accounted for less than 2%.

RQ12 examined the relationship between media exposure, demographics, and support for TARP. Overall, this model found no statistically significant associations among these variables except between education and support for TARP as well as hours with television and support for TARP. None of the demographic variables, except for the control variable of education, were significant predictors of support for TARP. Particularly, higher education levels were predictive of support for TARP.

RQ13 concerned the relationship between blame and support for TARP. This model found that blaming the Republican Party and blaming other causes were

significant predictors of support for TARP. Specifically, respondents who blamed the Republicans or blamed other causes were slightly more likely to support TARP.

H8 predicted that those respondents who were more afraid (H8a) and pessimistic (H8b) would be more supportive of TARP. Neither of these hypotheses was supported. Fear was not a significant predictor of support for TARP. Optimism was a significant predictor of TARP as the variables were positively correlated. According to this result, respondents who were optimistic were more likely to say they supported TARP. Thus, H8b was not supported.

H9 predicted that respondents who were in states where the foreclosure rate was above the national average would be more supportive of TARP. Overall, this model found no support for this hypothesis. Geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis was not a significant predictor of support for TARP or significantly correlated with support for TARP.

RQ14 concerned how respondents in different geographical regions varied in support for TARP. Overall, this study did not find evidence that support for TARP significantly varied across geographical regions operationalized in relation to proximity to the foreclosure crisis. Respondents in different regions appeared to have varied in their views of TARP but not significantly.

Optimism Model

The second model looked at how demographics, media use, and economic attitudes were predictive of optimism. This model was statistically significant, $F_{(18, 1,354)} = 8.54$, $p < .001$. The model explained 9% of the variance in optimism. This model's purpose was to examine RQ14, which concerned how economic attitudes and news media consumption varied geographically. Overall, geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis was not a significant predictor of or significantly correlated with optimism.

However, partisan identification was a significant predictor of optimism, with Republicans being more likely than Democrats were to say they were optimistic. The demographic controls block of variables accounted for just over 1% of the variance, whereas the demographic block accounted for over 5%. Fear was also predictive of optimism, as respondents who were not concerned about the crisis were more likely than respondents who were scared to say they were optimistic. Finally, blaming Democrats was a significant predictor of optimism, as respondents who blamed Democrats were more likely than respondents who did not blame Democrats to say they were optimistic. The attitudes block accounted for over 3% of the variance in the model.

<u>Fear Model</u>

The third model looked at fear, specifically how demographics, media use, and economic attitudes were related to being afraid of the economic crisis. This model was statistically significant, F (18, 1,354) = 4.97, $p < .001$. This model explained 5% of the variance in fear of the crisis. The purpose of this model was to examine RQ14. However, the geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis variables was not a significant predictor or significantly correlated with fear of the crisis.

Income was also a significant predictor of fear and was negatively correlated with fear, implying that respondents with higher incomes were more likely than respondents with lower incomes to say they were not scared by the crisis. Demographics accounted for almost 2% of the variance. Lastly, optimism was predictive of fear, as was blaming Republicans. Specifically, optimistic respondents were more likely than pessimistic respondents to say they were not afraid, while respondents who did not blame Republicans were more likely than respondents who did blame Republicans to say they were not afraid. The attitudes block accounted for less than 3% of the variance in the model.

<u>Blame Model</u>

The fourth and final model looked at how demographics, media exposure, and economic attitudes were related to views of blame for the crisis. Specifically, blame on Republicans was analyzed as the content analysis study found that national television news in the U.S. most often blame Republicans for causing the crisis. Overall, the model was statistically significant, F (16, 1,356) = 20.88, $p < .001$. This model also explained nearly 19% of the variance in blaming Republicans for causing the crisis. The purpose of this model was to investigate RQ14. However, geography was not a significant predictor of blaming Republicans for the crisis.

Race was a significant predictor of blaming Republicans. Specifically, Hispanic respondents and White respondents were both less likely than other respondents to blame Republicans. Partisan identification was also moderately correlated with blaming Republicans, as Democrats were more likely than Republicans were to blame Republicans for causing the crisis. This block overall accounted for nearly 18% of the variance. Finally, fear was a significant predictor of blaming Republicans, as fearful respondents were more likely than respondents who were not afraid to blame Republicans. Attitudes accounted for 1% of the variance in the model.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

The first component of this study looked at the relationship between demographics and media exposure. H4a, H4b, and H4c predicted that an individual's likelihood of being affected by the crisis would be associated with time spent with the news media, specifically that respondents self-identifying as a race other than White, as well as higher income respondents and employed respondents would spend more time with the news. Overall, this study found limited support for these hypotheses. Specifically, White respondents did spend more days a week watching television news, and higher income respondents also spent more days a week watching television news.

However, respondents not employed full-time spent more days a week with the news than respondents employed full-time did.

RQ8 concerned the relationship between partisan affiliation and time spent with media. Strong Republicans were found to spend the most days with the news, followed by moderates of both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

RQ9 examined the relationships among income, employment status, race, partisan affiliation, and news media exposure. Overall, the only variable that was not significantly associated with media exposure was employment. Hispanic individuals were less likely to select cable news. Furthermore, higher income respondents were more likely to select cable news, while lower income respondents predominantly used network news. Finally, in terms of partisanship and news outlet selection, strong Republicans were most likely to pick cable, whereas moderate Democrats and moderate Republicans both predominantly picked network news. These results suggest that individuals' self-selection into viewing specific television news outlets was based on having time to spend with the news and being able to afford cable news outlets. Additionally, it appears that political dispositions, in terms of partisan identification, also shaped preferences for specific news outlets, such that strong Republicans predominantly watched cable news whereas moderates of both parties selected network news.

The next set of research questions and hypotheses looked at the relationships between news media exposure and economic attitudes. H5 predicted that individuals who spent more time with the news would be more afraid and pessimistic as the content analysis study demonstrated that fear and pessimism was a common feature in economic news, especially in autumn 2008 and in relation to the economic crisis. However, these hypotheses were not supported. Time spent with the news was associated with fear or pessimism. Furthermore, respondents who spent fewer days with the news predominantly said they were afraid, as opposed to respondents who spent more days with the news.

H6 predicted that respondents who spent more time with the news would be more likely to blame the Republican Party, but this study found little support for this hypothesis. However, time spent with the media was not significantly associated with blame or blaming Republicans for the crisis.

H7 specifically predicted that exposure to network news would be predictive of fear, but this hypothesis was not supported, as cable viewers were proportionally more concerned and afraid than network viewers. Furthermore, the linear regression models looking at fear did not lend support to this hypothesis.

RQ10 and RQ11 examined the relationship between media selection and pessimism as well as blame. This study found that network viewers were more pessimistic than cable viewers, while cable viewers were more optimistic than network viewers. Additionally, cable viewers were found to predominantly blame Republicans. Respondents who blamed other causes also predominantly blamed Republicans.

The third and final set of hypotheses and research questions analyzed the parameters of the issue public that supported TARP as well as the parameters and influences on economic attitudes. H8 predicted that respondents who were more afraid and pessimistic would be more supportive of TARP, but neither hypothesis was supported. RQ12 examined the association between blame and support for TARP, and this study found that blaming Republicans and blaming other causes were both significant predictors of support for TARP. RQ13 concerned the association between support for TARP and demographics as well as media exposure, specifically which factor was more predictive of support for TARP. However, neither demographics nor news media exposure were significant predictors of support for TARP.

RQ14 analyzed how economic opinions and attitudes varied geographically, while H9 predicted that respondents who were closer to the foreclosure crisis being more likely to support TARP. H9 was not supported. Furthermore, geographical proximity to the

foreclosure crisis was not found to be significantly associated with economic opinions or TARP.

To summarize, very few of the predictions that were developed for this study from the findings of the content analysis were supported. This study found evidence that respondents who watched more cable news were more likely to blame Republicans, which is in line with the content analysis study's finding that Republicans were most often blamed for the crisis by both cable and network news outlets. However, there was no support for the prediction that respondents who predominantly watched network news would be more afraid, or that respondents who spent more time with the news or were closer in proximity to the foreclosure crisis would be more supportive of TARP. Additionally, the prediction that time spent with the news would be associated with pessimism and/or fear was not supported.

In terms of the parameters and formation of economic public opinion and issue publics, support for TARP were found to be most significantly predicted by blame for the crisis, specifically among respondents who blamed the Republican Party. Education was also predictive of support for TARP, with respondents with more education more likely to support TARP.

Economic attitudes were found to be intertwined and related to each other, with the strongest correlation existing between optimism and fear. Overall, demographics were the strongest predictors of affective attitudes, whereas media exposure and attitudes were the best predictors of blaming Republicans for the crisis. Blaming Republicans was also predictive of fear. However, media exposure was only predictive of blame, specifically exposure to cable news. Although income was predictive of fear and optimism, race was only predictive of blaming Republicans, specifically among respondents who identified themselves as White or Hispanic. Finally, partisan identification was predictive of optimism and blaming Republicans, but not fear. The implications of all these findings,

as well as the findings from the content analysis study in relation to this secondary data analysis, are discussed in the next chapter.

Table 4.1 Recoded income frequencies.

Income	n	Percent	Valid percent
<10k	78	3.1	3.6
10-15k	100	4.0	4.6
15-25k	186	7.5	8.6
25-35k	220	8.8	10.2
35-50k	311	12.5	14.4
50-75k	401	16.1	18.6
75-100k	333	13.4	15.4
100-150k	311	12.5	14.4
>150k	216	8.7	10.0
Don't know	117	4.7	N/A
No answer	220	8.8	N/A
Total	2,493	100.1	99.8

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 4.2 Collapsed income frequencies.

Income	n	Percent	Valid percent
<10k-15k	178	7.1	8.3
15k-35k	406	16.3	18.8
35k-75k	712	28.6	33.0
75-150k	644	25.8	29.9
>150k	216	8.7	10.0
Missing	337	13.5	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.0

Table 4.3 Recoded employment frequencies.

Employment status	n	Percent	Valid percent
Working full-time	1,183	47.5	48.4
Not working full-time	1,262	50.6	51.6
Missing	48	1.9	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.0

Table 4.4 Strength of identification among respondents who identify with different political parties.

		Partisan identification			
		Republican	Democrat	Independent	Total
Strength of identification	Strong	406	578	492	1,476
	Not very strong	241	251	192	684
	Total	647	829	684	2,160

χ^2 (2, 2,160) = 14.15, $p < .001$, $V = .08$.

Table 4.5 Recoded partisan identification frequencies.

Partisan identification	n	Percent	Valid percent
Strong Republican	406	16.3	17.0
Republican	272	10.9	11.4
Independent/Other	847	34.0	35.6
Democrat	606	24.3	25.4
Strong Democrat	251	10.1	10.5
Missing	111	4.5	N/A
Total	2,493	100.1	99.9

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 4.6 Frequencies of Hispanic origin among respondents of different races.

		Race							
		White	Black	Asian	American Indian	Hispanic	Mixed	Other	Total
Hispanic origin	Yes	94	19	0	2	32	5	0	152
	No	1,977	171	39	23	0	29	11	2,250
	Total	2,071	190	39	25	32	34	11	2,402

χ^2 (6, 2,402) = 492.38, $p < .001$, $V = .45$.

Table 4.7 Frequency counts of responses for the recoded race variable.

Race	n	Percent	Valid percent
White	1,977	79.3	82.3
Black or African American	171	6.9	7.1
Hispanic	147	5.9	6.1
All other races	107	4.3	4.5
Missing	91	3.7	N/A
Total	2,493	100.1	100.0

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 4.8 Recoded selection of news outlet frequencies.

News outlet	n	Percent	Valid percent
Cable	1,085	43.5	55.8
Network	558	22.4	28.7
Other/None	300	12.0	15.4
Missing	550	22.1	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	99.9

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 4.9 Time with the news media and cable viewership among respondents of different races.

	Race	n	Mean	SD
Days per week with news[a]	White	1,952	5.86	2.23
	Black or African American	168	5.77	2.18
	Hispanic	146	4.76	2.89
Selected cable news[b]	White	1,545	.57	.50
	Black or African American	151	.56	.50
	Hispanic	105	.37	.49

[a]$F (2, 2{,}263) = 15.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01.$

[b]$F (2, 1{,}798) = 7.79, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01.$

Table 4.10 Media exposure among respondents with different partisan identifications.

	Partisan identification	n	Mean	SD
Days per week spent with TV news[a]	Strong Republican	342	6.08	1.97
	Republican	213	5.82	2.32
	Independent/other	634	5.67	2.41
	Democrat	493	5.85	2.24
	Strong Democrat	198	5.52	2.28
Selected cable news	Strong Republican	342	.70	.46
	Republican	213	.54	.50
	Independent/other	634	.54	.50
	Democrat	493	.54	.50
	Strong Democrat	198	.46	.50
Selected network news	Strong Republican	342	.21	.41
	Republican	213	.35	.48
	Independent/other	634	.28	.45
	Democrat	493	.31	.46
	Strong Democrat	198	.32	.45

[a]$F (4, 2,345) = 3.23, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01.$

[b]$F (4, 1,875) = 9.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02.$

[c]$F (4, 1,875) = 4.51, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01.$

Table 4.11 Linear regression models predicting opinions of TARP and economic attitudes.

	TARP[a]	Optimism[b]	Fear[b]	Blame[b]
Gender (male)	.01	.05	.09***	-.05*
Age	.02	-.03	-.06	-.00
Education	.08*	.00	-.02	-.02
Incremental R^2 (%)	.01*	1.2***	1.4***	0.8*
Blacks	-.02	-.08	-.06	-.01
Hispanics	.03	-.02	-.04	-.08*
Whites	-.06	-.09	-.06	-.10*
Near average foreclosure rate	.01	-.02	.01	-.00
Above average foreclosure rate	-.04	-.04	.02	.02
Employment	-.04	.02	-.03	.01
Income	.04	.06	-.09**	-.02
Partisan identification (D)	-.06	-.15***	-.03	.38***
Incremental R^2 (%)	.01	5.4***	1.8**	17.8***
Cable exposure	-.03	.04	-.05	-.08*
Network exposure	-.01	-.00	-.07	-.05
Days with news	.01	.01	.04	.02
Incremental R^2 (%)	.00	0.3	0.3	0.3
Optimism	.06*	N/A	.14***	-.05
Fear	-.06	.13***	N/A	-.08**
Blame Democrats	.01	.14***	.01	N/A
Blame Republicans	.12**	-.00	-.07*	N/A
Blame other	.07*	.02	.05	N/A
Incremental R^2 (%)	1.7**	3.3***	2.7***	0.9***
Total R^2 (%)	1.9**	9.0***	5.0***	18.8***

Note: Coefficients are standardized regression coefficients (betas).

[a]$N = 1,075$.

[b]$N = 1,373$.

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

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The Great Recession was a multi-faceted economic catastrophe that encompassed the foreclosure crisis, financial crisis, rising costs and prices, higher inflation, increasing unemployment, bank closures, bankruptcies, and an unpredictable stock market (Burtless & Gordon, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011). It was also notable in that it disproportionately affected specific groups of individuals and specific states (Douglas & Browne, 2011; Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al.; Wolff, Owens, & Burak, 2011). At the same time, when the recession was unfolding in 2008, the U.S. political system was arguably as complicated as the economy, with the approval rating of then-President George W. Bush struggling to rise above 30% all year ("Presidential approval ratings," 2013). Furthermore, the country was in the midst of an historical presidential election that featured Barack Obama running as the first African American presidential candidate on a major party ticket, and Sarah Palin running as the first female Republican vice-presidential candidate.

The purpose of this dissertation was to study the parameters and formation of economic attitudes as well as an issue public that was supportive of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). In particular, this dissertation determined what effects, if any, exposure to and time with television news had on public opinion and issue publics in autumn 2008 by examining the relative obtrusiveness of the economic crises that together defined the Great Recession. Essentially, this entailed an assessment of whether a) news media exposure or b) demographics and geography, in relation to the Great Recession, had a more discernible influence on economic attitudes and opinions.

Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, priming, the public opinion process, selective exposure, and issue publics, this dissertation entailed a content analysis of television news content and a secondary

analysis of survey data. With the content analysis of news study, this dissertation found that television news coverage of the unfolding recession was generally negative, relied predominantly on experts and accredited sources, did not elaborate on the demographic and geographic disparities of the recession, and focused mainly on the election but also energy issues and the economy, with inflation and taxes the most commonly covered economic attributes. Coverage of the crisis occurred mostly in March, September, and October. Other attributes of the economy were also covered but not to the extent of inflation and taxes, despite the numerous economic events that occurred throughout 2008. Finally, the most notable differences between cable and network news outlets and among all five outlets were in the main issue objects, the main attributes, as well as the coverage of taxes, inflation, the financial crisis, jobs, suggesting fear, citing specific sources, and discussing income as a demographic. These findings were used to develop hypotheses for the secondary analysis study of this dissertation.

As for the public opinion study, significant differences in terms of selection of cable or network news were found among respondents of different races, incomes, employment statuses, and partisan identifications. Specifically, White individuals spent more days per week with television news, while Hispanics were the only group significantly associated with selection of a specific news source. There were substantial differences among respondents with different incomes, with higher income respondents increasingly likely to watch cable news and spend more days with the news, whereas lower income respondents were increasingly likely to select network news. Unemployed respondents spent the most days viewing the news. Finally, among respondents with different partisan identifications, strong Republicanism was found to be the strongest predictor of selection of cable or network news as well as days spent with the news.

There were also significant differences in blame, optimism, and pessimism among respondents with different media exposure habits and economic attitudes. Overall, days per week with television news and selection of news both were predictive of blame for

the crisis. Specifically, respondents who spent more days with television news were less likely than other respondents to blame other causes. Cable viewers predominantly blamed Republicans. Finally, cable viewers were found to be predominantly optimistic, whereas network viewers were predominantly pessimistic.

The public opinion study also tested linear regression models. Three of the models looked at the composition of respondents who were a) optimistic, b) afraid, and c) blaming Republicans, while the other model determined the parameters of the issue public that supported TARP. Respondents with higher education levels and those who blamed Republicans and/or other causes for the crisis were found to be most supportive of TARP. Optimistic respondents were primarily higher income, Republican, not afraid of the crisis, and more likely to blame Democrats, whereas male respondents with higher incomes who were optimistic and did not blame Republicans were primarily not afraid of the crisis. Finally, respondents who primarily blamed Republicans were Blacks who a) identified with the Democratic Party, b) did not watch cable news, and c) were afraid of the crisis. However, the geographic proximity to the foreclosure crisis component was not a significant predictor of any of the dependent variables.

To summarize, although some individuals did appear to spend more time with the news and selectively expose themselves to specific news outlets, it was cognitive and affective economic attitudes, predominantly blame for the crisis and to a lesser extent fear and optimism, that were consistently found to be the strongest predictors of economic attitudes and opinions. Evidence for attribute agenda-setting effects was apparent for views of blame for the crisis as well as TARP. Finally, the issue public that was supportive of TARP appeared to be based upon economic attitudes, with minor differences apparent among respondents with different levels of education. The implications of these findings are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

The first section of this chapter reviews the findings of this study that pertain to the historical circumstances of the Great Recession. The next section evaluates the

theoretical ramifications of the findings from both studies and ties these implications to the circumstances of the Great Recession. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of each of the studies, directions for future research, and practical implications and conclusions.

<div align="center">Circumstances and Disparities of the Great Recession</div>

Specific demographic groups and geographic regions were more affected or more likely to be affected by the Great Recession, which was not defined by a single economic crisis but instead consisted of several interrelated and simultaneous downturns (Douglas & Browne, 2011; Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011; RealtyTrac, 2009; Wolff et al., 2011). Along with these demographic and geographic disparities, the Great Recession unfolded in the middle of an unprecedented presidential election. Additionally, television news ratings reached their highest point in 2008 in September and October, just as the election and economic crisis were both beginning to intensify. In light of these unique circumstances, and in order to understand how news content and exposure to news content could have shaped public opinion and issue publics in autumn 2008, this dissertation examined a) the extent to which news outlets covered the demographic and geographic disparities of the recession and b) how individuals paid varying amounts of attention to different news outlets. The implications of the content analysis study were discussed in Chapter 3 but reviewed below.

<div align="center">News Coverage of the Great Recession</div>

Overall, the content analysis study found that television news coverage of the unfolding recession was generally negative, relying predominantly on experts and accredited sources. Additionally, news coverage of the unfolding recession very rarely discussed the disparities underlying the Great Recession, and most coverage focused on the election followed by the economy and economic crisis. Rather than elaborating on racial and geographic disparities of the recession, national television news coverage was

more likely to call attention to the circumstances of individuals with varying incomes and employment statuses. Individuals with varying incomes and employment statuses were also disproportionately affected by the Great Recession, but arguably not to the extent to which different racial groups were disproportionately affected. As for geography, although the economic conditions of some hard-hit states (namely California and Florida) were discussed, national television news also focused on the situation in other states that were less affected (such as Michigan and Texas). Furthermore, the news coverage focused mainly on the election, energy issues, the economy, inflation, and taxes, as opposed to the economic crisis, the foreclosure crisis, or the financial crisis.

The findings from the first study were explored more in depth in Chapter 3. Briefly, the most important implications of these findings were that in the summer and autumn of 2008 there was a variety of newsworthy events simultaneously occurring, and because of this, journalists likely struggled to cover everything or determine which issues to cover and which issues not to cover. Although the election was overall the most common issue object of the news stories, the news stories that were analyzed were broadcast on national television networks, which have extensively covered elections, specifically at the national level (McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011). Furthermore, the lack of coverage concerning the foreclosure crisis as well as the demographic disparities reflect prior research that has found U.S. news media generally does not cover racial inequalities, especially in terms of the economy (see Chiricos & Escholz, 2002; Dixon, 2008a, 2008b; Entman & Gross, 2008; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Holt, 2013; Holt & Major, 2010). On the other hand, it is also possible that journalists were unaware of the underlying racial disparities and that the news content analyzed in the first study was essentially too temporally close to the unfolding economic crisis. Altogether, the results suggest that the public and the press were likely overwhelmed, not fully knowledgeable about the events that were unfolding, and thus swimming in uncertainty.

The content analysis study also found significant differences between cable and network news outlets, and among all five networks in terms of covering the election, economy, economic crisis, taxes, and inflation, as well as suggesting fear, quoting certain sources, and covering income as a demographic group. However, there were no significant differences in coverage of the economic crisis, the foreclosure crisis, the financial crisis, optimism, blame, or discussing the conditions of different race groups. These issues were likely competing with the election and other economic events for coverage. Alternatively, it is also possible that national television news networks – and possibly the public at large – perceived these events as not important at that time or possibly as insignificant, at least in comparison to the financial crisis and TARP. Nonetheless, the demographic and geographic discrepancies that signified the Great Recession were rarely discussed on national television news, and none of the five networks was more likely to call attention to the disparities. Again, this may be simply because U.S. news media rarely discuss racial injustices, but could also imply that journalists were unsure how to cover these issues, as they were emergent and occurring simultaneously with a number of other newsworthy events. However, it is possible that local television news attended to these differences, and future research should examine how local news coverage of the Great Recession from specific states compared to national television news coverage. Nonetheless, just as the various networks devoted time and attention to different issues and aspects of the economy, individuals appeared to differ in both days per week with the news and exposure to specific outlets.

<div align="center">Television News Viewership</div>

Ratings data from 2008 demonstrate that from mid to late 2008, Americans were increasingly spending more time with national television news. Although there were likely a number of reasons for this, including the ongoing presidential campaign, this dissertation examined the possibility that this increase in news exposure was due to the

economic crises. The timing of the ratings spike, along with the timing of the housing and financial market collapse in September, supports the argument that news viewers were increasingly turning to the news for information. Yet, even if this was the case, the findings from the content analysis study in Chapter 3 demonstrate that these viewers were not receiving a whole lot of information on the crisis, at least in terms of the causes and how quickly the issues could be resolved. Furthermore, these viewers were also being told more about TARP than the crises, with the crises serving as background information to the reasoning behind TARP. Coverage of TARP appeared to focus more on the political squabbling that was hindering the passage of the legislation, as opposed to the real effects or outcomes that could result from TARP. This coverage possibly could have influenced individual perceptions of the economy, but the nature of the coverage, specifically that it was more concerned with legislative drama than the purposes or reasons for favoring or opposing TARP, suggests that exposure to this content would not have led to those effects hypothesized in this dissertation.

H4 predicted that income, employment status, and race would be predictive of time spent with news media, while RQ8 and RQ9 examined the association between selection of media and demographics, namely partisan identification, income, employment status, and race. Television news rating data in 2008 found that cable news, specifically Fox News and CNN, respectively, attracted more viewers than network news (Pew Research Center, 2008a; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a). Additionally, the best predictors of television news exposure in 2008 were age and partisanship (Pew; Project for Excellence in Journalism). The findings from the secondary analysis study of this dissertation reflect the effects of these ratings, but also provide a little more insight into who might have been paying the most attention to television news in September and October 2008. Specifically,

Like the ratings data, there were significant differences among respondents with different partisan affiliations. Specifically, strong Republicans were found to select cable

news predominantly and spent the most days per week with television news. However, moderate Republicans and moderate Democrats both appeared to select predominantly network news. Besides strong Republicans, respondents with different partisan identifications generally spent equal days per week with the news. Overall, this suggests that Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, except for strong Republicans, were spending similar amounts of time with the news, despite selecting different outlets, which means all three groups potentially were affected by the news, albeit in different ways. Specifically, given that cable news and network news generally cover issues dissimilarly, with cable news also typically more opinionated (see Aday et al., 2005; Bae, 2000; Baldwin et al., 1992; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012), strong Republicans and moderates of both parties were likely learning different things about the economy and election. This could have been due to ability and accessibility, in terms of affording cable and having free time. More importantly, though, these exposure patterns might have led to real differences in perceptions and beliefs about the economy. Nonetheless, the findings that moderates of both parties were more likely to tune into network news, whereas strong Republicans said they predominantly watched cable news, are in line with prior research that found Republicans overwhelmingly attend to Fox News over any other network (Baum & Gussin, 2008; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; McCombs et al., 2011; Stroud, 2010; Stroud & Lee, 2013). The theoretical implications of these findings are discussed below.

Along with partisanship, income, employment status, and race were found to be significantly associated with news exposure. Differences among respondents with varying incomes were the greatest. Specifically, higher income respondents spent more days with the news. Additionally, White respondents spent more days of the week with television news. However, unemployed respondents also spent more days with the news than respondents who were employed. These mixed findings suggest respondents' time spent with the news was mostly shaped by free time and at least partially by a need for

orientation. Unemployed respondents spent the most time with the media, which was probably at least partially due to the fact they have more free time to spend with the media, but the fact that higher income respondents spent more days of the week with the news suggests that this group might have had a higher need for orientation concerning the unfolding crisis. This implication is supported by the finding that White respondents also were more likely to attend to television news, overall suggesting that White respondents with higher incomes had a higher need for orientation than other groups or simply were more likely to attend to national television news. This might be due to the fact that higher income individuals had interests in the financial markets that were beginning to sour, or they had more reasons to watch television news, specifically for information about the election or economy. Along these same lines, individuals who were unemployed at the time of the survey also may have had a high need for orientation, specifically concerning the rising unemployment rate, which would explain why unemployed respondents spent more days per week with the news than respondents working either full-time or part-time.

The finding that income was a significant predictor of cable or network viewership suggests that individuals who selected cable news were significantly different from individuals who viewed network news. Essentially, income appears to be the demographic variable that best predicts selection of news because income is influenced by other demographics, namely gender, age, education, and race. In other words, higher income groups are more likely to select cable news because they can afford it.

Nonetheless, race was also significantly associated with selection of either cable or network news, with Hispanics less likely than any other racial group to watch cable news. This finding, however, arguably supports the idea that news outlet selection was more of a function of accessibility and availability as opposed to a preference for a specific news outlet, especially when considered along with the income finding. Thus, it appears the groups that were most likely to exhibit attribute agenda-setting effects were higher income, White respondents, as well as unemployed respondents, as these

individuals spent the most days out of the week with television news. The accuracy of these predictions is explicated below in the theoretical section.

To summarize, the economic crisis, foreclosure crisis, financial crisis, and the demographic and geographic inconsistencies that were tied to these crises were not the major focus of national television news of the economy in 2008. Additionally, there were no differences between cable and network news outlets in covering these aspects of the Great Recession. As for exposure to news media, individuals' partisan identification was not associated with time with the news, though strong Republicans were more likely to say they watched cable news while moderates from both parties were more likely to say they watched network news. Additionally, race and income were found to be associated with news exposure, with lower income respondents slightly more likely to say they predominantly watched network news. As for race, Hispanics were more likely than any other group to say they watched network news, whereas Whites spent the most days of the week with television news.

According to these findings, selection of specific news outlets was associated with affordability, political ideology, free time, and in all likelihood age, which further supports the idea that free time was substantially related to selective exposure. Although unemployed respondents might have had a higher need for orientation, it also is possible they just had more free time to spend with the news. Overall, age was likely the most substantial influence on selective exposure given that older respondents in general were probably more likely to be able to afford cable news and have more time to spend with the news. The theoretical implications of these findings are discussed below.

Theoretical Implications

Several theoretical frameworks guided the research of this dissertation. Agenda setting, attribute agenda setting, and priming were utilized as these theories offer predictions of how the news media can influence, inform, and even shape public opinion.

Related to agenda setting and priming is the concept of selective exposure, which also informed this research as any potential effects of news media on public opinion is necessarily determined or limited by an individual's selective exposure to specific news outlets. Additionally, this dissertation drew from the public opinion process, a theoretical framework that helps to explain the various factors that can influence the formation of public attitudes and opinions as well as publics. Finally, the concepts of issue publics and state-specific issue publics were also utilized.

The research findings of this dissertation have practical as well as theoretical implications. The theoretical conclusions are discussed below, beginning with the common features of economic news, followed by a discussion of the selective exposure and agenda-setting findings in relation to the public opinion process, and then examines the parameters of the issue public that was supportive of TARP. The practical implications of this dissertation are discussed in the conclusion section at the end of the chapter.

<div align="center">Economic News and Selective Exposure to the News</div>

Research on economic news has consistently demonstrated that economic news tends to be more negative than positive, and negative economic news at times can be more negative than necessarily warranted (Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Stevenson et al., 1994; Wu et al., 2002). The findings of this dissertation are in line with this research as economic news coverage was predominantly negative. The economy and, more specifically, the economic crisis was among the top-covered issues, and four of the most frequently mentioned attributes (inflation, the housing crisis, the financial crisis, and unemployment) were all aspects of the economy that were increasingly worsening over the course of the year 2008. Although fear was not suggested in a great deal of television news stories overall (15%), it was more likely to be suggested in October and September, suggesting that the scariest of all the crises were the events unfolding in

autumn – the financial and housing crises. Finally, 26% of stories were coded as pessimistic, with only 6% of stories coded as optimistic. Thus, economic news was predominantly negative, and it even appeared to grow more negative as autumn approached. Although this coverage was arguably warranted, it inevitably was limited in that the coverage generally focused on some issues over others – specifically the election, energy, inflation, and taxes, as opposed to unemployment, the housing crisis, the financial crisis, and economic legislation. Ultimately, this might have been because there were too many events to cover, or because journalists were unsure which events to cover and how to cover them.

Prior research has found that different news outlets provide different coverage of news stories, specifically in terms of elections and the economy (Aday et al., 2005; Bae, 2000; Baldwin et al., 1992; Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012). This dissertation supports the previous research as it found significant differences among the five outlets as well as cable and broadcast networks. The five networks covered issues and economic attributes to various extents, yet the most intriguing difference among all five outlets is arguably the finding that Fox News was most likely to suggest a cause of the crisis, and that this cause was toxic assets that strained financial institutions' resources. The reasons for why Fox News was more likely than other networks to suggest that toxic assets were to blame for the recession cannot be discerned by this dissertation. One possible explanation is that the sources cited by Fox News were more likely than sources on other networks to believe that toxic assets were causing the crisis. As Fox News tends to be more opinionated than other news networks (see Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012), it is plausible that the cable news outlet was deliberately seeking sources who held this opinion in particular.

However, it is also possible that Fox News was simply covering more business-like aspects of the unfolding recession – as opposed to economic or social aspects – considering the network attracts a predominantly older viewership more likely to have

investments in the financial markets (see Pew Research Center, 2008a; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a). Additionally, this dissertation found cable news covered taxes and the election more frequently than network news, suggesting that the economic news on Fox News and CNN was very different from the economic news on CBS News, ABC News, or NBC News in 2008. These results also imply that news media often have to choose from several newsworthy events and simply cannot cover every important issue. At the same time, some networks may be more predisposed to cover some issues than other issues, such as the election, the economy, or politics.

News media research has found that journalists rely on experts and accredited individuals when citing sources (Cross, 2010; McCombs, 2004; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Additionally, citizens and average, unaccredited individuals are most often cited to provide perspective or humanize a story (Cross; Gans, 1980; Hackett, 1985; Hall et al., 1978). This dissertation predominantly found that the sources cited by journalists were experts or sources with some form of credibility. Moreover, it appears as though citizens were predominantly cited to give a sense of perspective, or to humanize the stories, as citizens were most often cited in March and October – two months when the foreclosure crisis was at a fever pitch. Although citizens were quoted more often than partisans, pundits, social scientists, interest group members, and celebrities, as well as economic experts, small business and big business people individually, the most often-cited sources were politicians, candidates, and economic experts and business owners combined. These sources are all prime examples of experts and individuals with credibility. The implications of these results are that national television news coverage of the unfolding recession in 2008 was conventional in that cable and network news outlets predominantly relied on the perspective of accredited, expert sources. These individuals are presented and utilized by journalists as credible sources of information in order to give stories journalistic authority and provide viewers with perspective. If viewers also perceive these individuals as credible experts, then these sources could influence attribute agenda-

setting effects by priming individuals to think about issues and attributes in certain ways (see Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; McCombs; McCombs et al., 2011).

Along with differences in sources cited and in terms of the issues and economic attributes that were covered, network and cable news outlets also suggested fear to various extents. This was a substantial finding for this dissertation in that this result was based on theoretical grounds with the purpose of informing the public opinion study. More specifically, this dissertation found that network news was more likely to suggest that the crisis was scary. This might have been due to the fact that cable news appealed to individuals with higher incomes, who again might have watched cable news for either election information or financial and business news coverage from cable television news outlets. At the same time, cable news also covered taxes and the election more often than network news, clearly suggesting that cable news covered different issue objects and economic attributes from what network news covered. This was inevitably due to the different demographic compositions of the audiences of cable and network news. Nonetheless, utilizing this result from the content analysis study, the public opinion study predicted that survey respondents who watched network news more often than cable news would be more likely to say they were frightened by the crisis. However, this hypothesis was not supported, suggesting that fear of the unfolding economic crisis was probably not shaped by news media exposure.

These findings have major implications in terms of the potential effects of attention to either cable or broadcast news networks. Any such effect would be related to an individual's own economic status, as the public opinion study found that an individual's annual income, partisan identification, and race were associated with television news exposure. In sum, these findings suggest that differences in news coverage between cable and network news, together with individual preferences for either cable or network news in autumn 2008, could have affected public opinion at this time, such that selective exposure to media affected the parameters and formation of public

opinion and issue publics. Although news media can have a substantial influence on public opinion, these effects are almost entirely dependent upon an individual's selective exposure to certain news outlets and content. Attention to different news outlets has the potential to shape individual attitudes and opinions in various ways, as news outlets, despite covering the same issues, frequently cover subjects and stories in dissimilar ways, as found in this study. In order to understand the potential effects the news media had on public opinion in autumn 2008, this dissertation studied the ways in which individuals selectively exposed themselves to news media.

Overall, the public opinion study of this dissertation found some evidence of selective exposure. RQ8, RQ9, and H4 examined the extent to which demographics were predictive of media exposure, specifically selection of cable or network news and days of the week exposed to television news. However, the results concerning selective exposure were not as prominent or telling as this dissertation predicted. Ultimately, this should not be considered a surprise finding, though, given that the content analysis study found that national television news rarely covered the foreclosure crisis and underlying causes of the crisis.

According to the public opinion study findings, income played a substantial role in individuals' selective exposure to news media in autumn 2008. However, race appeared to play only a minor role, but was most significant with Hispanic individuals. Although these findings demonstrate that individuals did select different news outlets for various reasons, the frequency count for the selection of cable or network news reports that 56% of the survey's sample picked cable news. These findings are in line with the ratings data from 2008, which demonstrates that Americans were more likely to watch cable news than network news (Pew Research Center, 2008a; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a). One possible explanation for this is that cable news is on all day and evening, whereas network news is typically only 30 minutes long. Thus, it is easier to watch and spend more time with cable news.

However, whereas network news could be viewed over the air, cable news requires a subscription and thus has limited accessibility. These findings reflect the demographic composition of the survey's sample as well as the news consumption habits of this population. The frequency counts of the original survey measures report that 58% of the sample was 50 years or older, 79% White, and 58% making more than $50,000 annually. As prior research has demonstrated that age and partisanship were the strongest predictors of news outlet selection (Pew Research Center, 2008a; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009a), the finding that cable news selection was common with this population is not surprising. Additionally, these findings support research that has demonstrated how the audience of network news has continuously decreased since the advent of cable news (McCombs et al., 2011). Finally, these respondents would appear to be able to afford cable and thus attend to cable news more often than network news.

Partisan affiliation also was important as strong Republicans overwhelmingly selected cable news while moderates of both the Republican Party and Democratic Party predominantly selected network news. Along with demographic differences in selective exposure, this dissertation found some evidence of partisan selective exposure.

Partisan Selective Exposure

The concept of partisan selective exposure posits that individual media exposure habits can be influenced by partisan and political beliefs (Garrett, 2009a, 2009b; Garrett et al., 2013; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2013; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Stroud, 2008, 2010; Stroud & Lee, 2013). This study examined partisan selective exposure with RQ8 and RQ9, finding that although partisan identification was not related to time with the news, it was predictive of exposure to either cable or network news. Overall, the findings of this research support the notion of partisan selective exposure, particularly the conceptualization presented by Garrett and Garrett et al., which postulates that although individuals with stronger partisan affiliations are more likely to attend to specific news

outlets, they do not exclusively attend to these outlets and do not simply disregard information from other sources.

Notably, among partisan groups, strong Republicans were the only group to predominantly select cable news. Moderate Republicans and moderate Democrats predominantly selected network news. Based on prior research, it is likely that strong Republicans in this study were attending to Fox News, which potentially reinforced what they already believed (see Gil de Zuniga et al., 2013; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Stroud, 2008, 2010; Stroud & Lee, 2013). At the same time, while the stronger-affiliated Republicans preferred cable news, these findings demonstrate that in general respondents who identified with either the Democratic Party or Republican Party did not exclusively attend to a single news network. Thus, although the study found evidence of partisan selective exposure, the findings are in line with recent research demonstrating that selective exposure does not equate with exclusively watching one network. Additionally, given that research has demonstrated that cable news in general is more opinionated than network news (see Aday et al., 2005; Bae, 2000; Baldwin et al., 1992; Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012), individuals who were selecting cable news may have been receiving less factually based information and more opinionated or biased information than individuals attending to network news. In conclusion, these patterns of selective exposure, and partisan selective exposure, may have led to different agenda-setting effects, which are discussed below.

<center>Agenda-Setting Effects and the Public Opinion Process</center>

In line with the theoretical frameworks of agenda setting and attribute agenda setting, this study examined the main issues (objects) and aspects (attributes) of television news coverage of the economy from March to October 2008. Identifying the different objects and attributes, as well as the main object and attribute, was by necessity the first step in understanding how and what the media might or might not have taught news

viewers about the economic crises. Research has demonstrated that the news media and exposure to the news can substantially shape the contours of public opinion, especially opinions and attitudes concerning the economy (Erbring et al., 1980; Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hagen, 2008; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Wu et al., 2002). The public opinion process is a theoretical model that describes the various influences that can shape the parameters and dimensions of public opinion (Crespi, 1997; Hoffman et al., 2007). However, in order to fully understand the extent to which all of these variables can shape public opinion and attitudes, they must be considered collectively.

Findings from the content analysis study informed the secondary analysis of survey data in order to see if respondents who paid more attention to national television news were more likely to express views that were reflective of the media content. This component of the public opinion study was guided primarily by H5, H6, H7, RQ10, and RQ11. These hypotheses and research questions investigated the ways in which time spent with media and selection of specific outlets shaped economic attitudes.

Additionally, research has found that economic public opinion and attitudes in particular are influenced by individual's geographic proximity to and likelihood of being affected by economic hardship (Hagen, 2008). Based on the historical circumstances of the Great Recession, as well as the theoretical frameworks of the public opinion process, agenda setting, and issue publics, this dissertation predicted that individuals who were more likely to be affected by the economic crises, in terms of demographics, and closer in proximity to the foreclosure crisis would be more likely to support TARP, more afraid, and less optimistic. This research also investigated the relationship between selective exposure to the news and economic opinions and attitudes, as well as the extent to which economic attitudes were predictive of support for TARP. In particular, H8, RQ12, and RQ13 examined the formation of support for TARP, whereas H9 and RQ14 examined the relationship between geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis and economic attitudes.

Overall, cable and network television news were found to have covered the events of 2008 differently and attracted different audiences, specifically in terms of partisan affiliation and, to some extent, demographics, including income, employment status, and race. Additionally, there is some evidence that the news media may have affected economic attitudes, in particular views of who or what was to blame for the crisis. According to this research, economic attitudes and opinions were consistently predicted significantly by attitudes of fear, optimism, and blame for the crisis, but rarely by media exposure and demographics. On the other hand, attitudes concerning blame for the unfolding recession appear to have formed differently than optimism and fear attitudes, which appeared to be highly correlated with each other. These results altogether demonstrate the various ways individuals were seeking information concerning the economic crisis of autumn 2008 and how selective exposure to news media possibly influenced economic attitudes. However, the findings provide only some evidence of attribute agenda-setting effects. In particular, news media exposure was associated with blame and to some extent optimism, but not support for TARP or fear of the crisis.

Optimism and Fear of the Crisis

The two affective economic attitudes that were studied appeared to have been influenced predominantly by each other. Respondents who were not afraid were more likely to be optimistic, just as respondents who were optimistic were also more likely to not be afraid. This relationship makes sense in that these two affective attitudes should be highly correlated, given that an individual's feelings of fear would affect feelings of optimism towards the future. Media exposure was not a significant predictor of fear or optimism, which is also sensible considering that individuals likely did not need the media to tell them the crisis was scary and unlikely to be resolved any time soon.

Fear was significantly predicted by income, with higher income respondents more likely to say they were afraid. In terms of the various events and crises that were

occurring in September and October 2008, higher income individuals were probably most affected by the stock market, the financial crisis, and inflation. However, it is impossible to know for sure what aspects of the unfolding recession were scariest, as the only other significant predictor was gender. Nonetheless, respondents who spent fewer days with the news were more likely to say they were afraid of the crisis, yet neither days per week with television news nor selection of cable or network news was significantly associated with fear. Thus, the implication is that some aspects of the unfolding recession were more likely to scare individuals than other aspects, and that in the end an individual's likelihood of being affected played only a minor role in shaping fear and optimism. Fear and optimism might have shaped individuals' subsequent economic behaviors and potentially even their voting behaviors, as research has demonstrated that attitudes have a direct influence on behaviors, especially in the case of economics (Erbring et al., 1980; Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hagen, 2008; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Wu et al., 2002).

These results are counter-intuitive of what attribute agenda setting predicts. According to the content analysis study, fear was present in 15% of all stories, but was significantly more likely to be suggested in September and October of 2008, the time of the survey study. Based on these results, if agenda-setting effects were apparent, respondents who paid more attention to news – specifically network news – would have been more likely to say they were afraid of the crisis, but this was not the case. With support for TARP, in order to support possible attribute agenda-setting effects, time spent with the media should have been positively correlated with support, such that as time spent with the news increased, so did support for TARP. However, it is not possible to predict what the nature of these opinions would have been, as the content analysis study did not look at whether the coverage of TARP was supportive or critical. This is a limitation of the study.

As for optimism, this dissertation predicted that individuals who were more likely to be affected by the crisis, in terms of race, income, and employment demographics,

would be more pessimistic than individuals less likely to be affected. However, optimism was not significantly associated with these demographic variables, suggesting that likelihood did not play a substantial part in the formation of optimistic attitudes in the fall of 2008. Although the linear regression model did not find news media exposure to be significantly correlated with optimism, separate tests found that cable viewers were more likely to be optimistic, while network viewers were more likely to be pessimistic. This finding is suggestive of possible attribute agenda-setting effects, but the content analysis study of this dissertation lends only some support for this idea, as there did not appear to be significant differences among news outlets in terms of optimism. Given that network news was found to suggest fear more often, it is possible that exposure to network news encouraged pessimism more than fear. Nonetheless, the findings generally suggest respondents were scared and pessimistic regardless of their exposure to news media. This was likely because the obtrusiveness of the crisis and its various aspects directly influenced attitudes concerning fear and the future. Optimism, therefore, may have been more closely tied to other events and factors, such as the 2008 election or even the current presidential administration. Even though the economic crisis did not appear to be directly related to views of optimism, it was influenced predominantly by fear, which was shaped by one of the variables operationalized as encompassing an individual's likelihood of being affected by the crisis.

Blaming the Republican Party

Blame for the crisis was the only economic attitude significantly associated with media exposure, but blame was also associated with demographics and attitudes. The race, partisan affiliation, and economic demographics block in the blame model accounted for the majority of the variance in the model (18%), with partisan affiliation overall being the strongest significant predictor ($\beta = .37$). Individuals clearly were also influenced by their affiliation with a political party when thinking about who or what

caused the crisis. However, this may have occurred in this survey due to the wording of the question, which specifically asked respondents to pick either the Democratic Party or Republican Party as the object of blame.

Exposure to news media was also associated with blame. This dissertation found that respondents who did not watch cable news were more likely to say that Republicans were to blame for the crisis. Overall, cable viewers were more likely to blame Democrats than other viewing groups, but among just cable viewers, more respondents blamed Republicans than Democrats. Although the content analysis found that there were no significant differences among the networks in terms of suggesting blame, Republicans were most often identified as being blamed for the crisis in national television news coverage from 2008. These findings are suggestive of an attribute agenda-setting effect, with the directionality suggesting that time spent with the news, along with selective exposure to specific news outlets, was predictive of respondents' attribution of blame for the crisis. At the same time, respondents who were more afraid and pessimistic were also more likely to blame Republicans.

In sum, public attitudes concerning the causes of the crisis formed in line with the public opinion process (see Crespi, 1997; Hoffman et al., 2007; Price, 1992, 2008). Specific groups of individuals shared a common perspective on who was to blame for the crisis, based on similar demographic characteristics, media exposure habits, and attitudes. Furthermore, the causes of the crisis and who or what was most to blame appear to have been generally unobtrusive, as media exposure was predictive of blame. According to this research, individuals had a higher need for orientation when it came to the causes of the crisis, meaning individuals could not and did not have any direct experience with the underlying causes of the various crises, and therefore turned to news sources for information regarding the unfolding crisis. These individuals might have been primed by the news media to think that the Republican Party was to blame for causing the crisis. Findings from the content analysis study support this argument, as Republicans were

most often identified by news coverage as causing the crisis when blame was suggested. Thus, it is possible that the news media shaped perceptions of blame among those respondents increasingly attending to the news to learn about what caused the crisis.

Based on all of the findings concerning public opinion and economic attitudes, it appears the economic events of 2008 were generally obtrusive (McCombs, 2004; Zucker, 1978), as respondents did not rely on the news media to inform them about how scary the unfolding recession was or if things would begin to improve any time soon. Furthermore, it appears demographics and individual experiences during the unfolding crisis were shaping economic attitudes and perceptions more than exposure to news media did. The variables that were found to be predictive of fear and optimism were consistently a respondent's income, while partisan identification was predictive of optimism. Additionally, fear and optimism were positively correlated with other, further supporting the idea that individual experiences and demographics, as opposed to exposure to news media, shaped affective attitudes.

Despite the fact that individuals, depending on their demographic characteristics, were having different experiences in autumn 2008, in this study it appears demographics were most useful in deciphering who was interviewed, as opposed to determining the parameters of issue publics. However, these findings may be limited by the composition of the sample from the survey, which was composed predominantly of older, more affluent White individuals. Furthermore, although it is clearly important to examine what individuals are thinking and feeling, these dispositions are not substitutes for individual experiences. Instead, attitudes and opinions are probably shaped by real-world experiences. Thus, while real world, everyday experiences might be a greater influence on perceptions and beliefs, individual experiences are difficult to measure with survey research, and, at the very least, attitudes and opinions offer a proxy measure of these experiences.

Parameters of the Issue Public in Favor of TARP

In addition to the formation of economic attitudes, this dissertation studied the formation and parameters of an issue public that was supportive of TARP, which was the economic legislation that was debated and ultimately passed in October 2008. Issue publics are groups of individuals that agree on the importance of a specific issue, though they do not always or necessarily share the same issue stance (Althaus, 2003; Converse, 1964; Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990; Iyengar et al., 2008; Price, 1992; Price et al., 2006). Research has examined issue publics in terms of demographics, media exposure, attitudes, and even geography (see Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Krosnick, 1990; Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Nicholson, 2005; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993; Smith & Tolbert, 2010). Prior research and public opinion theory explains that economic public opinion and issue publics are predominantly shaped by an individual's likelihood of being affected by the economy and geographical proximity to aspects of the economy (see Hagen, 2008).

This dissertation predicted that support for TARP would be predicted by an individual's demographics, geographic location, media exposure, and economic attitudes. In particular, this dissertation predicted that support for TARP would depend on individuals' geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis and likelihood that they were being directly affected by the various economic crises of autumn 2008. Essentially, these hypotheses were testing the idea that individuals who were more likely to be affected by the unfolding recession and/or residing in states that were specifically harder hit would be more likely to support the passage and implementation of TARP. When predicting opinions and approval of TARP, this dissertation expected to find significant differences among respondents of various demographic make-ups and across geographical regions, which were operationalized based on the rate of foreclosure in a specific state compared to the national average. However, this dissertation found no evidence that demographics and geography had any substantial influence on the formation of opinions of TARP.

Specifically, this research hypothesized that respondents who were closer to foreclosures would be more supportive of TARP. Overall, however, geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis was not significantly associated with support for TARP or economic attitudes, thus implying that individuals likely did not perceive TARP as benefiting specific geographical regions or alleviating the unfolding foreclosure crisis. In terms of agenda setting, this result suggests that individuals, regardless of geographical proximity, generally did not have a high need for orientation when it came to TARP (see Hagen, 2008; Kepplinger, 2008; Weaver, 2007). As such, individuals across the country did not rely on national television news for information about TARP, thus confounding potential attribute agenda-setting effects. This finding also suggests that economic attitudes and opinions in autumn 2008 were not substantially shaped by individual proximity to or likelihood being affected by the unfolding recession. At the same time, it is possible that the operationalization of geography utilized in this study limited the results in that the variable was an aggregate and composed of three relatively large categories. Rather than grouping respondents in certain states into groups, future research could utilize geography as a criterion variable or possibly just use each state's respective foreclosure rate.

Although prior research has demonstrated that demographics and geography can be significantly associated with economic attitudes and opinions (see Erbring et al., 1980; Hagen, 2008; Nicholson, 2005; Smith & Tolbert, 2010; Stevenson et al., 1994), according to this research, favorability of TARP was more influenced by attitudes than demographics, geography, and even media exposure. Along these same lines, this dissertation did not find evidence that economic issue publics varied geographically such that state-specific issue publics could be identified (see Nicholson; Smith & Tolbert). Again, this may be due to this study's operationalization of geography. However, it is also possible that individuals did not perceive TARP as important, or even knew much about the proposed legislation considering that the survey was conducted as the legislation was

debated and subsequently passed. Thus, the events surrounding TARP and the related news coverage may have been occurring too close to the time the survey was conducted, limiting the feasibility of studying individual perceptions of TARP and what shaped these perceptions. Alternatively, individuals may not have been concerned with TARP, quite possibly because they did not think it would benefit them.

Along with geography, though, demographics were not associated with support for TARP. Demographics were not significant predictors of support for TARP, probably for a number of reasons, most notably the lack of in-depth coverage on TARP on television news as well as the fact that TARP ultimately was not designed to alleviate the crises that average citizens were facing on a daily basis. It is also possible that the coverage of TARP and subsequent passage of the bill occurred too rapidly, such that the effects of exposure to news coverage of TARP could not be discerned until a later date. Nonetheless, the only significant demographic predictor of support for TARP was education.

Despite prior research that has found issue publics can be influenced by demographics, including race (see Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Kinder & Sanders, 1996) and partisan identification (Krosnick & Telhami, 1995; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993; Price et al., 2006), this dissertation found the issue public that favored TARP was not significantly predicted by race or partisan identification. Rather, attitudes and education were associated with support for TARP, implying that support for TARP was not influenced by individuals' race or partisanship, but more likely how they felt in general about the unfolding recession or if they were even aware of the proposed legislation. However, it is also possible that the racial disparities underlying the unfolding crisis were not fully understood by the general public. Additionally, the limited perspective of news coverage of the recession suggests that individuals were not learning about the demographic disparities of the recession, and therefore it is not surprising that

media exposure was not predictive of support for TARP or occurring more prominently among individuals who were disproportionately being affected.

Considering the circumstances of the unfolding recession, and the purpose of the economic legislation, respondents with higher levels of education might have simply known more about the legislation or better understood its purpose. Furthermore, although these individuals were probably being affected by the crisis, they were not necessarily experiencing the foreclosure crisis firsthand. Nonetheless, higher income respondents also might have benefited from TARP, or at least perceived that they would, especially since income was only significant related to support for TARP in states where the foreclosure rate was at or near the national average. Overall, support for TARP appears to be have been more closely tied to individual likelihood of being affected, at least to a greater extent than geographical proximity to the foreclosure crisis. Additionally, given that optimism was predictive of support, it is possible some respondents did believe that TARP would solve the crisis or at least be a step in the right direction. These results also suggest that support for TARP might have been based on perceptions of how the legislation would potentially benefit banks and financial institutions as opposed to individuals.

Blame for the crisis, optimism, and education were found to be the exclusive significant predictors of approval of TARP. More specifically, respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to support TARP, as were respondents who were optimistic and predominantly blamed Republicans as well as other possible causes of the crisis. The implications of these results are that individual attitudes and opinions are undoubtedly vital considerations when studying the formation of economic public opinion. These perceptions and feelings may be shaped by real-world experiences, but should not be considered equivalents of experience, as it is also possible that the demographic and geographic differences of the unfolding crises in autumn 2008 did not influence public opinion to the extent that could be theoretically expected.

However, media exposure was not a significant predictor of opinions of TARP. Thus, it appears individuals did not perceive TARP as having a direct impact on their own lives or being tied to the issues they were experiencing, including the foreclosure crisis, inflation, unemployment, or the financial crisis. This seems feasible given that the purpose of TARP was to provide monetary assistance to U.S. banks and financial institutions, not to create jobs or bring down inflation. Furthermore, although this dissertation predicted that media exposure would be associated with support for TARP, the nature of the coverage on TARP on national television news suggests that this finding should not be a surprise. The news coverage on national television that was analyzed as part of this dissertation found that TARP was covered to some extent, but the coverage typically focused on the legislative and partisan debate over TARP, as opposed to the purpose or real-world impact the bill was supposed to have. At the same time, it is also possible that the coverage of TARP was too brief or even too close temporally to the dates on which the survey was conducted. Overall, these results imply that individuals did not use the news media to learn about TARP and that an individual's likelihood of being affected by the crisis or proximity to the foreclosure crisis did not shape support TARP.

Overall, demographics and geography had little influence on an individual supporting TARP, but attitudes were consistently predictive of support for TARP. Thus, public perceptions of TARP and supporting the passage of TARP were tied more closely to optimistic attitudes rather than media exposure, demographics, or geography. Specifically, support for TARP was not associated with the foreclosure crisis or individuals' geographical proximity to or likelihood of being affected by the foreclosure crisis. Thus, while demographics are vital to any survey research study, sometimes demographics are most useful at simply identifying who was interviewed in a survey, and that appears to be the case with this study.

As for economic attitudes, views of fear and optimism were strongly associated with each other, whereas views of blame for the crisis were shaped by media exposure. Despite finding some patterns of selective exposure to news media, it appears that the news had little influence in shaping public opinion and attitudes in autumn 2008. In conclusion, this dissertation provided some support for further research on state-specific issue publics, though it appears TARP did not foster the formation of issue publics along geographical lines. Some evidence for agenda-setting effects was also found, specifically for who or what caused the various economic crises of 2008. Finally, this dissertation found that attitudes related to the crisis were consistently the strongest influence in the formation of economic public opinion and issue publics in 2008.

Limitations

The research of this dissertation was limited in several ways. In particular, the content analysis study was limited in that the study focused on one news medium and only on nationally disseminated content. Rather than analyzing newspaper or radio coverage of the unfolding crisis, or internet-based news content, this dissertation analyzed national television news coverage as this news content was readily available to a national audience and a national sample was focus of the survey data under analysis. This ensured that survey respondents could have seen the same news content, regardless of where they lived. Nonetheless, it is probable that individuals attended to television news as well as other news media, and thus this dissertation cannot account for how exposure to other news media may have influenced public opinion in autumn 2008.

The news content under analysis was also constrained to a specific time frame, which limited this study by providing just a snapshot of coverage from a specific period leading up to what could be called the major events of the recession. Although this time frame encapsulated several major economic events, including rising gas prices, the financial crisis of September, and the passage of TARP, the rest of 2008, specifically the

rest of October, featured a number of severe economic events (see Fligstein & Goldstein, 2011; Grusky et al., 2011). It is possible these events had an even more pronounced effect on public opinion than the events that occurred in the time frame that was analyzed.

Along the same lines, this study only analyzed nightly newscasts and excluded weekends and daytime coverage. Newscasts that aired at other times, i.e., in the morning, afternoon, or late night, could have also covered the unfolding recession and thus had some effects on the formation of economic attitudes and opinions at that time. At the same time, local newscasts could have covered the unfolding crises as well and exposure to this content may have influenced public opinion more than exposure to national news did. Finally, the content analysis was only of transcripts and did not analyze video footage, which specifically led to a limited interpretation of the race of citizen sources as well as a general lack of understanding of what images were presented along with the news of the Great Recession. In terms of TARP specifically, this study was limited in that it did not determine if coverage of TARP was predominantly favorable or oppositional. It is possible that different networks were more supportive or critical of TARP than other networks were and that these differences also influenced public opinion.

The secondary analysis of survey data was also limited in several ways. For one, this study was limited in that it was a secondary analysis of survey data. Scholars have elaborated on the limitations of secondary data analyses, including the availability of applicable data, errors made in the original research process, measurement issues, sample issues, and data quality issues (see Hyman, 1972; Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985; Smith, 2008). In particular, this study was limited by the availability and selection of measures from the survey. Specifically, for the media exposure measures, this study utilized the only relevant and available variables in the data, which asked respondents about the news outlet they were watching for campaign information instead of for information about the economy. Similarly, with time spent with the media, the most relevant measure was days per week spent with television news. However, this study would likely have benefited

from a more specific measure, such as whether a respondent watched television news in the last 24 hours.

Another major setback of secondary analyses of survey data is that the secondary researcher has no control over how questions are worded or how variables are operationalized (Hyman, 1972; Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985; Smith, 2008), which inevitably affected this research. One specific example of how this study was limited by the wording of a question pertains to the question about blame for causing the crisis. In the survey, respondents were expected to select a political party most responsible (either Democrats or Republicans), but this study would likely have been stronger if respondents were allowed to pick other potential causes along with the political parties.

The operationalization of variables in this study was guided by the theoretical framework of this study as well as the historical circumstances of the Great Recession, but ultimately limited by the availability of relevant and conceptually oriented measures from the survey. Some survey variables were measured inconsistently, being either unavailable from the period of time that was analyzed or only measured very briefly Specifically, this study had to combine two separate measures of income. Furthermore, this study was unable to utilize other economic status measures, such as investments or home ownership, as these measures were not included during the time frame that was analyzed for this study. At the same time, the survey data did not include other relevant measures that could have further strengthened the study, such as interpersonal communication about the economy. Finally, the operationalization of variables could have been approached differently, specifically with geography. Rather than grouping individuals in certain states together, the geography variable could have been operationalized as each individual state's foreclosure rate.

This study was also limited in that it utilized cross-sectional and not longitudinal data, so no causality could be inferred. At most, this study was able to examine the relationships among the variables, but it cannot suggest, for example, that exposure to

news media caused individuals to think about the crisis or election in some way. Another related limitation was the choice to utilize an aggregate sample as opposed to looking at how opinion might have changed from day to day or over a set period of time. It is possible that as TARP neared passage, individual opinions of the legislation shifted.

Although one of the purposes of this dissertation was to examine how exposure to national television news shaped economic attitudes and opinions during autumn 2008, this study was limited in that it only utilized attention to television news. However, national television news was selected specifically because these newscasts were available nationally, and this study examined a national sample. Accordingly, to ensure that all respondents could have potentially seen the same news content, national television news was the focus of the study. Nonetheless, based on the findings of this study, other news media, such as local news or Internet news, likely had effects on the formation of public opinion at this time. It is also possible that these other news media outlets covered the crises differently, and this coverage could have potentially influenced public opinion as well.

Finally, these studies also had statistical limitations. For one, this study cannot speak to or test the veracity of the measures or variables, in terms of how accurately the questions measured the concepts under analysis. This is due to the methodological approach of the second study and the inherent limitations of secondary data analysis. Overall, the statistical analyses of this study do measure the variability of the measures under analysis but not the accuracy of the measures. The statistical analyses in these studies only focus on averages and generalities, and cannot speak to individuals or individual experiences. Further research, likely more qualitative in nature, would need to be conducted to better understand how individuals attended to the news at this time and how this may or may not have influenced their individual perceptions. Additionally, although the sample size under analysis in the public opinion study is sufficiently large, the sample for the content analysis study could be increased such that results that were

approaching statistical significance might then be significant. Lastly, the selection of specific tests over others influenced the potential results such that different researchers could utilize other, appropriate statistical tests and get slightly different results. In particular, the proposed model should have been tested with logistic regression as opposed to linear regression.

<div align="center">Future Research</div>

Based on the findings of this dissertation, there are several different potential directions for future research. Researchers could analyze the coverage from other news media, such as Internet news, radio news (NPR), or print news of the unfolding recession. Analyzing the coverage from these media would balance the perspective of this study by examining how other news agencies utilizing different media covered the Great Recession. Specifically, researchers could determine if other news media in the United States were more likely than national television news to discuss the geographic and demographic disparities of the Great Recession.

Along these same lines, future research could look at news from a broader time span, either before March or after October 2008, up to some specific date, perhaps the presidential inauguration of Barack Obama. The period analyzed in this dissertation was selected specifically because it was disseminated nationally six months prior to the passage of TARP. However, future research could look at all coverage of the economy from all of 2008 or from October until the end of the year. This study did not analyze coverage from January, February, most of October, November, and December of that year. Therefore, this dissertation did not analyze coverage of the historic election of Barack Obama in November or the economic events of later October (see Grusky et al., 2011). It is very likely the news coverage in these months differed from the coverage analyzed in this dissertation.

Similarly, research could analyze video footage from news of the Great Recession or expand the news media under analysis to include coverage from weekends, mornings, and/or daytime. By analyzing video footage, researchers could better study the extent to which individuals of different races and in different economic situations were present in national television news in 2008. By expanding the news media under analysis, researchers would be analyzing content that is consumed by a different audience. Furthermore, although this content possibly just reinforced or elaborated information that could be received by watching the evening news, it is likely different from the news coverage analyzed in this dissertation.

Other researchers might also conduct framing studies of news content from the Great Recession. This would entail looking at the perspectives and interpretative lenses through which journalists explained the recession. In particular, experimental research could examine how different news media frames of the economy affect individuals and the way individuals interpret events.

Finally, future research could analyze local television news coverage of the recession and then relate the findings from that analysis to state-specific survey data. Future research could determine how coverage of the unfolding crisis varied among states with different foreclosure rates. Local television news stations were likely an important source of information concerning the foreclosure crisis in 2008. However, the amount of coverage of the crisis was likely dependent on location of the news station, as stations in states with foreclosure rates above the national average, for example, might have covered the crisis extensively or not at all. If individuals were more attentive to local television news than national television news, state-specific issue publics were likely influenced by exposure to local television news and not national television news.

<u>Conclusions</u>

According to the content analysis study of this dissertation, national television news coverage of the unfolding recession in 2008 was uncommon, with the majority of economic news at this time concerned with the election. The coverage was also generally conventional in that it predominantly referenced expert and credible sources. This study also demonstrated that national television news coverage of the economy did not call attention to the demographic or geographic disparities that were inherent in the Great Recession. Overall, national television news coverage of the unfolding recession was focused on national-oriented issues and economic attributes like taxes and inflation. This study contributes to prior research findings that the recession and the roots of the recession were largely not covered by national U.S. news media (Lewis, 2010; McCombs et al., 2011; Sandvoss, 2010). Additionally, this study contributes to research that has found coverage of issue objects and issue attributes can vary among different news outlets (see Aday et al.; Bae, 2000; Baldwin et al., 1992; Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012).

Overall, the implications of this study are that national television news coverage in the United States in 2008 focused predominantly on the election and paid little attention to the economic events that unfolded throughout that year. Based on these findings, it is possible that the greatest agenda-setting effects occurred in terms of the election. There are at least three substantial facts supporting this argument: a) the 2008 presidential election was unprecedented, b) coverage of the campaign was extensive and often discussed the election in relation to the economy, and c) Americans paid an increasing amount of attention to national television news as 2008 progressed. At the same time, it is also possible to argue that national television news outlets failed to cover adequately the economy and unfolding economic crisis, specifically the underlying racial disparities and injustices that ultimately fueled the Great Recession. Finally, considering the numerous events that occurred in 2008, along with the sporadic national television

coverage of the events, national television news outlets – and by extension the general public – appear to have been very uncertain about what was happening, how to think about what was happening, and likely were caught off guard by how fast everything seemed to occur. This argument is further supported by findings from the second study, which suggest economic public opinion in autumn 2008 was largely shaped by individual perceptions of and experiences with the unfolding economic crisis.

According to the public opinion study, although individuals of different races, partisan identifications, and economic statuses did differ in exposure to and time spent with television news, these differences did not appear to influence the parameters of economic issue publics in autumn 2008. Instead, support for TARP, along with optimism, fear of the crisis, and blaming Republicans for causing the crisis were predominantly shaped by attitudes about the economy. These results contribute to research and scholarship that specifies the close relationship between attitudes and opinions (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Price, 1992; Zaller, 1992). The practical implication of these findings is that even if certain groups spend increasingly more time with news content than other groups, agenda-setting effects are not guaranteed and largely depend on the issues at hand, the timing of news coverage and subsequent survey research, and the survey measures utilized to study possible agenda-setting effects. Additionally, although attitudes and opinions are likely shaped by individual real-world experiences, these perceptions and beliefs are not substitutes for everyday experience, which cannot be easily captured with survey research.

As for the demographic and geographic contours of issue publics during the Great Recession, this study did not find evidence that demographic likelihood of being affected or proximity to effects significantly shaped the formation and parameters of issue publics in autumn 2008. Although prior research has found that economic issue publics and public opinion are substantially influenced by demographics and geography (see Erbring et al., 1980; Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hagen, 2008; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Wu et al.,

2002), this study contributes to that research by demonstrating that the Great Recession was an exceptional crisis with opinions and attitudes during the crisis shaped by factors besides geography and demographics. Overall, the results of this dissertation suggest that even if individuals with various demographics are having different real-world experiences, these differences do not always translate cleanly into differences in opinions and instead only inform researchers about who was surveyed. At the same time, given the timing of the survey and the numerous events occurring then, the demographic and geographic disparities, despite being an undeniable aspect of the Great Recession, simply might not have mattered at that time. Instead, most individuals in the general public were apparently afraid and unsure what to think.

These conclusions suggest possible practical implications for private and public sector opinion researchers and scholars alike. Overall, opinion and survey researchers should continue to thoughtfully develop survey questions and operationalize survey measures. Researchers should also carefully consider the timing of a survey, in terms of when to ask certain questions and how the timing of the survey might influence the survey results. Some of the questions in the survey were asked during very limited time frames, and the timing of these questions likely had implications on the results of the survey. Additionally, the majority of questions from the survey utilized for the public opinion study of this dissertation were close-ended and generally required respondents to select an answer from a set of options. Although these questions were operationalized as measures of specific concepts, if the answer options are not exhaustive then some respondents will be unable to accurately or truthfully answer the question (see Price, 2011). Inevitably this limits the validity of the measure and questions the usefulness of the variable altogether. Furthermore, the wording of the question and availability or selection of possible answer choices can have serious implications for survey measures. This appeared most obviously with blame, in which respondents were encouraged to choose between the two major political parties. Phrasing the question and answer option

in this way essentially excluded individuals who did not blame either political party and limited the variable to a measure of which political party caused the crisis as opposed to what caused the crisis in general.

The results of this study also suggest that when studying anything remotely political (i.e., legislation, approval ratings), researchers should include all relevant politically oriented variables and measures. This would include measures of political ideology. The findings of the public opinion study of this dissertation suggest that political ideology might have been significantly associated with blame for the crisis, optimism, and possibly even support for TARP. Although prior research has demonstrated that survey respondents generally do not have a full understanding of different political ideologies, selecting a specific ideology is likely tied to identifying with a specific, or specific set of, beliefs or values (Delli-Carpini & Keeter, 1993; Price, 2011; Zaller, 1992). This is an especially important consideration given the increasingly partisan and ideological nature of politics and television news (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Along these same lines, this dissertation found support for combining measures and utilizing two or more measures as an operationalization of a concept. Specifically, the public opinion study lends support to the approach of combining measures of partisan identification and strength of identification as moderates of each party were found to significantly differ from strong partisans of each party. Additionally, researchers should continue to utilize knowledge measures. The results of this study suggest that support for TARP might have been knowledge- or information-based, such that respondents who were more knowledgeable of politics, the legislative process, and/or the economy were probably more supportive of TARP. This is implied by the finding that education was predictive of support for TARP and that prior research has demonstrated that higher education levels are positively correlated with knowledge of politics and government (Delli-Carpini & Keeter, 1993; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010).

Finally, opinion and survey researchers should continue to refine their measurements and operationalizations of geography. Researchers have examined how issue publics can vary geographically, depending on how national issues are perceived in different states (see Nicholson, 2005; Smith & Tolbert, 2010). Although the public opinion study of this dissertation did not find support for state-specific issue publics, this study contributes to this research by examining a novel operationalization of geography. However, this operationalization was not a statistically significant predictor of economic opinions or attitudes, suggesting future research should avoid operationalizing geographical proximity exclusively at the state level. It is possible that there was variation in attitudes within pockets of some states that the state-level measure failed to capture. Nonetheless, this dissertation analyzed how respondents in different states varied in terms of support of TARP and economic attitudes by grouping respondents into three different regions, based on the foreclosure rate in a given state. In the end, this variable was not a significant predictor of support for TARP or economic attitudes. This might have been due to sampling limitations, in that individuals were sampled disproportionately from states with different foreclosure rates. Alternatively, this might also have been due to the operationalization of geographic proximity to the foreclosure crisis at the state level, as opposed to rural or city level. Nonetheless, given that geography is another variable that can influence an individual's economic situation (Grusky et al., 2011; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Massey & Denton, 1993), researchers should continue to measure geography and develop methods to analyze geographical differences and relationships.

APPENDIX A

PREDICTIVE MODEL
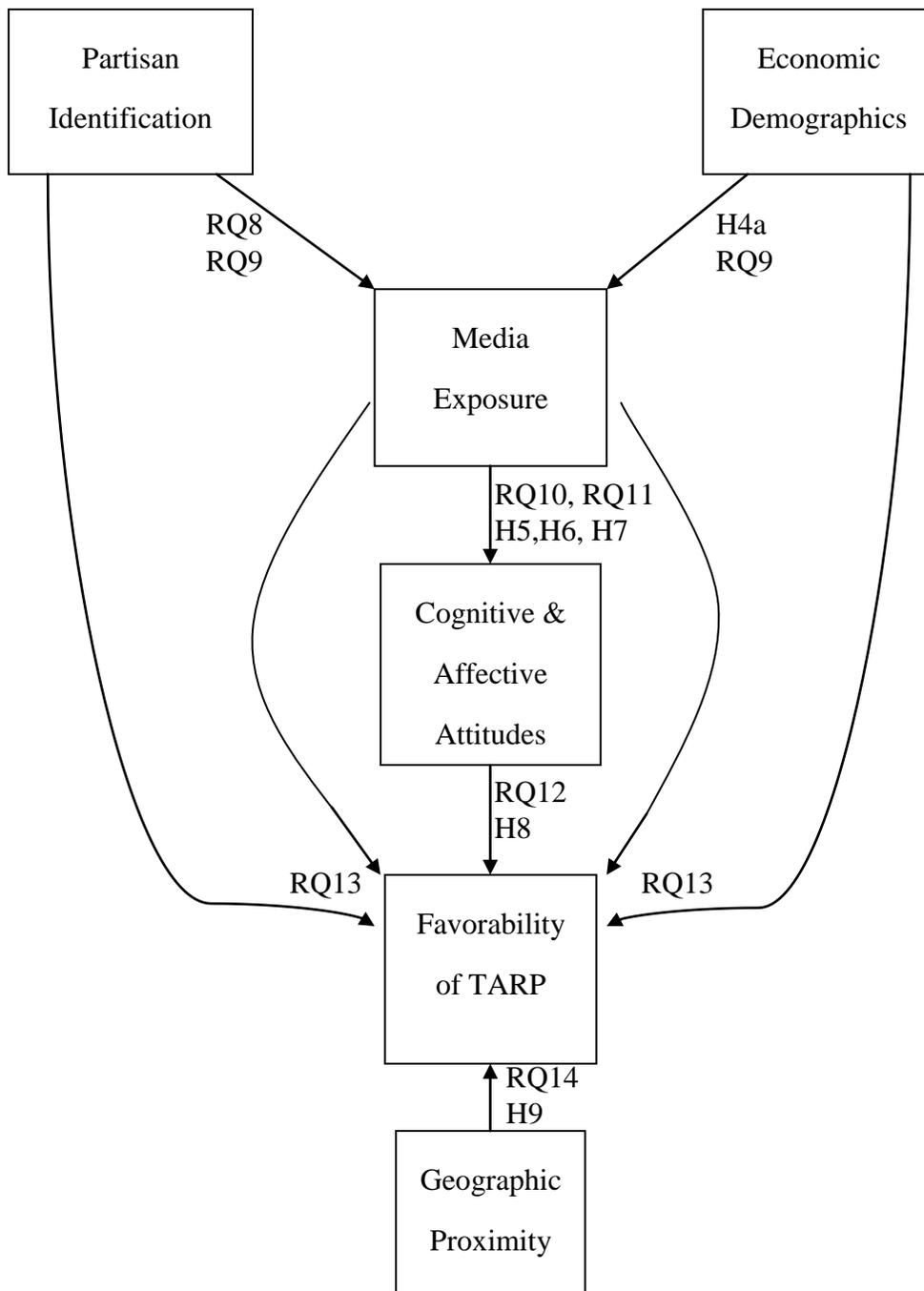
APPENDIX B

CONTENT ANALYSIS CODEBOOK

A. Case: Record the number above the article.

B. News outlet:

     1 – ABC

     2 – CBS

     3 – CNN

     4 – Fox News

     5 – NBC

C. Date: 03/01/2008 – 10/03/2008

D. Journalist – geography: Does the story cut to a reporter in the field or providing coverage from outside the studio? If so, please list the state where the reporter is. If a city is named and not the state, please list the state where the city is located. Only when cutting to field report, likely at beginning of story and in outro but not simply as part of outro**.** Should be explicit they are somewhere else for a specific reason. When in doubt, code no (0).

E. State from journalist geography: Insert 1 – 51 for state where reporter is.

Alabama - 1

Alaska - 2

Arizona - 3

Arkansas - 4

California - 5

Colorado - 6

Connecticut - 7

Delaware - 8

Florida - 9

Georgia - 10

Hawaii - 11

Idaho - 12

Illinois - 13

Indiana - 14

Iowa - 15

Kansas - 16

Kentucky -17

Louisiana - 18

Maine - 19

Maryland - 20

Massachusetts - 21

Michigan - 22

Minnesota - 23

Mississippi - 24

Missouri - 25

Montana - 26

Nebraska - 27

Nevada - 28

New Hampshire - 29

New Jersey - 30

New Mexico - 31

New York - 32

North Carolina - 33

North Dakota - 34

Ohio - 35

Oklahoma - 36

Oregon - 37

Pennsylvania – 38

Rhode Island - 39

South Carolina - 40

South Dakota - 41

Tennessee - 42

Texas - 43

Utah -44

Vermont - 45

Virginia - 46

Washington - 47

West Virginia - 48

Wisconsin - 49

Wyoming - 50

Washington D.C. - 51

F. Geography: What is the geographical orientation of the story? In other words, does the story focus on a specific geographic level, region, or area? *(select one)*

1 – Rural/countryside/small town (any story about an area or town that is not large, i.e. very well known or recognizable)

2 – Suburban/urban/metropolitan/city (mentioned specifically by name or described as such; stories about LA, NYC, other cities but focus is on that city)

3 – State (only one or two states mentioned by name; up to two different states acceptable; election or caucus or primary occurring in one or two states, the economic conditions in one or two states; state-specific issues or conditions but no more than two states)

4 – Regional/multiple states (region by name, or two regions, or three or more states named; three to ten states compared, described, or mentioned within story; more regional or state-specific issues)

5 – National (federal and national issues, including national election, the national economy; about country as a whole; gas prices nationwide; no specific states mentioned OR more than 10 states named)

G. Geographical comparisons: Does the story compare, contrast, or describe **economic** conditions or situations in two or more geographical areas? Two conditions should be met in order to code yes: a) the economic situations in specific areas are described, and b) the situations in two or more areas are described. Only code for economic conditions/situations, not just comparisons of states or different geographical areas. Also could be *differences* or *similarities* – so long as multiple areas are described.

       0 – No   **1 – Yes**

H. Geography – states named: Does the story talk about economic conditions in **certain** areas? List any states that are explicitly mentioned or named in the story. If a city is mentioned, then please list the state in which that city is located. D.C. counts as a state. Only code for economic conditions and/or situations. *(multiple entries – abbreviations acceptable)* **CODE 0 if not, otherwise 1-51.**

Demographics: Demographic characteristics in the story – describing people as a demographic group.

(code all that apply) **CODE: 0 for no, 1 for yes**

> **I – Age** (general description of age group/generation acceptable; retirees)

> **J – Race** or ethnicity (whites, blacks, minorities, Hispanics, etc.)

> **K – Sex** (likely just male or female, as a group/in general)

> **L – Education** (college-educated, high school graduates, uneducated, highly educated, etc.)

> **M – Income** (low-income, top earners, blue-collar, middle-class, etc.)

> **N – Employment** (most likely unemployed)

> **O – Partisan affiliation or political orientation** (liberals; Dems/Repubs as in voters)

> **P – Other** (please specify)

Q. Demographical comparisons: Does the story compare, describe, or mention the situations of two or more demographic groups (i.e. race, class, age)? Exclude partisanship. Again two conditions should generally be met: 1) the economic situations or hardships facing a specific group must be described; and 2) two or more groups must be explicitly mentioned or described. Not sufficient just to describe the situation of one demographic group – needs to compare or describe the situation of two or more demographical groups. Not necessarily oppositional or related groups; in other words, age and race, or employment and gender, etc. (could be multi-dimensional)

> **0 – No**   **1 – Yes**

Objects: The major topics or issues that are discussed or mentioned in the story. (Demographics and geography probably should be coded here if also coded above) (might code many/overlapping categories but not necessarily) Remember this is all

objects mentioned, so it is possible to code both Economy and Economic Crisis. However, if only the crisis is discussed, then only code for Economic Crisis. If the economy is discussed in general or abstractly, especially in relation to the campaign, then only code Economy – in this case there should really be no mentioning or hints of the economic crisis. BUT if both positive attributes and negative attributes of the economy are discussed, code for both.

(code all that apply) **CODE: 0 for no, 1 for yes**

> **R – Economy** in general/abstract; more positive aspects as well; probably just code if a) election story and discussing economy OR b) trying to talk about positives or be upbeat about economy) (include general topics that are tied to economy but perhaps not tied to crisis – like airlines, businesses opening, etc.
>
> **S – Economic crisis** (specific negative aspects, overall negative news; or discussion of "economic crisis"; look for some of the attributes listed below like foreclosure crisis, financial crisis, etc.)
>
> **T – Election/campaign** (presidential campaign, local campaigns, primaries, or just election season in general)
>
> **U – Governance/government/laws/politics** (probably related to economy; include government regulation, potential legislation, political action)
>
> **V – Partisanship/bipartisan/political parties/political ideology** (i.e. disagreements, differences, bickering; differences between liberals and conservatives, differences between Republicans and Democrats, or differences aside and bipartisanship)
>
> **W – Geography** (states, across nation OR specifics to an area; only economics & U.S. geography; code if the economic specifics to an area or region are mentioned)
>
> **X – Demographics** (i.e. age, race, socio-economic status; code if demographics coded above)

Y – Energy (oil, fuel, coal, biofuels, power, jet fuel expenses, etc.)

Z – Other (please describe)

AA. Main object: As best as you can tell, which topic or issue is the main object of the story? To help discern main topic, double check lead in and beginning of story. Refer to details above for further clarification. *(select one)*

    1 – Economy (in general/abstract; more positive aspects as well)

    2 – Economic crisis (specific negative aspects, overall negative news)

    3 – Election/campaign

    4 – Politics/governance/government/laws (probably related to economy)

    5 – Partisanship/bipartisan/political parties/political ideology (i.e. disagreements)

    6 – Geography (differences between states, across nation OR specifics to an area)

    7 – Demographics (i.e. age, race, socio-economic status)

    8 – Energy (oil, fuel, coal, biofuels, power, etc.)

    9 – Other (please describe)

    0 – None (only if more than one object clearly presented as main issue)

Attributes of the economy: Sub-topics of economy that are included in story. Code for any mentioning of these attributes. *(select all that apply)* **0 for no, 1 for yes**

    AB – Foreclosures/mortgage market/housing crisis

    AC – Loan practices/subprime loans/loans

    AD – Banks, corporate, business, industry profits and practices/credit/capital/financial crisis

    AE – Government & economy/regulation of economy/government role in economy [NOT bailout, TARP, stimulus, legislation – purely regulation and government interference of economy]

AF – Economic legislation/bailout/stimulus/TARP/tax rebates

AG – Unemployment/job losses/job cuts/outsourcing, etc.

AH – Stock market performance/crash/crisis/401k, etc. [NOT regular stock updates, but investments, investors or how the crisis is affecting the stock market or people's retirement in the stock market, "if I own stock, what happens?]

AI – Government deficit/budget (could be national or state specific)

AJ – Taxes/ loss of tax revenue/increase tax/decrease tax/corporate tax, etc. [code for any discussion of tax, by journalist or speaking part – either in relation to the economy or as part of the campaign]

AK – Inflation/rising prices/lower dollar value/costs/expenses (individual or corporate)

AL– Wealth or income inequalities and disparities/lower incomes [growing wealth inequalities, divide between rich and poor]

AM – Trade/trade laws/free trade/NAFTA/trade deficits, etc.

AN– Bankruptcies (corporate or personal)

AO – Consumer confidence/sales/spending/retail/savings (focus is consumers)

AP – Other (please specify)

AQ. Main attribute: As best as you can tell, which aspect is the predominant focus of the story? **If there are too many attributes, or no single attribute clearly the central focus of the story, then code 0. Also code 0 if the story seems to just be about the economic crisis and all the ways that people are experiencing the crisis or the ways in which the crisis is affecting the economy. Pay close attention to how story is introduced by anchor, as well as the attention paid to these attributes by the reporter and speaking sources. If necessary, count how many times each attribute is mentioned and code whichever is mentioned the most times.**

0 – None/Can't tell/economic crisis overall [several attributes all focus]

1 – Foreclosures/mortgage market/housing crisis

2 – Loan practices/subprime loans/loans/lenders

**3 – Banks, corporate, business, industry profits and
practices/credit/capital/financial crisis**

**4 – Government & economy/regulation of economy/government role in
economy/policy**

5 – Economic legislation/bailout/stimulus/TARP/tax rebates

6 – Unemployment/job losses/job cuts/outsourcing, etc.

7 – Stock market performance/crash/crisis/401k, etc.

8 – Government deficit/budget (could be national or state specific)

9 – Taxes/ loss of tax revenue/increase tax/decrease tax/corporate tax, etc.

10 – Inflation/rising prices/lower dollar value

11 – Wealth or income inequalities and disparities/lower incomes

12 – Trade/trade laws/free trade/NAFTA/trade deficits, etc.

13 – Bankruptcies (corporate or personal)

14 – Consumer confidence/sales/spending/retail, etc.

15 – Other (please specify)

Blame: Does the story clearly suggest what/who is to blame for the economic crisis?
Could be mentioned by anchor, journalist, or by speaking source. **Any blame or
connection between the economy/economic crisis and potential causes should be
explicit or overt; i.e. the speaking source or journalist or anchor** *specifically says the
crisis was caused by something or something caused the crisis or something is to blame
for causing the crisis*. *(code all that apply)* **0 for no, 1 for yes**

AR – Practices of banks or corporations/subprime loans/Wall St.

AS – Toxic assets/restraints on capital/bad assets [NOT individuals or Wall St
but the effects of each, or the constraints on bank's finances, *strain on resources*]

AT – Individuals (i.e. irresponsible people, taking loans they couldn't afford)

AU – Lack of government regulation [NOT Wall St. but lack of regulating it]

AV – Politics/partisanship/government [congress, etc.]

AW – Republicans (include blame on Bush/"current administration")

AX – Democrats

AY – Other (please specify) [must be clear and explicit]

AZ. Main blame: As best as you can tell, who/what is primarily blamed for crisis? Could be mentioned by anchor, journalist, or by speaking source. Any blame or connection between the economy/economic crisis and potential causes should be explicit or overt; i.e. the speaking source or journalist or anchor *specifically says the crisis was caused by something or something caused the crisis or something is to blame for causing the crisis*. **If two or more blames are mentioned, consider coding 0 if one is not presented as more likely than the other.**

    0 – Does not seem to suggest blame

    1 – Banking/loan/corporate practices/subprime loans

    2 – Toxic assets/restraints on capital/bad assets

    3 – Individuals (i.e. irresponsible people, taking loans they couldn't afford)

    4 – Lack of government regulation

    5 – Politics/partisanship

    6 – Republicans (include blame on Bush/"current administration")

    7 – Democrats

    8 – Other (please specify)

BA. Fear: Does the story suggest that the crisis is scary or something to be feared? Look for descriptions of the economy, situation, or crisis using the words "fear/afraid," "scary," "fearful," "worried," "frightening," "worrisome." Could be by journalist or anchor, or by

a speaking source in their quote. **If any of these words appear then code yes. Do NOT read into the story – if not immediately apparent that fear is being suggested, code as no. Not enough to talk about scary aspects or negative aspects of the crisis and economy – must explicitly suggest or describe the situation as frightening, scary, worrisome, etc.**

       0 – No   **1 – Yes**

BB. Optimism: Does the story include descriptions of being optimistic or worried about the future? Look for phrases like "no recovery in sight (pessimistic)" or "hopeful/things should get better" (optimism). **Must be very clear that story has pessimistic or optimistic bent to it. Just describing positive and/or negative aspects of the economy, situation, or crisis is not enough – must go further and talk about the outlook or future and if there is reason to believe or think things will get worse and/or better. If cannot tell, or seems balanced, then code 2.**

       9 – Neither pessimistic nor optimistic/balanced/can't tell

       1 – Optimistic

       0 – Pessimistic

BC. Number of speaking parts: Enter total number of people quoted (exclude paraphrase & **only** code those appearing within the transcript and being directly quoted – will have identifier prior to text/quote).

Record the number of each of the following sources **directly quoted** in the transcript.

BD. Political candidate (any individual running for political office – if current politician, code as candidate and not politician, i.e. Obama, Clinton, McCain, Palin) **SEE BF**

BE. Politician (not running for office, incumbent representative/senator/president; include secretaries (treasury, state, etc.), governors, foreign heads of state; spokesperson, etc.) **SEE BF**

BF. If coded for BD and/or BE, is the state included **within context** of story? (i.e. explicitly mentioned by reporter in the speaking transcription, not just part of identifier)

0 – No   Yes (CODE 1-51)

BG. State of candidate or politician. Enter 1-51 for state(s).

BH. Partisans (campaign managers, party leaders, former politicians – MUST be identified as former politician or having ties or affiliation with political party; former Democratic/Republican strategist, or former administrator worker; NOT current candidates or politicians)

BI. Political pundit (political expert, political scientists; NOT current politicians, candidates, journalists – DO include political experts employed or affiliated with network)

BJ. Economic expert (economist, economics/business prof., analyst, researcher, energy, Ben Bernanke)

BK. Corporate officer/executive/trader/banker (CEO types, owners, corporate spokesperson)

BL. SMALL business – owner and/or employees (specifically tied to small business, not big biz)

BM. Social scientist/researcher (pollster, sociologist, professor – NOT economics, business, etc.)

BN. Celebrity/famous activist type (i.e. George Clooney, Michael Moore)

BO. Interest group member (anyone tied to an interest group: spokesperson, researcher, director, etc.)

BP. Journalist/anchor/network employee (anyone with network but also other journalists in J roles)

BQ. Citizens/average people (no clear expertise/credentials; likely in story for contextual purposes)

BR. Other (please describe)

BS. Number of citizens/average people as sources: Enter total. All will be coded as citizen above.

Demographics for citizens/average people: Enter the following information **for up to 4** citizens.

BT, BY, CD, CI.

    Sex – 0 female, 1 male, 2 can't tell

BU, BZ, CE, CJ.

    Age – Write in (code 0 if not included)

BV, CA, CF, CK.

> **Race/ethnicity** – 1 Asian/Asian-American, 2 Black/African-American, 3
>
> Hispanic/Latino, 4 Native American/American Indian, 5 White, 6
>
> mixed/interracial, **7 can't tell** (don't guess)

BW, CB, CG, CL.

> **Residence** –state of residence (code 1-51) [0 for none]

BX, CC, CH, CM.

> **Occupation** – enter description of job/employment (unemployed or retired is
>
> acceptable)

CN. Homeowners: Using the find tool in Microsoft Word, search the document for the
word "homeowner" and code accordingly. **0 for none, 1 for any inclusion of term**

APPENDIX C

FREQUENCIES OF ORIGINAL SURVEY VARIABLES

Table C.1 Age frequencies.

Age in years	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
18-20	34	1.4	1.4
21-30	163	6.5	6.7
31-40	346	13.9	14.2
41-50	488	19.6	20.0
51-60	593	23.8	24.3
61-70	442	17.7	18.1
71-80	256	10.3	10.5
81-90	118	4.7	4.8
91-94	5	0.2	0.2
Don't know	6	0.2	N/A
No answer	42	1.7	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.2

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.2 Education frequencies.

Education level	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
Grade 8 or lower	42	1.7	1.7
Some high school	94	3.8	3.9
High school diploma	623	25.0	25.7
Technical or vocational school	54	2.2	2.2
Some college, no degree	385	15.4	15.9
Associate's degree	247	9.9	10.2
Four-year college degree	499	20.0	20.6
Graduate or professional school	108	4.3	4.5
Graduate or professional degree	371	14.9	15.3
Don't know	1	0.0	N/A
No answer	69	2.8	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.0

Table C.3 Income with nine possible responses frequencies.

Income	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
<10k	42	1.7	3.8
10-15k	49	2.0	4.4
15-25k	88	3.5	7.9
25-35k	117	4.7	10.5
35-50k	155	6.2	13.9
50-75k	203	8.1	18.2
75-100k	179	7.2	16.0
100-150k	168	6.7	15.0
>150k	116	4.7	10.4
Don't know	42	1.7	N/A
No answer	119	4.8	N/A
System missing	1,215	48.7	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.1

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.4 Income with ten possible responses frequencies.

Income	n	Percent	Valid percent
<10k	36	1.4	3.5
10-15k	51	2.0	4.9
15-25k	98	3.9	9.4
25-35k	103	4.1	9.9
35-50k	156	6.3	15.0
50-75k	198	7.9	19.1
75-100k	154	6.2	14.8
100-150k	143	5.7	13.8
150k-250k	64	2.6	6.2
>250K	36	1.4	3.5
Don't know	75	3.0	N/A
No answer	101	4.1	N/A
System missing	1,278	51.3	N/A
Total	2,493	99.9	100.1

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.5 Employment frequencies.

Employment status	n	Percent	Valid percent
Working full-time	1,183	47.5	48.4
Working part-time	275	11.0	11.2
Unemployed	65	2.6	2.7
Self-employed	2	0.1	0.1
Retired	667	26.8	27.3
Homemaker	121	4.9	5.0
Permanently disabled	104	4.2	4.3
Student	25	1.0	1.0
Other	4	0.2	0.2
Don't know	1	0.0	N/A
No answer	46	1.9	N/A
Total	2,493	100.2	100.2

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.6 Partisan identification frequencies.

Partisan identification	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
Democrat	857	34.4	36.0
Independent	765	30.7	32.1
Republican	678	27.2	28.5
Other	17	0.7	0.7
Conservative	19	0.8	0.8
Libertarian	17	0.7	0.7
Green Party	4	0.2	0.2
Don't vote/apolitical	6	0.2	0.3
Between parties	6	0.2	0.3
Liberal	4	0.2	0.2
Moderate	2	0.1	0.1
Neutral/neither	5	0.2	0.2
Socialist	2	0.1	0.1
Don't know	81	3.3	N/A
No answer	30	1.2	N/A
Total	2,493	100.2	100.2

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.7 Strength of partisan identification frequencies.

	n	Percent	Valid Percent
Strong	1,476	59.2	68.3
Not very strong	684	27.4	31.7
Don't know	82	3.3	N/A
No answer	58	2.3	N/A
System missing	193	7.7	N/A
Total	2,493	99.9	100.0

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.8 Race frequencies.

Race	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
White or white Hispanic	2,071	83.1	86.2
Black, African-American, or black Hispanic	190	7.6	7.9
Asian	39	1.6	1.6
Mixed race	34	1.4	1.4
Hispanic, no race given	32	1.3	1.3
American Indian	25	1.0	1.0
Other	11	0.4	0.5
Don't know	8	0.3	N/A
No answer	83	3.3	N/A
Total	2,493	100	99.9

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.9 Frequencies of Hispanic descent.

	n	Percent	Valid percent
Is of Hispanic descent	152	6.1	6.3
Is not of Hispanic descent	2,250	90.3	93.7
Don't know	8	0.3	N/A
No answer	83	3.3	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.0

Table C.10 Days spent with television news frequencies.

Days	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
Zero	213	8.5	8.7
One	50	2.0	2.0
Two	96	3.9	3.9
Three	92	3.7	3.7
Four	73	2.9	3.0
Five	102	4.1	4.1
Six	42	1.7	1.7
Seven	1,793	71.9	72.9
Don't know	31	1.2	0
No Answer	1	0.0	0
Total	2,493	99.9	100.0

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.11 Selection of news outlet frequencies.

News outlet	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
CNN	493	19.8	25.2
Fox News	429	17.2	22.0
NBC	228	9.2	11.7
ABC	202	8.1	10.3
Local news (unspecified)	146	5.9	7.5
CBS	138	5.5	7.1
MSNBC	119	4.8	6.1
PBS	75	3.0	3.8
Spanish language	33	1.3	1.7
Comedy news	22	0.9	1.1
Other network	15	0.6	0.8
C-SPAN	14	0.6	0.7
CNBC	14	0.6	0.7
Other	12	0.5	0.6
International news	5	0.2	0.3
Headline News	4	0.2	0.2
None	3	0.1	0.2
Bloomberg	2	0.0	0.1
Rush Limbaugh	1	0.0	0.1
Don't know	284	11.4	N/A
No answer	254	10.2	N/A
Total	2,493	100.1	100.2

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.12 Fear of the crisis frequencies.

Fear	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
Concerned	1,638	65.7	66.3
Scared	654	26.2	26.5
Not concerned	180	7.2	7.3
Don't know	17	0.7	N/A
No answer	4	0.2	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.1

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table C.13 Optimism and pessimism frequencies.

Direction of country	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
Wrong track	2,003	80.3	88.9
Right direction	251	10.1	11.1
Don't know	204	8.2	N/A
No answer	35	1.4	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.0

Table C.14 Blame for the crisis frequencies.

Reasons	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
Republicans	856	34.3	39.5
Both parties equally	593	23.8	27.3
Democrats	454	18.2	20.9
Banks and corporations	85	3.4	3.9
Neither party	77	3.1	3.6
President Bush	67	2.7	3.1
Government	14	0.6	0.6
Individuals	13	0.5	0.6
Other	10	0.4	0.5
Don't know	270	10.8	N/A
No answer	54	2.2	N/A
Total	2,493	100	100

Table C.15 Favorability of TARP frequencies.

Favorability	*n*	Percent	Valid percent
Disapprove	956	38.3	52.4
Approve	753	30.2	41.3
Depends	116	4.7	6.4
Don't know	655	26.3	N/A
No answer	13	0.5	N/A
Total	2,493	100.0	100.1

Note: Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

February 23, 2013

TO: Michael Sears

       Graduate College

       Julie Andsager

FROM: Janet Karen Williams, PHD

IRB Chair or Chair Designee

RE: Not Human Subjects Research Determination

I have reviewed the information submitted with your project titled 201302809 The

Formation of Issue Publics during the Great Recession: Examining the Influences of

News Media, Geography, and Demographics.

Hello Michael, I have determined that the project described in the application *does not*

meet the regulatory definition of human subjects research and does not require review by

the IRB, because the project does not involve collection of individually identifiable

information from living individuals. Please don't hesitate to contact the Human Subjects

Office or me, if you have any questions. Janet Williams, PhD, Chair IRB-02

We appreciate your care in submitting this application to the IRB for review. If the

parameters outlined within this Human Subjects Research application request change, re

review and/or subsequent IRB review may be required.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. The Human Subjects

Office can be reached via phone (319)-335-6564 or email irb@uiowa.edu.

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