
Television Media and Fiscal Policymaking

Zachary Stevens

June 2025

Submitted to the University of Hertfordshire in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of PhD

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my work, and no part of it has been submitted for any other degree of qualification.

Zachary Stevens

June 2025

Abstract

This thesis investigates how U.S. television media shaped the public's understanding of the 2009 financial crisis and the legitimacy of its competing fiscal responses. While existing research has explored the role of print media in reinforcing austerity narratives, particularly in Europe, this study focuses on the under-examined case of the United States, where a significant Keynesian stimulus response provided an opportunity to assess whether media discourse facilitated or constrained the possibility of paradigmatic change. The thesis examines how cable and broadcast television networks represented actors, framed fiscal debates, and mediated the contest between stimulus and consolidation in a moment of acute economic uncertainty.

Conceptually, the research integrates Peter Hall's model of policy paradigms with Mark Blyth's emphasis on authority, uncertainty, and ideational struggle. It extends this theoretical foundation by conceptualising television media as active institutional actors that participate in the construction of fiscal legitimacy. Through selective amplification of voices, symbolic appeals to "the public," and strategic framing of crisis narratives, television media shapes the discursive terrain in which policy alternatives are made possible or foreclosed.

The study develops a novel categorisation methodology that maps fiscal discourse across three analytical dimensions: actor type (state vs. society), ideological orientation (Keynesian vs. neoliberal), and issue framing (spending vs. taxation). Drawing on 782 television transcripts from 2009 and 2010—spanning over 6,000 policy arguments—the analysis identifies substantial asymmetries in actor visibility, policy framing, and partisan alignment. While initial coverage in early 2009 showed notable support for expansionary measures, by 2010, media discourse had shifted sharply. Pro-stimulus coverage declined by 38%, and consolidation-oriented narratives increased by 38%.

The findings reveal that television media helped reassert neoliberal fiscal norms despite the presence of Keynesian policy interventions. Institutional actors such as President Obama, the White House, and progressive economists were increasingly marginalised, while Republican elites and media hosts gained disproportionate visibility. Notably, CNN, positioned as the most ideologically centrist among the cable networks, emerged as a critical arbiter of legitimacy; its shift toward conservative framing added critical credibility to the reassertion of fiscal restraint.

The thesis concludes that the failure to achieve a paradigmatic shift in the U.S. cannot be understood solely through empirical exercise, institutional inertia, or elite resistance. Instead, it

reflects how televised discourse filtered and structured political and public meaning, limiting the circulation of competing ideas. By applying a novel categorisation framework grounded in theories of policy paradigms and social learning, this thesis demonstrates how U.S. television media functioned as a key intermediary in the contest for fiscal authority between state and societal actors, shaping which voices and policy alternatives gained legitimacy, and ultimately influencing the trajectory of paradigm stability and transformation during the post-crisis period.

Acknowledgements

There are several individuals I would like to acknowledge and thank, who have had a significant influence throughout my PhD journey.

I would like to express my gratitude to the University of Hertfordshire, my principal supervisor Professor Hulya Dagdeviren and supervisor Dr Francesca Gagliardi for their continuous support and invaluable oversight. Their guidance and expertise helped shape this dissertation. Thank you.

I want to thank my wife, and my family, who have given me endless encouragement. All your love and support has made this journey possible.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Figures.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Motivation, Aims, and Objectives.....	4
1.2 Approach and Data.....	7
1.3 Findings and Contributions.....	9
1.4 Chapter Overview.....	13
Chapter 2: Economic Paradigms and Crises.....	19
2.1 The Evolution of Economic Paradigms in the United States.....	20
2.2 Theoretical Foundation: Policy Paradigms and Social Learning	24
2.3 Competing Economic Ideologies of the Crisis	25
2.4 TV Framing, Constraints, and the Battle for Economic Legitimacy	30
2.5 Structural Power and the Conditions for Paradigm Shifts	45
Chapter 3: Neoliberalism Resilience and Policy Authority.....	50
3.1 Origins of the Paradox: Two Causal Stories.....	52
3.2 Importance of Incommensurability and Persuasion.....	54
3.3 Elite Interests and Neoliberal Policymaking.....	58
3.4 Discursive Struggles and Austerity's Popularity.....	59
Chapter 4: The Effect of TV Media on Policymaking, Public Opinion, and Polarization.....	62
4.1 Media and Post-Crisis Path Dependency.....	64
4.2 Media Coverage and Public Opinion.....	69
4.3 An Evolving TV Media Landscape: Polarization and Selective Exposure.....	74
Chapter 5: Media Coverage Methodology and Data.....	85
5.1 Conceptual Framework: Media, Actors, and Paradigms	86
5.2 Media Coverage and Policy Outcomes	94
5.3 Methodology Approach.....	99
5.4 Methodology Outline and Timeframe	105
5.5 Search Query Methodology	110

5.6 Categorization Methodology	112
Chapter 6: Media Coverage Analysis and Policy Favoritism.....	121
6.1 The Primary Actors Presented in Policy Coverage.....	122
6.2 Stimulus vs Consolidation	129
6.3 Spending Preferences	154
6.4 Taxation Preferences	175
Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion.....	190
7.1 Key Findings Overview	192
7.2 Social Learning, Evolving Policy Narratives, and the Actors	197
7.3 Television, the Tea Party, and the Conservative Resurgence	229
7.4 Persuasion Techniques	236
7.5 Contrast of US Findings to Existing Case Studies	240
7.6 Limitations of Study and Implications for Future Research	245
7.7 Thesis Conclusion	246
References	258

List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: TV Media, Actors, and Paradigms	93
Figure 2. Number of transcripts focusing on fiscal policy	109
Figure 3. Number of Transcripts Focusing on Fiscal Policy By company	109
Figure 4. Total Fiscal Policy Positions by Partisan – Cable Companies.....	125
Figure 5. Total Fiscal Policy Positions by Actor Group – Cable Companies	126
Figure 6. Total Fiscal Policy Positions by Partisan – Broadcast Companies	127
Figure 7. Total Fiscal Policy Positions by Actor Group – Broadcast Companies	128
Figure 8. Fiscal Stimulus vs. Consolidation – Cable and Broadcast 2009.....	150
Figure 9. Fiscal Stimulus vs. Consolidation – Cable and Broadcast 2010.....	150
Figure 10. Fiscal Stimulus vs Consolidation by Actor Group – Cable 2009.....	151
Figure 11. Fiscal Stimulus vs Consolidation by Actor Group – Cable 2010	152
Figure 12. Pro-stimulus vs Consolidation by Actor Group – Cable 2009 and 2010.....	153
Figure 13. Dominant Spending Positions – 2009 and 2010	169
Figure 14. Specific Spending Preferences in Cable Coverage – 2009 and 2010	170
Figure 15. Specific Spending Preferences in Broadcast Coverage – 2009 and 2010	171
Figure 16. Spending Positions by Actor Group – Cable 2009	172
Figure 17. Spending Positions by Actor Group – Broadcast 2009	173
Figure 18. Spending Positions per Actor Group – Cable 2009 and 2010.....	174
Figure 19. Taxation Positions in TV Cable Coverage – 2009 and 2010	186
Figure 20. Taxation Positions in TV Broadcast Coverage – 2009 and 2010	187
Figure 21. Taxation on Wealthy Positions in Cable Coverage – 2009 and 2010.....	188
Figure 22. Taxation on Wealthy Positions by Actor Group – 2009 and 2010.....	189

Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite scholars' heightened focus on the merits and components of austerity programs in Europe and expansionary policies in the United States following the 2009 crisis, there has been minimal research into how TV media covered the crisis and presented policy alternatives. The two most relatable methodologies to the one presented in this thesis stem from Iain Pirie's "Representations of Economic Crisis in Contemporary Britain" (2012) and Julian Mercille's "The Role of the Media in Fiscal Consolidation Programmes: The Case of Ireland" (2013). Mercille introduces a new framework to categorise print editorials according to fiscal policy arguments. Mercille establishes parameters for classifying six different spending and taxation policy arguments relative to fiscal consolidation. Pirie's approach is broader, investigating three opposing narratives of the crisis presented by the British press.

This gap in the literature is puzzling, given the abundance of attention in the research area to how influential media can be in forging public perception of other key policy issues. Research into other key policy issues, such as climate change, has underscored the significant role of media in shaping how key policy debates unfold in the public spotlight. Catherine Happer and Greg Philo's "The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change" (2013) represents a significant leap forward in conceptualising the media's involvement in policy affairs and the public's understanding of policy alternatives. These studies indicate that media can foster greater public cohesion on policy issues and solutions, such as in the case of public health policies, including those related to AIDS and tobacco safety. However, it can also create more significant division and distort the clarity on policy issues, as the authors find in the case of global warming. Happer & Philo's contributions have significantly impacted how many research scholars view the media's role in policy change and social learning—unearthing new questions in the field and contributing data-led analyses on the extent of media's impact on top policy issues, including climate change and public health.

In addition to exploring scholars' differing interpretations of media's shaping of policy alternatives and narratives and its potential impact on policy issues, this thesis applies theories from Peter Hall and Mark Blyth regarding the social learning process. Authority, Blyth argues, is the supreme determinant that controls policy outcomes between collective interests and elite groups in state and society. Blyth argues that no two economic paradigms are commensurable and

that other “sociological” factors play a role in whether policies are deemed a failure or success. It is not always a logical deduction that paradigm A failed and must be replaced with paradigm B. If this were the case, Blyth argues that the Keynesian experiment tested out in 2009 by the United States would have replaced decades of neoliberal policymaking direction. However, it was only temporary, and the United States immediately began reimplementing its neoliberal strategy within the first year of the crisis.

The paradox stems from the highly regarded theoretical framework that Peter Hall developed regarding the process of social learning and its relationship to the forces between the state and society. Hall’s “Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State” (1993) is widely regarded as the most significant contribution to understanding ideational change in political economy in recent decades. Many scholars have adopted Hall’s framework, but the most notable post-crisis is Mark Blyth’s “Paradigms and Paradox: The Politics of Economic Ideas in Two Moments of Crisis” (2013). Hall’s “policy paradigm” framework emphasises two causal logics, the empirical and sociological, to explain the roles that the state and society play in the policymaking process. Blyth terms these logics the “Bayesian” and “Constructivist,” respectively.

The Bayesian logic explains paradigm change as a gradual accumulation of empirical anomalies, eventually resulting in paradigm succession. The Constructivist logic explains paradigm change as a “political struggle” stemming from the incommensurability of “truth claims, “resulting in anomalies and failures being “underdetermined by [the] evidence” (Blyth, 2013a).

Authority, Blyth states, is the key to how the two causal logics interact to explain ideational and institutional change, functioning as the “conceptual bridge” between them. Hall argues that the media is highly influential regarding “shifts in the locus of authority.” Blyth emphasises the sociological factors in shaping economic paradigms, suggesting a path-dependent process where the absence of an obvious replacement strengthens the existing paradigm’s hold, even during crises. The broader debate centres on whether the crisis period witnessed the coexistence of two paradigms, a temporary shift, or the emergence of a new paradigm, with lingering questions about the prevalence of fiscal austerity post-crisis. Both Hall and Blyth emphasise persuasion as the most intricate element within sociological logic and the predominant force of paradigm change.

This thesis further explores Blyth’s questions regarding neoliberal path dependency and the most influential factors. This thesis argues that U.S. television news companies serve as

institutional actors within the power struggle between state and society, shaping the distribution of policy authority by selectively legitimising actors, narratives, and fiscal paradigms in moments of crisis. I apply Hall and Blyth's social learning theories to US television news. Television companies serve as channels of competition for opposing ideologies and interests among elites in the state and society. I explore the role of television news in policy authority contests by introducing an original methodology and framework for analysing how TV media companies covered the crisis in the United States. Additionally, to demonstrate empirically the types of actors that were most magnified in the policy debate at critical junctures. This study's framework for categorising fiscal policy positions and different actor types provides valuable insights into how news coverage moulds elite and public opinion in understanding crises and potential policy alternatives.

What sets this study apart is its analytical treatment of media not merely as a transmitter of political debate but as an institutional actor that influences policy formation through its role in shaping perceived legitimacy and narrative coherence. By applying Hall's and Blyth's theories of social learning and paradigm stability to television media, the thesis examines how TV news companies serve as intermediaries in authority contests, framing not only what policies are imaginable or desirable but also who is permitted to articulate them. Television is conceptualised as a symbolic and discursive arena where elites from the state and society contest policy dominance and where the media's institutional logic, rooted in partisanship, commercial incentives, and simplified framing, structures the public visibility of competing economic paradigms. In this context, policy legitimacy becomes not only a matter of economic reasoning but also a function of representational authority and persuasive narrative.

It is within this conceptual framework, where television media are theorised as active agents in the struggle over economic ideas and public authority, that the present study is situated. By building an original methodology tailored to the complexities of TV coverage, this thesis aims to trace how fiscal policy preferences and competing economic paradigms were interpreted, represented, and either legitimised or marginalised in the most influential media format of the U.S. political landscape. The research design accounts for the layered dynamics of televised communication, including the interplay between hosts, guests, soundbites, and partisan framing. It also captures how editorial choices, narrative structures, and symbolic appeals to "the public"

shape the perceived credibility of policy responses. The following section outlines the study's core aims and objectives, detailing how its research questions, categorisation frameworks, and comparative analytical lens contribute to addressing the conceptual and empirical gaps identified in the existing literature.

1.1 Motivation, Aims, and Objectives

This study examines how US television news companies covered the 2009 financial crisis and its impact on shaping public understanding by crafting policy narratives and highlighting or downplaying specific issues during the peak of policymaking debates. Therefore, I set out four objectives. The first step is to create a policy categorisation framework that can be applied to television, as existing frameworks are currently limited to print media. The second is to construct a supplemental categorisation framework that analyses all the actor types involved in the discourse and their role in policy authority contests. The third is to apply Hall and Blyth's policy learning theories to examine how TV media serves as a mediator and symbol of policymaking authority. Fourth, it will examine the fiscal debate in the US during the crisis and compare its complexities and emerging narratives with those in the case studies of Britain and Ireland.

The first two objectives, creating a framework tailor-made for TV that also encompasses all actor types involved in fiscal policy debates, presented several challenges to overcome. The primary one is explicit favouritism toward one policy over another. In print media studies, this is straightforward as there is only one actor's viewpoint to consider: the editor. In TV programming, various actor types often present several viewpoints. Moreover, several voices may argue for opposing policy alternatives within the same program, making it more challenging to determine favouritism in the coverage. Packaged news clips, live interviews, and interchanging headlines as the hosts speak are also used. The persuasion tactics employed by TV media companies differ substantially from those of print media. The additional layers of complexity between print and TV coverage inspired my methodological approach to constructing a framework that can measure policy and actor favouritism.

The media's involvement in other key policy issues is well documented; however, the number of political economy scholars contributing to the research area is limited. The United States presents a unique contrast to existing case studies, and to date, there is no framework in the

literature that has examined TV media. Compared to other democracies worldwide, the US TV media is polarising and substantially commentary-oriented.

This thesis contrasts the immediate reaction of the United States to the 2009 economic crisis with that of existing case studies of Ireland and Britain, whereby fiscal consolidation was overwhelmingly favoured in Irish editorials and British print media. At the onset of the crisis in the United States, the political environment was vastly different, with demands for reform growing louder by the day. The Wall Street demonstrators were prevalent in the headlines, and Obama won a historic election with a campaign slogan that he would bring “change.” The context of this change was directed toward the growing resentment in the public toward greed in the financial industry and growing inequalities in both income and wealth—a distrust in a system that had led the country astray.

This thesis produces the first analysis of US TV media’s coverage of the 2009 fiscal debate. The existing case studies are limited to Britain and Ireland, where the conservative narrative of fiscal consolidation among political leaders and the media immediately dominated. Furthermore, the existing literature is limited to print media. Thus, given that TV media is still the preferred source of political news among the US public, I thought it would be a compelling subject matter to analyse both the differences between print and TV media and the cleavages between the US and countries that immediately favoured fiscal consolidation policies. The main themes include authority contests, persuasion, recognition, and policy narratives. The study explores research into media and society’s understanding of policy issues.

While existing research has primarily focused on European case studies, predominantly within print media, these studies have consistently indicated a propensity towards favourable coverage of neoliberal and austerity policies post-crisis. An innovative methodology is presented to bridge this gap and offer fresh insights into the American context. This original approach entails a meticulous analysis of the coverage provided by six prominent US TV media companies concerning the fiscal policymaking debate during the economic downturn. By scrutinising the narratives, framing, and discourses these influential media entities propagated, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how TV media in the United States shapes public perceptions and discourse surrounding fiscal policy decisions. Through this multifaceted analysis, I aim to illuminate the complex interplay between media representations and policy outcomes, thereby

contributing to a deeper understanding of the broader dynamics that shape political and economic landscapes.

While the four objectives are rooted in empirical goals, they also serve a deeper analytical purpose. They are designed to test the relationship between policy discourse and ideological reproduction through the lens of Hall's and Blyth's theories of social learning and authority. The categorisation frameworks developed in this study provide a mechanism for capturing the discursive dynamics of televised policy debates, mapping which actor types gained visibility, how fiscal policy positions were framed, and how authority was constructed or contested in real-time. By applying these tools to a high-stakes moment of economic crisis, the study not only offers insight into the role of television media in shaping public understanding of policy choices but also contributes to a broader understanding of how institutional actors influence the trajectory of paradigm stability or disruption.

The thesis poses two primary research questions: 1) How did TV media in the United States conceptualise the crisis, and how does that contrast to countries favouring austerity programs at the onset? Furthermore, 2) What types of actors were most prevalent in the discourse, and how does that relate to policy authority?

To address these research questions and objectives, a tailored methodological approach was required, one that could capture both the content and structure of televised policy debates. The complexity of television media, its commentary-driven format, and the multiplicity of actor voices necessitated a framework that could systematically categorise fiscal policy positions while accounting for the diverse agents involved in shaping policy narratives. Unlike print media, where editorial opinion is more singularly expressed, television presents competing claims, layered framing devices, and a continuous interplay between host perspectives and guest commentary. These conditions necessitated the development of an innovative, multidimensional categorisation framework that could analyse policy argumentation while simultaneously mapping the authority and visibility of distinct actor types. The following section outlines the specific data sources, sampling decisions, and coding strategies employed to operationalise this framework and support the empirical analysis. It also demonstrates how the framework captures both the ideological content and institutional dynamics embedded in televised fiscal policy discourse.

1.2 Approach and Data

To address the research aims and questions of this thesis, I developed an original framework for policy favouritism and actor categorisation, which is the first of its kind in the field of political economy research. The framework developed also necessitated an original search query methodology to extract the data in a manageable form. All data was derived from the LexisNexis database. After extensive trial and error, unique parameters were set to maximise efficiency by extracting relevant data within a manageable scope. The categorisation framework captures 15 different actor types, two broad policy categories (stimulus vs consolidation), six specific spending policies, and six specific taxation policies. The timeframe of the data was selected based on the timing of the fiscal budget calendar and by analysing the most heightened periods of the budgetary debate, which occurred in February and March in both 2009 and 2010, as seen in Figure 2. In total, including all six US TV news companies, 511 TV transcripts were analysed in 2009 and 271 transcripts in 2010, producing thousands of policy arguments to analyse, as seen in Figure 3.

Rose and Baumgartner (2013) and Pirie (2012) inspired the key term approach used in data extraction. Rose and Baumgartner, analysing five US newspapers from 1960 to 2008, find that heightened negative media coverage of low-income populations preceding budgetary plans and announcements between 1960 and 2008 resulted in less welfare funding. Pirie assigns a different string of key terms to differing crisis narratives, such as ‘public spending’ and ‘national debt’ to identify articles about the public debt crisis or terms like “derivatives” to identify articles relevant to financial regulation.

The two most relatable categorisation frameworks to the one presented in this thesis stem from Iain Pirie’s “Representations of Economic Crisis in Contemporary Britain” (2012) and Julian Mercille’s “The Role of the Media in Fiscal Consolidation Programmes: The Case of Ireland” (2013). Mercille introduces a new framework to categorise print editorials according to the policy arguments it promotes. Mercille establishes parameters for classifying six different spending and taxation policy arguments relative to fiscal consolidation. Pirie’s approach is broader, investigating three opposing narratives of crisis understanding presented by the British press. Was the 2009 crisis a failure of the private sector and financial industry, inept fiscal policymaking and overregulation of the state, or were global factors to blame? Pirie finds, surprisingly, that the British press overwhelmingly portrayed the crisis as either inept fiscal policymaking by the

political leadership and regulatory overreach or, as the case was with Financial Times reporting, emphasised global and external forces in defining the crisis.

The policy categorisation framework presented in this thesis was inspired by Julian Mercille's Irish case study, "The Role of the Media in Fiscal Consolidation Programmes: The Case of Ireland." Mercille argues that what inspired his research was the substantial gap in political economy between studies that analyse the key aspects of austerity programs and debate the efficacy of specific measures and the extent to which scholars pay attention to how those policy alternatives are presented by the media and interpreted by the public. Mercille argues that within political economy research, the media's role in fiscal policymaking is significantly understated, as the wide acceptance of its importance is well documented in other research areas. Mercille's case study is one of two key studies highlighted in this thesis that have emerged since the 2009 crisis. The other study, "Representations of Economic Crisis in Contemporary Britain" (2012), was conducted by Iain Pirie. Pirie argued that moments of great economic uncertainty and imbalance provide the "space" for political reform. Mercille and Pirie's findings represent the most significant advancements in the literature to date regarding the media's role in presenting policy alternatives and how the public understood the 2009 economic crisis.

Europe and most of the G20 nations' immediate response to the crisis was to implement austerity measures. The primary focus of the existing case studies is fiscal consolidation, a staple instrument of austerity. In 2009, the United States was one of only a handful of countries that reacted to the crisis by constructing a large-scale fiscal expansionary strategy. The US's neo-Keynesian effort is part of a much broader scholarly debate over the economic paradigms in flux during the crisis, a struggle between neo-liberal and neo-Keynesian ideologies. The United States policy debate is also unique from the existing case studies in that the crisis was seen more as a national crisis. In contrast, the media in Ireland and Britain conceptualised the affair as a global economic crisis. In the United States, the fiscal discourse was more dynamic at the onset, as it involved two conflicting strategies, fiscal stimulus vs fiscal consolidation, both of which would become polarised.

The original methodological framework constructed in this thesis approaches the fiscal debate from a series of lenses, moving from the broadest policies (fiscal consolidation vs stimulus) to more narrow policies that fit within the broader policy aims. The term 'stimulus' is commonly

used in media and political discourse to refer to fiscal expansionary policies that embody neo-Keynesian ideology. Following a broad categorisation framework, the methodology enables an analysis of more specific policy arguments and favouritism, such as spending and taxation positions. Fiscal policy strategies involving spending and taxation measures can be constructed in varying ways. The methodology is designed to align with the logical sequence of the debate. Specific spending and policy positions fall under two broader, conflicting strategies: austerity versus expansionary policies, or, as we define it in our framework, fiscal consolidation versus fiscal stimulus. Furthermore, one of the primary contributions of this study is the ability to capture the types of actors presenting each fiscal policy argument, which provides new insights that aid in explaining TV media's involvement in the policy learning process.

The analytical framework and data collection strategies outlined above provided the foundation for a systematic and multi-dimensional investigation into how U.S. television media covered the 2009 fiscal crisis. By capturing thousands of policy arguments across six major networks and classifying them by policy stance and actor type, the study offers a unique lens through which to assess the dynamics of persuasion, visibility, and ideological framing. The structure and granularity of the categorisation frameworks enabled a comparative and temporal analysis that highlights significant shifts in narrative emphasis and partisan alignment. The following subchapter presents the key empirical findings that emerged from this approach, revealing critical patterns in actor representation, policy favouritism, and media framing across both years under study.

1.3 Findings and Contributions

Significant and intriguing findings were discovered in each of the empirical subchapters. Notably, the discourse from 2009 to 2010 is substantially skewed toward Republican viewpoints across all cable and broadcast companies. The results suggest that the opposition party received more representation in the coverage than the party in power across broadcast and cable networks. In 2009, the partisan skew for cable companies was 69% Republican, while for broadcast, it was 72% Republican.

The second noteworthy finding is that the fiscal policy coverage of all six US TV media companies analysed in 2009 was highly favourable to fiscal stimulus efforts, apart from FOX

News. In 2009, out of 992 recorded positions in favour of either fiscal stimulus or fiscal consolidation, 75% were in favour of fiscal stimulus, and 25% were in favour of fiscal consolidation. However, by 2010, our results indicate an extreme shift in coverage and attitudes toward public debt and the fiscal deficit. Of the 245 total positions for either stimulus or consolidation, 63% supported fiscal consolidation. The 2010 results indicate a 38% drop in support for fiscal stimulus efforts and a 38% increase in favouritism toward fiscal consolidation programs in contrast to the previous year.

Third of the noteworthy findings is the essential intricacies between branding strategy and how policy alternatives were presented throughout the discourse on each network, as revealed by the actor categorisation. For example, CNN's reputation is perceived as less partisan when considering the collective views of Republican and Democratic viewers. The results show that CNN relied more on hard news reporting than its competitors. In 2009, Obama received more than double the coverage on CNN (19%) than FOX (9%). More indicative of this divide, the largest gap (15%) in representation among a specific actor group was the policy positions presented directly by media hosts. Media host's opinions represented 12% of CNN's total coverage and 27% of FOX's. Another example is the significant skew FOX had in presenting and hosting Republican elites in comparison to Democrat elites. In 2009, FOX presented 187 positions favouring fiscal stimulus or consolidation. Of those, 12% were presented by Democratic representatives and 32% by Republican representatives. FOX's gap in partisan representation was an outlier compared to its competitors. CNN's coverage presented 531 broad policy positions, whereby 16% were presented by Democrats and 17% by Republican representatives. MSNBC's coverage presented 156 positions, with Democrat representatives presenting 19% and Republican representatives presenting 15%.

Fourth is the drastic shift in discussing specific taxation policies between 2009 and 2010. By 2010, we saw a sharp reduction in the more commentary-oriented FOX News and MSNBC regarding 'pro-tax cut' arguments. Pro-tax cut positions fell 10% on FOX and 15% on MSNBC from 2009 to 2010. However, as pro-tax-cut positions were less frequent, tax arguments opposing tax increases became more prevalent. On FOX, roughly 84% of the overall 73 taxation arguments opposed tax increases, representing a 19% increase. This shift highlights a reorientation of the

taxation discourse, where opposition to tax increases supplanted support for tax cuts as the dominant rhetorical focus.

Fifth, it is apparent that taxation on the wealthy and business class became the focal point of the 2009 discourse. The culmination of consistent messaging from Republican political leaders and FOX News commentary, together with the emergence of the Tea Party movement, was at the root of this transition. In 2009, 29% of overall taxation positions favoured tax increases on the wealthy; however, this percentage had decreased to 13% by 2010 (Figure 19). The substantial shift in the one-year time frame is driven primarily by the drop in attention to taxation policy as a whole and less magnification on the wealthy and corporate class.

This thesis makes five key contributions to the study of political economy, media, and policy discourse. First, it presents the first in-depth case study of U.S. television media coverage during the 2009 economic crisis within this research area. Unlike previous case studies focused on Ireland and Britain, where fiscal consolidation was rapidly adopted and media coverage aligned with austerity narratives, the U.S. case offers a contrasting trajectory. The crisis originated domestically, the budgetary response was initially expansionary, and the policy debate unfolded in a highly polarised, nationally focused media environment. The U.S. case required the development of a more nuanced and multi-layered methodology to account for the dynamic and fragmented nature of the policy debate, the diversity of ideological perspectives, and the plurality of actor types involved.

Second, the thesis introduces a novel methodological framework that is unprecedented in two respects. It is the first categorisation framework explicitly designed to analyse fiscal policy discourse in television media, expanding upon previous frameworks developed for print. It also represents the first empirical study to capture the rise and rapid decline of support for neo-Keynesian policy solutions in real-time, revealing a 38% drop in media support for stimulus within a year and a parallel surge in consolidation narratives. The framework tracks the proliferation of arguments by actor type, thereby exposing how special interest groups, such as the Tea Party, were platformed by specific networks to reshape the fiscal narrative and alter the public consensus.

Third, this thesis is the first to systematically map actor visibility and policy argumentation within television news using a multi-layered categorisation framework. This enables a granular

examination of who gets to speak, what positions they promote, and how these patterns vary across networks. Unlike print-based studies where the editorial voice is singular, TV discourse features multiple actors—anchors, guests, clips, and political figures—competing for narrative authority. This distinction provides novel insights into the mechanisms of media persuasion and the interplay between actor prominence, policy framing, and network branding strategies.

Fourth, the study contributes an original argument about CNN's distinct and underappreciated role in shaping fiscal policy discourse and constructing policy legitimacy. Positioned as an ideologically centrist network with perceived neutrality among both Democrat and Republican viewers, CNN held disproportionate sway in mediating the contours of public legitimacy. While less overtly partisan than FOX or MSNBC, CNN's shifting tone—particularly in 2010—helped legitimise conservative fiscal narratives by amplifying centrist Republican voices and reducing exposure to progressive or interventionist alternatives. This contribution refines existing understandings of agenda-setting power, suggesting that perceived neutrality may function as a conduit for ideological consolidation under the guise of objectivity.

Finally, the thesis contributes to the political economy literature by re-situating television media as a central actor in the formation and contestation of policy paradigms. Drawing on Hall's theory of policy paradigms and Blyth's emphasis on sociological and political authority in ideational change, the study conceptualises TV news as both a symbolic and structural force in policymaking. The empirical findings demonstrate how media companies act as intermediaries in contests between state and societal actors, selectively curating the discursive terrain upon which paradigmatic alternatives are legitimised or excluded. By developing and applying a categorisation framework grounded in these theoretical foundations, the thesis enhances our understanding of how the media mediate power, forge consent, and delimit the conditions under which paradigm shifts may occur.

The findings and contributions outlined above not only address the empirical and conceptual gaps in the existing literature but also demonstrate the effectiveness of the thesis's novel methodological framework and theoretical orientation. To support these contributions, the remainder of the thesis is structured to guide the reader from theoretical grounding to methodological development through to empirical analysis and interpretive synthesis. The following section outlines the structure and logic of the chapters that follow.

1.4 Chapter Overview

The thesis is divided into four parts. The first part is the literature review, followed by the methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 represent the literature review and provide context to the empirical and discussion chapters. Chapter 5 presents the original methodology and categorisation framework of this thesis to analyse TV media, an approach that is the first of its kind in political economy research. Chapter 6 presents the results chapter, which constitutes my empirical findings derived from the methodology. Chapter 7, the discussion chapter, analyses the empirical findings in the context of the original research questions and existing case studies. The final chapter concludes by bringing together all the elements of the study. The study's achievements and answers to the research questions are discussed.

Chapter 2, the first of the literature review, examines how crises can expand or constrain opportunities for economic paradigm change, with particular attention to the role of television media. Chapter 2 lays the conceptual and analytical groundwork for the thesis by tracing how economic paradigms emerge, stabilise, and become contested during moments of crisis. The chapter begins by introducing the concept of paradigms, drawing on Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions and Peter Hall's adaptation of this model to the field of political economy. This framing establishes the crisis as a potential site for ideational contests, where frameworks are challenged. It also introduces Mark Blyth's critique of the rationalist assumptions embedded in Hall's model, thereby positioning social learning as a politically contingent process shaped by power, ideas, and institutional embeddedness.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the chapter proceeds to examine the ideological terrain surrounding the 2008 financial crisis. It provides a comparative overview of the primary economic schools of thought—Keynesian, Neoclassical, Austrian, and Marxist—highlighting their competing diagnoses of the crisis and preferred policy solutions. This section sets the stage for understanding how these economic ideologies entered the media domain, where they were simplified into binaries such as stimulus versus austerity or spending versus taxation. The chapter then turns to the media's role in filtering, translating, and legitimizing these paradigms. Drawing on framing theory, it demonstrates how cable news networks, such as CNN, FOX, and MSNBC,

framed fiscal policy debates in ways that aligned with distinct ideological preferences, often amplifying partisan narratives while marginalising others.

The latter sections of Chapter 2 shift the focus from ideological content to actor representation and structural constraint. Furthermore, the symbolic construction of “the public” is analysed as a discursive tool used by both state and media actors to legitimize specific policy stances. Finally, the chapter explores the structural conditions that limit media pluralism and entrench dominant economic paradigms. Drawing on political economy critiques of the media system, it argues that institutional logic, elite sourcing, and ownership concentration constrain the discursive space within which alternative paradigms can gain traction. In this way, Chapter 2 not only outlines the theoretical architecture of the thesis but also demonstrates how media systems shape the boundaries of economic imagination during periods of crisis.

Chapter 3 begins by retracing the origins of the social learning process, as developed by Thomas Kuhn in his work, “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions” (1962). Kuhn’s framework was later adopted by Peter Hall and applied to research in economics and policy learning. Peter Hall’s “Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State” (1993) is widely regarded as the most significant contribution to understanding ideational change in political economy in recent decades. Many scholars have expanded on Hall’s “policy paradigm” framework, but most notable since the crisis is Mark Blyth’s “Paradigms and Paradox: The Politics of Economic Ideas in Two Moments of Crisis” (2013). Hall’s framework emphasises two causal logics, the empirical and sociological, to explain the roles that the state and society play in policymaking regarding the process of social learning and paradigm change. Blyth terms these logics the “Bayesian” and “Constructivist,” respectively. Since the crisis, more attention has been allocated to analysing policy outcomes as a social learning process, whereby both logics appear evident in the post-crisis experience (Kirshner, 2014).

The Bayesian logic explains paradigm change as a gradual accumulation of empirical anomalies, eventually resulting in paradigm succession. The Constructivist logic explains paradigm change as a “political struggle” stemming from the incommensurability of “truth claims.” Resulting in anomalies and failures being “underdetermined by [the] evidence” (Blyth, 2013a).

Blyth's *Great Transformations* (2002) and "Any More Bright Ideas" article (1997) have made him "possibly the most convincing exponent and advocate of ideational explanation in comparative political economy" (Hay, 2004, p. 207). Blyth considers several implications of the post-crisis outcome for the paradigm struggle, the popularity of austerity, and why authority is the key to understanding policy outcomes.

Blyth argues that authority is key to how the two causal logics interact to explain ideational change, functioning as the "conceptual bridge" between them. Hall argues that the media is highly influential regarding "shifts in the locus of authority."

The later portion of Chapter 3 discusses the impact of neoliberal ideologies on government power and policymaking. Many scholars argue that neoliberalism benefits economic elites at the expense of social equality, with policies such as tax cuts and fiscal consolidation contributing to income inequality. It argues that neoliberalism, characterised by deregulation, privatisation, and reduction of public spending, has led governments to seek alternative methods to retain power in the face of marketisation. Scholars suggest that while the state has not lost power entirely, it has adapted to new styles of governance, forming networks with state and non-state actors to define collective interests and implement policies. Critics have raised concerns about special interest groups using television news platforms to maintain and bolster their policy agenda, potentially undermining transparency and the representation of majority interests. Additionally, budgetary constraints have led to increased reliance on external policy experts.

Chapter 3 also explores the struggle between economic paradigms that occurred at the beginning of the crisis. Despite significant failures of the existing neoliberal paradigm, a clear alternative did not emerge, leading to a rediscovery of fiscal policy in the United States. The initial neo-Keynesian response showed promise, but concerns about deficits prompted a return to fiscal consolidation among most G20 members, including the US. Blyth emphasises the sociological factors in shaping economic paradigms, suggesting a path-dependent process where the absence of a straightforward replacement strengthens the existing paradigm's hold, even in crises. The debate centres on whether this period witnessed the coexistence of two paradigms, a temporary shift, or the emergence of a new paradigm, with lingering questions about the prevalence of fiscal austerity post-crisis.

Chapter 3 concludes by exploring the prevalence of fiscal austerity measures before and after crises, particularly emphasised in political agendas. Austerity advocates argue that reducing public spending and sovereign debt promotes competitiveness and private investment. However, evidence suggests that countries implementing austerity measures post-crisis often faced higher unemployment rates and weaker economic growth than those pursuing stimulus strategies. Notably, Alberto Alesina and other prominent austerity advocates have faced criticism from the International Monetary Fund for their methodologies.

Chapter 4 expands the focus on the contentious issue of fiscal austerity policies and the media's role in shaping policy narratives and discourse. Many scholars argue that media is crucial in disseminating information and constructing narratives surrounding economic crises and policy responses, shaping public and elite understanding.

Chapter 4 also explores recent scholarly contributions, such as the work of Happer and Philo (2013), which suggests an intricate relationship exists between television media and social change, stemming from how the media moulds public opinion. They underscore the media's pivotal role in informing the public through empirical analysis, particularly in areas where audiences lack direct experience. Their research emphasises how dominant media narratives can establish specific understandings of social issues, affecting public attitudes and behavioural patterns. The author's study on climate change highlights the significance of media messaging on public attitudes. Despite scientific consensus on the urgency of climate action, the media's dissemination of conflicting information has fostered uncertainty among the public, leading to disengagement. Happer and Philo reveal how elite groups have strategically spread disinformation through media, including television, to steer public discourse.

Furthermore, Chapter 4 examines the evolving landscape of political information consumption in the United States, with a primary focus on the continued dominance of television media despite the rise of the internet and social media platforms. Moreover, selective exposure and media branding drive the worsening partisan divide in news consumption. It also raises questions about the role of media in shaping political discourse and the potential consequences of partisan polarisation and selective exposure in news coverage. Chapter 4 details the significance of wealthy interest groups and think tanks' ability to infiltrate media coverage and policy

discourse. It examines conservative think tanks and grassroots movements, such as the Tea Party, illustrating how elite donors shape political agendas through media and advocacy.

Chapter 5, the methodology chapter, begins by discussing related methodologies. The two most relatable methodologies stem from Iain Pirie's "Representations of Economic Crisis in Contemporary Britain" (2012) and Julian Mercille's "The Role of the Media in Fiscal Consolidation Programmes: The Case of Ireland" (2013). Mercille introduces a new framework to categorise print editorials according to the policy arguments it promotes. Mercille establishes parameters for classifying six different spending and taxation policy arguments relative to fiscal consolidation. Pirie's approach is broader, investigating three opposing narratives of crisis understanding presented by the British press. Was the 2009 crisis a failure of the private sector and financial industry, inept fiscal policymaking and overregulation of the state, or were global factors to blame? Pirie finds, surprisingly, that the British press overwhelmingly portrayed the crisis as either inept fiscal policymaking by the political leadership and regulatory overreach or, as the case was with Financial Times reporting, emphasised global and external forces in defining the crisis.

Following the related methodologies, the chapter presents the policy and actor categorisation framework developed for this thesis. Additionally, the chapter details the search query methodology used for data extraction. All data was derived from the LexisNexis database. After extensive trial and error, unique parameters were set to maximise efficiency by extracting relevant data within a manageable scope.

Rose and Baumgartner (2013) and Pirie (2012) inspired the key term approach used in data extraction. Rose and Baumgartner, analysing five US newspapers from 1960 to 2008, found that periods of greater negative media coverage of the poor, particularly before budgetary plans and announcements, between 1960 and 2008, resulted in less welfare funding. Pirie assigns a different string of key terms to different crisis narratives, such as 'public spending' and 'national debt' to identify articles on the public debt crisis or terms like "derivatives" to identify articles relevant to financial regulation.

The categorisation framework captures 15 different actor types, two broad policy categories, six specific spending policies, and six specific taxation policies. The timeframe of the data was selected based on the timing of the fiscal budget calendar and by analysing the most heightened periods of the budgetary debate, which occurred in February and March in both 2009

and 2010, as seen in Figure 2. In total, including all six US TV news companies, 511 TV transcripts were analysed in 2009 and 271 transcripts in 2010, producing thousands of policy arguments to analyse, as seen in Figure 3.

Chapter 6, the results chapter, begins by looking at all the actor types involved. Subchapter 6.1 provides a wide-lens view, capturing the entirety of the debate, including the actors most prevalent and those most absent from the debate. The significant differences between the cable companies highlight the strategic differences in how they present to their audiences and the trust each viewership places in certain actor types. It also provides an overview of the political skew of each company's coverage. The remaining three subchapters of the results focus on the policy favouritism demonstrated by each of the six US TV companies, comprising three broadcast and three cable companies. Subchapters 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4 focus on fiscal policy favouritism. The framework starts with the two broadest forms of fiscal policy, stimulus vs consolidation, and then works into more specific spending and taxation policies within these broader strategies.

Chapter 7, the discussion chapter, synthesises the empirical findings and interprets them through the thesis's conceptual and categorisation frameworks. It begins by revisiting the two core research questions and mapping the results against the original objectives. The chapter contrasts the media and fiscal policy dynamics in the United States with the existing case studies of Ireland and Britain, highlighting key differences in narrative framing, actor visibility, and policy authority. It reflects on how television networks helped construct the ideological and symbolic terrain in which certain policy alternatives gained traction while others were marginalised. Drawing on Hall's and Blyth's theories, the chapter re-examines persuasion as a mechanism of social learning, situating media framing within a broader process of ideational reinforcement and paradigm constraint.

The chapter concludes by arguing that television media functioned not merely as observers of elite debate but as powerful intermediaries in the struggle over policy legitimacy. The findings illustrate how news networks curated fiscal discourse by amplifying specific actors, legitimising dominant narratives, and invoking "the public" to support particular paradigms. These representational strategies reveal how media platforms have become central sites for authority contests between state and societal actors, shaping the parameters of policymaking in moments of crisis. Ultimately, Chapter 7 demonstrates that television media are not just reflections of the

political economy—they are embedded within it, helping to stabilise or contest the prevailing policy order and shaping the likelihood of paradigm change.

The chapter overview presented above clarifies how each component of the thesis contributes to the overarching research questions and theoretical concerns. With this roadmap in place, the thesis now turns to establishing the broader conceptual and ideological context in which the empirical analysis is situated. Chapter 2 provides the intellectual foundation for the study by exploring how crises function as openings for economic paradigm debate and how television media interpret, filter, and reframe these contests for public and political consumption. It situates television media beyond simple conveyors of information and as ideological actors that help construct the very boundaries of fiscal legitimacy.

Chapter 2: Crises, Economic Paradigms, and Media's Role

The financial crisis of 2008–2010 represented a critical rupture in global economic governance, exposing the vulnerabilities of prevailing policy orthodoxies and triggering renewed debate over the state's role, the limitations of market solutions, and the path to recovery. While such crises may destabilise dominant frameworks, they do not automatically result in paradigm change. As Peter A. Hall (1993) and Mark Blyth (2013) argue, crises are contested terrains in which competing ideas vie for authority, and paradigm shifts depend as much on discourse, persuasion, and institutional power as on empirical anomalies. In this context, the media—particularly television—play a central role in shaping the discursive environment in which policy alternatives are interpreted, legitimised, or dismissed. This chapter investigates how television media influenced the boundaries of fiscal legitimacy during the crisis by framing its causes, filtering economic paradigms, and shaping public and political perceptions of viable responses.

Chapter two has multiple parts. Subchapter 2.1 provides background to defining ideological paradigms and their applications to economic theory. Subchapter 2.2 details the theoretical underlying of paradigm struggles as a process of social learning and the role of television. Subchapter 2.3 examines how television served as an interpreter of the economic crisis, employing framing and agenda-setting to simplify complex developments and establish early narratives about the crisis and its causes. Subchapter 2.4 examines how television media shaped public understanding of the 2008–2009 financial crisis by framing competing economic paradigms

and policy responses. Drawing on framing theory and paradigm shift literature, it explores how networks such as FOX, CNN, and MSNBC promoted divergent ideological narratives—ranging from Keynesian interventionism to neoliberal austerity—that influenced perceptions of legitimacy, state responsibility, and fiscal policy tools. The subchapter also analyses how structural, institutional, and elite constraints limited the scope of paradigm change, despite the discursive opening created by the crisis. Subchapter 2.5 focuses on framing specific fiscal interventions, including stimulus spending, austerity, and taxation, and shows how media representations shaped their political legitimacy. Finally, Subchapter 2.5 examines the structural features of the media system, drawing on political economy to explain how elite sourcing, ownership concentration, and commercial pressures limit the discursive space for alternative paradigms and reinforce neoliberal path-dependency.

This chapter provides the conceptual and contextual foundation necessary for understanding how television media shaped fiscal policy discourse during the 2008–2010 crisis and influenced the conditions for paradigm stability or change. It traces the evolution of economic paradigms in the United States, reviews theoretical models of policy learning and ideational change, and situates media as both an interpretive filter and an active agent in the construction of fiscal legitimacy. By examining competing economic ideologies, alternative policy preferences, and the role of media in framing these debates, the chapter clarifies how televised discourse mediated public understanding and shaped the symbolic and institutional boundaries of viable policy responses. In doing so, Chapter 2 directly supports the thesis's central objective: to investigate how media representation influences paradigm resilience and the distribution of policy authority during times of crisis. To begin this analysis, Subchapter 2.1 examines the historical development of economic paradigms in the United States and the conceptual foundations of paradigm change.

2.1 The evolution of economic paradigms in the United States

Firstly, it is critical to define what a paradigm is. Secondly, to assess how those parameters apply to economic theory and fiscal policymaking. Thomas Kuhn popularised the term "paradigm." According to Kuhn, paradigm shifts resulted from "scientific revolutions." Kuhn endeavoured to understand further how scientific theories replace each other as society evolves. The sequence

Kuhn explores starts with what he refers to as 'normal science' "with a paradigm and a dedication to solving puzzles; followed by serious anomalies, which lead to a crisis; and finally, resolution of the crisis by a new paradigm" (Kuhn, 1962). The concepts Kuhn discusses as to what constitutes a paradigm have transcended many disciplines and have shaped how scholars interpret economic theories. Kuhn defines a paradigm as a set of practices that defines a scientific discipline at any specific period. Kuhn describes a paradigm as a set of underlying theories, methods, and assumptions that guide how scientists understand evidence and develop policy responses. He further suggests that paradigms go beyond ideational frameworks and are embedded within the broader institutional and social contexts that sustain them.

In political economy research, scholars have explored how paradigms shape the formulation and implementation of economic policies, especially during times of crisis. For instance, in 2009, scholars fixated on the sudden shift from a neoliberal paradigm that had dominated the last thirty years to a more state interventionist or Keynesian approach—two conflicting theories that substantially differ in the fundamentals of the role of government in economic management.

The term "scientific revolutions," in the title of Thomas Kuhns's most famous work, encapsulates the transformative power of paradigmatic struggles and provides a foundation for analysing the evolution of economic theory and policies in response to a crisis. A crisis, such as the one experienced in 2009, is a moment of elevated uncertainty in which the current school of thinking suffers severe failures.

Prominent economic theory scholar Mark Blyth explains the evolution of paradigm change since the Great Depression in simplistic terms. Blyth describes the period following the Great Depression up to the 1970s as a period dominated by Keynesian thinking. This period sparked a new wave of belief in a more prominent government role in economic affairs—an interventionist approach dedicated to managing demand and stability. The New Deal policies enacted in response to the Depression consisted of greater social protections, large-scale state-funded projects, and reforms to counteract future instability.

In the 1970s, inflation and unemployment began to rise, and economists and policymakers began to distrust Keynesian theories. The growing distrust allowed space for neoliberal theorists to persuade policymakers that less state intervention and regulation would enable markets to act

more rationally and self-correct. The policy focus shifted to greater tax cuts, deregulation, and more emphasis on monetary policy measures to manage inflation.

Like the transition in the 1930s and 1970s, the 2008 crisis revealed severe flaws in the neoliberal paradigm, particularly the problems with too much deregulation and dependence on financial institutions. The extreme economic uncertainty and plummeting markets led to a resurrection of Keynesian advocates and calls for policymakers to take drastic steps rooted in more significant state intervention to provide stability.

Blyth emphasises the authority contest between austerity and stimulus measures, contrasting the American experiment with that of the UK and Europe. Blyth's work has spurred rich debate into the implications of the paradigm struggle between Keynesians and market-oriented advocates, and the neoliberal paradigm's resilience despite critical failures. Since the crisis, more scholars have prioritised analysing the contest between organised elite institutions and individuals during paradigm conflicts and the media's influence in shaping these dynamics.

Tracing the evolution of economic paradigms and their responsiveness to periods of crisis provides essential context for understanding how such moments can provoke either continuity or substantial changes within policymaking. These shifts unfold through contested interpretations and struggles over authority and legitimacy. The way in which paradigms are reframed and made politically viable is inseparable from the institutions and discourses that carry them. This understanding lays the groundwork for analysing how crises not only expose policy shortcomings but also open discursive space for competing narratives, claims of authority, and ideational reorientation.

To further explore how paradigm change unfolds, the following section introduces the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis. It focuses on the concept of policy paradigms and the processes of social learning, particularly in relation to the media's role in shaping public and elite perceptions. Emphasis is placed on how television, as a dominant medium of political communication, contributes to defining which economic ideas are rendered credible, visible, or marginal during crisis periods. This theoretical foundation enables a more precise understanding of how economic ideas become embedded, or contested, within the public sphere and the policy process.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation: Policy Paradigms and Social Learning

Television, as a key platform for political communication, plays a significant role in shaping the discourse of policymaking. Through policy framing, television media shapes how policy solutions are interpreted and accepted by the public and policymakers. During a heightened period of political and public debate, such as the 2008-2010 crisis, when actors between the state and society actively contest economic paradigms, the media plays a crucial role in mediating the public's understanding of economic and political choices. This review will examine the role of television media in interpreting and persuading policy stances and choices, focusing on the theory of policy paradigms, the media's role in framing and persuasion, and the roles of different actor groups in the policy process.

One of the central frameworks for understanding the role of media in policy representation is the concept of policy paradigms, first developed by Peter A. Hall (1993) in his seminal work on the evolution of economic policymaking. A policy paradigm refers to the shared beliefs, frameworks, and practices that guide decision-making within a policy domain. An ideological paradigm is formed by institutions of the state and the influence of societal actors, including political elites, the public, and the media. Over time, paradigms shift, particularly during periods of crisis when new ideas and external pressures challenge existing frameworks. Hall's framework emphasises the role of social learning—the process by which actors adjust their beliefs and practices in response to new experiences or information.

Economic paradigmatic replacement entails profound transformations in the underlying assumptions about the roles of the state, markets, and society. Hall and Mark Blyth (2013) argue that crises destabilise prevailing paradigms, yet new paradigms take time to solidify, leading to a period of uncertainty and heightened policy debate.

Blyth further explores these ideas in *Paradigms and Paradox: The Politics of Economic Ideas in Two Moments of Crisis*, focusing on the political and economic implications of the 2008–2010 financial collapse. Blyth contends that a crisis alone does not automatically lead to a paradigm shift—it merely creates the conditions for change. Alternative policy paradigms become subject to intense contests between elite actors within the state and society and must gain traction with policymakers and the broader public for a shift to occur.

The emergence of a new policy paradigm typically depends on a set of interrelated conditions. First is a critical anomaly that creates mass frustration with the prevailing policymaking orthodoxy. Second, it is a period of great uncertainty in which decision-makers and the public struggle to interpret the crisis and identify solutions. Third, credible alternatives must exist. Fourth, the alternatives must gain traction through a process of social learning, whereby new ideas acquire legitimacy through exposure to media narratives and public debate. Ultimately, the momentum behind paradigm alternatives hinges on social mobility, the active engagement of political leaders and social groups, and, most importantly, media discourse that challenges the dominant order and promotes alternative frameworks.

Television news plays a crucial role in this process by shaping public perceptions of the crisis and the legitimacy of differing policy solutions. During the 2008-10 financial crisis, cable TV news played a crucial role in interpreting the causes of the crisis, whether by highlighting the failures of neoliberalism or emphasising the need for government intervention. Television media functions as a discursive arena where policy solutions are contested and legitimised.

With the theoretical framework of policy paradigms and media framing in place, the following section examines the competing economic ideologies that emerged during the crisis. These ideological frameworks—Keynesian, Neoclassical, Austrian, and Marxist—offer distinct interpretations of the crisis's cause and potential solutions. Understanding these intellectual fault lines is crucial for interpreting how the media subsequently framed fiscal debates and influenced the boundaries of acceptable economic discourse. Their varying emphases on state intervention, market autonomy, and systemic critique laid the groundwork for divergent media narratives and policy preferences.

2.3 Competing Economic Ideologies of the Crisis

Having established how television shaped early crisis narratives, we now examine how it mediated competing visions of economic responsibility, policy legitimacy, and systemic reform. The 2009-10 financial crisis marked a significant turning point in U.S. fiscal policymaking. It inspired a resurgence of research on the state's role in combating the recession that resulted from the crisis within the field of political economy. The increased attention of notable scholars within political

economy research has led to differing interpretations of its causes and implications, which has profoundly influenced views on the process of social learning relative to policymaking and the importance of the state in future economic affairs. The theoretical differences reflect the broader ideological divide regarding the role of government, the efficacy of market mechanisms, and the responsibilities of the financial industry. I will discuss the most popular theorists: Austrian, Keynesian, Marxist, and Neoclassical.

Noteworthy Keynesian theorists, such as Mark Blyth, Paul Krugman, and Joseph Stiglitz, emphasise that deregulation allowed risky financial products to destabilise financial markets, which led to the crisis. Krugman, from the very onset of the crisis, was outspoken about the need for government intervention and the leveraging of expansionary fiscal policy in a historic fashion. Krugman started a media campaign tour, appearing as a guest on numerous television outlets. Additionally, in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, Krugman advocated for fiscal spending on a scale similar to the New Deal, the response to the Great Depression. In the New York Times in October 2008, Krugman wrote, "It is politically fashionable to rant against government spending and demand fiscal responsibility. But right now, increased government spending is just what the doctor ordered, and concerns about the budget deficit should be put on hold."

Stiglitz argued that dismantling titans within the banking sector would reduce the potential for a similar crisis in the future and increase competition within the sector. Stiglitz advocated for enhanced international coordination among the IMF and the World Bank to address future crises. Importantly, Stiglitz was among many Keynesians who advocated for an expansionary stimulus to boost demand and public investments in infrastructure, thus creating jobs and stimulating the economy. Keynesians also emphasised addressing extreme income and wealth inequality by increasing taxes on the wealthy and corporations to help finance more public spending and investment.

Stiglitz, through three key publications, offers a nuanced critique of the structural and intellectual foundations that led to the collapse. In "The Anatomy of a Murder: Who Killed America's Economy?" (2009), Stiglitz presents an indictment of the economic and political actors responsible for the crisis. Stiglitz criticises theories that unpredictable shocks led to the crisis and argues that deliberate policy decisions and institutional failures are to blame. Like his other Keynesian counterparts, Stiglitz points to the deregulation of financial markets, the rapid rise of

risky financial instruments, and a political economy in which the interests of powerful financial institutions undermined effective oversight. Stiglitz underscores that these failures were preventable and rooted in a misguided ideology that glorified free markets while ignoring systemic risk and inequality.

In "The Current Economic Crisis and Lessons for Economic Theory" (2009), Stiglitz turns his critique toward mainstream economic thinking. He argues that the dominant models in macroeconomics failed to predict the crisis because they abstracted away from key real-world phenomena such as financial frictions, imperfect information, and asymmetric behaviour among market actors.

Stiglitz further develops these themes in "Rethinking Macroeconomics: What Failed, and How to Repair It" (2011), where he argues that macroeconomic models need to be fundamentally restructured to incorporate insights from the crisis. He criticises the standard dynamic stochastic general equilibrium (DSGE) models for excluding the financial sector and for assuming representative agents operating in frictionless markets. He contends that these models contributed to intellectual blind spots among central banks and academic economists. To repair macroeconomics, Stiglitz advocates incorporating more realistic assumptions about human behaviour, credit constraints, and the central role of institutions and inequality.

Across these works, Stiglitz's central argument is that the financial crisis was a manufactured failure of both policy and economic theory. He emphasises that inequality, distorted incentives, and inadequate regulation all contributed to the economy's vulnerability.

Neoclassical economists focus on external policy distortions rather than market failure as the root of the crisis. Many neoclassical economists believe the Federal Reserve kept interest rates too low in the years leading up to the crisis, creating a credit bubble in the housing market. Additionally, poorly designed government interventions created moral hazards and distorted financial incentives. In his 2009 paper, "The Financial Crisis and the Policy Responses," John B. Taylor emphasises this neoclassical narrative, attributing the crisis to monetary policy errors, the Federal Reserve's decision to keep interest rates too low, which led to the housing boom and bust.

Taylor argues for rules-based policy approaches, improved risk management, and minimal discretionary intervention. Like many neoclassical economists, Taylor opposed extensive fiscal stimulus efforts, viewing them as inefficient and potentially destabilising.

Taylor critiques the policy responses during the crisis—especially the discretionary nature of bailouts—as creating uncertainty and exacerbating panic. His framing is characteristic of the neoclassical belief in rules-based policymaking and market predictability, and he maintains that distorted price signals and policy-induced misallocations, not fundamental flaws in markets themselves, caused the downturn.

Caballero, Farhi, and Gourinchas (2008) provide a more global neoclassical explanation in their paper "Financial Crash, Commodity Prices, and Global Imbalances." They focus on the macroeconomic imbalances between high-saving economies (e.g., China, oil exporters) and high-consuming economies (especially the U.S.), which created a surge in demand for safe financial assets. This "safe asset shortage" led to financial innovation and the proliferation of complex instruments that ultimately failed under stress. Their analysis builds on neoclassical models of rational actors responding to market incentives, suggesting that institutional and policy frameworks failed to adjust to the global demand for safety and liquidity. The authors do not see the crisis as a failure of capitalism but rather as a misalignment between global capital flows and the capacity of financial markets to absorb them prudently.

Austrian theorists believed the post-crisis bailouts and expansionary programs rewarded entitled Americans and led to a culture of excessive risk-taking. In his article "Hoover, Bush, and Great Depressions" (2009), Mark Thornton, a prominent Austrian economist, draws parallels between the Great Depression of the 1930s and the 2008–2009 financial crisis. Thornton criticises both Herbert Hoover and George W. Bush for responding to economic downturns with large-scale government intervention, which, in the Austrian view, worsens rather than resolves crises.

Thornton argues that both Hoover and Bush engaged in significant government intervention during economic downturns. These actions, from public works programs to corporate bailouts, reflect a rejection of free-market principles and, according to Thornton, contributed to deepening the crises they sought to resolve.

Thornton situates the 2008–2009 crisis within the Austrian framework of boom-and-bust cycles, attributing the root cause to artificial credit expansion and low interest rates set by the Federal Reserve. Just as loose monetary policy in the 1920s inflated speculative bubbles that eventually collapsed, Thornton sees the housing bubble and financial collapse of 2008 as a direct result of similar distortions in the 2000s. From this perspective, the crash was a necessary

correction to a period of widespread malinvestment that needed to be unwound rather than prevented.

Thornton argues that stimulus packages and bailouts interfered with the market's ability to self-correct and the necessary liquidation of unsustainable investments. These interventions delayed recovery and perpetuated structural imbalances by propping up failing institutions and misallocating capital. Thornton warns that such policies encourage reckless behaviour with the expectation of future government rescue, thus setting the stage for repeated cycles of economic instability.

Thornton concludes that the best course of action during a downturn is non-intervention, allowing prices to adjust and market forces to reallocate resources efficiently. From the Austrian viewpoint, recessions are not failures of capitalism but necessary phases of economic realignment. By repeating the interventionist mistakes of the past, Thornton contends, the Bush administration turned a financial correction into a prolonged economic crisis.

Marxist theorists, including notable scholars Richard Wolff and David Harvey, highlight growing inequalities in wealth concentration and income inequality between classes. Wolff and Harvey argue that extreme inequalities led to overproduction. Marxists also argue that an overdependence on financial institutions and extensive deregulation created a housing bubble.

Richard D. Wolff's article, "The Economic Crisis: A Marxian Interpretation," situates the 2008 financial crisis within the deep structural contradictions of capitalism, particularly those tied to the distribution of surplus value. Wolff argues that the crisis was not a random or external shock but the outcome of a long-standing capitalist strategy that prioritised profit maximisation over workers' welfare. From the 1970s onward, capital succeeded in holding down real wages even as productivity continued to rise. To sustain consumer demand, households resorted to debt, creating a fragile system that was increasingly dependent on financial markets. According to Wolff, the financial crisis was the breaking point of this unsustainable model—where financialisation masked, but ultimately could not overcome, the systemic contradictions between labour and capital.

David Harvey's essay, "The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism," provides a broader theoretical framework by linking the crisis to the Marxist concept of overaccumulation. Harvey explains that capital, in its quest for expansion, periodically confronts barriers to profitable

reinvestment. In the decades leading up to the crisis, global capitalism produced vast surpluses of both capital and labour that could not be productively absorbed. Financialisation and real estate speculation became the mechanisms for absorbing these surpluses, but only temporarily. These outlets, Harvey argues, generated fictitious capital that eventually collapsed under its weight. The 2008 crisis, then, is a manifestation of a recurring capitalist tendency: crises emerge when the system can no longer resolve the contradiction between capital's expansionary logic and the limitations of real demand and profitability.

Harvey further develops his argument by examining the specific role of finance in restructuring global capitalism. He emphasises that the rise of finance was not simply a functional response to economic needs but a class project—a means by which capital reasserted dominance in the face of falling industrial profit rates and increasing labour unrest. As real wages stagnated, credit expanded, enabling consumption to persist despite stagnant incomes. However, this debt-based growth strategy was inherently unstable. The crisis exposed the limits of this model as speculative bubbles burst and credit systems froze. From a Marxist perspective, Harvey's analysis demonstrates how finance capital is not external to capitalism but rather central to its evolving contradictions, shaped by the imperatives of class power, capital mobility, and surplus absorption.

Together, these articles highlight key elements of the Marxist approach to crisis: the centrality of class relations, the structural tendencies toward overaccumulation, and the role of financialisation as both a temporary fix and a source of deeper instability. Marxist theorists argue that such crises are endemic to capitalism's core logic. The 2008 financial crash is interpreted not as an anomaly but as a predictable outcome of a system driven by exploitation, inequality, and periodic breakdown. Through their analyses, Wolff and Harvey challenge the notion that technocratic fixes or better regulation can prevent future crises without addressing capitalism's fundamental contradictions.

These perspectives—from Marxist, Austrian, Neoclassical, and Keynesian schools—each articulate distinct causal narratives about the crisis, reflecting fundamental disagreements over the role of the state, market stability, inequality, and systemic risk. While their conclusions diverge, they share an implicit acknowledgement of the crisis as a moment of rupture that tested prevailing economic ideas. These theoretical debates laid the intellectual groundwork for broader societal and institutional responses, many of which unfolded visibly in the public sphere.

With these economic schools of thought in place, the media emerges as a site of ideological struggle. The following section examines how television networks, through framing and agenda-setting, transform these abstract economic ideas into public narratives. It explores how media constructed accessible interpretations of the crisis, presenting Keynesian and neoliberal paradigms in binary terms and shaping early public and political responses.

2.4 TV Framing, Constraints, and a Battle for Economic Legitimacy

Media, particularly television, plays a crucial role in framing policy issues in ways that inform and persuade both the public and decision-makers. Framing theory, as developed by Entman (1993) and Chong and Druckman (2007), suggests that media frames shape how people interpret information by emphasising certain aspects of a policy debate while downplaying others. Television networks construct narratives that either reinforce or challenge the legitimacy of policy, shaping public opinion and the broader political landscape. The interaction between actor groups within the state and society, magnified and mediated through television coverage, is central to understanding policy choices and potential paradigm shifts.

The media's power to shape policy lies in its ability to act as an agenda-setter (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Economic crises amplify this power, as public opinion often becomes gradually polarised and fiercely debated policy alternatives become a spotlight of public interest. For example, during the US economic recession following the 2008 financial crash, media outlets played a crucial role in shaping the debate over fiscal stimulus versus austerity measures.

Despite the wide range of academic interpretations surrounding the causes and consequences of the 2008–2009 financial crisis—from Austrian critiques of credit expansion to Marxist analyses of systemic inequality—the public and political discourse soon coalesced around a far more constrained ideological contest. The complexity of economic debates was rapidly simplified into a binary framing across television coverage: Keynesianism versus neoliberalism. This simplification was driven in part by the urgency of the policy response and the political need for clear, actionable choices.

Television networks played a crucial role in shaping this narrative simplification. The Keynesian response—emphasising state intervention, job creation, and deficit spending—was

pitted against the neoliberal emphasis on limited government, deficit reduction, and market-led recovery. This binary framing resonated with partisan divisions in political leadership and media audiences, providing a clear structure for political debate, public understanding, and media storytelling. As a result, the more nuanced academic discussions about financial regulation, global capital flows, or the role of inequality were overshadowed by a polarised struggle over the legitimacy and effectiveness of fiscal stimulus versus fiscal consolidation.

The 2009 financial crisis is a critical case study for understanding the conditions that enable economic paradigm change. Political science scholars have identified several key factors that contribute to such shifts, including the role of crises as catalysts, the role of institutional frameworks, and the role of prevailing ideologies, with particular emphasis on the media. The television media landscape contributed to paradigmatic divisions by framing the crisis through divergent ideological lenses.

To understand how media framing can contribute to or hinder paradigm change, it is necessary to examine the theoretical role of crises in disrupting prevailing policy ideas.

Crises often expose the limitations of existing policy frameworks, prompting calls for new approaches to address these challenges. The role of the media in these moments is critical: television news outlets provide the platform through which alternative policy paradigms are discussed, legitimised, and contested. In the context of the 2008 financial crisis and its continuation into 2009, media outlets played a pivotal role in framing the crisis and promoting particular policy responses. Blyth (2013) notes that during periods of uncertainty, the media's framing of the crisis can either reinforce the status quo or pave the way for a paradigm shift.

The precise cause of the crisis remains the subject of significant debate. A critical issue was whether the crisis was a failure of the neoliberal economic model, which emphasised minimal government intervention and the efficiency of free markets, or whether it was a consequence of excessive government interference, particularly in the housing market. This ambiguity over the causes of the crisis created a fertile ground for different actors—politicians, policymakers, economists, and the media—to promote alternative policy paradigms. As Blyth (2013) notes, the crisis exposed the failures of existing policy ideas, as they proved ineffective in addressing the immediate economic challenges posed by the downturn.

With these theoretical tensions in mind, the following analysis turns to how they were reflected and reproduced across television networks.

Having established the theoretical foundations of media framing and the ideological simplification that defined early responses to the crisis, we now turn to how these dynamics materialised in the coverage itself. Television networks selectively amplified particular economic interpretations, setting the stage for ideological contestation.

Networks like CNN and CNBC focused on the immediate consequences of the financial collapse and market instability. By emphasising systemic failures in financial deregulation, television news framed the crisis as a failure of neoliberalism rather than a cyclical economic downturn. The Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), a \$700 billion bailout package, was framed in the media as a necessary solution to prevent total economic collapse.

Television significantly shaped the policy discourse surrounding stimulus versus austerity measures. The contrast in coverage, between the cable networks especially, created competing economic narratives, increasing polarisation in public opinion on the cause of the crisis and possible solutions.

The 24-hour news cycle further amplified panic during the crisis. Constant updates and expert analyses contributed to a heightened sense of urgency, shaping public attitudes toward the necessity of immediate and robust policy action. TV media hosts and panel discussions frequently presented ideologically opposed views, reinforcing political divisions and making bipartisan agreement on economic solutions more complex.

Additionally, television played a crucial role in translating complex economic concepts into language that the public could understand. Terms such as "quantitative easing," "bailouts," and "stimulus packages" were repeatedly explained in simplified terms, influencing how audiences perceived these policies. By making economic discourse more accessible, television shaped public acceptance or rejection of government intervention strategies.

Television media framed the financial crisis and shaped the ideological terrain on which economic policy debates unfolded. Television news actively shaped how the public understood the crisis and potential solutions by amplifying specific narratives and selectively emphasising policy options.

On the competing cable networks, rival narratives emerged regarding the context of the crisis and the issues each chose to highlight. These rival narratives also reflect the stark contrast between neoliberal and Keynesian ideas. For instance, MSNBC focused on economic inequality and corporate greed within the financial industry. Coverage on MSNBC consistently highlighted data on rising income and wealth inequality in the US, emphasising issues with capitalism and social injustices. For instance, on February 27, 2009, MSNBC guest pundit and New York Times journalist David Leonhardt stated, "I think what we've had here is a 30-year period in which two main things have happened. One, we've had pre-tax incomes increase much, much, much more quickly for the top than the middle and the bottom. And we've had tax rates fall more for the top than the middle and the bottom." Later in the program, political columnist Roger Simon says, "The trouble is, the era of small government deregulation has not worked. We are paying for it now. And Barack Obama...presented a clear difference between his Republican opponent, John McCain...One guy offered: large government. The government is on your side. There's nothing wrong with big government if it helps people. The other guy, John McCain, wanted small government. He wanted to cut taxes, especially on businesspeople. And Barack Obama said the wealthiest in the nation will have their taxes increase. People made a choice in November. And they chose this path."

CNN also highlighted the hardships American families faced during the crisis. However, rather than the commentary-oriented delivery on MSNBC, CNN reporting included more interviews with individuals and families. Moreover, CNN's coverage focused more on the government's policy response and the need for state intervention. Policy initiatives, including the Troubled Asset Relief Program TARP, were discussed extensively, and different potential regulatory measures. On CNN, shows such as *The Situation Room*, starring popular host Wolf Blitzer, highlighted the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the problems with derivative deregulation more than its competitors. For example, on February 23, 2009, CNN host Jack Cafferty quotes billionaire George Soros, stating that "the current turmoil can be traced back to the financial deregulation of the 1980s and that it marks the end of the free-market capitalism model." CNN addressed the root cause and policy positions in greater depth than its competitors.

FOX's coverage highlighted the state's overreach and reckless budgeting, as well as individual responsibility and society's dependency on the state, including bailouts and

expansionary spending. FOX incited more emotive commentary, drawing parallels to patriotism and the wishes of the founding fathers, and promoted individualism and self-reliance.

For example, on March 18 2009, FOX interviewed Nevada Senator John Ensign. Ensign states, "Government created the problem. I have said this for a long time. This was not a question of deregulation. This was a question of over-government involvement into the subprime market, requiring Fannie and Freddie to up their percentages year after year, not having a strong regulator at Fannie and Freddie, but requiring Fannie and Freddie, with the Community Reinvestment Act, Fannie and Freddie basically loaning money to people who could never pay it back."

Additionally, FOX's coverage focused on reckless public spending projects. On March 18, 2009, primetime FOX host Sean Hannity began his program by arguing, "It is just one of the many pork barrel projects around America that's sucking up your hard-earned taxpayer dollars. Ainsley Earhardt takes us to West Virginia's Corridor H for a closer look at the road that leads to where? Nowhere." While these narratives reflect ideological divides, implementing policy alternatives was also shaped by institutional constraints and legal authority, which further shaped how the media framed what was politically possible.

While media outlets diverged in how they framed the causes and responses to the crisis, their coverage also had broader consequences beyond storytelling. Television media actively shaped not only the public's understanding of economic events but also evolving preferences regarding taxation, debt, and fiscal legitimacy. Beyond broadcasting crisis narratives, television became a central actor in shaping public preferences, mediating the symbolic construction of "the public," and legitimising or contesting political actors. As the media provided ongoing coverage of economic issues, it shaped public perceptions of fiscal policies, including government spending, taxation, and debt. Strömbäck and Esser (2009) argue that media can mediate public acceptance of policies by framing them in specific ways, influencing how audiences perceive their feasibility and desirability.

The media's role in framing taxation policy further influenced policy choices. The debate over tax cuts versus tax increases became a central focus of post-crisis policy discourse. Conservative outlets framed tax cuts as essential for economic growth, particularly for the wealthy. In contrast, liberal outlets emphasised the need for higher taxes on the wealthy to fund social programs and economic recovery efforts. The media's framing of taxation as either a growth

mechanism or a tool for reducing inequality played a crucial role in shaping public attitudes and policy decisions in the aftermath of the crisis.

A further layer of complexity in the media's role in framing policy debates is the interaction between different actor groups in the state and society.

Actors within the state rely on the media to communicate their policy positions and persuade the public of the legitimacy of their choices. However, the media's portrayal of these actors is often filtered through ideological lenses.

The media's coverage of fiscal policy debates in 2009 and 2010 illustrates how the interplay between state and society actors and television media shaped the public's understanding of policy.

The figure of "the public" plays a crucial, if often indirect, role in theories of policy change. In Peter Hall's (1993) framework of policy paradigms and social learning, major transformations in economic governance, or what Hall terms "third-order change," involve shifts in instruments and settings but not in the overarching goals and assumptions that structure policymaking. These paradigm shifts are articulated, justified, and contested in the public sphere. Within this discursive space, "the public" emerges not as an empirically defined entity but as a constructed concept invoked by state and societal actors to legitimise competing understandings of the crisis and appropriate fiscal policy responses.

Mark Blyth (2013) deepens this interpretive perspective by situating policy change within moments of ideational breakdown, when dominant paradigms lose coherence and powerful actors struggle to define causality, blame, and solutions. In such moments, representations of "the public" are integral to these power struggles. Economic ideas require credibility and public resonance. Moreover, actors embed their policy preferences within narratives that construct "the public" as burdened, deserving, or resilient. These portrayals go beyond rhetoric and serve as mechanisms for aligning public consent with elite agendas.

In this sense, "the public" functions as a symbolic resource—a legitimating figure through which different paradigms gain or lose traction. Within the neoliberal framework, "the public" is often portrayed as an overburdened taxpayer, disciplined by markets and threatened by state profligacy. Within the Keynesian framework, the public is perceived as economically vulnerable and in need of protection from market excesses. These are not neutral representations; they reflect

deeper ideological commitments about the role of the state, the function of markets, and the meaning of citizenship.

The actor framework employed in this study, which categorises political and societal actors by both institutional domain (state/society) and fiscal orientation (spending/taxation), clarifies how these representations are produced and circulated. State actors—including President Obama, Congressional Democrats and Republicans, and Governors—invoke the public to justify legislative decisions. Societal actors—Media hosts, External commentators, Think Tanks, and Labour Unions—mediate these claims, translating them into accessible narratives for mass consumption. In this process, the media plays a particularly influential role, actively shaping it through selective representation and framing.

This construction of the public has profound implications for policy learning. When paradigms shift, they do so through transformations in how the public is imagined and mobilised. Recognising the discursive function of "the public" is therefore essential to understanding the dynamics of paradigm change. During the 2009 financial crisis, as later chapters will demonstrate, debates about how to portray the public were prominently played out on cable news, where coverage shaped public concerns through ideological lenses.

These representational practices—centred on taxation, stimulus, and the symbolic invocation of the public—did not operate in isolation. Instead, they were nested within a deeper ideological framework that structured how economic policy options were defined and debated. In what follows, we examine how the ideological binary of Keynesianism versus neoliberalism was constructed and reinforced through televised discourse.

This dynamic of representation unfolds within broader questions of paradigm maintenance and contestation, which scholars like Blyth and Hall help us to understand.

Blyth (2013a) states that paradigm shifts are not "all-or-nothing affairs." Nothing succeeded the neoclassical paradigm because there was no clear alternative idea-set promoted. Instead, in the eight months following the crisis, the United States "rediscovered" fiscal policy and compensatory finance. The neo-Keynesian response showed signs of success; however, concerns about the "fiscal cliff" led most G20 members to revert to fiscal consolidation and budgetary cuts to balance growing deficits (Warner, 2013). Blyth (2013a) argues that because the paradigm was not replaced despite numerous large-scale failures, this strengthens the logic that the sociological

perspective most likely outweighs the scientific. As Underhill (2015) states, it is a clear indicator of path dependency.

Nevertheless, the brief stimulus and reforms after the crisis have been highly controversial. Did two paradigms coexist? Was there a temporary shift in paradigms, or is a new paradigm starting to formulate? Additionally, why has the post-crisis consensus among most G20 members, including the United States, been one of fiscal austerity?

Baker and Underhill (2015) reveal there has been an abundance of "no-change thesis" since the crisis (Crouch, 2011; Hay, 2011; Helleiner, 2014; Quiggins, 2012; Blyth, 2013a). Although these articles resist paradigm succession, they do acknowledge that "subtle" policy and institutional changes are occurring that could evolve into a new paradigm. Most scholars consider ideational change a slow momentum process (Carstensen, 2011). Time is the element Hall and Blyth stress as most important in explaining the outcome of the paradigm struggle and the survival of finance-driven capital. Hall (2013, p.191) states that in the process of policy succession: "parties jockey for position in contests in which collective well-being is at stake. Thus, it should not surprise us that a new paradigm has not yet emerged."

Paradigm shifts are rare phenomena that significantly alter ideologies, culture, and power distribution among states, societies, and markets. In Thatcher's case, it took years for people to recognise that a major transformation had occurred, a process she had only initiated (Mackintosh, 2014). Mackintosh argues that a new paradigm is forming. Mackintosh suggests that the reduction of finance graduates at top universities reflects the public's growing distrust of the financial sector and indicates a cultural change. Furthermore, international institutional changes occurred. The dominance of the G7 forum in negotiating the direction of the world economy was succeeded by the G20 forum, which established the Financial Stability Board (FSB), backed by both European and North American central bankers, to assess growing risks to financial stability and coordinate ways to mitigate those risks (Mackintosh, 2014). In addition, some changes in regulation and ideologies post-crisis have given authority back to the state and central bankers. International regulation was implemented mainly as Basel-II/III regulation regarding "capital adequacy standards and the IOSCO" regarding securities markets (Underhill, 2015). However, most scholars argue that these changes have not disrupted the "market-based approach" (Baker, 2013). Braun argues that the shift in power distribution to the European Central Bank post-crisis is most likely

a paradigm maintenance effort as the ECB attempts to defend the neoliberal model and promote fiscal consolidation (Braun, 2015). Hay (2011) believes that the US "Anglo-liberal" model will survive even if "Anglo-liberal growth is inherently risky business."

As Hall (1993) and Mazzoleni & Schulz (1999) discuss, the media acted as an intermediary, translating complex economic issues into more accessible narratives often framed through partisan lenses. While television played a key role in simplifying the crisis and shaping public understanding, it also served as a platform through which competing economic ideologies were communicated.

Ideological contestation was visible across cable news networks, and these debates occurred within, a landscape of significant legal and institutional constraints. As media narratives amplified specific policy ideas, the feasibility of implementing these alternatives depended on public persuasion and also on the political and structural limits.

Policy alternatives and potential paradigm shifts are constrained by complex factors involving institutions, interests, and the media. Scholars such as Phillip Swagel argue that a series of legal, political, and institutional constraints substantially affect how policy alternatives are contextualised and primarily why policy alternatives were constrained to the pre-existing paradigm. Swagel (2015) argues that key limitations included a lack of legal authority for policymakers, limited economic emergency powers of the US federal government, and political pressure.

Policymakers did not have the legal powers to use public capital to stabilise the banking sector or manage the failure of large financial firms outside the scope of banking regulation, such as investment banks. Swagel argues that the US Treasury had almost no emergency economic powers at the start of the crisis. As a result, the Federal Reserve became the primary focus, enacting its emergency powers to stabilise the economy. Finally, Swagel argues that mounting political resistance and pressures against broadening the state's power, particularly concerning fiscal powers, such as the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), suggests that the state regaining greater fiscal power will be even more challenging in the future. However, while legal authority matters, how these tools were presented to the public was equally critical. Media framing shaped the perception of interventions and their political viability.

Television media played a pivotal role in shaping public perception of these policy interventions. In 2009, US TV media coverage of the ARRA stimulus package varied significantly. For instance, CNN and MSNBC helped forge the narrative that the stimulus was necessary to prevent economic depression, frequently citing the arguments of Keynesian economists. In contrast, right-skewed Fox News portrayed these policies as excessive government interference, warning of long-term debt and the impact such policies would have on future generations, frequently appealing to the effect on people's children and grandchildren.

Despite the systemic crisis, entrenched interests and institutional impediments help explain why paradigm shifts remain rare. However, these moments also offer discursive openings. Television media, as explored above, plays a dual role—narrating disruption and mediating the legitimacy of new economic ideas.

Television shaped the broader debate over stimulus versus austerity by moulding how policy interventions were portrayed and received. These representations contributed to the potential for paradigmatic shifts and significant departures from "business as usual" policymaking in the form of second-order shifts by reinforcing and challenging particular ideological views and shaping perceptions of what was politically legitimate in response to the crisis.

Scholars Ayse Kaya and G. Herrera (2015) argue that three factors led to the undermining of long-term policy alternatives for policymakers in the US and UK. First, the opposing narratives emerging from the crisis are the crisis as a deep recession versus ballooning public debt. The authors argue that "as the crisis unfolded, the former lost ground to the latter. While the first interpretation of the crisis opened space for the Keynesian tool of expansionary fiscal policy, proponents of the second understanding of the crisis rejected the appropriateness of this tool." The second factor, similar to what Blyth argues as ideational path dependency, Kaya and Herrera (2015) argue "fiscal policy had been discredited over several decades in favour of monetary policy, making it unlikely that fiscal policy would be judged successful regardless." Thirdly, "monetary policy had increased its institutional strength via the growing influence of central banks in economic policymaking."

Cahill (2011) examines the brief decline of neoliberal popularity and the resurgence of Keynesianism. Cahill argues that the return to neoliberalism around the developed world is clear, as it has been two years since the crisis. Cahill asserts that "Greece, for example, is now following

an IMF programme of privatisation and cuts to social expenditure, while other European nations are pursuing austerity policies. In the USA, state and municipal governments are selling off public assets in response to mounting deficits." Cahill, in response to this evidence, argues that "neoliberalism is best understood as a historically specific process of state and economic restructuring that is socially embedded through three mechanisms: ideological norms, class relations, and institutional rules. Although the ideological legitimacy of neoliberalism has been somewhat weakened, there is little evidence to suggest that the three mechanisms, through which neoliberalism is socially embedded, have been significantly eroded." Cahill emphasises that for a new paradigm like Keynesians to replace neoliberalism successfully, it would have to be "socially embedded: through a coherent alternative ideology; the mobilisation of social forces; and the institutionalisation of non-neoliberal rules and norms within the apparatuses of the state."

However, while these ideological battles were fought publicly through television screens and partisan framing, the prospects for genuine paradigm change were heavily constrained. Behind the rhetorical contest lay structural and institutional barriers—legal limitations, path dependencies, and elite interests—that resisted fundamental change. The following section delves into these deeper obstacles, drawing on the work of Hall and Blyth to explore why paradigms endure, how power is maintained, and the role of media within these elite-driven dynamics.

These ideational and institutional hurdles—despite intensified critique—prompt a deeper examination of how paradigms endure. Political theorists like Peter Hall and Mark Blyth offer frameworks for understanding why crises so rarely result in paradigm shifts. Peter Hall and Mark Blyth emphasise how overcoming the entrenched interests of elite groups and institutions in maintaining the existing paradigm is critical to facilitating third-order shifts, whereby new ideas can replace the existing paradigms' structural constraints. Many scholars have noted how elite institutions are motivated to preserve the existing power dynamics and protect their financial well-being. However, both authors also argue that a substantial accumulation of significant anomalies within a paradigm, such as the 2008 financial crisis, is required for paradigmatic shifts.

Hall and Blyth have substantial differences in their arguments on the role of structural constraints in shaping policy direction, social learning, and paradigm shifts. Blyth emphasises how economic ideas are legitimised and institutionalised and how a set of ideas benefits select elite groups. Conversely, Hall focuses more on how ideas relate to institutions. Hall defines policy

paradigms as both ideational and institutional. Paradigms are more than a set of ideas; they are deeply embedded within institutions. Therefore, according to Hall, paradigm shifts require shifts in ideas and institutions.

In his book "Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea," Mark Blyth emphasises path dependency as a key constraint on paradigm change. He argues that existing intellectual ideas and institutional structures limit the potential for paradigm shifts, especially when elite actors in both the state and society benefit from maintaining the existing paradigm. Blyth notes that deviating from this path presents risks that these elites are unwilling to take, even at the expense of public welfare and social stability.

In the case of neoliberalism and austerity, Blyth argues that despite the evident failures of the neoliberal paradigm, austerity policies continued to gain support among the G20 post-crisis. Blyth asserts that austerity's popularity was ideologically embedded within elite institutions, such as the IMF and the European Union, which were more interested in sustaining it than in the evidence that austerity measures were effective. Supporting Blyth's argument, scholars Ban and Gallagher (2015) state, "Some new ideas and evidence definitely found their way into IMF decision-making, but this process was often tempered by the nature of the institution and the powerful interests that control its governing structure." In this sense, austerity was not simply a set of policies but a dominant ideology deeply entrenched within political and economic systems. Blyth suggests that time is a critical factor in how new paradigms gain legitimacy, as advocates of new ideas must engage in legitimacy contests against the interests of powerful elites.

Peter Hall, in contrast, emphasises the role of organised efforts of elite interests in both state and society, which need to work systematically to reshape political and institutional structures. According to Hall, third-order change can only occur when there is significant pressure from elites to realign political and economic frameworks.

Hall posits that the media is critical in enabling paradigmatic shifts, as it influences the perception of new ideas and organises elite interests. Hall states that economic paradigms shape political institutions, as the framework governing these institutions is designed under the assumptions of the dominant economic ideology of the period.

Despite the differences in emphasising different elements of paradigmatic shifts, both authors agree that elite interests are instrumental in paradigm shifts. Whether through the

ideational path dependency argued by Blyth or the institutional limitations pointed out by Hall, both contend that powerful institutions tend to resist significant policy changes, as they present a risk to the prevailing power dynamics. Both authors stress that paradigm shifts necessitate immense pressure on elite actors to motivate them to adopt new ideas. Third-order shifts are not spontaneous; they emerge from organised and sustained efforts. Time is what Blyth emphasises as the primary determinant in these transformations, as new ideas must overcome the ideological and institutional obstacles that reinforce existing power dynamics. Hall adds an additional layer by arguing that media is critical in how new ideas gain traction and how contests for legitimacy are waged between old and new paradigms.

These constraints help explain why paradigm change remains rare, even in the wake of major crises. However, moments of potential transition are also marked by heightened visibility and discursive opportunity. In this regard, television media plays a dual role: both shaping the public's understanding of a crisis and mediating the legitimacy of emerging paradigms. Understanding how news coverage constructs these moments is key to evaluating whether—and how—paradigm shifts can occur.

These entrenched interests and structural impediments help explain why paradigm shifts remain rare, even in the face of systemic crises. However, moments of disruption also open discursive opportunities. As the following section will show, television media not only narrates these moments but actively shapes the legitimacy of emerging ideas by amplifying—or silencing—alternative paradigms. By legitimising alternative economic ideas or reinforcing dominant logic, media coverage becomes central to the conditions under which economic governance is reimaged.

Paradigm shifts involve a fundamental change in economic governance. New paradigms gain leverage as the existing policy paradigm is perceived as ineffective in addressing a crisis, and public confidence in the existing policy paradigm erodes. TV news companies play a pivotal role relative to the conditions for paradigm change. Paradigm shifts are made possible when TV media amplify alternative ideas that align with increasing public discontent. TV companies can accelerate or hinder paradigm shifts by providing or not providing a platform for new and alternative ideas to be magnified and by framing policy solutions to appeal to their audience. For instance, during the 2008 crisis, a surge of TV media attention to the economic inequalities due to decades of

neoliberal policy direction became more widely discussed and popularised amidst soaring public dissatisfaction with the perceived greed of Wall Street and politicians. This negative attention created the space for alternative policy paradigms involving wealth redistribution and social spending to gain popularity, thereby pressuring policymakers to adopt new ideas.

TV media companies play a pivotal role in forging the policy agenda by determining how political and economic issues are interpreted, represented, and persuaded in the public spotlight. Economic crises present opportunities for TV media companies to either support the status quo or frame the crisis in a way that allows new ideas to gain popularity.

Peter Hall states on the media's significance in paradigmatic struggles: "Politicians rather than experts played a dominant role, and the process spilt well beyond the boundaries of the state to involve the media, outside interests, and contending political parties. Policy changed, not as a result of autonomous action by the state, but in response to an evolving societal debate that soon became bound up with electoral competition" (1993: p.288).

Supporting Hall's theory, Happer and Philo (2013) argue that the British media's framing of welfare spending as a choice between cuts now or later lent credibility to welfare reductions as a necessary measure. The authors argue, "Whilst social changes at the level of the current transformation of the welfare system do not require public support, they are certainly facilitated by it, and just as crucially by the elimination of active opposition. This is primarily because governments constantly strive for electoral support. In this sense, the dual role of media coverage in generating public anger, combined with the presentation of benefit cuts as an inevitable 'solution' to the economic crisis, has made way for these quite radical social changes to be pushed through by limiting the potential for public resistance. While the interplay of public opinion, policy implementation, and social change is complex, the media can often play a legitimising role."

Having explored how television coverage legitimises or challenges paradigms, we now return to the ideological contest itself. The final section examines how Keynesianism and neoliberalism were framed during the 2009–2010 fiscal debates and how this framing shaped perceptions of policy success.

One of the media's central roles in shaping public understanding of policy lies in how it engages with competing economic narratives, particularly those rooted in Keynesian and neoliberal traditions. These two paradigms offer fundamentally divergent approaches to crisis

management and the scope of state involvement in the economy. According to Hall (1993), crises often create opportunities for alternative policy paradigms to emerge, especially when prevailing approaches are widely perceived as inadequate. Within this context, the Keynesian emphasis on state-led economic intervention gained renewed traction as a practical solution to the recession's immediate effects.

Blyth (2013) notes that while neoliberal orthodoxy faced renewed criticism, it continued to be a dominant force in economic governance. The IMF's shifting stance, for example: Although initially supportive of stimulus efforts, the institution gradually pivoted back toward advocating fiscal restraint as the crisis endured.

Two primary issues emerged relative to the potential impacts of policy interventions: 1) Economic Growth and Employment and 2) Long-Term Fiscal Health. Fiscal stimulus measures, such as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, aimed to stabilise the economy, reduce unemployment, and stimulate economic growth. While these measures had some success in mitigating the immediate effects of the recession, the slow pace of recovery led many to question the effectiveness of stimulus spending.

The question of long-term fiscal health was central to the policy debates surrounding fiscal consolidation. Proponents of austerity measures argued that reducing government spending was necessary to prevent a future debt crisis. However, critics of austerity, argued that reducing spending too quickly would hurt economic growth and increase unemployment. The media's framing of these policies, particularly regarding their potential impacts on social welfare programs and public services, played a critical role in shaping public support.

Strömbäck and Kaid (2009) argue that the political economy of media production, including ownership structures, market dynamics, and regulatory environments, shapes how media outlets cover political issues. The varying editorial slants within US TV media, such as FOX News, CNN, and MSNBC, exemplify how the political economy of media interacts to frame policy debates. FOX News, the more right-leaning, presented fiscal consolidation as the more responsible policy choice. In contrast, left-leaning networks such as MSNBC and the more centrist CNN presented Keynesian fiscal stimulus as the most effective response to the crisis.

Overall, television media facilitates what Kuhn and Blyth argue is the most important factor in paradigm struggles, persuasion, by reinforcing partisan ideologies and deepening political

polarisation (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Television informed audiences and actively shaped policy preferences, particularly during the critical post-crisis years, creating the ideational space in which broader economic ideologies were contested.

As this subchapter demonstrates, television media is an active participant in shaping the policy discourse. The following section examines the structural dimensions of media power—namely, ownership concentration, elite sourcing, and editorial imperatives—and their impact on the discursive boundaries of televised economic discourse. Drawing on the work of critical media scholars such as McChesney and Chomsky, this examination explores why paradigm shifts remain so rare, even in the face of systemic crises.

2.5 Structural Power and the Conditions for Paradigm Shifts

TV news plays a crucial role in interpreting, representing, and persuading policy positions and decisions, determining how crises are understood, how policy options are presented, and shaping public opinion. In the United States, television media companies played a pivotal role in shaping the public's interpretation of the 2008 crisis and in presenting and accepting policy alternatives. During this crisis period, the three major cable TV news networks became central to forming policy paradigms, serving as the primary platform through which collective interests were organised and persuasive efforts were made to steer policy decisions. Throughout the literature review, I discuss the top theories in political economy research on the interplay between media, policy authority, the creation of policy narratives, and the framing of issues, as well as how TV media facilitates the formation of policy paradigms and their potential to popularise new policy paradigms during periods of economic crisis.

In the context of political economy, TV news companies do not simply transmit information neutrally; they are influenced by ownership structures, editorial policies, and institutional imperatives that shape how policies are framed and represented. Robert McChesney, in his book *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (1999), examines how media narratives, particularly during crises, are often shaped by corporate interests and the concentration of media ownership. McChesney argues that the media frame crises and issues in ways that align with their owners' economic and political interests. McChesney argues that the media often marginalise alternative ideas that challenge elite power

structures. McChesney states, "In the United States, the concentration of media ownership has led to a narrowing of perspectives, as the major media conglomerates have little incentive to offer a diversity of viewpoints, especially those that challenge the interests of the powerful corporate and governmental entities that sustain them." (p. 60). One of the primary arguments McChesney relies on in his work is the necessity of a more diverse and independent media industry to promote a voice that more effectively reflects democratic principles and the public's interests.

Television media played a significant role in shaping public trust in economic institutions during the financial crisis. TV programs emphasised the greed and irresponsibility of financial elites, focusing on executive bonuses, risky lending, and bailouts funded by taxpayers. Narratives that contributed to public cynicism toward the financial sector and government regulators. However, television also served a rehabilitative function. President Obama's televised speeches and appearances reassured viewers that the government was taking decisive action, helping to restore some measure of public confidence in institutions like the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury.

TV coverage also created distinct ideological lenses through which the crisis was interpreted. Fox News tended to frame the crisis as a consequence of government overreach and irresponsible spending, whereas CNN and MSNBC focused more heavily on market failures and deregulation. These diverging portrayals reflected and reinforced broader partisan divides about the appropriate scope of government involvement in economic recovery. Audiences exposed to these differing narratives developed divergent policy preferences, with conservative viewers opposing stimulus packages and liberal viewers supporting them.

Television contributed to long-term ideological polarisation by simplifying complex issues into accessible narratives. The public's understanding of the crisis was shaped more by the framing preferences of the media they consumed than by consensus-based expert analysis. The media also determined which policy responses were viable, elevating some proposals while marginalising others. For example, Keynesian alternatives, such as infrastructure spending and wealth redistribution, were given more airtime on liberal networks, while conservative media emphasised austerity and tax cuts.

Furthermore, television helped shape post-crisis perceptions of capitalism and inequality. Shows, documentaries, and special reports examining Wall Street's role in the meltdown contributed to a broader cultural critique of neoliberal economics. Television became a battleground where competing economic paradigms were discussed, popularised, or discredited.

McChesney also emphasises that mainstream media "does not merely present information; they frame it in ways that promote specific political and economic interests, often reducing complex issues to simplistic narratives that obscure the true nature of events" (p. 49). Regarding the gradual concentration of media ownership throughout neoliberal policymaking, McChesney argues that the extreme concentration of ownership restricts public discourse, limiting the range of voices and perspectives available to the public: "As media ownership becomes more concentrated, fewer voices are heard, and those that dominate the conversation tend to reflect the interests of large corporations, making it increasingly difficult for independent or alternative viewpoints to gain a foothold, especially in times of crisis." (p. 35) McChesney highlights the media's role in shaping perceptions of crises and policy issues, arguing that corporation-dominated news often prioritises the maintenance of existing power structures over fostering a democratic discussion of important issues.

Prominent scholar Noam Chomsky offers further support for how policy choices are moulded by mainstream media, which are inclined to support and reinforce the interests of elite power structures. Noam Chomsky's three works, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Media* (1988), *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (1997), and *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievement of Propaganda* (1999) explore the dynamics of media, power, and public opinion, emphasising different elements of how mainstream media shape public perceptions, particularly during economic crises.

In *Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky and co-author Edward Herman discuss the "propaganda model" of the media. The model emphasises how the interests of corporations, the state, and other elite institutions form mass media in the United States. Based on this framework, the authors argue that a few conglomerates control media companies and are instruments for assembling public consent for policies that benefit the elite. Chomsky and Herman argue that the extreme concentration of media ownership diminishes the diversity of viewpoints, leading to limited ideas and framing issues that favour the pre-existing paradigm. Both scholars detail the

framing as excluding or minimising alternative policies, particularly policies that challenge political and economic power structures and elite interests. In the case of economic crises, the authors argue that the mainstream media prioritises policy goals such as austerity, deregulation, and privatisation while excluding other potential solutions like state intervention or redistribution.

Chomsky and Herman, in their work "Manufacturing Consent," argue that television plays a central role in shaping public opinion and promoting the interests of elites. Commercial imperatives drive TV news corporations, and the need to attract advertisers serves as a mechanism for manufacturing consent, tactfully and subtly persuading viewers to accept ideologies and policies that align with corporate and political agendas. Through framing and agenda-setting, TV news corporations control which issues are covered and how they are represented. According to Chomsky and Herman, TV companies function as modern propaganda, employing complex techniques to shape public perception while maintaining existing power structures within the state and society. Herman and Chomsky contend that TV informs and also shapes public consciousness in ways that serve elites by simplifying complex issues, sensationalising news, and limiting the scope of political discourse.

Profit Over People shifts the focus to the rise of neoliberalism among Western nations. Chomsky criticises neoliberal economic policies that emphasise free-market capitalism, deregulation, privatisation, and the reduction of the state's role in the economy, which prioritise corporate interests over public welfare. Profit Over People argues that the media's ability to forge policy narratives is integral to justifying neoliberalism during economic crises. Chomsky claims that the media frequently portray crises as inevitable, framing the only viable solutions as those that involve neoliberal goals such as austerity and privatisation. Alternative solutions, such as state intervention or social welfare, are presented as unfeasible. The work underscores how media serve the interests of corporations and suppress public debate that threatens the neoliberal agenda. Chomsky states, "The media... play a central role in disseminating the ideological constructs that legitimate policies, particularly those that favour the rich and powerful, and promote the status quo of neoliberal economic arrangements." (p. 14).

Media Control focuses on media manipulation and propaganda, specifically the role of the media in shaping public opinion during crises. Chomsky expands on his earlier works by

exploring how propaganda is constructed in Western democracies. Chomsky argues that the mainstream media does not simply transmit information but serves as active agents in constructing controversy and uncertainty that distracts the public from real issues. Chomsky highlights how, during periods of crisis, the media frame events in ways that support neoliberal solutions and discourage alternative ideas. Media serve the interests of the powerful by promoting passive public engagement, advancing narrow political agendas, and depoliticising issues. Chomsky's primary contribution in this work is to detail how the media creates a manufactured sense of consensus by presenting elite-driven solutions as inevitable while framing alternative perspectives as unrealistic, extreme, or dangerous.

Chomsky's three works form a comprehensive critique of mainstream media and its focus on hindering ideas that benefit the masses over those that benefit the few. *Manufacturing Consent* provides the theoretical foundation of the "propaganda model," focusing on media ownership and its impact on public discourse. *Profit Over People* applies the "propaganda model" to the rise of neoliberalism, illustrating that the media formulates narratives that justify neoliberal solutions during economic crises. *Media Control* further explores how media manipulate public opinion through propaganda, particularly during times of crisis, and how they reinforce elite power structures. Chomsky's theories offer a sophisticated understanding of how media shapes public perceptions, deters alternative viewpoints, and serves the interests of economic and political elites.

The role of TV channels in times of crisis underscores how media can influence the understanding of the nature and causes of a crisis, and by extension, the policy solutions deemed appropriate. Applying Chomsky and Herman's "propaganda model" is a valuable lens through which to view the initial TV coverage and emerging narratives formulated at the onset of the 2008 crisis. According to the authors, TV corporations can shape the public's perception of the causes and consequences of a crisis, frequently aligning public opinion with the policy responses favoured by political elites.

During periods of uncertainty, such as the 2008 financial crisis, TV channels offer multiple competing narratives, each associated with distinct policy choices. A clear example is how the different TV news companies in the United States during the 2008-10 crisis presented the causes of the crisis and the appropriate responses.

In summary, television was an active agent in constructing the narratives and legitimacy frameworks that shaped the public's understanding of the financial collapse. From trust in institutions to reinforcing partisan economic ideologies, television helped define the boundaries of the economic debate.

This chapter demonstrates how television media have shaped the public's understanding of the financial crisis, simplifying ideological divisions, amplifying partisan narratives, and constraining the space for policy alternatives. It also exposed the institutional and structural forces that restrict the potential for paradigm change. Even as new ideas gained visibility, their implementation was hindered by elite resistance, legal limitations, and the media's commercial imperatives. The media framed the crisis through a narrow ideological lens and also symbolically constructed "the public" in ways that reinforced dominant narratives and limited the visibility of alternative demands. These dynamics provide the conceptual groundwork for examining how specific economic ideas and actors gained visibility—or were marginalised—in the policy discourse that followed.

Chapter 3 builds directly on this insight. It turns from the interpretive and communicative dimensions of policy discourse to the institutional logic and ideological durability of neoliberalism in the post-crisis context. The chapter opens by revisiting Peter Hall's paradigm framework and Mark Blyth's critique of its internal contradictions, with a focus on the competing logics of social learning. It then examines how authority, persuasion, and elite interests shape the boundaries of policy legitimacy and why, despite widespread public disillusionment, neoliberalism remained dominant. Chapter 3 connects the representational struggles discussed in Chapter 2 to the structures of economic governance, tracing the deep roots of austerity and market-centred policymaking in the United States.

Chapter 3: Neoliberalism Resilience and Policy Authority

Chapter 3 has four subchapters. Subchapters 3.1 and 3.2 define the policy learning process and explain the importance of authority and persuasion in this context. Subchapter 3.3 examines the history of neoliberalism in the United States and the elite interests that benefit from these policies. Subchapter 3.4 discusses the popularity of fiscal austerity measures.

Subchapter 3.1 details Peter Hall's adaptation of Thomas Kuhn's theoretical framework on the stages of social change in his work "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (1962). Hall's "paradigm framework" explains social learning and the policymaking process as a dynamic relationship between the state and society. Hall argues that two conflicting logics, the empirical and the sociological, explain how social learning occurs. Mark Blyth terms these two logics the Bayesian and the Constructivist. However, Blyth argues that a paradox emerges from Hall's "Policy Paradigm" framework in that both logics cannot exist simultaneously.

Subchapter 3.2 conceptualises the importance of authority and persuasion in the policy learning process. Blyth applies Hall's framework to the 2009 crisis, whereby we should see a shift in the policy paradigm, but we do not. Blyth states that policies fail partly because of how policies are 'presented' to fail. Blyth argues that incommensurability between two economic paradigms and struggles over policy authority are the two most essential elements in determining paradigm shifts and why an evolution from neoliberalism policymaking did not occur post-crisis.

Subchapter 3.3 discusses the impact of neoliberal ideologies on government power and policymaking. Neoliberalism benefits economic elites at the expense of social equality, with policies such as tax cuts and fiscal consolidation contributing to income inequality. Scholars argue that deregulation, privatisation, and reduction of public spending have led governments to seek alternative methods to retain power in the face of marketisation. Suggesting that while the state has not lost power entirely, it has adapted to new styles of governance, forming networks with state and non-state actors to define collective interests and implement policies.

Subchapter 3.4 discusses the prevalence of fiscal austerity measures. Austerity advocates argue that reducing public spending and sovereign debt promotes competitiveness and private investment. However, evidence suggests that countries implementing austerity measures post-crisis often faced higher unemployment rates and weaker economic growth than those pursuing stimulus strategies. The discourse surrounding austerity policies involves competing narratives, with neo-Keynesians advocating for more significant state intervention to address financial crises. Meanwhile, neo-liberals emphasise reducing national debts for greater stability and business confidence. This subchapter underscores the complexity of fiscal policy discourse, which is composed of competing ideologies, narratives, and economic theories.

This chapter examines the resilience of neoliberalism in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, exploring how authority, persuasion, and ideational control interact with the structural conditions of policymaking. While the crisis appeared to expose the failures of existing economic orthodoxies, the anticipated shift to a new policy paradigm did not materialise. Drawing on Hall's theory of policy paradigms and Blyth's critique of policy learning, the chapter interrogates why neoliberalism endured despite widespread socio-economic disruption and the reintroduction of Keynesian measures. Through a systematic analysis of third-order change, incommensurability, actor legitimacy, and elite interests, Chapter 3 advances the thesis's broader objective: to understand how crises are discursively navigated and how television media, in particular, interacts with state and societal actors to shape which ideas are elevated, which are marginalised, and which ultimately gain policy traction. The chapter begins by revisiting the theoretical foundations of policy learning and paradigm change to clarify how contestation and authority function in times of uncertainty.

3.1 Origins of the Paradox: Two Causal Stories

Kuhn's "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (1962) is one of the most influential pieces in social sciences. Kuhn introduces two significant contributions. First is the idea that scientific paradigm change results from scientific and sociological forces. Second, Kuhn is the first to use the term incommensurability and conceptualise its importance in the relationship between these forces. Expanding on Kuhn's philosophy, Hall sought to understand better the social learning process and "the role ideas play in policymaking." Hall applies Kuhn's concepts to macroeconomic policymaking in "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State" (1993). Hall asks if "national interest" is what policymakers respond to, then how do we define what that "national interest" is? (Hall, 1993, p.275). In the quest to answer this question, Hall makes several contributions to Kuhn.

One significant contribution of Hall's is the order in which social learning, and essentially paradigm change, takes place. Hall introduces a disaggregated concept of social learning, whereas policymakers' "response to cumulative external stimuli" occurs in three sequential orders: 1) changing policy settings, 2) changing policy instruments, and 3) resetting policy goals.

Hall further clarifies these distinctions by categorising policymaking events in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s into each order. Classifying first-order change, Hall presents adjustments in “fiscal stance” and “minimum lending rate” as representative of altering settings. Second-order change refers to “techniques” or instruments changed relative to the “dissatisfaction” of previous experimentation. Hall illustrates the distinction of second-order change through events transpiring in Britain: the creation “of a new system for monetary control in 1971, ‘cash limits’ on public spending in 1976, and movement away from strict targets for monetary growth in 1981-83” (Hall, 1993, p.278). Alterations in settings and instruments are autonomous from third-order change, for they do not alter the overall goals of the policy paradigm. Hall notes it was not until the 1980s, after an accumulation of anomalies, that the “radical shift from Keynesian to monetarist modes” changed overall macroeconomic goals. Development goals shifted from fiscal policy to monetary policy, and the state’s role of market intervention in economic recessions was severely undercut as policy focus transferred from controlling unemployment to controlling inflation.

This view of learning aligns with the Bayesian logic, “defined as a deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information” (Hall, 1993, p.278). Empirical errors accumulate and move from first to second order, eventually building “environmental pressures” that lead to third-order change. However, Hall and Blyth agree that the Bayesian explanation does not embody the entire process of paradigm succession. Anomalies are regarded under an institutional context, and that context is crucial to “driving policy content.” According to Hall, a policy paradigm is “a framework of ideas and standards that specifies . . . the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing” (Hall, 1993, p.279).

Two conclusions emerge from this, representing the two logics, as Blyth argues. One, policies do not fix the problems they are designed to fix and are deemed a failure. Two, policies fail due to how they are presented or “seen to fail...that failure is constructed despite the evidence” (Hay, 1996). Here lies the importance of incommensurability and authority; it is key to understanding how sociological logic can outweigh scientific logic in the social learning process.

This paper focuses on the concept of third-order change, also known as paradigm change, which is a transformative shift that fundamentally alters the underlying assumptions, values, and structures of the economic system. While some existing literature addresses various levels of

change, this study focuses on third-order change, as described and debated by influential scholars such as Thomas Kuhn, Peter Hall, and Mark Blyth.

Kuhn's groundbreaking ideas on paradigm shifts and Hall's three-order policy change framework highlight the complex structural alterations that characterize third-order change. Mark Blyth's analysis of economic transformations surrounding the crisis further complements these insights, emphasising how such shifts can destabilise existing systems and create new frameworks for understanding political and economic realities. By focusing on third-order change, this paper examines the profound and disruptive nature of these transitions and their implications for theory and policymaking. Moreover, TV media plays a critical role in shaping how paradigms change by serving as a conduit for policy authority and actors in the state and society. Television is one of the most influential forms of media in transmitting policy ideas to the public. It provides a platform for political leaders, business leaders, economists, academics, civil society actors, and others to communicate their ideas.

While Subchapter 3.1 outlined the structural logic of policy learning and the sequential orders through which paradigms may shift, these mechanisms alone cannot fully explain why paradigm change does—or does not—occur during moments of crisis. As both Hall and Blyth argue, empirical anomalies are necessary but insufficient for dislodging dominant ideas. The process of paradigm succession is as much sociological as it is technical, shaped by struggles over meaning, legitimacy, and the authority to define policy failure. Crucially, such transformations unfold not in neutral analytical spaces but in politically charged arenas where narrative control and actor positioning are decisive. Subchapter 3.2 builds on this tension by examining the significance of incommensurability and persuasion in shaping the fate of competing paradigms. It explores how crises trigger rhetorical battles, where actors embedded in different ideational frameworks seek to persuade others and reconfigure the dominant 'rules of relevance' that underpin policy authority.

3.2 Importance of Incommensurability and Persuasion

The “superiority” of one theory over another is not proven in debate; it results from one group being persuaded by another (Kuhn, 1962, p.198). Kuhn asserts that “economic theory is not like mathematics...there is no neutral algorithm for theory choice.” Opposing theorists argue from

“incommensurable viewpoints,” where the frameworks that comprise policy paradigms are bound to different rules, which is why “inter-paradigmatic choice between theories is not possible” (Blyth, 2012, p.8). Due to incommensurability, Hall and Blyth agree that the learning process is political and “value-driven,” whereby Hall (1993, p. 280) makes three key points.

First, the sociological will “most likely” outweigh the scientific in the succession of paradigms. Scientific evidence brought forth by “experts” is controversial in nature and “rarely [can] be made on scientific grounds alone.” From this conflict, “actors construct and contest which empirical anomalies matter, and which ones do not” (Blyth, 2013a, p.8). Second, authority contests “are likely to be central to the process of paradigm change.” Finally, policy experimentation produces anomalies. Anomalies accumulate and tarnish the credibility of the existing paradigm and its advocates.

Analysing Britain’s paradigm change in the 1970/80’s, Hall diverges from the “traditional conception of the political system...[whereby] the only ‘transmission belts’ between state and society” pertained to organised interest groups and political parties. Hall argues that, for the first time, societal elements significantly pressured policymaking decisions and “became the subject of an intense public debate.” That society also “powers,” as power is acquired “in part by trying to influence the political discourse of the day” (Hall, 1993, p.290; Heclo, 1974).

According to Hall, societal pressures build upon the state through three mechanisms in the transition to monetarism: media, financial markets, and new research institutes.

Media was the most “obvious” and yet most undervalued; it “catapulted monetarist thinking onto the public agenda [for] the press is both a mirror of public opinion and a magnifying glass for the issues that it takes up” (Hall, 1993, p.288). Hall suggests that beyond media, “new research institutes” and think tanks became involved in the political discourse, “providing outsiders with influence over a formerly closed policy process” (Hall, 1993, p.289).

Paradigm change results from the “positional advantages” and “exogenous factors” impacting the authority “of one set of actors to impose its paradigm over others” (Hall, 1993, p.280). Authority and incommensurability are the two factors Blyth emphasises as responsible for creating and partly explaining the paradoxical tensions. When Hall (1993) applies the paradigm succession in Britain, these paradoxical tensions are evident.

In Britain, Edward Heath (1970-74) and Margaret Thatcher (1979-83) ran conservative platforms promising low inflation, tax cuts, and a less government role in markets.

However, their governments used very different approaches to address rising unemployment levels. Heath's government orchestrated a tactic of "reflation and state intervention," whereas Thatcher's government relied on monetarist policies and its campaign promise to promote deflation. Hall states, "Policymakers are likely to be in a stronger position to resist [societal] pressure when they are armed with a coherent policy paradigm." Heath's government, after decades of experimentation in policy settings and instruments, accumulated enough anomalies to "stretch the intellectual coherence of the paradigm . . . to the point of breaking" (Hall, 1993, p.285).

Monetarism was introduced and debated among "experts," equipping Thatcher with a new solution. Thus, Thatcher had an alternative to "fall back on," while Heath did not. Thatcher "appeal[ed] to the monetarist paradigm for authoritative arguments with which to resist mounting pressure for reflation" (Hall, 1993, p.290) while Heath was limited by a Keynesian paradigm that "dictated reflation."

Bayesian logic contests that there are "objective, empirical standards" whereby events can be judged as factual. In this sense, the accumulation of anomalies in the 1970s resulted in the failure of Keynesianism. However, constructivists argue that the experimentations in the 1970s were in themselves a "political move," whereby anomalies were "underdetermined by evidence and overdetermined by theory" (Blyth, 2013a, p.8). Separate paradigms are incommensurable; therefore, "empirical failure cannot be a sufficient criterion of truth" (Blyth, 2002). Facts "are true in terms of the theory within which they are embedded, and they are true if the majority, or the most powerful members of a group or society, consent to that truth" (Blyth, 2013a, p.7).

Regarding the paradox, Blyth states that failure must be seen as failure. Truths are both "conventionally and consensually" based, not solely empirically. Moreover, social learning is not solely cognitive but also about "recognition." Incommensurability is why Blyth argues that "authority contests" act as a "conceptual bridge" between the two causal logics. Furthermore, it serves as the reason Hall, after providing many examples suggesting the Bayesian logic is driving paradigm change, decides to emphasize the Constructivist logic.

Persuasion is the most important element within the Sociological or Constructivist argument. From Kuhn to Hall to Blyth, all three scholars emphasise persuasion as the fundamental driver of paradigm succession. Thomas Kuhn's groundbreaking advancements in social learning emphasised that persuasion is most critical in how scientists and scholars defend their paradigms during periods of 'normal science', but most notably during paradigm struggles and times of uncertainty that produce the conditions for ideological revolutions. As existing paradigms are profoundly entrenched in time, institutions, and actors' interests in both state and society, it is challenging to advocate for a revolution of ideological paradigms.

An ideological revolution is only possible by actors persuading other actors. When a crisis arises within an existing paradigm, such as neoliberalism, advocates of a new paradigm, such as Keynesians, must engage in persuasive discourse to gain acceptance. Kuhn argues that this persuasion is not simply about presenting data but involves broader appeals to values, beliefs, and the vision of what science should accomplish.

Kuhn's consistency in alluding to incommensurability is apt because two different paradigms are so intrinsically different that they do not provide a standard measure to base judgement and rely on 'normal science'. Incommensurability adds considerable complexity for scientists, scholars, and policymakers to communicate across paradigms and make compelling arguments. However, according to Kuhn, those complex persuasive efforts throughout the paradigm struggle dictate whether scientific revolutions happen. Persuasion in paradigmatic struggles results in a change in what Kuhn refers to as 'world views', one system replacing another and adopted by the majority in state and society. Persuasion is the reason all three prominent scholars choose to promote the sociological, or constructivist, logic over the scientific, or Bayesian, logic.

The preceding discussion highlighted how struggles over authority and incommensurable paradigms inhibited the shift away from neoliberalism despite initial moves toward Keynesian intervention. Building on this, Subchapter 3.3 turns to the longer historical trajectory and institutional architecture of neoliberal governance in the United States. It examines how neoliberalism has redefined state power, benefiting economic elites while reshaping the conditions under which policy legitimacy is constructed—an essential backdrop for understanding the constraints operating during the crisis.

3.3 The Evolution of Neoliberalism and Elite Interests

Neoliberal ideologies led governments to seek alternative methods of retaining power as the state became subject to marketisation (Pierre, 2009). Whiting (2001, p.8) theorises that “state governance of capital and the market is continuously subordinated to the political imperatives of maintaining power” (see also Boone, 1992; Geddes, 1994; Moore, 1997, p.339). One prominent theory claims the state has not lost power but instead adapted along with its institutions to a new style of governing due to changes in their external environment (Rhodes, 1996; Mann, 1997; Sorenson, 2004), whereby political institutions serve to “define collective interests and serve as a hub coordinating the actions of state and non-state actors” (Pierre & Peters, 2000). State leaders work “with actors in their environment” and establish networks “as instruments of gathering information, bargaining, persuasion, collaboration, and policy implementation” (Fell, 2008; Pierre, 2009, p.598). As Whiting (2001, p.9) states, “To the extent that particular interests can colonise the state apparatus, they can undermine both its autonomy and its ability and willingness to implement state policy.” Using policy networks to govern has raised concerns over transparency and the representation of majority interests, as only the interests of network members are served (Kjaer, 2004, p.55). Additionally, the state increasingly relies on state-external policy “experts” due to budgetary constraints (Painter & Pierre, 2005).

Many scholars regard neoliberalism as an ideology designed to benefit the economic elite by encouraging policies that deregulate, privatise public sectors, financialise, reduce taxes, and reduce public spending, especially in welfare (Mercille, 2013, p. 282; Harvey, 2010; Duménil and Lévy, 2011). Different adaptations to laissez-faire economics since the 1980s have enabled rapid development and wealth accumulation in the United States but at the expense of social equality. Out of the wealthiest countries, the United States has both the lowest share of tax revenue and the highest levels of income inequality since the 1980s. Moreover, in 1980, the top marginal tax rate was 70%; by 2008, it had decreased to 35%. Republicans and Democrats have contributed to promoting and maintaining neoliberal policies. The Republicans particularly have been aggressive in fiscal consolidation programs targeting non-defence spending, typically to justify greater tax cuts and “shrink” government.

Fiscal consolidation has been a crucial component in achieving neoliberal objectives. Within a year of the US's most considerable Keynesian stimulus in history, policymaking began transitioning toward consolidation. From 2010 to 2014, the United States undertook greater fiscal consolidation efforts and experienced stronger growth than all other wealthy developed nations. By 2017, the neoclassical paradigm was back in full swing, as President Trump reduced corporate tax by 14% while slashing welfare spending and lowering the top income bracket, as well as reducing inheritance and corporate tax rates.

While Subchapter 3.3 contextualised the neoliberal transformation of state capacity and its ideological consolidation, the final section of this chapter addresses the policy instruments through which this logic materialised. Subchapter 3.4 focuses on fiscal austerity as both a technocratic solution and an ideological project, examining how its implementation and legitimisation were contested in the public sphere. It situates austerity within the broader landscape of post-crisis policy responses and evaluates the narratives and counter-narratives surrounding its impact and justification.

3.4 Discursive Struggles and Austerity's Popularity

Pre- and post-crisis fiscal austerity has been a top priority on the political agenda (Blyth, Stanley, Dellepiane-Avellaneda, Baker, and Underhill). Austerity advocates argue that expansionary results are attainable through cutting public spending and reducing sovereign debt, as states become more competitive due to less state “crowding out” of the market, which increases private investment, keeps interest rates low, and restores faith in consumer and producer confidence (Mercille, 2013). However, those who immediately adopted austerity measures after the crisis were unable to reduce their debt-to-GDP ratio; they experienced higher levels of unemployment and suffered worse economic growth compared to those who initially pursued stimulus policies (Blyth, 2013b). Exemplifying this phenomenon is that by 2012, the EU contracted for the first time in history. In contrast, stimulus spending in the US achieved more substantial economic growth following the initial crisis years (Blyth, 2013c).

Alberto Alesina and contributors have been scholarly networks' most prominent austerity advocates. Alesina's analyses “provide much of the intellectual justification for austerity policies,” however, post-crisis outcomes have led to greater scepticism of austerity and its advocates

(Mercille, 2013, p.287; Blanchard & Leigh, 2013). The IMF argues that Alesina's methodologies "fail to remove changes in government tax revenue related to asset price or commodity price variations, leading to changes in the adjusted balance that are not related to policy changes" (Mercille, 2013, p. 288). Alesina's framework is "selectively" biased towards periods of growth when minimal austerity measures were implemented, while at the same time, it tends to "omit unfavourable growth outcomes" (Ball et al., 2011, p. 21). The IMF stated after the crisis that widespread fiscal consolidation will have contractionary effects (IMF, 2010; Guajardo et al., 2011; Mercille, 2013, p. 288).

Since the crisis, more prominent authors have stressed the flaws in the "expansionary fiscal consolidation" theory (Baker, 2010; Perotti, 2011). Ireland's fiscal consolidation experiment between 1987 and 1990 is often cited as evidence of expansionary fiscal consolidation being effective; however, global economic growth, currency devaluation before 1987, and increases in fiscal transfers need to be considered (Kinsella, 2012; Mercille, 2013). The literature gives several reasons austerity engulfed the EU post-crisis. EU members are restricted from using monetary policy or currency devaluation to stimulate growth (Mercille, 2013). Compared to European Union members, the flexibility afforded to Iceland by having its own national currency appears to have helped crisis relief efforts (Wade & Sigurgeirsdottir, 2012). Additionally, the EU requires ceilings on national annual deficits (Warner, 2013). Austerity's popularity has also been attributed to the power of German central banks and the necessity for export-driven Germany to control inflation and price competitiveness.

According to Stone (1988), "discursive struggles" define the problems, ideas, and "shared meanings on which people act." These struggles occur in parliamentary debate (Wendler, 2012) but also in the media, whereby scholarly journals, think tanks, and state-society leaders act as, or elevate others, as "experts." (Schmidt, 2014, p. 193). Schmidt (2014) claims that the European sovereign debt crisis became "existential" partly due to growing debt and declining growth. However, it was primarily due to how national leaders communicated the crisis and policy solutions to one another, the public, and the markets. According to Schmidt, national leaders are the most influential in communicating and understanding policy solutions and alternatives; however, central banks, institutional leaders, and other state-society elites also play a significant role.

Schmidt (2014, p.190) argues that EU leaders alter policy discourse and persuade action through “coordinative discourse”, which takes place amongst national leaders and is not open to the public, and “communicative discourse” between the elites and masses involving media, electorates, cultural and societal movements (Habermas, 1989; Mutz et al., 1996).

The “coordinative discourse” is affected by interest groups, state-society experts, and think tanks. This literature recognises ‘discourse coalitions’ (Hajer, 1993; Sabatier, 1993; Lehmbruch, 2001), ‘epistemic communities’ (Haas, 1992; Dellepiane-Avellaneda, 2015), and ‘knowledge regimes’ (Fischer, 1993; Campbell & Pedersen, 2010). Whereby “communicative discourse” refers to persuasion efforts among national leaders, financial market leaders, and the people.

In the persuasion process, two types of frames emerge. Rein and Schön (1994) define “rival frames” as separate guidelines for “knowledge, persuasion, and action... [whereby] ‘frames of reference’ orient differing understanding and action.” Following the crisis, neo-Keynesian ideas and experts began to challenge the neo-liberal foundation and the post-crisis understanding became constrained to the two opposing “narratives” or “rival frames” (Roe, 1994; Bal, 2009; Schmidt 2014, p. 191; Pirie, 2012). The neo-Keynesians viewed the crisis as the result of excessive debt leverage by financial institutions, largely due to understaffed and unchecked regulatory bodies, which necessitated more significant state intervention in the market and recovery, starting with bailouts and public investments. The ‘neo-liberal’ opposition argued excessive national debts due to the inability of states to control their finances, which generated large-scale instability and hurt business confidence (De Ville & Orbie, 2014; Rosamond, 2013; Schmidt, 2014, p. 191)

Schmidt (2014) analyses differences in the “narratives” forged by German Chancellor Merkel and French President Sarkozy of post-crisis understanding and necessary policy action as a vital sample of the discursive persuasion amongst the two most powerful EU leaders that led to consolidation policies encompassing the EU. The story for the French was one of solidarity; for the Germans, it was one of survival. Political leaders often use economic events selectively to justify policy actions, a phenomenon known in the literature as “collective memories” (Rothstein, 2005; Schmidt, 2014). Proponents of austerity in Germany’s leadership often refer to the hyperinflation episode of 1923 to justify austerity “and for opposition to the European Central Bank to act as a lender of last resort, to buy member-state debt, or engage in quantitative easing” (Schmidt, 2014, p. 193). However, what is not addressed is Germany’s experience of depression

in 1931, mainly due to a massive deflation experiment (Wolf, 2011). The dominant narrative following the 2008 crisis is one of fiscal deficits and concerns about sovereign debt defaults. However, as Mercille (2014) and numerous other scholars have illustrated, this understanding is significantly overemphasised by national leaders, elite groups, and the media and, in many ways, is unjustified based on empirical evidence.

This chapter emphasises that the endurance of neoliberalism following the 2008 crisis cannot be understood solely in terms of institutional inertia or the availability of alternative ideas. Instead, it reveals a deeper configuration of ideational authority, elite alignment, and strategic legitimisation, wherein policy continuity was secured not despite the crisis but through the crisis itself. As Hall and Blyth contend, paradigmatic resilience is as much a function of narrative control and perceived authority as it is of formal institutional design. In this regard, the media emerges not as a peripheral actor but as a constitutive element of the policy process—both reflecting and reinforcing dominant ideologies through its discursive power. This theoretical grounding sets the stage for a more focused investigation into how media discourse constructed fiscal policy debates during the post-crisis period.

Chapter 4 extends this inquiry by critically engaging with the media's role in shaping the ideological terrain on which policy debates unfold. Moving beyond questions of representation, it interrogates how media structures, narratives, and consumption patterns mediate the public's relationship to economic knowledge and political authority. In doing so, it highlights the mechanisms through which austerity narratives gained widespread traction despite their contested efficacy, and how media logics—driven by political economy, audience segmentation, and elite interests—shape the conditions for public deliberation and democratic accountability. Where Chapter 3 focuses on the production of policy authority, Chapter 4 turns to the communicative infrastructures that legitimise, diffuse, and entrench it.

Chapter 4: Media, Interests, and Persuasion

Chapter 4 has three subchapters. Subchapter 4.1 reviews the literature on the dynamic interactions of media, interests, authority, and persuasion in the policymaking process. Subchapter 4.2 explores the media's role in shaping public opinion on policy issues. Finally, subchapter 4.3 dissects the current TV media landscape and its evolution from 2000 to 2010. Additionally, the final

subchapter addresses increasing selective exposure in audiences and a growing partisan polarisation among the US public.

Subchapter 4.1 focuses on the contentious issue of fiscal austerity policies. Proponents of austerity argue that reducing public spending and sovereign debt can lead to economic expansion by making states more competitive, encouraging private investment, and keeping interest rates and inflation low. However, evidence suggests that countries implementing austerity measures post-crisis often struggled with high unemployment rates, stagnated economic growth, and an inability to reduce debt-to-GDP ratios compared to those pursuing stimulus measures. The failure of these policies has led to increased scepticism regarding austerity and its advocates, with many arguing that austerity served to protect the interests of elite groups. Many scholars argue that the media plays a crucial role in disseminating information and constructing narratives surrounding economic crises and policy responses, as it can shape public and elite understanding.

Subchapter 4.2 discusses ways the media shape public opinion and debate across various social issues. The research emphasises how media narratives can establish specific understandings of social issues, which affect public attitudes, political agendas, and behavioural patterns. The media's dissemination of conflicting information has fostered uncertainty among the public, leading to a decline in engagement. Scholars such as Happer and Philo reveal how elite groups, driven by economic and political interests, have strategically spread disinformation through media channels to direct public discourse favouring their interests.

Subchapter 4.3 focuses on the popularity of television media when it comes to political news, despite the rise of the internet and social media platforms. The subchapter offers a comprehensive analysis of the political media landscape in the United States, highlighting the popularity of TV news as a source of political information, the partisan divisions in news consumption, and the strategies employed by TV news companies to shape public opinion. It also raises questions about the role of media in shaping political discourse and the potential consequences of partisan polarisation in news coverage. Additionally, the influence of wealthy interest groups on policy discourse. Illustrating how elite donors alter political agendas through media and advocacy.

This chapter examines the structural conditions and discursive dynamics of the U.S. television media landscape during the 2008–2010 fiscal crisis, with a focus on how media

institutions influenced public understanding and the visibility of competing policy preferences. Building on previous chapters that explored the ideological endurance of neoliberalism and the contested nature of policy authority, Chapter 4 shifts attention to the communicative processes through which economic paradigms are made visible, legitimised, or constrained. It critically evaluates how the television news environment shaped political discourse through agenda-setting, selective amplification, and representational asymmetries—particularly concerning elite access and partisan segmentation. In doing so, this chapter advances the thesis’s broader objective of understanding the role of media in structuring the interpretive and persuasive conditions under which fiscal policy is debated. While the categorisation frameworks guiding empirical analysis are introduced in Chapter 5, the present chapter provides essential theoretical and contextual groundwork for understanding the media’s role as an active site of ideological contestation and boundary-setting. The discussion begins by reviewing key literature on media framing, political communication, and structural transformations in the U.S. media ecosystem.

Subchapter 4.1 examines the political and institutional foundations of post-crisis austerity, highlighting how economic ideas gained traction not only through empirical credibility but also through their alignment with elite interests and media amplification. It traces how theories such as expansionary fiscal contraction were legitimised despite poor economic outcomes and explores how television media—deeply intertwined with corporate and political networks—functioned less as a neutral observer and more as a strategic conduit for reinforcing dominant ideologies. In doing so, the subchapter situates the media within a broader ecosystem of authority and persuasion, where fiscal policy discourse became shaped by structural incentives, elite framing, and the path dependencies of neoliberal governance. This analysis clarifies how austerity narratives gained institutional momentum and public legitimacy through media-driven appeals to responsibility, inevitability, and moralised deficit reduction.

4.1 The Media and Post-Crisis Path Dependency

Pre- and post-crisis fiscal austerity has been a top priority on the political agenda (Blyth; Stanley; Baker & Underhill). Austerity advocates argue that expansionary results are attainable through cutting public spending and reducing sovereign debt, as states become more competitive due to less state “crowding out” of the market, which increases private investment and keeps interest and

inflation low (Mercille, 2013). However, those that immediately embraced austerity after the crisis could not reduce debt-to-GDP, had higher levels of unemployment, and worse economic growth than those that initially pursued stimulus (Blyth, 2013b).

In scholarly networks, Alberto Alesina's analyses "provide much of the intellectual justification for austerity policies." However, post-crisis outcomes have led to increased scepticism of austerity, "expansionary fiscal consolidation" theory, and its advocates (Mercille, 2013, p.287; Baker, 2010; Perotti, 2011; Ball et al., 2011, p.21). Dellepiane-Avellaneda argues that "ascendancy and influence" explain the rise of the expansionary fiscal contraction hypothesis. Like Blyth, Dellepiane-Avellaneda (2015:392) claims that the success of specific economic ideas over others is "about power." Austerity's popularity, despite evidence of contractionary consequences, led many scholars to argue that consolidation was implemented mainly to protect the interests of state-society elites (Peet, 2011; Callinicos, 2012; Crotty, 2012; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2012; King et al., 2012; Mercille, 2013).

The role of TV media in fiscal policymaking deserves more attention from scholars, given the public's reliance on mainstream TV and print companies for political news. Media and non-media companies have become increasingly intertwined through acquisitions, stakeholders, and shared board of directors; thus, what is published by media sources "will reflect economic and political elites' interests and views" (McChesney, 2004 Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Media companies have become an "integral part of the broader corporate sector" and will strategise to cover policy issues and solutions that coincide with the interests of their shareholders, board members, and advertisers (McChesney, 2004; Mercille, 2013, p. 288). Media companies "pay enough deference to elite frames to maintain access while deviating enough to generate and maintain public interest in the news" (Baum & Potter, 2008). Additionally, modern journalism requires a constant flow of information that only governments and large institutions can provide (Mercille, 2013, p. 288).

Inherent to democracy, policy outcomes depend on public opinion (Baum & Potter, 2008). Since McCombs and Shaw (1972), policy scholars have presented evidence that media "determines the important issues...at the centre of public attention and action." Baum and Potter (2008, p.53) argue that media shapes "elite opinion", not just public opinion; Tifft and Jones (1999) and Powlick's (1995) findings support that government leaders "at the highest level" rely heavily

on media companies for information on current events. Additionally, media leaders have transitioned into government positions and vice versa (Holsti & Rosenau, 1984; Reilly, 1995). Baum and Potter argue that three key actors explain policy outcomes: “the public and its leaders,” whose interests naturally diverge from one another, and the media.

Hall (2013) argues that the events of 2008-2010 are the “preconditions” for a new policy paradigm to gain political momentum. Historically, similar conditions of unemployment, income inequality, and inflation made it possible for the alternative ideas of John Keynes and Milton Friedman to gain political appeal. Since the crisis, Baker and Underhill (2015, p.382) argue that political economists prioritise understanding “the use of economic ideas in constructing crisis events and in changing the range of available appropriate policy options, as well as the politics this entails.” Periods of crises are times when the “established” ideological systems and their advocates are most “vulnerable” (Hall, 1993; Blyth, 2002).

Given past failures and consistently underachieving outcomes, Dellepiane-Avellaneda (2015) joins the rising number of sceptics regarding austerity policies post-crisis. Specifically, the concept of “expansionary fiscal contractions” gained traction based on the works of Francesco Giavazzi and Marco Pagano. Dellepiane-Avellaneda argues that “ascendancy and influence” explain the rise of the expansionary fiscal contraction hypothesis and economic ideational shifts in general.

Like Blyth, Dellepiane-Avellaneda (2015, p.392) claims that the success of specific economic ideas over others is “basically about power.” Ideas have consequences of both power and distribution, resulting in “winners and losers,” thus, ideational changes are inherently political, for the emergence of new economic ideas requires “political viability” to gain the traction necessary to be translated into practice (Hall 1989, 1993). Historically, expansionary Keynesian policies have demonstrated more successful recoveries from the recession than austerity (Pollin, 2012; King et al., 2012; Popov, 2012; Kuehn, 2012; Sawyer, 2012; Blyth, 2013). Blyth (2013a, p.14) argues that the questionable policy outcomes post-crisis reinforce the logic that “politics, not economics, and authority, not facts” matters most in understanding and realising policy paradigm shifts.

Austerity’s popularity, despite evidence of contractionary consequences, led scholars to argue that consolidation was implemented mainly to protect the interests of state-society elites

(Peet, 2011; Callinicos, 2012; Crotty, 2012; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2012; King et al., 2012; Mercille, 2013). Ideological path-dependency, mainly stemming from the pre-existing “vested interests” of powerful groups and state-society actors, is the greatest obstacle for “norm entrepreneurs,” or authoritative actors, to promote new ideas and institutional change following crisis and fragile economic episodes (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Widmaier et al., 2007; Chwioroth, 2010; Baker & Underhill, 2015, p.383).

As Baker and Underhill (2015, p.384) phrase it, “Long-shared ways of thinking may trump a genuine search for radically better outcomes due to the latent habitual patterns of various political and institutional actors. In this sense, policy entrepreneurs have to shake off a crisis of understanding as much as a crisis of policy.” Baker and Underhill provide new insight into the political nature of the crisis and its aftermath, the path dependency and “cognitive locking” to pre-existing ideas driven by embedded interests that mount resistance to the emergence of new ideas (Hall, 1986; Pierson, 2000). Additionally, the authors explore the persuasive efforts of elites over the meaning of the crisis and the instruments they use to gain or maintain their political and economic position (Widmaier et al., 2007; Dellepiane-Avellendea, 2015; Schmidt, 2014).

Media instruments wielded by the elite shape the political debate on how the crisis is understood and what necessary policy changes are required. Media's role in policymaking aligns with the constructivist reading of policy change where the learning process is driven by the “realignment of authority relations and social standing, in which new groups and advocates enjoy growing prominence as a result of on-going performance, reputation and positioning in social networks” (Chwioroth, 2010; Baker, 2013a; Blyth, 2013a; Baker & Underhill 2015, p.382). Media and non-media companies have become increasingly intertwined through acquisitions and stakeholders, and thus, what is published by media sources “will reflect economic and political elites’ interests and views” (McChesney, 2004; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Media companies have become an “integral part of the broader corporate sector”. They will strategise to create a context and narrative that aligns with the interests of its shareholders, board members, and advertisers, comprising a diverse group of state-society elites who position themselves according to shared interests (McChesney, 2004; Mercille, 2013, p. 288). Media companies “pay enough deference to elite frames to maintain access while deviating enough to generate and maintain public interest in the news” (Baum & Potter, 2008).

Though media can serve as a platform for opposing interests and public well-being, it also enables power coalitions to limit ideas that could potentially harm the interests of certain elite groups and actors. Additionally, pressures of “limited resources, time constraints and a competitive news environment led reporters to connect with those institutions that provide a steady flow of news,” which results in the majority of information being sourced from the government and most prominent companies (Mercille, 2013, p.288).

Inherent to democracy, policy outcomes partially depend on public opinion (Baum & Potter, 2008). Since McCombs and Shaw (1972), policy scholars have presented evidence that media “determines the important issues...at the centre of public attention and action.” Baum and Potter (2008, p.53) argue that media shapes “elite opinion”, not just public opinion; Tifft and Jones (1999) and Powlick’s (1995) findings support that leaders “at the highest level” rely heavily on media companies for information on current events. Additionally, media leaders have transitioned to government positions and vice versa (Holsti & Rosenau, 1984; Reilly, 1995). Baum and Potter argue that three key actors explain policy outcomes: “the public and its leaders,” whose interests naturally diverge from one another, and the media. When the interests of elites and masses clash, the “information held by each actor” determines the ability to dictate policy change, which is why media is critical in this process. Baum and Potter (2008) note that a limit in their work, and of the existing literature, is treating media as a “unitary actor,” for as media evolved, it has become significantly differentiated and segmented into different mediums and audiences (Baum, 2003; Hamilton, 2003). Therefore, Baum and Potter claim the most “fruitful” approach is to “consider implications...of increasingly niche-oriented and sometimes overtly partisan new media outlets.” Baum and Groeling demonstrate that “media fragmentation” increases individuals’ likelihood of gravitating towards media sources that affirm their pre-existing beliefs.

According to Reed et al. (2001), the social learning process is often initiated and sometimes steered by media; however, if media did shape our understanding of an event, it would only be social learning if that understanding spread through social networks that “link” the micro (individuals) to the macro (culture, collective norms, institutions) (Granovetter, 1973). Reed et al. argue that power is critical in dictating learning outcomes and can help assess how learning occurs through social interaction and networks. Regarding policymaking as a social learning process, Hall argued that the media is the most significant medium of persuasion in shaping public and elite

understanding of economic events and potential policy solutions. Additionally, media companies serve as a means for elite individuals and groups to position themselves by shared interests. Therefore, it is essential to continue contributing to research on policy change and the media's role. Media is potentially the most critical element in the persuasive and authoritative struggles of opposing elite actors in state and society, as well as their interests relative to policymaking outcomes.

Subchapter 4.1 provided an overview of the competing claims surrounding austerity and stimulus, highlighting how the media functioned as a key agent in the dissemination and legitimization of economic policy choices. Moving from a focus on policy narratives to broader mechanisms of influence, Subchapter 4.2 turns to the media's role in shaping public opinion and civic understanding. It examines how media content drives elite discourse and also mass attitudes, often through strategic framing and selective exposure, with implications for democratic engagement and the public's ability to assess competing fiscal paradigms.

4.2 Media and Public Opinion

Happer and Philo (2013) analyse the relationship between the media and social change by examining the media's role in shaping public opinion and debate. As Happer and Philo state, "The media play a central role in informing the public about what happens in the world, particularly in those areas in which audiences do not possess direct knowledge or experience." Based on empirical studies, Happer and Philo concentrate on several social issues, including economic growth, disability, and climate change. Based on their findings, Happer and Philo argue that out of a range of alternative policy solutions, dominant positions in the media "operate to establish specific ways of understanding" (Briant et al., 2011; Philo, 1996; Philo & Berry, 2004, 2011). The results from all three models suggest evidence that the media had a significant impact on setting the political agenda, public "attitudes", and interests toward specific policy issues, and whether changes in understanding and attitudes toward specific issues led to changes in audience behaviour.

The authors find that despite the overwhelming support in the scientific community that humans can have a major impact on climate change by changing personal behaviour, the media has presented a tremendous amount of conflicting information that has led to a high level of "uncertainty" in public. Happer and Philo present statistical evidence that this uncertainty, fuelled

by the media, led to real-life consequences as people “disengaged” from the issue of climate change, which created a lapse between attitude and action. Blake (1999) also refers to this as the “value-action gap,” which means the audience acknowledges a need for change but is not motivated to change their behaviour.

Happer and Philo analyse climate change as a political policy because changes in climate change policies primarily rely on public participation, which extends beyond public attitude and understanding of issues; as they state, “attitudes and belief need to be accompanied by the adoption of new behavioural patterns – and it is in these that social change will ultimately take place.” Happer and Philo find that the spread of disinformation by elite groups creates confusion and a complex understanding of social issues as part of an effort to support their economic and political agendas, which is a critical element in explaining the media's interactions with public attitudes and behaviour. They cite numerous recent public revelations of elite groups that have been “systematically undermin[ing] accurate media reporting” to steer public attitudes and behaviour.

For instance, in February 2013, The Guardian published evidence that elite groups in the US and UK had directly financed their efforts to create confusion on climate change through indirect channels, such as secret trusts (Goldenberg, 2013). Their efforts included launching an anti-renewables media campaign, financing over 100 organisations to “downplay the need to take action,” and giving millions to think tanks and activists to present sceptical viewpoints on scientific findings and spread scepticism to renewable energy. Also revealed in The Guardian was that the IEA, one of the UK groups responsible for these efforts, had representatives frequently appearing on BBC broadcasts (Monbiot, 2013). The fact that they could penetrate numerous media outlets, including public service media companies such as BBC, proves their tactics were successful. The media presented representatives from their disinformation campaign as policy “experts” rather than the experts we would expect to see throughout this area of policy debate, such as engineers and scientists. The implication Happer and Philo argue is that all of the key scientific evidence was immediately “undermined” from the polarising and conflicting messaging coming from the media coverage; it was the media, not the political actors or climate scientists, that was dictating the direction and attention of the public and political discourse.

Since the economic crisis, there has been a significant reduction in the amount of coverage focused on climate change, suggesting it has become a less urgent political issue. This shift is

mainly due to politicians' role in shaping priorities and determining which issues stay in the public eye (Fischer, 2011; Happer & Philo, 2013). At the same time, the media's priority setting had severe consequences for public attitudes and behaviour, as it enabled politicians to depoliticise the issue.

Prior research by the University of Glasgow Media Group demonstrates evidence of what types of new information can transcend from understanding to behaviour (Happer et al., 2012). Their contributions to this area include an analysis of the media's role in promoting progressive social and policy changes related to HIV prevention and awareness (Kitzinger, 1990, 1993; Miller, 1998). Another popular example is research illustrating positive correlations between media coverage of smoking and cancer that led to social and policy changes. Thus, some types of new information the media presents transcend behavioural changes. However, others do not; therefore, the primary purpose of their methodology is to understand those factors further. Their methodology employed numerous focus groups in the UK to construct an experiment that provided interviewees with new information after being presented with a set of two scenarios that depicted different tones, accounts, and consequences of climate change. The new information included a Bangladesh refugee story that focused on a migrant 'flood' that would threaten employment and housing resources. It was not until the additional information was relayed that the interviewees had a heightened level of concern and accepted the need for action. The results showed that 68% of the group raised the importance of climate change as a policy issue after receiving additional information focused on the migrant crisis. However, they still felt the barriers to change were too high for them as individuals to make any impact. Happer and Philo designed follow-up interviews to confirm their findings, in which half of the original group were re-interviewed. Those results were conclusive because most interviewees' attitudes had changed, but not their behaviour.

One of the primary barriers to transcending the interviewees' attitudes and behaviours was knowing which sources and experts they could trust, given the conflicting messaging in the media. The results showed that scientists were classified as a trusting source. However, that only sometimes extended to their acceptance, as many deemed their stances more theoretical than quantitatively proven.

Many interviewees felt the "evidence could be easily manipulated to present different arguments and promote different agendas." Furthermore, politicians whom the interviewees

ranked as very low in trustworthiness on policy issues were also present in the debate. One of the key findings of Happer and Philo's study from the focus group was a feeling of "powerlessness" that those making policy decisions cannot be trusted and that, as individuals, they were not enough to implement change, which led them to "disengage" with making behavioural changes.

Although most of the focus group acknowledged the need for changes to address climate change, the reports indicate that the drop in media coverage concerning climate change following the economic crisis also altered their opinion on it as a policy priority. In conclusion, two additional key findings from this study were that the majority accepted the need to increase the cost of air travel to limit energy emissions if legislators promoted such a policy. These changes depend on "collective action". Only when the participants felt "broad support and participation" would they dedicate themselves to making behavioural changes.

Happer and Philo also explore the implications of their climate study for researching media messaging, specifically the "recurrence and reinforcement" of specific messages. They find a positive relationship between the level of exposure to messages and themes and the "strength of attitude...and the degree to which the information impacted [their] beliefs and opinions" (p.332).

Moreover, the follow-up interviews also demonstrated that, during the time between interviews, the media's focus on climate change shifted to policy debates over "green taxes" and their economic impact (Hall, 2011; McDermott, 2013). This fuelled the participants' uncertainty, even after participating in the experiment six months earlier and acknowledging a transition towards prioritising climate change in public policy. The uncertainty the media created once again "functioned to close down viable behavioural choices."

TV media companies are a platform and mediator for the interests of policymakers, national leaders, business leaders, and the public. Media and journalism are the most critical elements in how economic leaders in both state and society understand events and policy alternatives. How media companies have evolved over the era of neo-liberal policymaking and the technological advances that have coincided during that time has led many to argue that media has transitioned from being a facilitator of new ideas to one that inhibits new social and political ideas from emerging and from disrupting the power and distributional relations of elite groups (Bagdekin, 2000; Mercille, 2013, 2014; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Langer & Sagarzazu, 2017). As world-renowned journalist and scholar Ben Bagdekin states regarding media's "self-serving"

censorship: “Some intervention by owners is direct and blunt. However, most of the screening is subtle, and some do not even occur at a conscious level, such as when subordinates learn by habit to conform to owners’ ideas. But subtle or not, the ultimate result is distorted reality and impoverished ideas.”

Media ownership concentration has grown substantially in the United States during the era of neoliberal policymaking, transitioning from approximately fifty medium-sized companies in the 1980s to fewer than ten media conglomerates by the early 2000s. This transformation has significantly impacted the dynamics of authority, interests, and persuasion in the policymaking process. New networks exist between elite groups in the state and society. Media companies operate as a bridge between elite actors in government and business. Media companies are politically and financially motivated institutions. They are the primary tools of authority and persuasion used by elites to shape public opinion and policy decisions that serve their interests.

Today, Media companies are part of a broader corporate sector with interests and ownership across all industries. Directors and board members of non-media companies often sit on the boards of media companies and vice versa (Shah, 2009). Current networks of “interlocking directorates” were analysed by Burris (2005), who “provides empirical support for the thesis that social networks among corporate elites facilitate political cohesion within the business community.” The policy agenda exerted by media companies is dependent on the commercial imperatives of not disrupting business. Furthermore, the issues that media companies set priority to have been shown to affect the priorities of the public directly, and additionally, those of political elites, as those issues will be subject to public scrutiny and open to public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 1996; Weaver et al., 2004).

The previous section examined how media narratives shape public attitudes toward policy and economic issues, revealing the risks of disengagement and misinformation in a fragmented media environment. Subchapter 4.3 builds on this by analysing the structure and evolution of the U.S. television news landscape itself, focusing on the period from 2000 to 2010. It investigates how the dominance of cable news, the rise of partisan segmentation, and the influence of elite interest groups reshaped the conditions under which policy discourse is produced and consumed—

offering critical context for understanding the patterns of representation analysed in subsequent empirical chapters.

4.3 An Evolving Media: Polarization and Selective Exposure

This subchapter begins with an examination of polarisation and selective exposure, as well as the information silos they create. Partisan commentary and media branding have exacerbated this growing issue, as well as creating an incentive to promote emotive news content and commentary. Additionally, the politicisation of specific groups, such as scientists and academics, is discussed, which has proven to alienate audiences from scientific evidence and diminish public cohesion on key policy issues. Finally, the exposure of conservative think tanks in cable news coverage.

In recent years, television has remained the primary source of political information, although the growing popularity of other news media, such as news apps, social media, and online news platforms (Pew Research; Nielsen), has also been a factor. TV media is considered a more trustworthy source for political news than the internet, news apps, and social media. In December 2018, the Pew Research Centre reported that U.S. news consumers still largely prefer to watch the news (47%), as opposed to reading (34%) or listening (19%). Most Americans still prefer TV (44%) over online (34%), radio (14%), and print (7%) sources.

The resilience of TV news in the face of new mediums stems from the greater trustworthiness that voters place in TV news and the preference of consumers to watch news rather than read or listen to it. Additionally, TV news companies have adopted delivery models to modernise, such as delivering all content on YouTube. This modernisation is also a contributing factor in exacerbating the information silos that have worsened as viewers demonstrate more animosity and resentment toward those that choose ‘opposition’ news and political leadership. Like similar tech companies, YouTube utilises algorithms to track members viewing history and suggest content they may be interested in. Therefore, they further embed that person in the information they seek out.

Pew Research Survey “Trump, Clinton Voters Divided in Their Main Source of Election News” conducted in November and December 2016 found that the majority of both Democrats (56%) and Republicans (62%) named Television as their primary source for election and political

news. A significant portion of Republicans ranked FOX (40%) as their primary news source, followed by CNN (8%). Democrats relied most on news from CNN (18%) and MSNBC (9%). The broadcast TV companies ABC, CBS, and NBC ranked much lower for both Democrats and Republicans, as roughly 5% reported a broadcast company as their primary source. One of the most notable findings in the survey was the extreme gap in trustworthiness between Democrats and Republicans regarding FOX and MSNBC, as well as the commonality of trust in CNN.

In 2009, approximately 60% of Americans felt that media coverage was politically biased, and 63% stated that news stories are often factually inaccurate (Pew Research, 2009). Republicans (78%) were more sceptical of news organisations' ability to present unbiased coverage than Democrats (50%). Furthermore, only 20% believed news organisations work independently of influential individuals and groups.

Hyun and Moon (2016) argue that “TV news, in particular, merits scholarly attention as it has undergone significant partisan self-selection and polarisation” (Hollander, 2008; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2010). The composition of cable news companies' programming underwent rapid changes from 2007 to 2012 (Pew Research, 2013). Similarly, for CNN, FOX, and MSNBC, daytime programming has gradually evolved into a news structure that is more familiar in primetime over the five-year analysis. By 2012, the cable companies' average daytime content attributed 63% of the coverage to commentary. However, CNN remained the sole cable media company that delivered more reporting than commentary between 2007 and 2012. The more commentary-heavy news structure reflects the growing polarisation of news media and party identification.

Additionally, Hyun and Moon note that television's consistent public favouritism as the primary source of political news over other digital mediums provides greater merit to analysing cable news companies' agenda-setting effects. Television outranked the internet, newspapers, and radio as the primary national news source, with 71% of those surveyed identifying it as such. Regarding cable news networks, the survey found extreme gaps between Democrats and Republicans in their positive views of each network (Pew Research, 2009).

How TV media companies have differentiated themselves from one another in the last decade has amplified voter polarisation and exacerbated selective exposure among consumers. Stone (2011) notes two factors, “dynamics and repeated competition,” as a potential motivator for

the amplified efforts of US TV media companies to differentiate themselves from one another. Stone reasons that “the industry as a whole is better off with differentiated firms; thus, firms might cooperate and separate themselves even though they would benefit in the short run by deviating towards the middle. Moreover, since establishing a reputation for ideology takes time, deviations towards the middle may not be profitable even in the short run.”

DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) expand on behavioural theories (De Marzo, Vayanos, and Zwiebel (2003) and cognitive linguistics theories (Lakoff, 1987) by investigating US cable media company FOX and voter turnout since the network’s inception. The authors analysed voting data for 9,256 towns between 1996 and 2000, matching town-level cable programming data with the town-level data for federal elections. The authors found a strong relationship between exposure to FOX programming and Republican voter turnout. Note that during this timeframe, FOX and MSNBC nearly matched each other in viewership and ratings, whereas from 2000 to 2002, FOX’s primetime viewership nearly tripled that of MSNBC. In the last two decades, FOX has consistently maintained double the viewership levels of MSNBC during primetime programming (Grossman & Hopkins, 2016).

Matt Grossman and David A. Hopkins’s book “Asymmetric Politics” addresses the lack of attention political science scholars have dedicated to the different relationships between media and Democrats and Republicans. Particularly of interest for our case is their analysis of MSNBC and FOX. The authors explain the “asymmetric relations” between MSNBC and FOX, as well as the two parties—extending to the size and demographics of their audiences and their unique roles within the parties. Grossman and Hopkins utilise public policy data from 2010 to 2015, yielding several significant findings.

The authors argue that much of the research into FOX News’ coverage and Republican voter turnout and partisan support is outdated (such as Dellavigna and Kaplan), considering that FOX’s viewership and ratings have soared way above MSNBC and CNN over the last two decades. In addition, they are by far the most conservative-leaning TV company (Grosseclose & Milyo, 2005). From this, the authors suggest that the impact of FOX News on Republicans is most likely underestimated in the literature.

Grossman and Hopkins write in their 2016 Washington Post article, “While the ideological nature of the GOP is reinforced by Republican voters’ reliance on intellectual and media authorities

that explicitly claim a commitment to a conservative worldview, Democratic voters do not depend on openly liberal media for their political information.” They argue that “The Republican Party is the political vehicle of an ideological movement that has spent decades building a conservative media infrastructure. This alternative information ecosystem has undermined supporters’ trust in mainstream news sources.

The “ecosystem” of information that the Republican party spent decades constructing relies instead on ideologically aligned research usually sourced from conservative think tanks. Grossman and Hopkins observe that Republicans, whether governmental leaders or voters, “are more likely to live in an information cocoon, walled off from ideologically inconvenient evidence.” The effect, the authors argue, is that powerful conservative media companies such as FOX News exist as a “parallel power structure, rivalling Republican Party leaders.”

Stroud (2008), by analysing the 2004 National Annenberg Election Surveys, provides evidence that consumers were driven by their pre-existing political beliefs in selecting the sources and political information they were exposed to across all media types. Additionally, specific to cable news programming, greater exposure to cable content increasingly polarised attitudes.

Furthermore, Garrett and Stroud (2014) investigate the processes of selective exposure, in both selective approach and selective avoidance, by constructing an online experiment with a diverse group of participants and analysing over 2,000 individual exposure decisions. Their findings provide evidence that there are significant differences in selective exposure between Democrats and Republicans. Interestingly, the authors find no statistical significance in story selection based on information challenging the participant’s “preferred position”. The authors find that for both Democrats and Republicans, “pro-attitudinal” information in the stories was a more significant selection factor than exposure to some “counter-attitudinal” information. However, there were distinct variances across party lines. Republicans were more likely to engage in selective avoidance, whereby counter-attitudinal information, or “challenges” to the individual’s policy stances, played a more significant role in their decision-making than it did for Democrats. For Democrats and Independents, the pro-attitudinal information was more important in their decision-making, with opinion reinforcement being prioritised in the selection process.

Cable television, along with other news apps and internet platforms, has superseded the use of broadcast television companies as a primary source of political news (Feldman et al., 2012).

On behalf of the increasingly polarised media content, Feldman et al. state, “As media audiences fragment, television networks and programs now cater to specific segments of the public rather than the masses. At the same time, shifting structural, economic, and audience conditions are helping to erode the boundaries between news and entertainment so that entertainment values now filter into hard news programs and vice versa.” Supporting this claim, the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2005) revealed that 52 per cent of cable news programs presented a singular viewpoint on key policy issues. In contrast, only 20 per cent of broadcast news did.

More research is needed into the effects of increasingly partisan news content, audience fragmentation, policy framing, and selective exposure concerning federal budgets and fiscal policy. However, these factors have been explored in other policy issues, such as immigration, healthcare, and climate change. The surge of research into the evolving policy issue of climate change offers valuable insights into the significant effects of growing partisan news content on public policy issues.

Feldman et al. investigate differentiation in cable news content and policy framing relative to the policy issue of global warming. Although nearly the entire international scientific community has analysed and substantiated the human impact on climate change over the last few decades, most Americans believe scientists must be more decisive and conclusive in acknowledging humanity’s effect on climate change (Nisbet & Myers, 2007). Feldman et al. argue that as cable news content has become progressively targeted to more specific partisan audience segments (Hamilton, 2005), it is critical to the research to understand further the implications of the differential coverage on the “shaping” and polarisation of viewers’ attitudes towards global warming (Feldman et al.; Hamilton).

The Feldman et al. analysis indicates that Democrats and primary audiences of both CNN and MSNBC are highly accepting of global warming as a top policy priority. In contrast, most Republicans and FOX viewers remain deeply sceptical of human impact on climate change. The research primarily links the confusion over global warming realities to the growing partisan content on cable media, audience fragmentation, selective exposure, uncivil discourse, and strategies to ‘sensationalise’ discourse for ratings and viewership. Some theories in the literature argue that reporting norms, such as constructing ‘balanced’ content, are partially to blame (Boykoff, 2008, 2011; Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004, 2007). However, Feldman et al. note that the

differentiated coverage between cable media companies in how they frame policy issues, and the ideological alignment of their audience, is well documented (Hart, 2008).

Results from a content analysis of national survey data by Feldman et al. (2012) in 2007 and 2008 find significant variations in how climate change was covered on FOX compared to CNN and MSNBC. The authors find that FOX presented a greater proportion of guests and commentary that either denied or downplayed climate change than those that acknowledged the issue of climate change. This starkly contrasts with the coverage of CNN and MSNBC, which overwhelmingly presented guests and commentary that acknowledged the existence and issue of climate change. The authors provide evidence that a negative relationship exists between FOX News viewership and ‘acceptance’ of global warming. However, a positive relationship was found for the viewership of CNN and MSNBC.

Feldman et al. identify a stronger relationship between Republicans in their exposure to cable news and their acceptance of global warming than Democrats. The author’s results suggest that the viewpoints of Republicans were more reflective of the exposure to cable news, regardless of their existing ‘political predispositions’. Thus, when exposed to more news content accepting global warming as an issue, Republicans became less dismissive towards climate change. However, most Republicans gravitate toward FOX as a primary source of political information and, therefore, have maintained a dismissive attitude toward humanity’s ability to exacerbate climate change. A weaker relationship was found between Democrats and their exposure to cable news and their attitudes towards global warming. The authors argue that this finding suggests Democrats’ predispositions may be less dependent on cable news exposure. However, this finding could stem from Democrats using and trusting a multitude of news sources in comparison with Republicans, as was discussed earlier in the chapter.

The undermining of scientists and scholars, as well as the widening partisan gap in attitudes towards information presented by scientists, has been well-documented in recent years and analysed in terms of causation and its effects on policy discourse and audience attitudes (Happer and Philo; Grossman and Hopkins; Feldman et al.; Hmielowski et al.). In 2014, three of the authors in Feldman et al., along with other contributors, further expanded on their research by concentrating specifically on the trustworthiness of scientists between partisans and its effect on the policy issue of climate change in the article “An attack on science? media use, trust in scientists,

and perceptions of global warming” (Hmielowski et al). By utilising within-subject panel data the authors find a significant link between trust in scientists and the acceptance of global warming. Conservative media exposure led to a greater distrust in scientists and of the existence of global warming. In contrast, non-conservative media exposure led to greater trust in scientists and a higher acceptance of global warming.

Similarly, a study by Krosnick and MacInnis (2010) found that the more exposure to FOX, the more likely individuals were to be dismissive of scientists’ views on global warming. Furthermore, Grossman and Hopkins’s analysis shows that Democrats overwhelmingly trusted news from the media over Republicans. Additionally, distrusted by conservatives were representatives in academia or science, as they are perceived to largely lack objectivity and are biased towards liberals. One major contribution to the research from Hmielowski et al. is that their methodology was constructed to analyse the “interplay” between media use and trustworthiness rather than considering them as independent factors in predicting attitudes toward divisive policy issues.

Both Pirie and Mercille acknowledge the importance of ownership relative to a specific media company’s news values and political slant. The ownership structure of US TV media companies is highly concentrated. Rupert Murdoch and Brian Leon Roberts have tremendous power over the entire US TV industry. 21st-century FOX owns FOX, and its partner, Walt Disney, has a significant stake in both CNN and ABC. Brian Leon Roberts is chairman and CEO of Comcast, the parent company of Turner Broadcasting and CNN. He is also the principal executive officer for NBCUniversal, a parent company of NBC and MSNBC. Another critical ownership concentration element is the vested interest that the largest financial conglomerates, such as Blackrock Inc., Capital Group Co., and Vanguard Group Inc., have in all three cable companies. Additionally, the three conglomerates and the Laurene Powell Jobs Trust are heavily invested in Walt Disney, which holds the second-largest ownership stake, after the Murdoch family, in 21st Century Fox.

Other scholars have focused on the various financial relationships owners and board members share with other wealthy interest groups and advertisers. Wealthy interest groups penetrate media coverage and policy discourse through various means. Primarily covered in the research are the think tanks and policy advocates that are funded by wealthy interest groups, often

through secret trusts, as Happer and Philo illustrate in their investigation. Happer and Philo attribute “powerful and well-resourced bodies operating to systematically undermine accurate media reporting” as the critical driver in the confusion and scepticism concerning climate change.

The public exposure of their ideologies can occur either intentionally, as seen with FOX News giving a platform to conservative think tanks like Americans for Prosperity, or unintentionally, as in the case of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), infiltrating BBC's policy discourse. IEA was one of the hundreds of secretly financed think tanks that consistently had their representatives appear on BBC to spread disinformation and entice scepticism toward climate change (Monbiot, 2013; Happer and Philo). Thus, it illustrates that even news sources perceived as more balanced and unbiased are susceptible to the agenda of powerful interest groups. The objective is to either confuse or overwhelm the audience and reduce the potential for action or behavioural changes in response to the discoveries of human effects on climate change. Happer and Philo's results argue that the impact of overloading audiences with conflicting information significantly altered viewers' attitudes and potential behavioural changes.

Although there is now ample evidence of the partisan gaps in the trustworthiness of scientists, there needs to be more evidence of the trustworthiness placed of other actor types involved in public policy discourse. Trustworthiness in different types of actors (i.e., scientists, think tanks, governmental leaders) transcends what Blyth argued was the missing lynchpin in Hall's policy learning paradox: policy authority, which stems from recognition. As Blyth points out, policy learning cannot be deduced to a process of cognition, for “politics is not just about who thinks, it is also about recognition: who gets to (authoritatively) speak”. The success of the policy advocate is limited by the recognition, exposure, and credibility of the actor, as well as the news platform used to advocate specific policy solutions.

Two scholars have made noteworthy contributions, explaining how emotive discourse and policy framing is persuasive and appealing to audiences. Research conducted by Mutz and Reeves (2005) analysed the “phenomenon” of TV news consumers finding more appeal in uncivil, rather than civil, political discourse. Whereby emotionally charged disagreements have broader appeal than cordial debates between pundits presenting contesting ideologies that focus on in-depth policy details. The authors conclude that while more uncivil programming may be an effective means to drive consumption, it has an adverse effect on trust in government and between political parties.

McDonald and Morgaine (2016) analyse policy framing in the form of emotional attachments to policy issues. McDonald and Morgaine (2016) analyse the framing of healthcare and immigration policy framing on FOX and MSNBC. The authors analyse the height of the healthcare and immigration policy debate throughout 2009 and 2010 by employing a content analysis to examine 322 TV transcripts. The authors' results demonstrate that profound, contradictory frames were established between conservative and liberal pundits in their emotional conceptualisation of 'freedom' and its association with policy choices. Conservative pundits framed public healthcare as anti-freedom yet advocated for greater government involvement in immigration and border security. Conversely, liberal pundits "framed access to health care as security for the greater good, while viewing immigration legislation as racial profiling and a violation of personal freedom."

The framing of the policy debate in emotional verbiage, such as 'liberty' and 'freedom,' was significantly amplified by the rhetoric of FOX News hosts and contributors, in conjunction with the Tea Party movement and mobilisation. The authors conclude that policy debates concerning healthcare and immigration were reduced to a discourse of "whose freedom" was violated. From this conclusion, McDonald and Morgaine stress the importance of using qualitative methods to provide further insights "into how framing processes are communicated and reinforced amid political debate...[for] frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements, and suggest remedies" (Entman, 1993).

The significant role of wealthy interest groups on various policy issues following the 2008 crisis has been increasingly analysed by political science scholars and prominent Journalists, such as Jane Mayer. In 2010, Jane Mayer's infamous New Yorker article "Covert Operations" detailed the Koch brothers, billionaire conservative donors with close ties to conservative think tanks and other political initiatives, presenting information on major policy issues such as climate change and fiscal policy that benefited their personal and financial interests. The most notable focus of the research concerns the origins of the Tea Party movement and the wealthy groups and individuals behind it. According to Jane Mayer, "The anti-government fervour infusing the 2010 elections represents a political triumph for the Kochs. By giving money to "educate," fund, and organise Tea Party protesters, they have helped turn their private agenda into a mass movement."

Americans for Prosperity is one of the most closely linked think tanks to the Tea Party agenda. FreedomWorks, formerly known as Citizens for a Sound Economy, was founded by David Koch. Both think tanks receive a significant portion of their funding from the Koch brothers. Another think tank primarily funded by the Koch brothers, the Mercatus Center, has been instrumental in lobbying efforts against environmental regulation, energy taxation, and Obama's fiscal stimulus spending efforts. Since 2008, membership claims for Americans for Prosperity have ranged from eight thousand, as reported by Tim Phillips, the group's head, to the 1.2 million members they claim on their website.

The Tea Party and affiliated think tanks market themselves as a populist grassroots movement. However, investigative research is abundant in academia and journalism, illustrating its deep connections and funding from elite conservative donors. Of the most influential are the Koch brothers, Charles and Dave. The brothers jointly own Koch Industries, the largest privately held energy corporation in the world, making them two of the wealthiest individuals in the world.

In 2009, Renown Journalist Jane Mayer details the Koch's efforts to remain independent from the Tea Party and associated lobbyist-oriented think tanks in the public spotlight. However, employees and representatives of the group revealed that David had held the position of Chairman of Americans for Prosperity for a long time. Hardy quotes University of Texas law professor Thomas McGarity on Koch's decades-old strategy of utilising think tanks as vehicles of persuasion and mobilisation toward their agenda. McGarity describes that by funnelling corporate money through "neutral sounding think tanks [that] hires people with pedigrees and academic degrees who put out credible-seeming studies. However, they all coincide perfectly with the economic interests of their funders." Several corporate lobbying groups have emerged from Americans for Prosperity, including Patients United Now, which has emphasised its attention and efforts in opposition to healthcare reform.

The Tea Party movement posed a threat to divisions within the Republican Party, essentially pressuring the Republican establishment to adopt more neoliberal policies, such as spending cuts, tax cuts, and deregulation. They attach their branding to restoring the principles of our founding fathers using terminology such as "we the people" and other emotional attachments to American patriotism. As RNC chairman, Michael Steele attempted to bring uniformity and push towards common goals among the protesters of the Republican establishment, mostly from within

their own party. In an interview with FOX on January 5th 2009, Steele proclaims, “If I were not doing this job [RNC chairman], I would be out there with the Tea Parties.” The majority of opinion hosts on FOX News, especially Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity, spoke favourably of the movement and consistently presented the ideologies of Dick Morris, one of the Tea Parties' top promoters and funders.

FOX also consistently presented high-profile Republican governmental leaders, such as former RNC chairman Michael Steele and the former Republican governor of Alaska and 2008 Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin, who were either advocating for or sympathetic to the policy agenda of the Tea Party movement. Sarah Palin was given \$100,000 as a speaking fee at the National Tea Party Convention.

March 29th, 2010, on MSNBC, host Ed Shultz goes after conservative media's celebrity defenders of the Tea Party, Michael Steele and Sarah Palin. Bashing Palin for her claims, the media lied about Tea Party protestors harassing lawmakers who voted for the health care reform bill and reporting accusations that Michael Steele took the organisation's money to pay for a night at the strip club in Hollywood.

Shortly after the Supreme Court's ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* in January 2010, which removed nearly all political spending limits for corporations and unions that donate to Political Action Committees (PACs), Morris and other wealthy conservative strategists founded the Super PAC for America. The group's mission statement and top policy concerns were promoted on its website as restoring the ideologies of our founding fathers, embracing the Tea Party initiatives, and linking itself to Reagan conservatism.

Chapter 4 demonstrated that the media's role in shaping economic discourse extends beyond the transmission of information to the active construction of meaning, authority, and ideological alignment. The framing of austerity, the cultivation of selective exposure, and the strategic dissemination of elite narratives highlight how media logics intersect with political economy to shape public understanding and limit the scope of policy possibilities. This intersection of symbolic representation and material interest not only demands empirical scrutiny but also requires methodological precision.

Chapter 5 turns to the design of such an empirical investigation. It sets out the conceptual and methodological framework through which the analysis of television media, fiscal policy

discourse, and paradigmatic contestation is operationalised. The chapter builds on the preceding discussions of authority, media framing, and ideational struggle by translating these abstract dynamics into a replicable research design. By linking the theoretical concerns explored in previous chapters to concrete research strategies, the chapter constructs a systematic approach for examining how different actor types articulate fiscal preferences, how media coverage shapes policy narratives, and how ideological boundaries are reproduced or challenged in moments of crisis. In this sense, the methodology is a central analytical tool for uncovering how media structures and actor dynamics sustain or challenge dominant policy paradigms.

Chapter 5: Media Coverage Methodology and Data

The methodology chapter is structured into six sections: 5.1) Conceptual Framework: Media, Actors, and Paradigms, 5.2) Media Coverage and Policy Outcomes, 5.3) Methodological Approach, 5.4) Data, 5.5) Search Query, and 5.6) Fiscal Policy and Actor Categorisation Framework.

First, a detailed breakdown of the conceptual framework is provided. Second, an overview of the methodologies existing in the literature that are most relevant to the methods constructed in this chapter. Third, an outline of the methodological approach, research questions, and hypotheses. Fourth, an outline and timeframe of the data collection and categorisation. Fifth, the search query methodology includes the key terms for identifying different policy positions. Sixth, the fiscal policy and actor-type categorisation framework is detailed.

Having established the theoretical foundations of policy paradigms, the ideological dynamics of neoliberal resilience, and the structural and representational logic of television media, the next stage of the thesis turns to methodology. Chapter 5 outlines the analytical strategy through which these themes are empirically investigated, detailing the conceptual and categorisation frameworks developed to examine how television news channels constructed fiscal discourse during the 2008–2010 crisis. This chapter operationalises the thesis’s core concepts—actor authority, fiscal orientation, media framing, and paradigm contestation—by specifying how actor types, policy preferences, and ideological stances are identified, coded, and interpreted across televised content. In doing so, it provides the necessary bridge between theoretical inquiry and empirical analysis, enabling a systematic investigation into how media discourse shaped the public

understanding of the crisis, the legitimacy of fiscal interventions, and the conditions under which a policy paradigm shift might have occurred. Subchapter 5.1 begins by presenting the conceptual framework that underpins this methodological design.

5.1 Conceptual Framework: TV Media, Actors, and Paradigms

The study of policy paradigms is foundational for understanding how policy shifts occur, particularly in response to significant crises. Peter Hall's "three-order framework" provides a nuanced understanding of how the interaction between state and society, coupled with economic theory, leads to policy change. This methodology chapter aims to demonstrate how the conceptual and categorisation frameworks developed in this research bridge the theoretical arguments about paradigmatic shifts to the research design. Specifically, we will elaborate on how the categorisation frameworks capture the essence of Hall's theoretical arguments concerning policy paradigms and the different orders of change in the social learning process.

The conceptual framework constructed in this subchapter is unique because it addresses two issues that have not been addressed simultaneously. The first explores the relationship between media coverage, persuasion, and policy issues and alternatives. Substantial scholarly contributions have been made to this issue since the 2008 crisis. The studies most relevant to this thesis are detailed in the following subchapter. The second addresses the theories presented in the literature review, fixating on the persuasive power of both state and society during crises and paradigm struggles.

Peter Hall's ideas on policy paradigms, mainly his focus on social learning and paradigm shifts, are central to this research design. Hall argues that policymaking is not a static process but rather a dynamic one influenced by feedback loops between the state, society, and the media. The core of this process is social learning, where policy paradigms evolve because of interactions between societal demands and state responses. The actors involved in this process (state, society, and media) shape the policy discourse and the eventual policy outcomes.

Peter Hall's "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State" fixates on the power dynamics between the groups and individuals that embody the state and society. Hall argues that the dynamic power tensions between the two primarily shape policymaking outcomes. The state has the power to implement policy; however, the state is also subject to the demands and norms of

society, resulting in a complex process whereby interests may intertwine. Social movements and mounting public interest and pressure can force state actors to adapt their policy positions on specific issues. Hall argues that the interplay between state and society compels social learning, as both sides evolve in response to feedback from each other. Hall argues that the struggle for policy authority is constantly shifting through the conflict and discourse that occurs through the public lens.

The conceptual framework developed for this research incorporates these three levels of change into the design of the categorisation scheme, allowing for a systematic examination of policy evolution during the financial crisis. By incorporating Hall's understanding of social learning and the interplay between state and society, the research aims to capture the depth of change and the dynamics that drive paradigm shifts.

The conceptual framework, seen on page 93, illustrates the complex relationships and interplay between actor groups (state vs. society), economic theories (Keynesian vs. Neoliberal), and the role of the media and its power of persuasion. The interaction between the three key elements is organised to illustrate how power dynamics between state and society, shaped by economic theories (specifically Keynesianism and Neoliberalism), contribute to policy change.

The conceptual framework, seen on page 93, positions Keynesianism and Neoliberalism at opposite ends of the economic spectrum. Keynesians are placed on the left, and Neoliberals on the right in the framework. Moreover, the fiscal instruments used to achieve each goal are above each school of economic thought. Keynesians use fiscal stimulus to increase government involvement, while Neoliberals emphasise fiscal consolidation to reduce public spending and government interference.

Keynesianism supports active government intervention to stabilise markets and reduce inequalities, often through fiscal stimulus. In contrast, Neoliberalism advocates for market-driven policies, privatisation, deregulation, and reducing the state's role, typically through fiscal consolidation. The 2008-2010 financial crisis highlighted this ideological divide, with fiscal stimulus representing the Keynesian response and fiscal consolidation the neoliberal one.

Neoliberal economics is often seen as an evolution of orthodox economics, though they differ. Orthodox economics supports moderate government intervention to correct market

inefficiencies and regulate industries. However, neoliberalism, emerging in the 1970s, advocates minimal government involvement, focusing on deregulation and privatisation.

Key differences between orthodox, neoliberal, and Keynesian economists lie in their respective views on macroeconomic policy, markets, and the role of government. Regarding government, Orthodox argue for moderate state involvement primarily to correct market inefficiencies. Neoliberals argue for extremely limited state involvement, including reducing the state's powers by expanding privatisation and deregulation. Neoliberal fiscal policy ideals promote austerity, primarily through the instrument of fiscal consolidation, which focuses on reducing public spending and welfare programs. Tax cuts, particularly those targeted at corporations and high-income individuals, encourage private investment and foster economic growth. Conversely, Keynesians argue for a more active state role in markets and the economy. Keynesians view the state's role as prioritising supply and demand to avoid substantial recessions, primarily by increasing public spending and reducing tax burdens that hamper consumer spending. In 2008, Obama ran on a platform of change and government help as the nation felt the angst of a potential economic meltdown in the United States. A staple of Obama's campaign message was a promise to deliver a historic fiscal stimulus package to relieve individuals, small businesses, and families. Obama's landslide victory on this promise resulted in the greatest challenge to neoliberal advocates in nearly forty years.

The actors representing state vs society are placed on opposite sides of the framework. The state represents the government apparatus, from national leadership to local representatives, which formulates and implements policies. On the other hand, society represents the broader spectrum of public opinion and organised interest groups that exert pressure on the state, pushing for policy changes based on societal needs and values. Hall's analysis emphasises that policymaking results from the ongoing tension between the state and society, where both sides shape the policies adopted. Arrows point from 'state' actors to the two conflicting economic policy frameworks to signify its responsibility for policy formulation. All layers of the state are considered, from congressional leaders to the President to local mayors, to encompass the power dynamics at each level of government. Arrows are also directed from 'society' actors to each opposing economic instrument and school of thought, representing public opinion and the pressure society exerts. For instance, business class actors may advocate for fiscal consolidation and neoliberal privatisation

goals. In contrast, labour unions may advocate for fiscal stimulus, including tax increases on the wealthy to pay for stimulus measures.

The role of media and persuasion is a central feature of the conceptual framework, as media outlets play a key role in shaping public opinion and setting the political agenda. Media companies are not neutral participants; instead, they play an active role in framing policy debates, selecting which actors and ideas are given prominence, and ultimately shaping the public's understanding of key issues. The media's role in the fiscal policy debate is particularly critical in the context of the 2008 financial crisis, where different outlets adopted divergent positions on issues like fiscal stimulus and taxation. Media outlets like FOX News, CNN, and MSNBC played significant roles in supporting or challenging the dominant policy paradigms, thus influencing public perceptions of fiscal policy.

Television media coverage can affect how policy alternatives are perceived by society and, in turn, influence state responses. The media reflects societal concerns and constructs narratives that can legitimise or delegitimise policy paradigms. Television media plays a key role in the feedback loops between society, the state, and the policy process. Through coverage and analysis, the media frames issues in ways that shape the public's view on policies, altering both public opinion and the decisions made by state actors. Media and persuasion are illustrated in the opposing economic frameworks below, seen on page 93. Arrows from media flow to state and society groups, indicating how the media shapes perceptions and public opinion. Arrows are also directed from the media to each opposing economic paradigm as policy narratives that evolve in the media lens can promote or challenge the credibility of each framework.

The feedback loops in the conceptual framework further illustrate the dynamic interaction between these elements. These feedback loops capture how media and societal pressures mould state decisions and how state responses to crises or policy debates impact public opinion and media coverage. For instance, as the state adopts policy responses, these are scrutinised by society, and societal pressure (such as public protests or advocacy by interest groups) can lead the state to revise its position. Media plays an intermediary role, shaping the discourse and providing visibility and credibility to different policy alternatives.

There are several feedback loops representing the dynamic interactions between the variables. The feedback loop from society to media suggests that societal concerns, public interest,

and activism partly shape media coverage, and media can also influence the public's perception of policy alternatives by crafting policy narratives. The loop between the state and the media signifies that the media can hold the state accountable for its policy decisions by magnifying issues and steering policy discourse. Media narratives and critical media coverage can also lead policymakers to reconsider their policy stances. Moreover, public trust and sentiment toward government performance are formulated mainly through the state's media relations.

The feedback loop from society to state represents that the state's responses to the crisis are shaped by societal needs (Keynesian) vs. market principles (Neoliberal). Public scrutiny and calls for reform put pressure on policymakers and government. The state responds to the crisis through fiscal policy instruments, and the public and societal actors react to those decisions, including protesting and organising movements such as 'Occupy Wall Street'. Those responses influence policymakers and will alter policy direction.

The fiscal policy categorisation frameworks are designed to capture the different aspects of policy preferences that emerged in response to the financial crisis and examine how these preferences represent various levels of policy change. It helps identify the role of social learning in the policy process by categorising views on fiscal policy and breaking them down into two main areas: fiscal stimulus and fiscal consolidation. These areas reflect the central ideological debate between Keynesian and Neoliberal approaches to managing the economy.

In the context of the categorisation framework, fiscal stimulus v. consolidation categories serve as the starting point for analysing the evolving policy discourse during the financial crisis. Pro Fiscal Stimulus represents viewpoints advocating for government spending to stimulate economic growth and address recessionary pressures. Advocates of fiscal stimulus typically argue for increased public expenditure, either through direct government spending on infrastructure projects or tax cuts to incentivise consumer and business spending. From a Keynesian perspective, this represents an interventionist approach aimed at ensuring economic stability by stimulating demand and reducing unemployment. Pro Fiscal Consolidation includes viewpoints that emphasise the need to reduce government deficits through cuts in public spending, reduction in government borrowing, or increases in taxation. Advocates of fiscal consolidation typically argue that reducing the fiscal deficit is necessary for long-term economic stability. Neoliberals argue for

fiscal consolidation as part of a broader push for reduced government intervention in the economy, which they believe will ultimately foster growth by allowing the market to function more freely.

By categorising views according to these broad frameworks, the research design allows for an analysis of how the 2008-10 financial crisis polarised the policy debate into these two competing paradigms. This categorisation serves as the foundation for capturing first-order changes (adjustments to policy instruments within each paradigm), second-order changes (refining the tools used to implement fiscal policy), and third-order changes (a more profound shift in the underlying economic assumptions, such as the embrace of Keynesianism in the wake of the crisis).

The categorisation framework further dissects fiscal policy preferences into more granular views based on spending and taxation. This detailed breakdown helps assess first-order, second-order, and third-order changes by analysing whether specific policy instruments (such as tax rates or government expenditure priorities) represent only incremental adjustments or more profound shifts in the policy paradigm. Pro Spending Increases and Oppose Spending Increases: These categories capture positions on the general expansion or contraction of government spending, which are central to the Keynesian stimulus argument versus the Neoliberal consolidation agenda. Pro-Specific Spending Increases and Oppose-Specific Spending Increases: These categories reflect more specific policy discussions regarding particular budget items, such as funding for infrastructure projects or social programs. This indicates second-order change, where policy priorities may shift, but the fundamental Keynesian or Neoliberal framework remains intact.

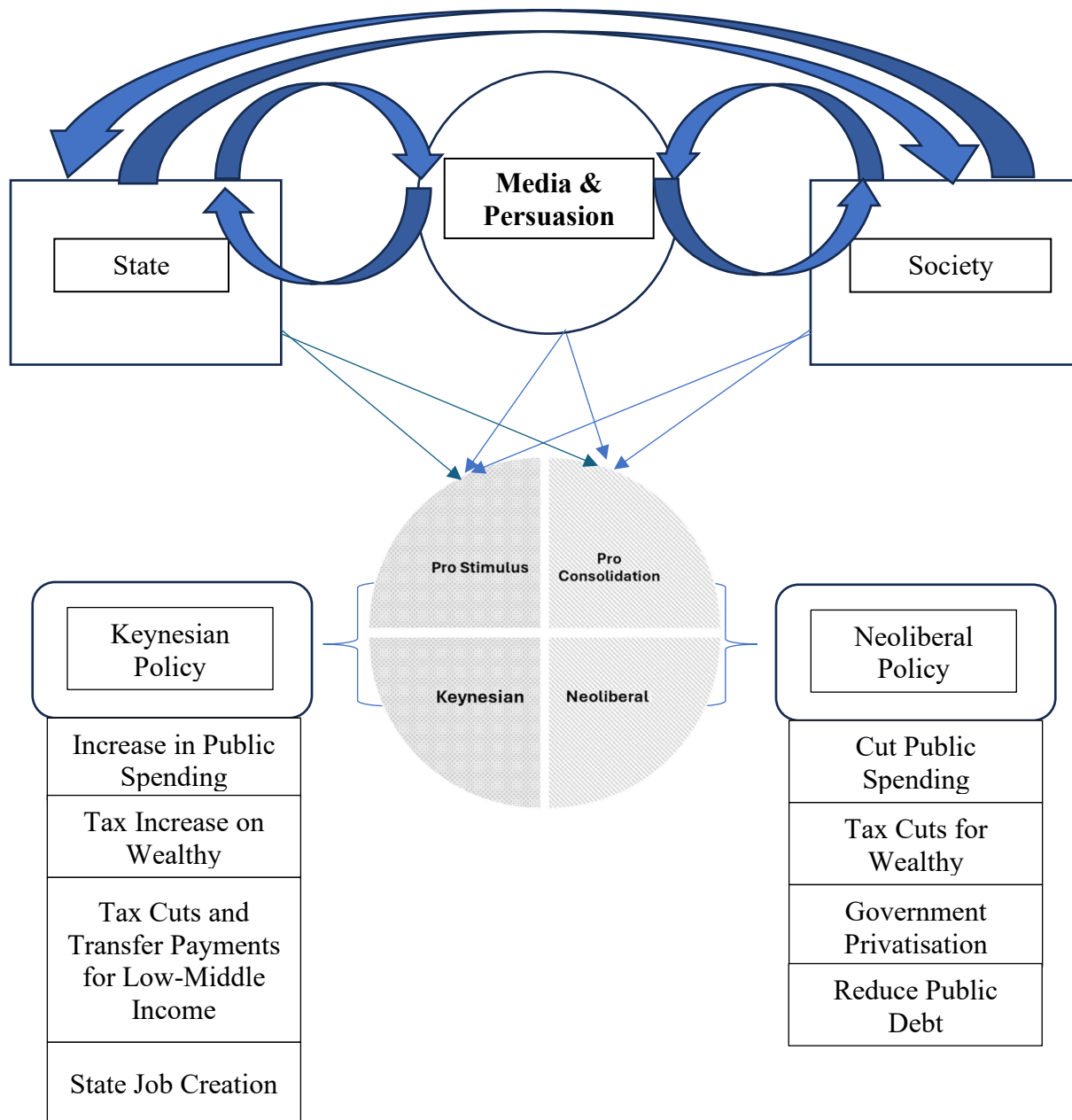
Pro Tax Increases and Pro Tax Cuts: These positions reflect views on how the government should finance its fiscal policies. Taxation plays a critical role in both Keynesian and Neoliberal frameworks, but the stance on taxes often represents an ideological divide. Pro-tax increases on the wealthy, for example, signal a potential third-order change if they shift the balance of power toward progressive taxation, challenging the dominance of regressive tax policies associated with Neoliberalism.

By categorising preferences into these specific positions, the framework provides a detailed view of how the policy discourse evolved in response to the crisis and the ideological battles between Keynesian and Neoliberal factions. Each policy preference, whether for increased government spending or tax cuts, reveals different levels of change in the policy paradigm, from

first-order and second-order adjustments (such as a temporary fiscal stimulus) to third-order shifts in the broader economic model.

In summary, the categorisation and conceptual framework developed in this research bridges Hall's theoretical framework of policy paradigms and social learning with the design of this thesis, enabling a nuanced analysis of policy change. By examining the tensions between Keynesian and Neoliberal paradigms, the role of media in shaping policy narratives, and the complex interactions between state and society, the methodology provides a detailed understanding of how the financial crisis catalysed both incremental and profound shifts in fiscal policy. The framework enables the identification of first-, second-, and third-order changes, capturing the depth of policy evolution in response to societal demands, state responses, and the power dynamics between competing economic theories. Through this approach, the study can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how policy paradigms shift, particularly during moments of crisis and heightened periods of social learning.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: TV Media, Actors, and Paradigms



5.2 Media Coverage and Policy Outcomes

The role of media in presenting policy alternatives following the crisis and its ability to shape the political discourse surrounding crisis events and policy solutions has been relatively unexplored (Mercille, 2013; Pirie, 2012; Quiring & Weber, 2012; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Langer, 2015). Rose and Baumgartner (2013) find a significant correlation between the amount of welfare spending by governments and the content and “portrayal” of newspaper stories of the poor. The results of Rose and Baumgartner’s analysis, spanning from 1960 to 2008, indicate that periods of greater negative media coverage of the poor, prior to budgetary plans and announcements between 1960 and 2008, were associated with less welfare funding. The newspapers chosen for analysis were *The New York Times*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. These five were selected due to geography, opposing political ideologies, and market share. The goal of their methodology was to analyse trends in national media coverage of the poor to determine if differences emerged between the companies in coverage based on frames of focus and what the implications were on policymaking outcomes.

Rose and Baumgartner construct a key term approach to locate and investigate print articles related to poverty, using the terms: ‘welfare’, ‘low income’, ‘public housing’, ‘needy’, ‘indigent’, and ‘impoverished’. These terms were connected using “OR” in a Boolean algebra search methodology. Rose and Baumgartner then implement a second set of key terms to identify and group related poverty articles into five themes according to different parameters. For instance, one of the frames, ‘cheating’, encompasses articles on how many people unfairly benefit from welfare programs. Rose and Baumgartner (2013, p. 32) draw their findings from the insights of Kingdon (1984), which conceptualises that the potential solutions to public issues depend exclusively on public attitudes and understanding of the issue. In the case of the welfare analysis, the authors argue that how low-income groups were covered in the media had a direct impact on how lawmakers interpreted the necessary steps to combat those issues. Negative framing would lead lawmakers to reduce welfare programs in an effort to combat dependency. Conversely, positive framing would more likely result in lawmakers writing policies that encouraged more government spending toward job creation and welfare programs. A critical finding is that over the last few decades, a shift has occurred in the negative stereotyping of low-income groups that depend on

welfare programs; the most significant was the framing that those that rely on social spending are “lazy” and need extra motivation to return to the workforce.

Pirie (2012) analyses five British national media companies’ coverage of the crisis to determine the primary “narratives” forged on the causation of the economic crisis following budget announcements between October 2008 and December 2010. The timeframe concentrated on four 10-day sample periods selected around major budget announcements. The five UK newspapers analysed were *The Sun*, *The Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Financial Times*. Pirie creates three groups to distinguish the dominant narrative of the 2008 crisis in each article, from a public debt crisis to a financial regulation crisis to an external global crisis.

Pirie develops a key-term approach by assigning different strings of key terms that identify with each narrative, such as “public spending” and “national debt”, to identify articles pertaining to the public debt crisis or terms like “derivatives” to identify articles relevant to financial regulation. Pirie finds that attention to the “overdevelopment of the financial sector” was relegated in news coverage, and the conservative party and conservative media concentrated their efforts on promoting the economic issue as a public debt crisis. In 2010, Prime Minister Cameron emphasised the over-dependency on the state, which was hindering the nation’s private-sector competitiveness. Concern shifted from financial sector regulation and dependency to protecting the financial sector’s competitiveness while minimising social costs from the crisis. Moreover, the Labour Party was equally accountable for this narrative, as their social democratic imperatives are often secondary to their neoliberal goals (Hall, 2003; Smith, 2009). The Labour Party Pirie notes is a “neo-liberal social democratic hybrid,” yet the social imperatives are constantly “subordinated” to neo-liberal factors (Gamble & Kelly, 2001; Hall, 2003). After all, the Labour Party greatly contributed to public-sector marketisation (Leys, 2001; Pollock, 2004; Pirie, 2012). Concurrently, the Conservative approach was “rebalancing” by focusing on further financial deregulation, reduced welfare spending, and decreased public investment in non-financial industries (Pirie 2012). Thus, neither party produced an alternative narrative, and the unwillingness of partisans to take responsibility for their past policy direction and failure to communicate crisis events led to a dominant crisis narrative of fiscal budgets and sovereign debt, which the media amplified. Pirie argues that in Britain, media coverage overly relied on political leaders’ interpretations of the crisis, which further constrained policy alternatives.

Langer and Sagarzazu (2015) construct an automated content analysis framework that involves dictionary coding to identify and categorise 5,501 articles relevant to six government budget announcements between 2008 and 2012. The vast majority of policy positions came from the four broadsheets included in the analysis: *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, and *the Financial Times*. Although the tabloids had significantly fewer positions and participation than the broadcast sheets in the public debate, three tabloids were included: *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Sun*. One element of their investigation was to contrast differences between the two types of newspapers in their attention to specific policies and engagement in budget issues, as there is evidence that differences will emerge between the two types (Deacon & Golding, 1994; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). The authors note that all the included companies have different ownership, with the exception of *The Times* and *The Sun*, which were both owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International at the time, a media conglomerate known to have a centre-right political lean (Esser, Reinemann & Fan, 2000).

The companies selected all differ in their ideological and political positioning. The authors apply dictionary coding, a type of quantitative text analysis, to investigate a larger number of articles compared to more hands-on approaches. This approach entails linking categorical groups to specific terms, such as policy positions (Laver & Garry, 2000). From this framework, the authors find significant differences in the amount of media attention that certain types of policy decisions receive compared to others. One example of their findings is the change in attention from government transfer policies in 2008 to a dominant focus on taxation measures by 2010. Finally, a multivariate negative binomial model was applied, and it was found that three causation factors were statistically significant in explaining why certain policy decisions receive more media attention than others. The factors that proved positively correlated were the magnitude of the cost, whether positive or negative (i.e., tax hikes), the income group most impacted, and the attention received from political elites. The dependent variable used in the regression analysis was the number of times a specific policy decision was mentioned throughout an article.

The regression results indicate that there are some "commonalities" that exist between all newspapers analysed with respect to the same explanatory variables responsible for "news selection" for both tabloids and broadsheets, irrespective of their ideological cleavages or political lean. However, although the authors note commonalities in the types of budget decisions that

garner more media attention, they find great disparities between media companies in what specific policy issues and solutions receive more attention than others. Langer and Sagarzazu's argument reflects elite interests and positioning. The authors connect this concept to journalism studies that explain the “gap” in what journalists “normatively think” is newsworthy and in the best interest of the public and what stories they produce in practice due to how “news values interact with commercial imperatives and other organizational factors” (Strömbäck et al., 2012, p.722).

Langer and Sagarzazu note that a great deal of research has been devoted to understanding news values, their causal factors, and the motivations of media companies to present and amplify specific public issues over others (Gans, 2004; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978; White, 1950). Furthermore, research has been allocated to explaining transitions in economic policy paradigms and their causal factors (Esser, Reinemann, & Fan, 2000; Waisbord, 2011). However, the factors that lead to specific fiscal policies receiving greater coverage remain minorly explored. Therefore, it is surprising, given the abundance of literature highlighting the magnitude of significance that budgets have on a country and its citizens, as well as the importance of media on public perception and social change, that so little research has been dedicated to understanding the TV media's role in the policy learning process. The presentation and acceptance of specific budgetary ideas are critical components of the policy learning process, as they enable government officials to establish priorities for addressing certain fiscal issues and solutions (Walgrave, Varone, & Dumont, 2006). Public opinion dictates the winners and losers in politics throughout the policy process (Burstein, 2003; Stimson, 2004). Elite groups position themselves according to shared interests.

In contrast, I argue that the media serves as the greatest method of both public and elite persuasion, in which elite groups contest for ownership and control of media companies to serve their political and economic interests. The way political parties formulate their budgetary priorities and how they are presented in the media has a significant impact on voter opinion, as well as the views of those within elite groups, including policymakers (Whitten & Williams, 2011). Langer applies recent theories of “selection bias” to explain the “highly selective” nature of what parts of the policy process media covers.

In the US, the relationship of media and budget decisions is reactive. Most policy issues that receive media attention are already a part of the “policy agenda.” In contrast, the policy

dialogue around items such as spending increases and cuts is initially established by legislators (Mortenson, 2009). Langer, Hall, and other scholars in policy research have argued that media attention, directly and indirectly, determines which policy issues remain in the spotlight and which ones receive minimal priority. Langer constructs their methodology to help explain what items in the budget the media pay attention to and why. Similarly to Hall's propositions on the media and policymaking outcomes, Langer and Sagarzazu (2017) argue that what is and what is not in the media coverage during the fiscal policy debate has critical implications for public and elite opinion and action, and ultimately the policy learning process.

Mercille's methodology most closely aligns with the methods presented in this thesis. A critical element of my methodology is exploring the media's coverage of neoliberal ideologies and favouritism toward consolidation programs structured on spending cuts rather than tax increases, which is suggested by Mercille's findings. Neoliberalism is treated by Mercille 2013 and regarded by many scholars, including Harvey (2005, 2010) and Duménil and Lévy (2011), as an idea set designed to benefit the economic elite and help protect their political and financial interests by encouraging policies that deregulate, privatize public sectors, financialize, reduce taxes, and reduce public spending, especially in welfare (Mercille, 2013, p.282). Neoliberalism adheres to the notion that markets are self-sufficient. Thus, efforts by governments to intervene in those policy goals and in markets, as well as efforts of collective bargaining from organised labour unions, are counterproductive to market stability and natural market efficiency. Those individuals who benefit most from these policies are regarded as job creators.

Mercille (2013, p. 297) illustrates that the top three newspaper companies in Ireland between 2008 and 2012 presented fiscal consolidation as the favourable growth strategy, highlighting cuts in public spending over tax increases, which intensified scrutiny and attention to the public sector. By developing a categorisation methodology, Mercille examines potential ideological differences in newspaper ownership, as the three are owned by two separate media conglomerates, which may be reflected in their coverage of specific policies over others. However, this is limited to the top three national newspapers in Ireland, which are owned by two media conglomerates.

Using the following search query methodology "['Ireland' AND 'Budget!' in INDEXING AND 'Budget!' AT START of the articles AND Section (comment OR editorial OR opinion OR

analysis)]” Mercille was able to identify and analyse 431 opinion articles and editorials between the *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times*, and *Sunday Independent*. The *Irish Times* accounted for nearly two-thirds of the articles recorded. Mercille constructed two categorization frameworks to group articles according to their broader stance toward fiscal consolidation and then according to more specific spending and taxation preferences. The first framework includes ‘Pro-consolidation’, ‘Oppose Consolidation’, and ‘Neutral’. The parameters for ‘Oppose Consolidation’ encompass a wide range of viewpoints that present limitations, which I discuss and aim to address in my analytical frameworks. An additional categorization framework recorded articles into six groupings to investigate the specific spending and taxation measures behind the authors' stance toward consolidation; these include: ‘In favour of spending cuts’; ‘Opposed to Cuts’; ‘In favour of increased government spending’; ‘In Favour of tax hikes’; ‘In favour of tax hikes on the wealthy’; and ‘In favour of tax cuts.’

Another study, Mercille’s “The Role of the Media in Sustaining Ireland's Housing Bubble” (2014), illustrates that the media also played a critical role in downplaying growing real estate market instability and risk assessments leading up to the crisis. The results of the study suggest that, despite increasing speculation of instability, Irish national media coverage of the real estate market remained largely optimistic in the years leading up to the crisis. Most of the market ‘experts’ advocated by the Irish press pre-crisis were either business leaders representing real estate companies or banks or were political leaders—all of which Mercille argues were direct beneficiaries of a growing real estate bubble. Mercille finds parallels in these findings to research into Irish Journalism. Fahy et al. (2010, p. 13) provide insights into the factors motivating Irish journalism and the pressures it faces from elite institutions. Specifically, the necessity for journalists to maintain access to information channels through these organisations and the threat to their livelihood that losing such access entails. Fahy et al. highlights the role that banks and real estate conglomerates played in pressuring certain coverage and leveraging that pressure with threats of access, whether direct or indirect.

5.3 Methodology Approach

Between the TV media companies involved in the analysis, I intend to examine the differences in attention to specific fiscal policy issues and solutions, as well as potential commonalities that may

exist despite ideological differences. Additionally, the methodology addresses the types of actors that media companies gravitate towards during critical public debates. The US case study and original methodology presented in this thesis offer a unique contrast to the existing European case studies (Mercille, Pirie, Langer) that suggest media coverage was biased toward neoliberal and austerity policies post-2008. A US case study is lacking in the literature, as are any analyses of TV coverage. This is paradoxical, given that the US engaged in the largest Keynesian stimulus effort among all developed nations—furthermore, the favourability of cable news over print news among US voters.

Mercille's categorisation methodology (2013a), as well as key-term methodologies from Rose and Baumgartner (2013) and Pirie (2012), aided the methodology in this thesis. Analysing TV broadcasts rather than print articles required an original methodology to encompass the inherent differences between the two. For example, one individual writes an editorial article. In comparison, TV news broadcasts are presented by numerous hosts, often featuring guest commentary from a diverse range of experts. The TV host controls the conversation by dictating guest commentary, facilitating turn-taking, and interjecting new information, such as news clips.

This thesis constructs a summative content analysis, which “involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context” (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, p.1277). Quantification in summative content analysis is to record “the frequency of specific words or content” instead of explaining potential meanings, which is known as manifest content analysis and is technically a quantitative process (Potter and Levine-Donnersteint, 1999). However, it becomes qualitative once the analysis transcends counting to include a structure capable of understanding the “underlying meanings of the words or the content” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p.1284; Holsti, 1969).

The current research in political economy and political science provides a limited understanding and empirical analyses of the media's coverage of government budgets and fiscal policies, especially since the 2008 crisis. Although the research thus far is limited, early evidence suggests that following the 2008 crisis, print media coverage displayed a tendency towards maintaining the existing policy paradigm and implementing austerity packages primarily in the form of fiscal consolidation. The policy issue narrative adopted in print media focused on public debt, which made it more difficult for new idea sets and alternative solutions to emerge following

the 2008-10 crisis (Mercille, 2013, 2014; Pirie, 2012). The consensus among European countries' political leaders after the crisis was that austerity measures were necessary. Contrary to Europe and the existing case study of Ireland in the literature, the United States undertook an unprecedented fiscal stimulus effort following the 2008 crisis; thus, an elevated policy discourse between fiscal stimulus and consolidation alternatives emerges in comparison with Mercille's findings.

Mercille's studies have provided a cornerstone for analysing bias in print media toward certain fiscal policy positions. Still, those studies are limited to print media of editorial and opinion articles, whereby the 'point of view' of the articles is easily identifiable. The existing analyses have not extended beyond print media to encompass the different 'points of view' expressed in TV media, which involves a multitude of actors and a more complex nature of displaying favouritism or bias toward specific policies. Moreover, the media's role in the interactive forces of authority, elite interests, and persuasion in the policy learning process.

Concerning post-crisis research on the media's coverage of fiscal policy programs, Mercille's categorisation methodology (2013a) and key-term methodologies from Rose and Baumgartner (2013) and Pirie (2012) aided in developing the methodology presented in this thesis. As detailed above, both Mercille's analysis of the British experience and Pirie's Irish case study suggest evidence that their respective national print media companies overwhelmingly favoured a crisis narrative of fiscal deficits and a necessity for fiscal consolidation measures to restore stability and confidence in markets. This thesis builds on arguments in the literature that a transition towards a new policy paradigm jeopardizes the pre-existing distributional and power relations of leaders in the state and society. In dire economic times, President Barack Obama won voters over with campaign speeches that targeted public investment in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and clean energy. However, pressures from within his party and an assault from Republicans on Obama's spending levels amid growing deficit concerns resulted in many of Obama's ambitions never materialising. These policy reforms would have brought about a radical shift in the US's economic policy strategy and disrupted the existing power dynamics between the state and society, particularly the financial interests of banks and corporations. The growing uncertainty and panic in the economy provided an opportunity for new ideas to reforge the relations between the state and society that had developed over the last thirty years, enabling those at the top to maintain their

position of power. Pirie (2012) argues that the crisis provided the state with more space for political reform. Still, that space is determined by how the crisis is understood, which is primarily shaped by media coverage and contesting interests. Pirie (2012, p.361) argues that concerns over the financial sector and increasing regulation have been reduced to “secondary status...[and] the position adopted within the media is largely without any real intellectual support.”

Attention to the public sector, rather than financial regulation and the need for greater government intervention in the economy, is in the interests of wealthy individuals and elite institutions. Both Republicans and Democrats have contributed to promoting and maintaining neoliberal policies since the 1980s. The Republicans, in particular, have been aggressive in fiscal consolidation programs targeting non-defence spending. Since Ronald Reagan, republicans have made smaller government a staple of their platform and mission statement. Ronald Reagan notoriously identified government interference as the greatest issue facing US economic prosperity. During his presidency, Reagan increased military spending and implemented large-scale tax cuts. As republican strategist Dick Morris stated on CNN, “When I worked for Clinton, the [number one] thing was lower that deficit, and a Democratic president couldn't really spend because of the hole that Reagan had dug of the deficit. And that was deliberate by Reagan, and it worked; it shrank government.” These same policy goals were evident 20 years later, as Republicans in the President Bush era ran large-scale deficits, boosting military spending and providing tax cuts. Still, as soon as the political power shifted to the democrats after Obama won the presidency. The Democrats gained the majority in Congress, and the focus of the Republican Party turned to the fiscal crisis and surmounting public debt. The Republicans branded the Obama administration's budget proposals as socialist by attempting to allocate more power to the state, which has proven to be fiscally irresponsible. A dominant narrative emerged from fiscally conservative politicians and media about concerns for their children and grandchildren's future if deficit levels were not reduced.

The challenge to the neoliberal paradigm was short-lived in the United States. In Obama's first year as president, the US adopted the most aggressive form of fiscal stimulus, reflecting Keynesian ideologies in the modern economic era. However, within a year of public spending injections and tax relief, the United States transitioned back towards its neoliberal tendencies and resumed a path toward austerity and fiscal consolidation programs. Obama's

administration, along with many prominent economists such as Krugman, Stiglitz, and Blyth, argued that the fiscal stimulus efforts needed to be greater, and spending levels should be increased in infrastructure projects and key public sectors, including healthcare, energy, and education.

Following any economic crisis, especially one of the magnitude of 2008, elite actors struggle to maintain power and protect their distributional interests in the wake of a major policy paradigm shift. Significant policy paradigm anomalies threaten the entire power structure that exists between the state, society, and the business sector. In these critical moments, elite groups position themselves to influence certain policy decisions through media company ownership. The issues and solutions that receive the most coverage will be those that are in the interest of the media company owners and their respective business and political interests, including factors such as advertising revenues, cross-ownership between media and non-media companies, including sharing of the board of directors, and shareholder interests that banks and financial conglomerates often hold.

The ambition of this thesis is to extend the post-crisis literature on the role of television media in the policy learning process and fiscal policy decisions. Specifically, the agenda-setting power of media companies in shaping public policy debates and the authority struggles that arise between elite groups in both the state and society. The goal of the methodology is to bridge research insights into the importance of authority in the policy learning process and the media's role, as well as recent statistical findings on media coverage of fiscal policy alternatives, with my findings. I contrast my findings with the early evidence presented in the literature from European case studies thus far. These studies indicate that the media has been instrumental in favouring and encouraging fiscal consolidation and neoliberal ideologies, offering insights into their motivations for doing so. Between the TV media companies involved in the analysis, I intend to investigate the differences in attention to specific fiscal policies over others and potential commonalities that may exist despite their ideological and political differences. Additionally, the methodology presented in this thesis extends beyond the types of policies receiving more media coverage by addressing the types of actors that media companies tend to gravitate towards during critical public policy debates.

Regarding the methodical approach used in this thesis, there are some opposing viewpoints on the distinction between qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The more traditional paradigm would consider my approach to be quantitative content analysis; however, a more modern interpretation would classify it as a qualitative content analysis. Krippendorff (2004) argues that textual analysis is inherently a qualitative process, regardless of the ability to quantify the data. This thesis constructs a summative content analysis, which “involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1277). The purpose of the quantification in summative content analysis is to record “the frequency of specific words or content” instead of explaining potential meanings. According to Potter & Levine-Donnerstein (1999), this quantified process is known as manifest content analysis. Kondracki and Wellman (2002) argue that if you were to stop at this point in the analysis merely, it would be solely a quantitative exercise. However, it becomes qualitative once the analysis extends beyond counting to include a structure capable of understanding the “underlying meanings of the words or the content” (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p.1284; Holsti, 1969; Babbie, 1992; Catanzaro, 1988; Morse & Field, 1995).

Attempting to explore the incommensurable relationship between policy paradigms and the seemingly coexisting policy strategies of neo-Keynesian and neoliberal theory that drive policy decisions during the 2009 economic crisis, this thesis draws on research in policy learning, as well as the media and public opinion. Furthermore, an original methodology is constructed to address more narrow and verifiable research questions that expand and explore recent statistical findings in the literature, which support the notion that media coverage was favourable toward neoliberal policies and fiscal consolidation programs focused on spending cuts. The content analysis approach undertaken in the methodology poses the following questions: 1) How did TV media in the United States conceptualise the crisis, and how does that contrast with countries that favoured austerity programs at the onset? 2) What types of actors were most prevalent in the discourse, and how does that relate to policy authority?

Based on the research questions posed above, I formulate the following hypotheses. Firstly, based on statistical evidence and insights from Mercille (2013, p. 14), I expect my findings to illustrate favouritism in US TV media coverage toward neoliberal policies that favour tax cuts and fiscal consolidation programs focused on spending cuts rather than tax increases. I anticipate that,

unlike the Irish print media case study, the TV media coverage in the US will reflect a more dynamic and polarising debate around fiscal stimulus in the 2009 analysis due to the US's initial neo-Keynesian response to the crisis. However, I expect there will be substantially more pressure for consolidation policies in the 2010 analysis. I reason that President Obama won a large portion of the majority vote and ran his campaign on the promise of government help, providing investments in infrastructure, increased government spending, and tax relief for social protection programs, as well as reform in the healthcare, education, and energy sectors. The popularity of these policy ideas amongst the US voters was evident. The condition of the economy in early 2009 was desperate.

Most voters wanted and demanded help from their government, calling on policymakers for change. Moreover, during turbulent economic times, the threat of redistribution is real to all elite interest groups in the event of policymaking shifts toward a larger government and a more extensive welfare state. However, if the economy were to sink into a deep recession or depression, the magnitude of risk would be exponentially greater for elite interests and groups. Media companies pursue the political and financial interests of their owners and business partners while also relying on ratings, viewership, and access to elite news sources and influential political leaders. Secondly, I anticipate that the findings will reveal commonalities among all the US TV media companies analysed in their favouritism toward tax cuts in general and specifically toward the wealthy during the 2009 and 2010 debates.

Additionally, I expect to see a significant shift toward spending cuts from 2009 to 2010. As noted earlier in the thesis, many scholars theorize that fiscal consolidation is an element of neoliberalism encouraged by elites to reduce the size of government and its ability to regulate markets and redistribute wealth and income. Therefore, a shift from those policies would be threatening to the majority of elite actors.

5.4 Methodology Outline and Timeframe

The existing research on fiscal policy and media coverage has primarily focused on print media and is largely absent from analyses involving TV media. Additionally, the research on media coverage and fiscal policy lacks a case study on the United States. This gap is paradoxical given that the crisis originated in the United States, and the US engaged in the most extensive Keynesian

fiscal stimulus effort since free market ideologies were made politically popular by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s. This thesis presents an original methodology for data collection and categorisation, enabling an analysis of US TV media companies' coverage of fiscal policy alternatives during two periods of heightened policy discourse in the US following the 2008 crisis. The first two initial years of the crisis were moments the neoliberal policy paradigm was at its weakest point in the United States since its inception.

A total of six US TV media companies are analysed—Cable TV companies CNN, FOX, and MSNBC and broadcast networks ABC, CBS, and NBC. Cable companies are more involved in the public policy debate than broadcast companies. Therefore, most data points and intricacies of the debate are derived from cable coverage. These six companies were selected for the following reasons. All six major cable TV networks are the largest in the United States, both in terms of viewership and profitability. They are all owned by different media conglomerates and thus have different political and ideological lean. Collectively, the six parent companies and their owners control over 80% of the cable network market in the United States (IBISWorld). FOX brands itself as the TV source for Republican news, while MSNBC brands itself as the TV source for Democratic news. CNN positions itself closer to the ideological centre and brands itself as a more unbiased source of news, which has led the network into challenging periods of competitiveness with its more explicitly partisan competitors. All the broadcast companies are considered closer to the political centre and present less commentary and opinionated content.

Fox News is owned by 21st Century Fox, formerly known as News Corporation, a company owned by billionaire Rupert Murdoch that split into two companies in 2013. Fox is considered a conservative-leaning network. Fox is regarded as a conservative-leaning network. Among the largest shareholders are the Murdoch family, Walt Disney Co., Cruden Financial Services, Vanguard, and BlackRock. Comcast owns NBCUniversal News Group, which is a parent company of both NBC and MSNBC. Comcast's major shareholders are Brian Roberts family, Vanguard and Blackrock, Inc. ABC's primary shareholders include Walt Disney Co. Walt Disney's major controlling shareholders include Lauren Powell Jobs, Blackrock Inc., MFS Investment Management, and Fidelity Management. CBS is owned by CBS Corporation, which is a subsidiary of National Amusements. Billionaire Sumner Redstone owns and runs National Amusements Inc., the parent company of both Viacom and CBS. CNN is owned by Turner

Broadcasting, which is a subsidiary of WarnerMedia, owned by AT&T. In 1980, CNN became the United States' first 24-hour cable news station. In June 2018, AT&T won its antitrust case with the US Department of Justice, which allowed the company to acquire Time Warner and rename its subsidiary WarnerMedia. At the time of the acquisition, Time Warner was the third-largest cable TV network company in the US. Less than one month later, Disney and Comcast are locked in a bidding war to acquire the majority of 21st Century Fox's assets, of which Disney has already received approval from the US Justice Department. Interestingly, Vanguard Group Inc. and Blackrock Inc. are major shareholders in all the major TV cable news networks. BlackRock Inc. currently manages over \$6.3 trillion in assets worldwide, making it the largest financial management company in the world.

The LexisNexis database is where all the TV broadcast transcript data was derived, as it is the most comprehensive. The LexisNexis database enables sophisticated query building using Boolean algebra connectors and advanced indexing, which allows for high-precision recalls that return only the most relevant TV news transcripts. Only viewpoints pertinent to the national context of the fiscal budget debate surrounding the 2010 and 2011 fiscal budget announcements and the ARRA stimulus were considered. Fiscal policy viewpoints related to state budgets or bailout packages, such as TARP, are not included in the analysis. Additionally, any duplicates were removed. In total, over 400 transcripts were analysed and categorized. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the total number of transcripts between the six top US TV media companies relevant to the fiscal budget debate, as well as the number of transcripts per company.

As shown in Figure 2, there are two periods of heightened policy debate. In February 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus bill and President Obama's fiscal year budget proposal were announced. In February 2010, Obama announced his budget proposal for fiscal year 2011. There was much more attention in the media to the 2010 fiscal year budget proposals made in February 2009 due in part to the magnitude of the economic event, as most stimulus funds were dispersed in the first year of the stimulus effort. In February and March 2009, an intense debate over public fiscal policy emerged in response to the announcement of the ARRA stimulus bill and Obama's first budget proposal. In February 2010, Obama announced his budget proposal for fiscal year 2011.

Additionally, there was an increase in media attention surrounding the one-year mark of the ARRA stimulus package being passed. Both Democratic and Republican alternative plans to the president's budget, introduced in March 2009, did not include the health care reform funds, the tax increases on the wealthy, or the permanent tax cuts for middle- and low-income groups that Obama's administration wanted. By April 2009, the budget had been passed. I will use the two-month periods of heightened policy discourse, exactly one year apart, as two case studies to identify potential shifts in favouritism toward specific fiscal policies. The uptick seen in July 2009 was due to the state of California and Governor Schwarzenegger's finalization of their budget, which was a central talking point throughout the early stages of the economic crisis but will not be considered for our research purposes.

Figure 2. Number of Transcripts Focusing on Fiscal Policy

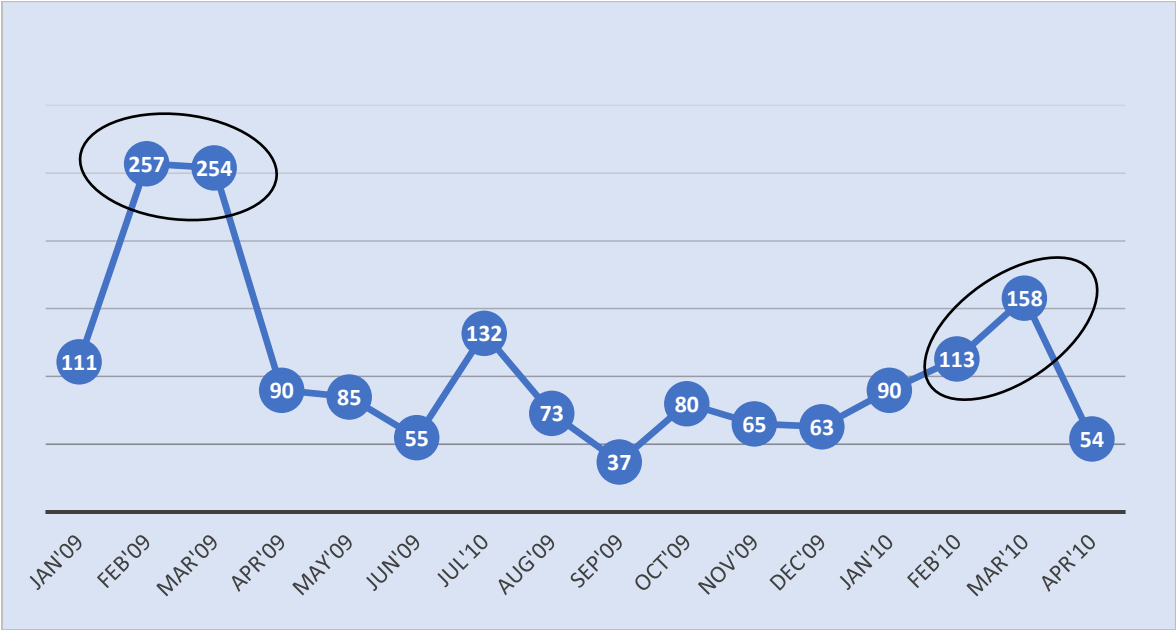
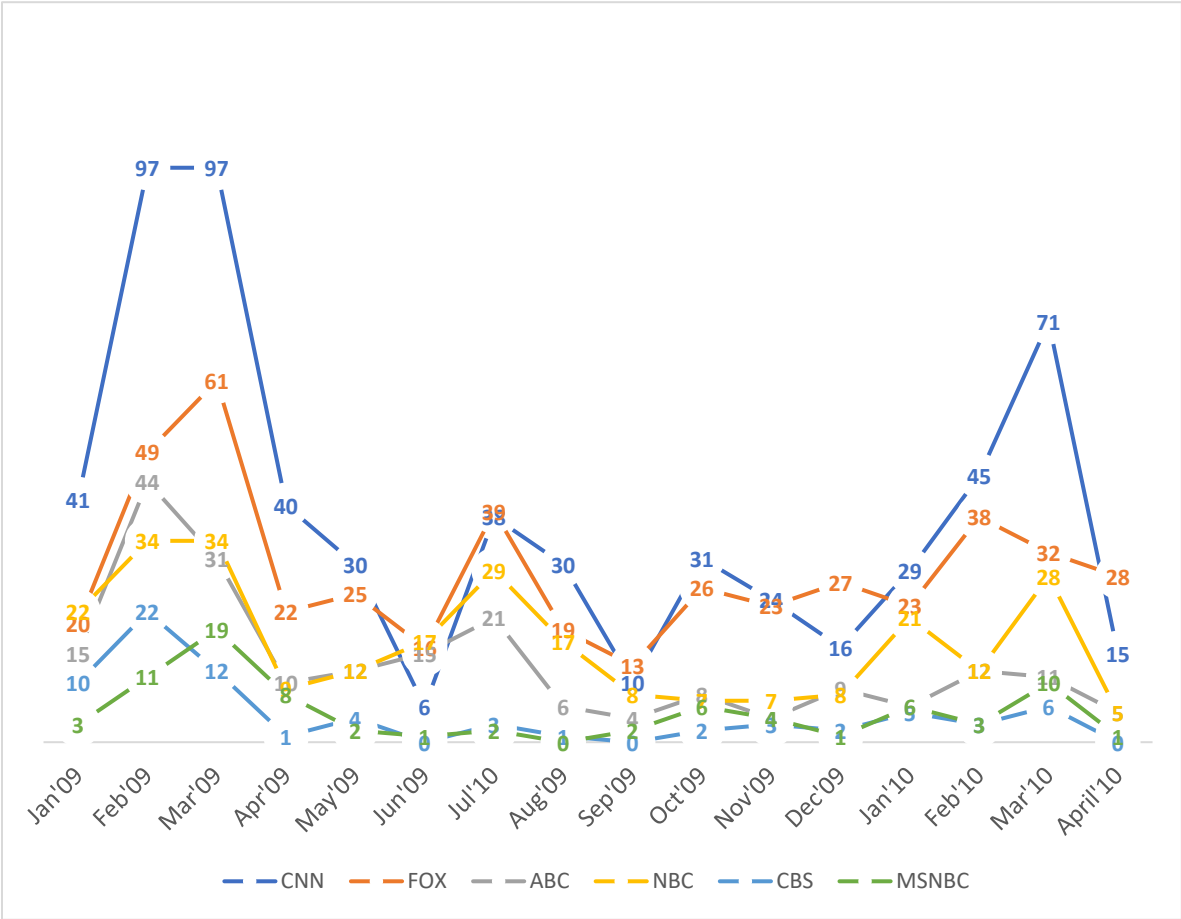


Figure 3. Number of Transcripts Focusing on Fiscal Policy by company



5.5 Search Query Methodology

Through trial and error, dozens of different Boolean algebra combinations and key term combinations were explored to determine the most effective search query methodology. The exact search constructed is detailed below:

(((((deficit OR debt OR budget OR spending OR government OR public OR fiscal OR stimul! OR tax! OR consolidat! AND COUNTRY(United States) AND ((#STX000218# and (BUDGETS #85PLUS#))) and Date(geq(01/01/2009) and leq(01/03/2009)) and ((#STX000218t# and (BUDGETS #85PLUS#))))))))))

The search query methodology presented was inspired by Mercille's (2013a) and Pirie's (2012) key-term methodology. The search query is compartmentalised into four parts. One element is establishing a key-term approach combined with the connector "OR." This sorts the articles by relevance to each key term. Each key term is highlighted within the TV news transcript, allowing for more feasible data collection as the relevant sections are easily distinguished. Therefore, it was advantageous to include all terms that are most appropriate to fiscal policymaking. The final key terms were used to identify the most relevant transcripts and also served to distinguish different fiscal policy viewpoints. The key terms selected were: 'deficit', 'debt', 'budget', 'spending', 'government', 'public', 'fiscal', 'stimul!', 'tax!', and 'consolidat!'. Terminologies such as 'quantitative easing', 'borrowing', 'expansionary', and 'contractionary' were considered but not included in the final search combination, as they were assessed to be seldom mentioned throughout the policy coverage of US TV media companies. Truncation symbols (!) were applied to a few of those terms so that any variations in the term would be included. The connector "AND" combines the selected key terms with a country code, a specific timeline, and a subject term tailored to a specific relevance level. It was crucial to identify the most suitable subject term to ensure that the most relevant articles were retrieved, thereby making the dataset comprehensive and manageable.

After contrasting several terminologies, 'Budgets' was selected as the subject term. Fiscal policies are intrinsically budgetary exercises, and using 'Budgets' as a key index term was found to include all key terms associated with fiscal budgetary exercises and provided greater recall accuracy than subject terms such as: "Public Debt," "National Debt," "US Debt," "Stimulus,"

“Deficit,” “Government Budgets,” and Budget Deficits. Attempting to combine key subject terms resulted in the elimination of relevant articles; therefore, only one was selected. Additionally, the United States was used as a country code, ensuring that the archived articles concentrate primarily on the US national budget rather than the budgets of foreign countries or intrastate budgets.

Furthermore, the LexisNexis database allows for a subject/industry term search that assigns percentages to the relevance of key subject terms within each article. Using the advanced power search engine on LexisNexis allows you two options with the subject/index terms: 1) Any relevancy, as long as that subject term is one of the subject terms catalogued for any specific TV news transcript 2) You can choose ‘Strong’ relevancy using the power search engine, and it will recall only news transcripts which have that subject relevancy as 90% or higher within a specific transcript. However, if the subject search query is manually constructed using the appropriate lexis subject codes, the relevancy percentage can be set to any preference. As outlined above, the lexis subject indexing code was combined with “Budgets!” to archive articles with at least 70% relevancy, which allowed for a comprehensive dataset that was feasible to analyse. Setting the relevancy at 80-90% was highly accurate, but it eliminated relevant articles. When set at 80%, the dataset became less relevant and more time-consuming. Mercille found 85% to be the ideal relevancy setting for his methodology; however, his sample size was much smaller, and TV transcripts have inconsistencies that printed editorials do not.

One challenge encountered in analysing TV transcripts is inconsistencies between all companies. Some transcripts were missing segments of dialogue. Another challenge was targeting content that may not align with the headline of the segment, as it was not intended to be the focal point of the coverage. Setting the relevancy target at 70% required scrolling more unrelated content, but it also enabled a more robust dataset as we were able to increase the number of data points to observe and track over time.

The effectiveness of the search query methodology outlined above was critical to assembling a comprehensive and relevant dataset, enabling the systematic extraction of transcripts that directly pertained to fiscal policymaking in televised news coverage. However, retrieving these transcripts was only the first step. To translate this raw textual data into meaningful empirical insight, it was necessary to develop a categorisation framework capable of mapping both the content and source of policy discourse. The following section details the categorisation

methodology used to identify the actors involved, the fiscal positions they advocated, and the structure through which those arguments were recorded and analysed. This dual-layered approach—capturing both what was said and who said it—forms the analytical foundation for understanding how media discourse structured the visibility, legitimacy, and contestation of competing economic paradigms.

5.6 Categorization Methodology

Both policy positions and the number of actors presenting those positions are recorded according to different actor types, which are designed to encompass all individuals and groups in both the state and society involved in the debate. A ‘Pro’ position indicates that an actor advocated for a certain fiscal policy or portrays that policy optimistically in context, and an ‘Oppose’ position represents the antipode definition. The only actor-type group that is recorded on positions but not actors is President Obama.

Most commentary exchanges throughout news shows are of a back-and-forth nature. Therefore, specific parameters are established to ensure a systematic approach to quantifying the recurrence of particular policy positions. The method involves transitioning from one conversational exchange to the next (i.e., from one actor to the next) and recording specific positions. In each exchange, no repetition of the same position is recorded twice. Furthermore, actors are only recorded once per specific policy position, even if they present that same position multiple times throughout the commentary.

Fiscal stimulus is defined in this thesis as policies aimed at increasing government spending, borrowing, or tax cuts to boost aggregate demand, consumer spending, and employment levels, thereby stimulating the economy. Fiscal consolidation is defined as policies that aim to lower the fiscal deficit by reducing government spending, borrowing, or raising tax revenues. Positions recorded as either fiscal stimulus or fiscal consolidation are explicit to their respective policy goals. There are three categorization frameworks. The first identifies positions towards fiscal stimulus and consolidation:

The recurrence of certain fiscal policy positions favoured over others in media coverage, as well as the number and type of actors advocating specific policy positions, is critical to further explaining the various persuasion methods TV media companies employ to set the policy agenda.

My micro-analysis approach quantifies the recurrence of specific fiscal policy preferences over others between US TV media companies. This was achieved by recording every relevant position presented in each conversational exchange, as per the TV broadcast transcript. Both policy positions and the number of actors presenting those positions are recorded according to the different categorizations of actor types. Suppose an actor presents a view that is positive or negative of a specific fiscal policy alternative; it is recorded as a ‘position’ exerted by that actor. A ‘Pro’ position indicates that an individual advocated for a certain fiscal policy based on necessity or as the optimal solution or that a specific policy will result in positive outcomes or portrays that policy optimistically in context, such as mentioning fiscal stimulus efforts and reports of the projected job creation. An ‘oppose’ position argues a specific fiscal policy is unnecessary or will result in negative consequences or portrays that policy pessimistically in context. Some positions are recorded without an actor if the media host presents a position on behalf of an entire actor-type group, such as all Democratic Congress members, rather than naming an individual actor who is a Democrat. In this case, one position would be recorded for Congress Democrats, but no actor would be recorded. However, this is only relevant when the media host presents viewpoints on behalf of other actor-type groups; the same does not apply to guest commentary. The only actor-type group that is recorded solely by positions rather than actors is President Obama, because it is a single individual and defeats the purpose of capturing the number of actors supporting specific positions and the proportion of coverage each actor-type group receives.

TV news segments can involve a multitude of actors from various industries, in which the commentary is highly segmented as each actor gets limited time to talk before the conversation turns to someone else. Most commentary exchanges throughout news shows are of a back-and-forth nature. Therefore, specific parameters are established to ensure a structured and systematic approach that enables a unique micro-data collection, limiting human error and dependency on the authors' interpretation of the policy content and allowing for reproducibility. The method involves moving from one conversational exchange to the next (i.e., from one actor to the next actor), where there is relevant text, and recording the specific policy positions that the actor is either in favour of or opposed to. In each exchange, no repetition of the same policy is recorded twice, even if the same position is repeated throughout the single exchange. Furthermore, actors are only recorded

once per specific policy position, even if they present that same policy position multiple times throughout multiple conversational exchanges and the entire TV news commentary.

Fiscal stimulus is defined in this thesis as policies aimed at increasing government spending, borrowing, or implementing tax cuts as a means to boost aggregate demand, consumer spending, and employment levels, thereby stimulating the economy. Fiscal consolidation is defined as policies that aim to reduce the fiscal deficit by reducing government spending, borrowing, or raising tax revenues. Positions recorded as either fiscal stimulus or fiscal consolidation are explicit to their respective policy goals mentioned above. Suppose the actor is favourable toward either fiscal stimulus or fiscal consolidation but does not provide any indication of specific spending or tax preferences. In that case, only the broader policy position is recorded (i.e., stimulus or consolidation). There are three categorization frameworks to analyse TV broadcast transcripts. The first categorization framework identifies positions towards fiscal stimulus and consolidation:

- 1) ‘Pro fiscal stimulus’: Views that are in favour of government spending increases, or tax cuts, or increases in tax expenditures (tax credits, deferrals, preferential rates, deductions, exemptions) to stimulate economic growth and alleviate the economic recession and growing unemployment. These views or transcripts emphasize fiscal stimulus favourably, whether directed at the broader policy strategy or stimulus spending and taxation preferences, either explicitly or in context.
- 2) ‘Pro fiscal consolidation’: Views or transcripts concerned with reducing the fiscal deficit by means of reducing government expenditures or government borrowing or raising revenues through taxation policies. Included are views or transcripts that emphasize fiscal consolidation favourably, whether directed at the broader policy strategy in principle or through a mix of stimulus spending and taxation preferences, either explicitly or in context.

A second categorization framework was established to examine the positive and negative views towards specific spending and taxation preferences. Twelve different spending and taxation policy positions were identified:

- 1) ‘Pro Spending Increases’: Pro-government spending increases in general.

- 2) 'Oppose Spending Increases': Oppose government spending increases in general or spending entirely.
- 3) 'Pro Spending Cuts': Positions that are in favour of government spending cuts either in a broad manner or specific to a particular sector.
- 4) 'Oppose Spending Cuts': Positions that argue against spending cuts either in a broad manner or specific to a particular sector.
- 5) Pro-Specific Spending Increases: Arguments advocating for increased spending on specific parts of the budget or for a specific spending project. For example, more money than what is being proposed for energy reform.
- 6) Oppose-Specific Spending Increases: Arguments opposed to the amount of spending increases to certain areas, but not stating they oppose spending increases in general. Also included are viewpoints that oppose a specific spending project or expenditure in a particular part of the budget.
- 7) Pro Tax Increases: Positions that advocate for tax increases either generally or specific to certain income groups or corporations.
- 8) Pro Tax Cuts: Positions that argue for tax cuts either generally or specifically, with the exception of wealthy individuals, as that is a separate group.
- 9) Oppose Tax Increases: Positions that oppose tax increases, either generally or specifically, with the exception of wealthy individuals, as that is a separate group.
- 10) Oppose Tax Cuts: Positions that emphasize an opposition to cutting taxes either generally or specific to certain income groups or corporations.
- 11) Pro Tax Increases on Wealthy: Arguments for raising taxes on wealthy individuals. A major focus of the policy debate was whether the Obama administration would repeal the Bush tax cuts, thereby raising taxes on individuals earning more than \$250,000 per year.
- 12) Oppose Tax Increases on Wealthy: Arguments for either greater tax cuts or against increasing taxes on the wealthy, corporate, or small business (often referred to in the discourse as taxes applying to those making over \$250,000), and also those positions that argue for even greater tax breaks for those making more than \$250,000 a year.

Augmenting the first two fiscal policy preference frameworks, which identify broad and specific fiscal policy positions, is a third categorisation framework that identifies and categorises the different policy positions introduced on TV news shows by the types of actors. Fifteen different groups were constructed to encompass nearly every different type of actor group involved in the fiscal policy discourse that occurs on TV news shows. The actor groups encompass nearly every type of actor involved in the national budgetary debate on TV news. Actor groups were constructed to differentiate the types of actors most involved in the policy debate, as observed through US TV media coverage. Furthermore, the actor categorisation framework investigates potential political leanings and gender bias among TV media companies. Actors are recorded as male or female. Actors are identified by their current working status or by how they are introduced in the TV show commentary. The actor groups are determined as follows:

- 1) 'Media': Includes positions that are expressed by direct employees of the media company being analysed. Common employees included in this actor grouping are company hosts, journalists, political consultants, correspondents, or directors who make personal arguments on behalf of their organisations. Policy positions are expressed on their personal behalf and independent of other actor-type groups.
- 2) 'External Media Company': Includes all employees and journalists from other media companies not associated with the media company being analysed.
- 3) 'Congress Democrat': Includes all active members of Congress, both the House and the Senate, which represent the Democrat party.
- 4) 'Congress Republican': Includes all active members of Congress, both the House and the Senate, which represent the Republican party.
- 5) 'President Obama': Throughout the selected timeframe, the active US president was Barack Obama. All former presidents are excluded.
- 6) 'Federal Executive Branch': Cabinet members, departments, agencies, commissions, committees, and all direct representatives of the federal executive branch. Includes council of economic advisors to the president and all White House Office Staff. Excludes independent agencies and congressional agencies that are not directly under Executive branch authority. The federal and local executive branches were not split into Democratic and Republican for

similar reasons. At the federal level, all appointees are appointed by the President and are, therefore, either directly or indirectly supporting the party of the current president. At the local government level, there is much less loyalty and dependence on party allegiance.

- 7) 'Republican Governor': Includes Republican state governors and their staff.
- 8) 'Democrat Governor': Includes Democratic state governors and their staff.
- 9) 'Local Mayor': Includes strong-mayor's serving the local government executive branch. The strong-mayor's primary task is managing the city budget.
- 10) 'Republican Strategist/Advisor': A strategist is a term often used on TV shows to express actors who were previously employed in a significant role in a political campaign. For example, a former campaign director or campaign advisor of a senior political figure. Includes republican campaign employees to any senior government role such as the president, Congressional members, and governors. Also included are conservative political commentators, advisors, or analysts.
- 11) 'Democrat Strategist/Advisor': A strategist is a term often used on TV shows to express actors who were previously employed in a significant role in a political campaign. For example, a former campaign director or campaign advisor of a senior political figure. Includes democrat campaign employees or policy advisors to any senior government role such as the president, Congressional members, and governors. Also included are liberal political commentators, advisors, or analysts.
- 12) 'Banking and Business': Includes employees and executives in banking and corporate sectors. Also included are small business owners.
- 13) 'Scholar and Economist': Actors in this grouping range include economists, professors, independent researchers, scholars, and university executives.
- 14) 'Think Tanks': Includes actors representing think tanks, research groups, or political advisory groups. It also includes nonpartisan and federally independent agencies.
- 15) 'Labor Union': Any labour union representative or organization is included.

Inspired by Mercille's ingenious attempt to provide a cornerstone methodology to an area of research that desperately requires more attention, I have developed a unique and original methodology to investigate TV media rather than print media. Mercille's categorization

framework was constructed to analyse and classify solely opinion and editorial news transcripts from the top three print newspapers in Ireland. Inherently, the position or “point of view” in most opinion and editorial news articles is transparent and easily identifiable. However, determining the position of TV broadcast transcripts proved to be troublesome, as they are often discreetly exerted and involve several new actors and factors to consider. Several challenges had to be overcome to develop a methodology that could quantify and categorise TV media coverage and the stances taken on various fiscal policy alternatives. For instance, only one actor is writing an editorial or opinion print article, and the purpose of the article is often to argue a certain policy position in an attempt to mould public opinion and policy discourse. TV news broadcasts are delivered by numerous hosts, often with guest panels acting as “expert” commentary and ranging in actor types such as strategists, political and business leaders, and other media company representatives. Most transcripts contain interviews, guest appearances, and short news clips, all of which are controlled and edited by the company's news hosts. They act as a mediator that controls the flow of the conversation through turn-taking, interruptions, and the interjection of new guests and information. The hosts within the relevant TV news broadcasts often directly interject their arguments for certain policies or indirectly through budget projections, polls, interview clips, and news clips that favour or oppose specific fiscal policy preferences, involving a multitude of actor types.

One challenge in constructing this methodology was to effectively represent the differences in policy discourse between the US and Europe. The elevated policy discourse surrounding stimulus efforts in the US offers a unique case study. My categorization framework addresses several limitations of the existing research. For example, one limitation of Mercille’s study is a limited number of categorizations for specific spending and taxation preferences, as well as for the broader policy framework. One concern Mercille notes in his findings is a tendency to overestimate figures, such as the opposition to consolidation, by not including a broader array of alternative categories. Mercille’s categorisation has three positions in relation to the broader policy strategy: pro-consolidation, opposition to consolidation, and neutrality. Under the parameters set forth by Mercille’s framework, a host of possibilities were grouped into ‘oppose fiscal consolidation’. From positions calling for the opposite strategy in fiscal stimulus to those that solely disagreed with certain spending areas, those that did not explicitly refer to fiscal consolidation itself were also

placed in this category. In my methodology, more specific categorizations are implemented to provide a more robust understanding of popular fiscal preferences. My framework has 12 spending and taxation categorizations, whereas Mercille constructs only six specific spending and taxation groups. Moreover, the US case study is unique in that it represents the most radical fiscal stimulus effort among all G20 nations in the immediate aftermath of the crisis and most current years.

In addition to offering unique insights into the fiscal policy coverage of each US TV media company, the micro data models make the analysis less subjective compared to those in the existing literature. The existing methodologies identify and categorise policy positions solely on a per-news-article basis. This approach is limited in representing the full richness of the policy discourse, and it could be argued that it is subjective insofar that the reader relies on the analyst's interpretation of each editorial or opinion article's point of view, which is not always explicit. By recording positions at a micro level, whereas every relevant fiscal policy position is recorded in each conversational exchange per transcript, the methodology offers more robust insights as there are hundreds of data points to analyse. One advantage is that there is minimal risk exposure to the author's ability to interpret each position accurately. Other analyses using print media articles and recording positions on a per-article basis are proportionally more susceptible to author interpretation mistakes, which can skew the accuracy of the data, given the substantially smaller number of data points.

Furthermore, the decision not to split local executive branch representatives into Democrats versus Republicans in the categorisation framework was made because local political leaders have less dependency on party affiliation than state legislative and executive branch representatives. It is much more common for independent partisans to hold office at a local level. For example, this approach enabled our analysis to capture influential independent mayors such as New York City's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, at the time. Moreover, to make the analysis manageable, only policy viewpoints focused on the national context of the fiscal budget were considered. The views not considered in the analysis were those that either concerned the bailout funds, including TARP, or explicitly concerned the state budget rather than the national.

Finally, it is vital to our analysis of how the public was captured in the categorization and methodology detailed in this chapter. This thesis does not categorise "the public" as a separate actor category but instead analyses how "the public" is invoked, represented, or symbolically

constructed by the actors included in the categorisation framework. The framework itself distinguishes between state and societal actors, further subdivided by their fiscal orientation, such as each actor's alignment with spending and taxation preferences. It includes fifteen actor categories, ranging from formal government figures (e.g., Congress Democrats, Republican Governors) to media agents (e.g., Media, External Media Company), policy intermediaries (e.g., Think Tanks, Scholars, Economists), and organised interests (e.g., Labour Unions, Banking, and Business). These actors are examined for how they rhetorically construct “the public” in media discourse, for example, as taxpayers, consumers, or displaced citizens.

This approach allows for an empirical analysis of “the public” as a discursive construction, mediated through the statements, framing choices, and symbolic appeals made by other actors. For instance, when media hosts or government officials speak of “what Americans want” or invoke “hardworking taxpayers,” such moments are analytically significant—not as reflections of actual public sentiment but as expressions of competing paradigmatic narratives. These representations are coded not only for their fiscal alignment (e.g., justifying tax cuts versus defending stimulus spending) but also for how they position the public within broader ideological frames. This operationalisation draws on the theoretical foundations established in Chapter 2, where the public is conceptualised, following Hall (1993) and Blyth (2013), as a symbolic terrain over which struggles for policy legitimacy are waged. In this study, these struggles are made empirically visible through media texts and the actor-driven rhetoric embedded within them.

The methodological frameworks outlined in this chapter provided a structured approach for analysing how fiscal policy debates were framed and contested in televised media discourse during the 2009–2010 period. By operationalising key dimensions, such as actor typologies, ideological paradigms, and the framing of spending versus taxation, we can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. This study was designed to investigate how policy authority is distributed, how media narratives align with or challenge dominant paradigms, and how specific actors are empowered or marginalised within the public sphere. Central to this approach is the recognition that television media companies are far from neutral conveyors of information and are complex sites of ideological negotiation and policy legitimisation.

Chapter 6 presents the empirical results of this analysis. It examines how the interaction between state and societal actors, as mediated through television news coverage, contributed to

shaping fiscal policy discourse during a period of heightened economic uncertainty. The findings provide insight into patterns of partisan representation, ideological alignment, and media framing, revealing not only which voices dominated the debate but also how these voices structured the public's understanding of fiscal responsibility, stimulus, and taxation. Collectively, the results address the broader question at the heart of this study: how media discursively constructs the conditions under which policy paradigms are preserved, contested, or transformed.

Chapter 6: Media Coverage Analysis and Policy Favouritism

This chapter, the results chapter, is organised into four sections: 6.1) The primary actors presented in policy coverage, 6.2) Stimulus vs. Consolidation, 6.3) Spending preferences, and 6.4) Taxation preferences.

The results chapter begins by looking at all the actor types involved. This subchapter provides a wide-angle view, capturing the entirety of the debate and the actors most prevalent, as well as those most absent from the debate. The significant degree of differences between the cable companies highlights the strategic differences in how they present to their audiences and the trust each viewership places in certain actor types. It also provides an overview of the political skew of each company's coverage. Subchapters 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4 focus on the specific fiscal policy favouritism. The policy frameworks are detailed, starting with the two broadest forms of fiscal policy: stimulus versus consolidation and, by extension, neoliberalism versus Keynesianism. The focus then narrows to more specific spending and taxation policies within the broader strategies.

Together, these four subchapters offer a structured empirical foundation for analysing how televised media shaped the parameters of fiscal policy discourse during the 2008–2010 financial crisis. By disaggregating patterns of actor visibility and fiscal preferences—beginning with broad ideological distinctions between stimulus and consolidation and narrowing into specific policy positions on spending and taxation—the chapter provides a systematic overview of how competing economic narratives were constructed, legitimised, or constrained across major cable news networks. These findings are not only descriptive; they form the empirical backbone of the thesis's central inquiry into how media representation contributes to the distribution of policy authority, the selective amplification of paradigmatic ideas, and the narrowing or expansion of economic possibility. The results in this chapter are thus directly aligned with the thesis's overarching goal:

to assess the role of television media in mediating public understanding of the economic crisis, structuring legitimacy claims, and influencing whether paradigm change becomes politically viable or ideologically foreclosed. The analysis begins by examining the patterns of actor representation across networks, offering a wide-lens view of which actor types dominated fiscal coverage, which were marginalised, and how partisan differences shaped these patterns. This first layer of analysis in Subchapter 6.1 sets the stage for subsequent sections that examine how these actors were positioned within the broader debates over stimulus, austerity, spending, and taxation.

6.1 The Primary Actors Presented in Policy Coverage

Figure 5 illustrates the total number of actors in the policy coverage. In 2009, out of 1,687 total positions for CNN and 774 total positions recorded for FOX, Obama received more than double the representation on CNN (19%) than FOX (9%). The representation of Republican Congressmen on FOX (30%) accounted for nearly double the coverage than on CNN (17%). The largest gap (15%) in representation among a specific actor group was observed in the policy positions presented directly by media hosts, where FOX (27%) hosts overwhelmingly presented more positions than CNN (12%). This wide gap can be explained by the evolution of media messaging strategies and branding, which will be discussed in more detail throughout this section. Surprisingly, Democrat Congressmen received nearly the same coverage for CNN (11%) and FOX (9%).

The majority of CNN policy coverage was allocated to President Obama's arguments. In contrast, Fox News either allocated less coverage to President Obama or presented more of Obama's arguments for fiscal consolidation programs and reducing our deficit. In early February, Obama struck an ominous tone about what would come if the government did not act fast to pass the significant fiscal stimulus programs his administration was proposing. However, by late February, Obama attended the fiscal discipline summit and sold his plans to reduce the deficit and projected public debt levels. He was playing a balancing act, selling two opposing ideologies simultaneously. The differences in the extent and nature of the coverage of President Obama and other actor groups may also be explained by ideological differences between the companies and their efforts to set the 'policy agenda'.

From the constructivist standpoint, authority contests are largely deduced from contests of public persuasion. Persuasion techniques differed drastically across the political spectrum, particularly among cable news outlets. However, similarities were evident among those closely ideologically aligned. As Figure 5 indicates, FOX invites significantly fewer live guests on the political left to engage in the debate than CNN's coverage of conservatives. Moreover, there is less heterogeneity in the coverage of all actor groups compared to CNN. A common FOX strategy is interjecting news clips of Obama or a select few congressional democrats, whereby commentary follows from mostly hosts and republican guests to refute Democrat ideologies.

Additionally, FOX hosts often reiterate verbiage from select Congressional Republicans and vice-versa. On February 26th, 2009, host Sean Hannity stated regarding Obama's budget proposal, "I keep using John McCain's words, 'generational theft'. We are stealing from our kids." This clip perfectly captures the narratives that emerge as a generative process driven by both political leadership and the media. Political leadership relies on television media to promote its policy agendas; simultaneously, television media utilises its access and recognition to exert its power, leveraging its agenda-setting function. The more TV media companies prioritise specific policy issues, the greater pressures that mount on policymakers and political leaders to address the issue. At the same time, internal interests within each company influence its agenda-setting function, including stakeholders, advertisers, the public, and its target viewership. For TV companies, there is also pressure exerted by the public, their advertisers, and stakeholders.

Left-leaning media engaged more conservative guest commentary, including more live coverage than news clips, in their persuasion strategies. On March 1, 2009, ABC host George Stephanopoulos began the show with Republican Senator Eric Cantor's argument that government spending will only redistribute wealth, not stimulate the economy. Then Stephanopoulos refutes, "But the public seems to be siding with President Obama...61% say they trust President Obama." Following this exchange, a poll indicates that only 26% of surveyed voters trust Republicans to handle the economy.

The results suggest that the opposition party received more coverage than the party in power across all broadcasts, particularly on cable networks. CNN's total positions were 28% Republican and 16% Democrat, whereas FOX was 26% Republican and 8% Democrat. Isolating only partisan opinions and commentary, as shown in Figure 4 for cable and Figure 6 for broadcast,

reveals a significant skew toward Republican viewpoints. The average in 2009 for cable companies was 69% Republican, and broadcast was surprisingly even higher, at 72% Republican skewed.

One commonality between FOX and CNN's persuasion strategy is using what this thesis refers to as 'fringe' actors. Fringe actors are individuals who do not align with the mainstream ideology shared by their constituents or other actors within the same group. For instance, Arnold Schwarzenegger represented a small minority of Republican governors who were outspoken in their support of Obama's stimulus plans and were frequently covered by CNN but not by FOX. Figure 5 highlights that a greater proportion of CNN policy coverage was allocated to Obama's arguments, many of which favour fiscal stimulus. In contrast, FOX allocated less coverage to Obama and what was primarily covered emphasised Obama's arguments for fiscal consolidation. Due to the extreme polarisation, only a select few fringe actors exist and are thus constantly recycled in the coverage. The Senate Budget Committee's Chairman, Senator Conrad, a conservative Democrat respected on both sides of the aisle, along with House Representative Walt Minnick, were among the few select Democrats that FOX covered. The coverage they received was based solely on their concerns about greater spending and tax deduction limitations.

Figure 4. Total Fiscal Policy Positions by Partisan – Cable Companies

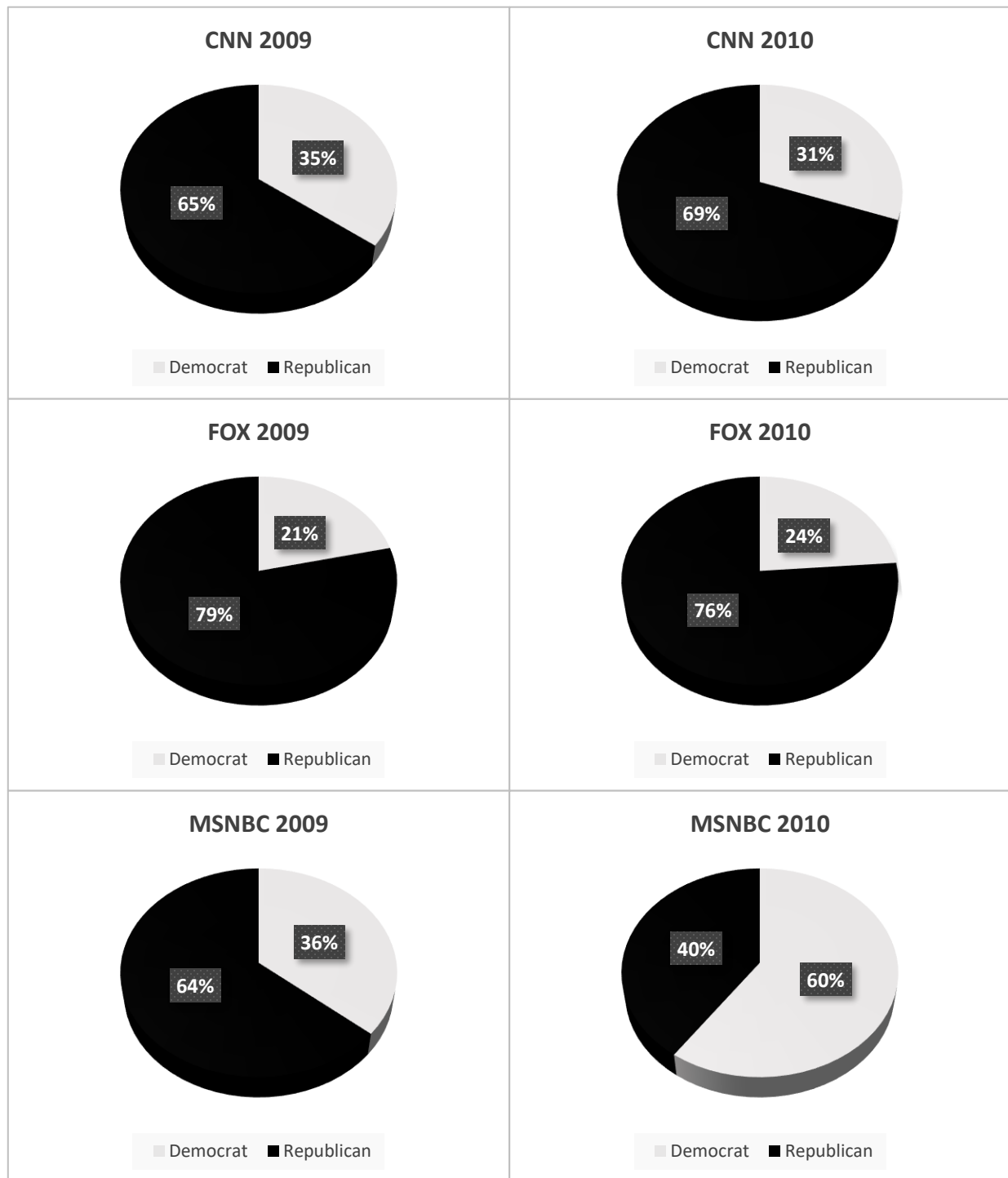


Figure 5. Total Fiscal Policy Positions by Actor Group – Cable Companies

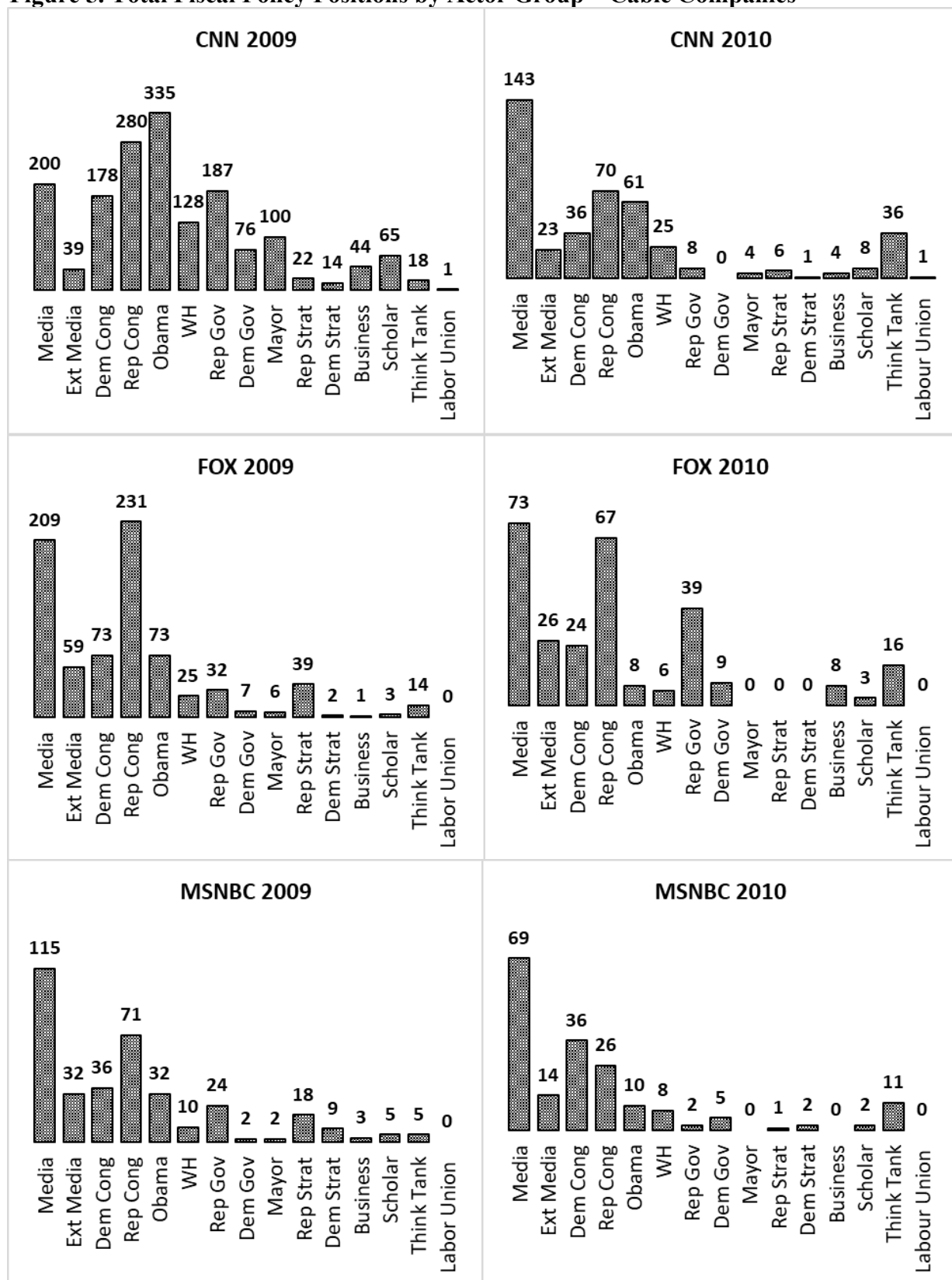


Figure 6. Total Fiscal Policy Positions by Partisan – Broadcast Companies

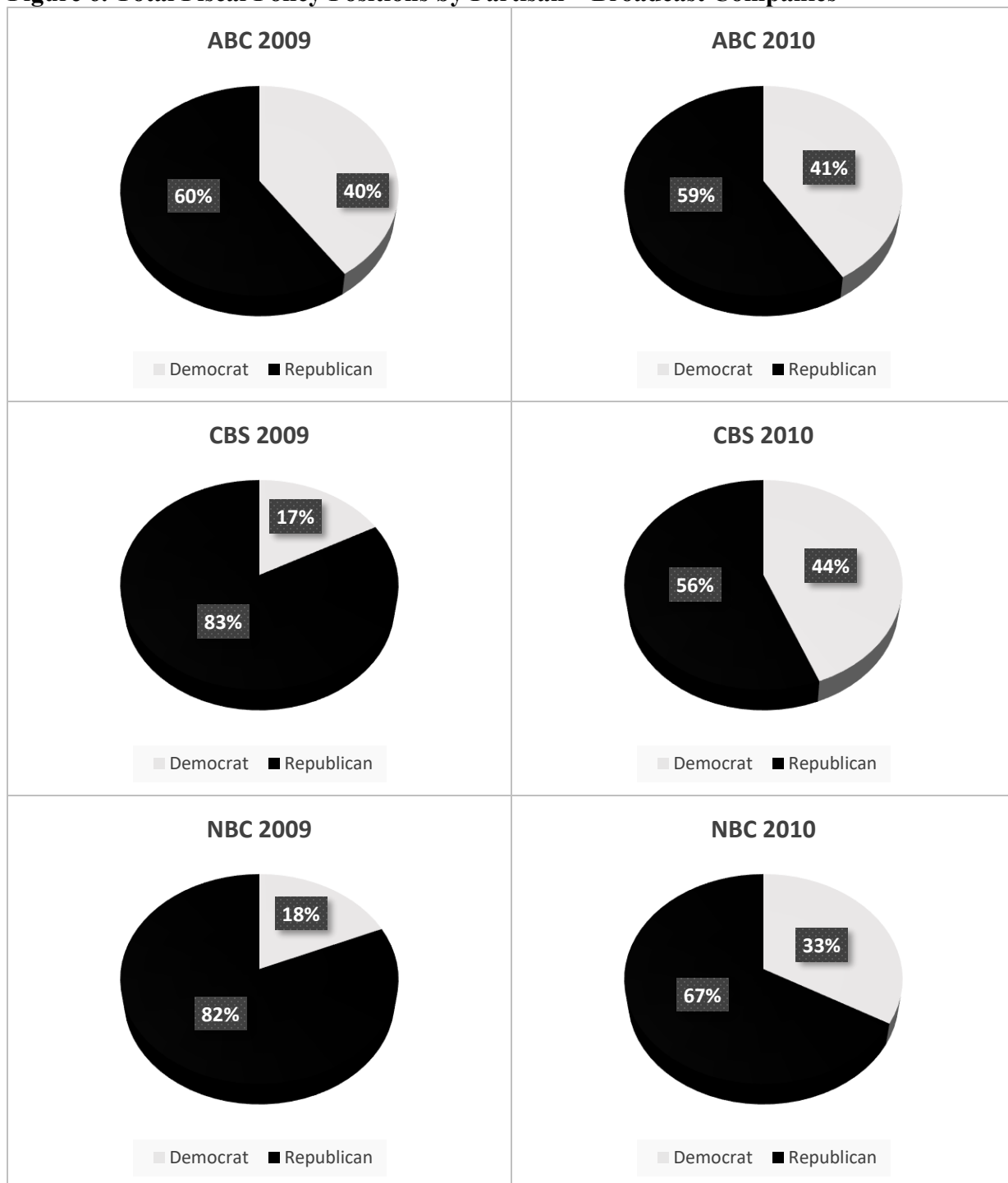
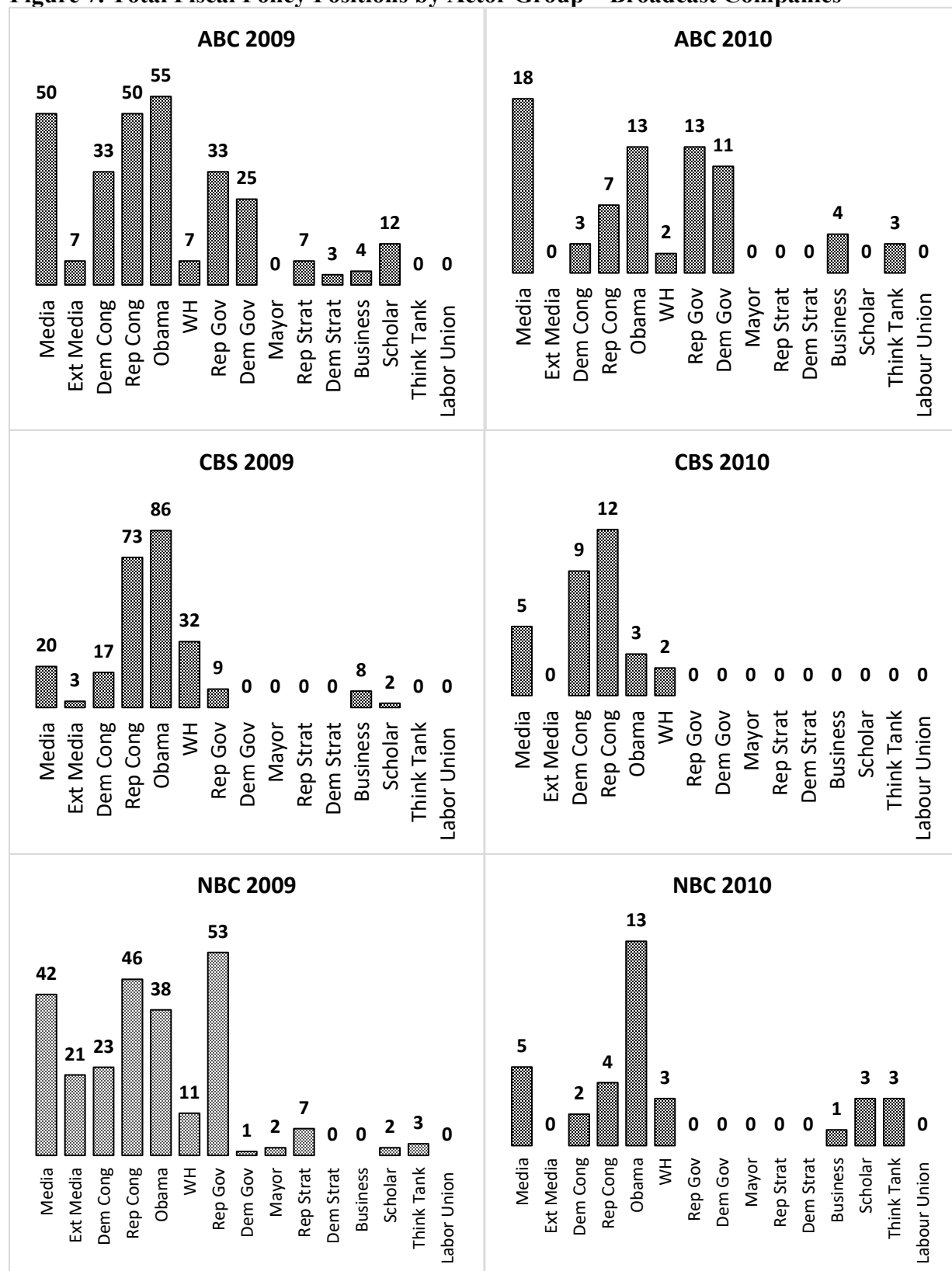


Figure 7. Total Fiscal Policy Positions by Actor Group – Broadcast Companies



6.2 Dominant Fiscal Policy: Stimulus vs. Consolidation

This subchapter details our investigation of the broader fiscal policy stances (i.e. stimulus v consolidation) favoured in the coverage between TV companies in the US in our 2009 and 2010 timeframe. Figures 8-9 illustrate a significant shift in attitudes toward fiscal consolidation from 2009 to 2010. In addition, Figures 10-12 depict policies favoured by specific actor groups in each company's coverage for 2009 and 2010.

Fiscal policy issues are seldom at the top of the agenda amongst media for most voters. The economic crises of 2009 led to the fiscal budget becoming the primary focus of the midterm and general elections unfolding over the next four years. The consequences were monumental. Uncertainty allows the space for the most drastic of policy changes, including fundamental shifts, as discussed earlier in the paradox of ideological paradigm shifts. The rise of the Tea Party and the group's advocacy of the consequences of fiscal deficits fractured and reshaped the Republican Party. Voters and news pundits became more entrenched in their information ecosystems. Cable news companies found increasing value in promoting more partisan commentary rather than politically neutral or hard news reporting. Thus, the findings presented in the next few chapters address a critical element that has been lacking in the research area. How did cable news coverage present the crisis and available solutions? The differing strategies deployed by each TV news company to jostle for a more significant market share, ratings, and viewer engagement and exert their political power add complexity to why specific policies are favoured over others in the coverage.

Before detailing the specific spending and taxation measures promoted by the different TV media companies, this section aims to outline the broader fiscal policy objectives (i.e., stimulus vs. consolidation). This subsection is structured into several parts. First, we outline the overall broad policy coverage across different TV media companies in 2009 and 2010, as illustrated in Figures 9-12. Policy positions are placed into two categories: 1) Pro-stimulus – Policy positions favour increasing public expenditure or tax cuts or a combination of the two, or 2) Pro-consolidation – Policy Positions aimed at reducing government deficits and debt accumulation (OECD).

One of the most notable findings of my analysis is the drastic shift in attitudes toward the fiscal stimulus and fiscal consolidation policy aims that occurred within the first year of the crisis,

as depicted in Figures 8 and 9. Additionally, textual excerpts from thousands of TV transcripts are analysed over a 1-year timeline to examine similarities and differences in policy coverage between individual TV news companies. Later in the subsection, the specific actor types engaged in the coverage and their favourability toward either fiscal stimulus or consolidation are analysed in-depth, as seen in Figure 8, including the reasoning behind elevating certain actor types and policy positions and how they relate to each company's unique ideological positioning and target audience. Finally, the Tea Party movement's coverage is analysed to provide insights, based on quantifiable data, into the varying magnification and favourability demonstrated toward Tea Party ideologies among TV companies.

One of the primary objectives of our analysis is to illustrate how different types of actors are engaged to target specific audiences and how this is substantiated by the individual company's branding and competitive positioning, which helps maintain and grow their market share, viewership, and ratings. Furthermore, and more importantly, what effect did that have on public opinion and the political discourse that led to such a drastic shift in public attitudes toward fiscal policymaking between 2009 and 2010? Our results, detailed in the following sections, indicate an extensive and rapid transformation of public attitudes toward a policy issue that is seldom at the forefront of voter priorities: government budgets. This phenomenon was at least in part facilitated and mirrored by commentary on TV cable news.

The landslide victory for the Republicans in the 2010 congressional races marked a drastic shift in US voter attitudes, political power, and the future direction of public policymaking. Synchronously, our findings illustrate a critical shift in favouritism of policy coverage between February and March of 2009 and 2010.

The broad fiscal policy coverage of all six US TV media companies analysed in 2009 was highly favourable of fiscal stimulus efforts apart from FOX News. In 2009, there were 992 recorded positions in favour of either fiscal stimulus or fiscal consolidation. Of those positions, 744 (75%) favour fiscal stimulus and 248 (25%) favour fiscal consolidation. The favourability of fiscal stimulus, or expansionary policies, rather than fiscal consolidation and austerity, ranged between 80% and 85% among CNN, MSNBC, and the three broadcast companies. However, the coverage on FOX, the outlier, was closely split in favourability between the polarising policy aims, whereby only 51% of the total broad fiscal positions in the coverage were 'pro' fiscal stimulus.

By 2010, our results indicate an extreme shift in coverage and attitudes toward public debt and the fiscal deficit. On cable networks, of the 276 total positions for either stimulus or consolidation, 97 (35%) favoured fiscal stimulus, whereas 179 positions (65%) supported fiscal consolidation. Including broadcast networks, only 38% support stimulus, compared to 62% for consolidation. Across all six TV networks, the 2010 results indicate a 38% drop in support for fiscal stimulus efforts and a 38% increase in favouritism toward fiscal consolidation programs in contrast to the previous year. So, what caused a drastic and consequential shift in public attitudes in such a short period? Many factors undoubtedly caused such a drastic shift in public attention and attitudes. Hall argued that the media was at the forefront of these contests. Our results further substantiate both Hall and our argument that media is the most critical factor regarding shifts in public attitude and winners of policy authority contests. In general, our results suggest a strong relationship between public attitudes and subsequent TV policy coverage regarding policy favouritism in TV coverage. However, the relationship is more complex, which we discuss in detail throughout the following three sections, considering the dynamics of increasing tribalism in news audiences.

In 2009, the primary similarity between all TV cable coverage was the necessity of a fiscal stimulus package; however, one stark outlier was how FOX News covered the policy debate. FOX News's conservative policy narrative parallels the conservative narrative regarding fiscal consolidation favoured in both British and Irish printing presses at the time (Pirie; Mercille).

Fox's 2009 coverage focused on the increasing fiscal deficit exacerbated by wasteful government spending, fiscal mismanagement, and concerns about inflation and tax increases resulting from increased public spending. Most coverage on MSNBC, CNN, and the broadcast companies concentrated on the dire economic situation and pleas from businesses and individuals for government relief rather than drawing significant attention to deficit concerns or inflation.

The significant differences in policy coverage between the networks in 2009 are evident from the tone of the headlines. The most partisan headlines came from MSNBC and FOX, which have incrementally developed as polar forces in their ideological and political positioning since their inception. In 2009, FOX headlines included 'Will Spending Work', 'Spending Issues' and 'Tea Party Protesters Demonstrate Against Stimulus Bill' (February 27th); 'Two Democratic

Senators Object to Budget Bill Earmarks’ (March 4); ‘Thousands of Earmarks in New Spending Bill’; ‘Obama Agenda Socialism?’ and ‘Gingrich Says Obama Seeks Dictatorship’ (March 27).

Headlines on MSNBC were more favourable to the Obama administration's policy position. A few exemplifying this: ‘The president offers a nation a path towards economic solvency’ (February 23); ‘Obama leans left’ (February 26); ‘Many business groups are working hard to help pass comprehensive health care reform’ (March 6); ‘President Obama delivers a warning to the states’ (March 12); ‘How far will the GOP go to sink the recovery in hopes of damaging the president?’ (March 25)

Conversely, CNN headlines remained more neutral than those of both FOX and MSNBC, focusing more on President Obama’s statements and interviewing partisan leaders from both the Democratic and Republican parties. The headlines read: ‘President Obama: Time for Action is Now’ (February 5); ‘Obama Warns of Catastrophe’ (February 5); ‘Economy Hemorrhaging Jobs’ (February 6); ‘Stimulus and Healthcare’ (February 11) John McCain Supporters Slam Obama Approach on Stimulus Campaign’ (February 16); ‘New Record High for Unemployed Number’ (February 19th) and ‘Fixing the Economy’ (February 21st). Then after Obama’s Fiscal Responsibility Summit in 2009, CNN headlines started noticeably shifting to ‘Borrowing Money from China’ (February 23rd); ‘No End to Wasteful Spending’ (February 23rd); Obama’s Big Government and ‘Spending Binge’ (Feb 25); ‘Spending Outrage’ (Feb 26th).

Furthermore, headlines in the TV broadcast coverage shifted drastically following Obama’s fiscal responsibility summit on February 23, 2009. Before the summit, headlines read: on ABC, ‘The Big Fix’ and ‘Where’s the Stimulus Plan’ (February 3rd) and ‘Remaking the Middle Class’ (February 28th). Then, after Obama’s 2009 Fiscal Responsibility Summit, headlines began shifting to uncontrolled spending ‘Borrowing Money from China’ (February 23rd); ‘No End to Wasteful Spending’ and ‘Obama’s Big Government’ (Feb 25); ‘Spending Outrage’ (Feb 26th).

At the beginning of February 2009, President Obama had just begun laying out the blueprint of his first fiscal budget and stimulus plan. Obama’s bold and progressive economic agenda was a signature of the campaign that won him the presidency over his opponent, Republican Senator John McCain. FOX’s coverage of the first week of February 2009 is articulated in an interview with Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona. On February 3rd, 2009, FOX host Neil Cavuto posed the question, “Is this stimulus, as it now stands, dead?” McCain

responds, “It should be dead because it is a spending bill. It’s not a stimulus bill. It’s a spending bill...there’s some ridiculous things in it. But fundamentally, I think this has got to be tax cuts. It’s got to be the right kinds of tax cuts, such as payroll tax cuts and cuts in business taxes, not just what amounts to rebates. It’s got to be some money for defence rather than all these pork barrel projects. And, we have to bring it to an end. When we have two-quarters of GDP growth, we have to embark on a path to balance the budget through spending cuts. Look, we’re laying multitrillion-dollar deficits on future generations of Americans, which could return us to the days of the ’70s, when we had out-of-control inflation, if we have to debase the currency.” During this time, John McCain was arguably the most popular and influential Republican in leadership, as the peak of policy debates occurred just months after McCain lost the general election to President Barack Obama.

Although McCain argues against the stimulus package’s heavy concentration on spending policy rather than taxation policy, he concedes that a stimulus package is required, and some public spending would be critical to avoiding a worse recession. In the first three weeks of February, leading up to Obama’s Fiscal Responsibility Summit, a commonality emerged in most TV coverage: the necessity for government action and a stimulus package to reduce the likelihood of a greater recession. However, the narrative and coinages McCain adopts in early 2009 reverberate in the conservative media. McCain’s parallel of government spending to that of ‘stealing from our grandchildren’ and constant use of the term ‘hyperinflation’ garnered increasing attention and concern amongst conservative media and conservative voters. The conservative counter-narrative to Obama’s agenda that emerges in early February, one of more tax cuts and less spending, gradually intensifies as the Democrats aim to pass unprecedented fiscal spending as their primary tool to stabilise the US and global economy.

FOX was the outlier in our 2009 and 2010 datasets among all six companies, and we found coverage to be particularly polarised with its more left-leaning competitor, MSNBC. Fox’s increasingly commentary-centric news cycle, the different actors it magnifies or avoids, and how that relates to its competitive positioning in the news market are unique in contrast to its competitors. We provide specific textual examples from the TV transcripts to support the stark ideological and strategical differences in the coverage between FOX and the other TV news networks. By providing these examples, we observe the development of the Democrat and

Republican narratives in the TV news coverage during the peak of the policy debate, as well as the different types of actors involved.

FOX brands itself as the lone wolf of conservative news on TV. Naturally, the coverage would be in opposition to the Democrat incumbent president. However, more than that, the FOX News platform, because of its large conservative viewership, amplifies Republican leadership's policy arguments. Moreover, recent research on selective exposure suggests that the way Democrats and Republicans choose their news varies significantly. Different ecosystems have developed between Democrats and Republicans regarding the sources of news they seek and the types of individuals that reaffirm or align with their ideological or political identity. Voter polling research indicates that individuals do not like to regard themselves as biased, even if their actions and behaviours indicate selective exposure based on their existing ideologies. The reaffirmation of political identity for the viewer is most important in news selection. It translates beyond TV news coverage into entertainment and popular culture, whereby late-night comedy hosts, popular podcasts, and musicians create content designed for specific information ecosystems, which consist of politically like-minded audiences and similarly aligned media outlets.

Sophisticated algorithms are employed by large Tech companies, such as YouTube, which exacerbates a user's selective exposure by promoting more content related to their previous views and searches. Additionally, traditional cable news structuring has changed drastically, from the news content to their revenue mechanisms. According to comScore traffic Data, as of 2015, cable TV news companies ranked in the top 50 in the US regarding digital media properties. The online presence of FOX, CNN, and MSNBC necessitates redefining the traditional role of television media as a news medium. Major Media companies, like those analysed in this thesis, are financial conglomerates with vast and diverse corporate stakeholders.

In the contest for policy authority, the actors most engaged and magnified in the coverage are highly diverse. The news structure and content strategies employed by TV news companies to boost viewership and ratings, and more importantly for our research, promoting a policy agenda that serves the interests of its shareholders, advertisers, and viewers is critical to the policy learning process. Nevertheless, minimal research exists that depicts the different policy jostling between news competitors and the actors most influential to opposing information ecosystems. As we discussed in the literature review, TV hosts are essential in this dynamic, as they are unique

entertainment celebrities. More important is the dynamic between the audiences and the ecosystem of information they trust. For example, sources from academia or the scientific community are often labelled liberal or Democrat by conservative media pundits on FOX.

FOX News brands itself as the sole Republican news source on TV in the US. In 2009 and 2010, FOX viewership was more than double the combined viewership of CNN and MSNBC in daytime and primetime coverage. The groups of actors FOX structures in its news coverage are particularly partisan in contrast to its top competitors. The partisan composition between the three cable networks is illustrated in Figure 8 and Figure 9. In 2009, FOX presented 187 positions favouring fiscal stimulus or consolidation. Of the 187 positions, 23 (12%) were presented by Democrat representatives and 59 (32%) by Republicans. FOX's 20% gap in partisan representation was an outlier compared to its competitors (Figure 11). CNN's coverage presented 531 broad policy positions, whereby 87 (16%) were presented by Democrats and 91 (17%) by Republican representatives. MSNBC's coverage presented 156 positions, whereby 30 (19%) were presented by Democrat representatives and 23 (15%) by Republicans.

CNN's centrist strategic positioning is demonstrated by its smallest gap in partisan representation during the 2009 broad policy debate. This distinction must not be understated. The split in political audiences and messaging, combined with FOX's double the viewership size of MSNBC and CNN, may have contributed to the rapid shift of public attitude from favouring fiscal expansionary policies to consolidatory.

The competitive landscape of the cable news industry is crucial to understanding each company's selection process of hosts and guests and how that relates to the coinciding political contests. The Democratic actors engaged on FOX are often moderates or fringe actors in their party, and whenever they are presented in the coverage, it is primarily during the daytime and not primetime slots with the highest viewership.

For instance, on February 5th, FOX host Neil Cavuto interviews Democrat Senator of Idaho Walt Minnick, a self-proclaimed 'Blue Dog Democrat' about his moderate position in the party. Cavuto opens the interview: 'Well, a new bill in the House may prove just how much waste is in this stimulus bill, and it is coming from a Democrat -- the total price tag, \$174 billion.' Minnick was one of the few congressmen in the Democratic party who argued for a drastically lower stimulus package than the figures debated by Democrats and Republicans. Moreover,

Minnick argued for more taxation relief than spending. The bill he proposed allocated 100 billion to tax cuts and 70 billion to infrastructure spending. Minnick's proposed bill was much more aligned with the Republican budget proposal and was extreme compared to most of his Democrat colleagues. The final stimulus package included spending over six times the amount Minnick proposed.

Congressional politics in the last decade has become especially partisan and tribal. Greater tribalism has been a consequence of a multitude of factors, including urbanisation and accelerated income inequality. However, one of the greatest factors has been the increasingly partisan policy coverage in cable news. Increasingly, electoral politics is concentrated in fewer geographical regions, often referred to as 'battleground states' due to the politically competitive environment, whereby voters are more evenly split between political parties, and therefore, more centrist, and moderate candidates tend to make more bi-partisan compromises prevail. For these reasons, the few fringe actors in political leadership, those moderates who rely on constituents of both parties and usually take more centrist policy positions, are frequently used by TV companies to amplify their persuasive power and drive the political discourse of the day. The coverage of political leaders in highly contested states, whether favourable or critical is critical in the key policy debates.

State Congressional and governor leaders who run in more competitive and evenly split voter demographics are vulnerable to voters from both parties. Thus, they are often looked to in highly contested policy change moments to break from partisan ranks and join the opposition agenda. For some states, it is seen as a badge of honour for leaders to be independent of either party and is considered less partisan, which is a positive for voters. In these cases, the leaders are rewarded by voters for their independent thinking, often regarding choosing their state's constituents over their party's agenda.

The independents and centrists in contested states are a few actors in political leadership that all the cable companies sometimes interview. Minnick is one of only a handful of Democrat interviewees during this time on FOX News. Therefore, the perception is that if even some of the top democrat leadership is arguing for much less spending and more tax, then the Obama administration and those pushing their agenda in Congress are taking an unreasonable and uncompromising position.

President Obama's Fiscal Responsibility Summit on February 23, 2009, proved to be a transformational day in the tone of fiscal strategy messaging, set in part by the president, but especially in the direction of TV coverage that followed. Obama's paradoxical messaging and the highly partisan TV coverage following the event transformed the government's policy agenda, which was analysed in the timeline of the subsequent discourse. On MSNBC, guest host Alison Stewart compares the contradictory messaging Obama presents, i.e. cutting the deficit in half while passing a stimulus bill, to that of organising abstinence education day the day after prom.

Regarding policy framing, terms such as 'generational theft', 'socialism', and 'hyperinflation' gradually became more frequent in the discourse. The coinage of 'generational theft' was made famous by John McCain and other GOP leaders early in the policy debate and also adopted by Sean Hannity and other top FOX news hosts. During Hannity's show on February 27, 2009, Republican senator John McCain stated on behalf of the stimulus package, "It is mortgaging our children's futures. I think it is generational theft, and even the CBO has said that over time, this could significantly harm our economy because it will crowd out private investment. But most importantly, Sean, what we are talking about is perhaps the biggest massive change in the relationship between the government and the free enterprise system since Franklin Delano Roosevelt."

Hannity frequently used the GOP policy framing of 'generational theft' in the headlines and opening remarks of his segments. Furthermore, emotive terms such as 'socialism' and 'redistribution' were incited much more frequently than both CNN and MSNBC's coverage combined. For example, on Sean Hannity's March 27, 2009, show entitled 'Obama Agenda Socialism?' Hannity's opening remarks are 'day number 67 of redistribution you can believe in, generational theft. Now, the president's brands of socialism have put a big old mortgage on our children's future. This is the kind of mortgage that got us into this mess to begin with – the rotten kind.'

Hannity's primetime segment on FOX immediately following Obama's Fiscal Responsibility Summit on February 23, 2009, began with the headline 'Feigning Responsibility'. In the opening remarks, Hannity defaces Obama's speech, stating, "Pretty arrogant from an administration that continues to spend the people's money on every possible liberal initiative that it can think of." The show featured two popular and controversial conservative political pundits as

interviewees, Dick Morris and Ann Coulter. Morris, a tea party purveyor and Republican strategist, gained political notoriety when he became one of the top advisors to Bill Clinton throughout Clinton's presidential tenure starting in 1992. With experience as a top conservative advisor to a Democrat President and identifying as a prominent Tea Party donor and activist, Morris uniquely appeals to both moderate and ultra-conservative audiences. Morris decries Obama's policy strategy on Hannity's show, stating, "When I worked for Clinton, the [number one] thing was lower that deficit, and a Democratic president couldn't spend because of the hole that Reagan had dug of the deficit. And that was deliberate by Reagan, and it worked; it shrank government. Obama is doing the opposite...everybody knows the world can't lend us \$2 trillion. They'll have to print the money, which means huge inflation. So everybody says now we need to cut the deficit, and what that means is a consensus for big, big tax increases."

Following Morris's interview, Ann Coulter states, "Whenever the government gets bigger and bigger, it does become – the politically powerful get ahead, the finaglers, the con men. We saw it with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Politicians get involved. They tell banks OK, you must abandon all business practices and give loans to the poor."

On March 6, 2009, FOX News guest pundit Dick Morris, a prominent Republican strategist and a proponent of the Tea Party, argued that hyperinflation would result from Obama's increase in fiscal spending. Morris states, "In two years or three years, when we begin to come out of this, all that money that is in the parking lot is going to come onto the freeway all at once to buy goods to expand plants and equipment. And then I think we will have runaway inflation. And the only way to cure that is another recession. And instead of sending a message of confidence, and instead of sending a message of keep your money and invest it and spend it, he is saying I am going to raise the debt, I'm going to raise the deficit, I'm going to print money like crazy. And on top of that, I am going to tax you to death." Following Morris's argument, another guest on the show, Wall Street Journal editor Steve Moore, further elevates concern over hyperinflation by stating regarding Morris's assessment, "I did not know that he was such a good economist, but he got it right."

TV media companies have ties to external media companies, such as newspapers, which align with their new brand and ideological perspectives. The closely aligned interests of particular media companies are often done explicitly through representation in coverage or directly as guest

pundits during live segments. An example from the fiscal policy debate occurs on February 26, 2009, as FOX host Bill O'Reilly contrasts the policy agenda of FOX to the rest of the 'liberal' media. Bill O'Reilly opens the segment about President Obama's \$2 trillion deficit, stating, "We understand the deficit is boring. And many Americans don't want to hear about it. But tonight, I will make the deficit exciting...the country could go bankrupt, just like the state of California is tottering on bankruptcy. If that happens, the U.S. dollar will collapse and we'll all be in big, big trouble...[but] if the economy turns around and the Feds cut spending, we might get out of this. It could go either way. But the truth is, we're all at great risk. And few media outlets will tell you that. Instead, we have a partisan press, which often lies to you...[At FOX] you get a wide range of views here while our hard news people deliver solid facts. CNN and MSNBC are openly rooting for President Obama's big-government vision. "The New York Times" and other far-left newspapers want the government to impose quasi-socialism."

Later in the segment, O'Reilly includes the TV broadcast companies in this group, stating, "You'd never hear this kind of analysis on NBC or CBS or ABC" regarding FOX's focus on deficit concerns. FOX brands itself as the singular TV news outlet for conservatives and the outlier amongst the 'mainstream' TV news. Drawing attention to the deficit not only aligns with the Republican policy agenda but also draws significantly more attention to the deficit than its competitors, which fits its branding. Also, it is self-fulfilling in promoting other policy agendas within a broader policy debate.

Conversely, MSNBC's coverage downplayed concerns over the deficit, producing more favourable coverage toward the stimulus and the Obama administration's fiscal policy agenda than its competitors, as seen in Figures 9 and 10. Illustrating this, on February 12, 2009, MSNBC Host David Shuster argues, "Republicans like to accuse Democrats of wasting taxpayer dollars and being condescending eggheads. But if President Obama's economic stimulus fails to prevent a Depression, it will be because he didn't waste enough money, and didn't spend enough time being a condescending egg head."

On February 26, 2009, MSNBC host Chuck Todd stated, "The deficit issue hasn't popped up as a campaign issue. Frankly, not since 1992, when our friend Ross Perot had those charts and graphs out, did the public start caring about the deficit. That's not to say they might not if and when the economy gets better, or if there is this sense that the deficit is somehow slowing down the

economy. But right now, that doesn't seem to be the case. And so, I think they are betting that this deficit issue won't hurt them."

Both FOX and MSNBC strategise to portray the opposition political party figureheads and each other in a negative light, but also as extreme. The coverage on MSNBC, FOX News's explicit ideological competitor, used the emotive language being adopted by FOX and Republican leadership to argue to its audiences that the conservative policy narratives were extreme and methodically designed to instil fear. On March 26²⁶, 2009, MSNBC host Keith Olbermann began the show with a clip of Republican Senator Newt Gingrich comparing Obama's economic policies to those of a 'dictatorship'; stating, "Former Speaker Gingrich tries to terrify people into thinking the economic recovery means dictatorship is near."

On March 27, 2009, MSNBC host Olbermann introduced an audio clip of Minnesota Republican Michele Bachmann on Sean Hannity's talk show, arguing for a 'revolution' against the 'economic Marxism of the Obama administration' that would bankrupt the country. Stating, "Like Thomas Jefferson said, 'A Revolution every now and then is a good thing'... We will be bankrupting this country within 10 years if we don't get a grip. And we can't let the Democrats achieve their ends any longer." Following the clip, MSNBC host Olberman counters, "In addition to the crazy that exists only inside the mind of Michele Bachmann, there is the kind of crazy that congressional Republicans are now inflicting upon each other – the unveiling of an alternative budget, a budget with no numbers in it, a fudge-it."

Polling is another effective method, beyond directly featuring the print news articles and representatives in their TV coverage, of including content from print media companies closely aligned with the TV media's policy agenda. A clear exhibit of this is seen on February 23, 2009, when MSNBC's guest host Allison Stewart displays a graphic of a New York Times poll which states, "3/4 of Americans think Obama has been trying to work with Republicans. But only three in 10 Americans said Republicans are doing the same, with 63 per cent saying that Republicans oppose the economic stimulus package primarily for political reasons rather than policy concerns." Another example that captures MSNBC's partisan tone towards stimulus spending occurs on February 19, 2009, when host Keith Olbermann mockingly and sarcastically draws attention to the Republicans' refusal to accept portions of the stimulus money. Olberman states, 'Cutting off their states despite their faces: Republican governors, Palin of Alaska, Jindal of Louisiana, Perry of

Texas, Barbour of Mississippi, maybe even Sanford of South Carolina, say they might not accept funds from the stimulus, that they all dream of running for president just a coincidence.' Beyond putting political pressure on state leaders who are more vulnerable in their elections, TV media companies portray the opposition's figureheads negatively to appease their audience and exert political pressure through the media spotlight and the reaction of the voting public.

During the same show segment, MSNBC host Olberman praises Republican governor Charlie Crist for accepting the stimulus money and advocating for Obama's stimulus ambitions in Florida. MSNBC's Olberman then brings Chair of the Democratic National Committee and former Democratic Governor of Vermont Howard Dean on the show to express his experience that governors tend to work more bi-partisan than their colleagues in the Senate. Dean states on behalf of Charlie Crist and the five Republican governors refusing stimulus money, "The voters will reward him. You know, something – it's interesting that these five governors are doing this because, when I was governor, which was for a long time, and also a chairman of the governor's association, governors, Republican or Democrat, are much more kind of bipartisan than Congress people. When you are a governor, most of the reasonable solutions of how to fix problems are in the middle someplace, and you have to actually do something. So, this kind of posturing is unusual for governors, and you don't usually see this. You usually see Democratic and Republican governors pretty much on the same page."

Both MSNBC and FOX's coverage were highly partisan. The substance of the policy debate is often minimised to partisan talking points rather than debating the merits of the specific fiscal policies over others. There are no references to historical empirical evidence, scholarly research, or the scientific community in any cable commentary. Our results further substantiate that the role of TV hosts in shaping public opinion is significant. In 2009, MSNBC presented 25% of its total broad policy positions directly from the TV host, or 39 out of 157, as shown in Figure 10. FOX hosts presented 21% of total fiscal policy positions. However, unlike its more partisan competitors, CNN's hosts presented 12% coverage or 65 out of 531 total fiscal policy positions. Filtering political leadership's messaging through various TV coverage results in significant variations in exposure to specific political figures and messaging. For example, the 2009 FOX coverage presented minimal exposure of direct content from President Obama and the administration. CNN's coverage incorporated an abundance of direct messaging from President

Obama. On FOX and MSNBC, very few guests appear on both shows, and both primarily avoid guests from the opposing party. On MSNBC, Republican governors who were more outspoken in favour of stimulus funds and more closely aligned with Obama's budget agenda were elevated and promoted, a trend also observed to a lesser degree in CNN coverage.

On the MSNBC show *Hardball* on February 25, 2009, host Chris Matthews invokes the support of the stimulus package from two prominent Republican governors, Charlie Crist of Vermont and Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, and another 'conservative' perspective from New York Times Columnist David Brooks in defence of those arguing the stimulus would be a catastrophe. As a rebuttal to Delay's argument that the debt leveraged by the stimulus package would result in catastrophe, Ford cites support for the stimulus package from two prominent Republican governors, Charlie Crist of Vermont and Arnold Schwarzenegger of California. As Delay follows up to make a counterpoint, Matthews interjects with a clip of what he argues is another 'conservative' perspective, constituting a statement by New York Times Columnist David Brooks. In the clip, Brooks states, "I think Bobby Jindal is a very promising politician, and I opposed the stimulus package because I thought it was poorly drafted. But to come up at this moment in history with a stale, government is the problem, we can't trust the federal government – it's just a disaster for the Republican Party." Delay responds to the clip, "Woah! Woah! Chris, first of all, take away the conservative moniker for David Brooks." In many instances on MSNBC and FOX, the partisanship in policy messaging is explicit. The two Republican governors are moderates from politically competitive states, and MSNBC host Chris Matthews knowingly places a conservative label on a news source that is perceived to be more left-slanted in their reporting, which their lone conservative guest pundit then calls out.

A prominent strategy on FOX and MSNBC, and to a lesser degree on CNN, is to create a guest panel whereby hosts and pundits outnumber the opposition pundit. In most cases, the opposition pundit is meant to represent the ideological perspective of the opposition party. Moreover, even in the 1v1 scenario where one opposition guest pundit faces off with the show's host, the audience most likely identifies with the policy and ideological positioning of the news source they selected. Therefore, the audience is more likely to identify with the celebrity TV host, given the selection process and the constant exposure to programming that aligns most closely with the individual's beliefs. The unique dataset we have built encompasses thousands of data

points, providing a thorough understanding of how coverage was structured between each TV news company and how different actor types were covered.

Furthermore, it provides new insights into the specific structuring of messaging that TV companies develop to appeal to specific audiences and to align with their company's ideological branding. What is newsworthy differs dramatically between companies, and therefore, the selection and delivery of news content are complex among companies. Our methodology offers a simplified illustration of this complex manoeuvring between each TV company's policy coverage. Figure 12 illustrates the distinct differences in how the various types of actors were engaged in the coverage, and more importantly, those utilised as persuasive vehicles for each company's unique audience and ideological branding. In 2009, CNN and MSNBC's coverage favoured fiscal stimulus policies, whereas FOX's coverage of the policy debate drew much more attention to the deficit. The composition of the actors promoting either fiscal stimulus or consolidation policies, as shown in Figure 12, is critical to understanding how these ideologies were promoted and tailored to appeal to each audience and how that aligns with the political and ideological branding of the TV news companies.

Interestingly, for FOX and MSNBC, which compete as polarised political news forces and produce more partisan coverage than their competitor CNN, according to our data, the favorability of the media hosts and TV personalities was one of the most significant indicators of the overall policy agenda and strategic content delivery. However, for less partisan news sources such as CNN and the broadcast companies, the skew of the hosts toward one policy over another was insignificant, as CNN engages a more diverse group of actor types than either FOX or MSNBC during both the 2009 and 2010 datasets, and brands itself as the most neutral cable news source.

In 2009, CNN had the smallest gap (3%) between hosts promoting either stimulus or consolidation, as hosts promoted 13% of overall pro-fiscal stimulus positions and 10% of pro-fiscal consolidation positions (see Figure 12). FOX had a more significant gap (19%). Unlike CNN and MSNBC's hosts, whose favourability skewed towards fiscal stimulus, 32% of FOX's pro-consolidation coverage was delivered by FOX hosts, and 12% for pro-stimulus policy aims. MSNBC had the most significant gap (26%), as 28% of pro-stimulus and 2% of pro-consolidation policies were presented by MSNBC hosts. Additionally, CNN concentrated more coverage at the local government level, which is seen as less partisan. As seen in Figure 12, City Mayors

constituted over 11% of CNN's total fiscal policy coverage that was favourable to fiscal stimulus, whereas FOX (2%) and MSNBC (2%) did not.

Engaging representatives from external media companies, such as newspapers and cable TV news programs, is often perceived as partisan, with the New York Times being associated with Democrats and the New York Post with Republicans. Reaffirming CNN's strategy of neutrality, our results demonstrate that CNN had the lowest engagement with external media sources, as only 3% of overall fiscal stimulus positions were presented by representatives from media companies unaffiliated with the network analysed. In contrast, 16% of MSNBC's and 11% of FOX's total pro-stimulus positions were attributed to external media representatives (Figure 12).

As we discussed in previous sections, the phenomenon of cable news has accelerated the formation of two increasingly tribal sets of news sources: one ecosystem for Republicans and another for Democrats. For conservative voters, FOX News uniquely brands itself as anti-mainstream news. Therefore, the actors and external media companies they engage with differ vastly from those of the other five TV companies in the US. For instance, academia is not invoked on either side of the debate throughout FOX's coverage, whereby 1% of Pro-stimulus positions were presented by academia, and 0% were included in the coverage to promote fiscal consolidation, as shown in Figure 12. However, for the more left-slanted CNN and MSNBC, scholars were a significant indicator of the favourability of the coverage of either fiscal stimulus or consolidation. CNN's policy coverage in 2009 was 80% favourable toward the stimulus and even more favourable on MSNBC, with 85%, as shown in Figure 8. Academia accounted for 7% of total pro-stimulus positions in CNN coverage and 5% in MSNBC coverage. However, academia accounted for 0% of total fiscal consolidation positions presented in the coverage of both CNN and MSNBC. The lack of academic support for consolidation policies from academia on CNN and MSNBC could be explained by overwhelming favouritism amongst scholars toward stimulus at the time or a concerted effort not to give merit to the Republican narrative of a need for austerity to avoid a ballooning fiscal deficit that would result in hyperinflation and tax increases.

TV companies select hosts and guests to cover specific policy issues, not randomly. Hosts and specific guest panels are often used to create a multitude of different content to appeal to their diverse audiences and to build popularity and familiarity with certain actors, which in turn leads audiences to seek out the content and messengers they enjoy or trust the most. I argue, with support

from the empirical results, that the hosts themselves are the most persuasive actors in contests for policy authority. The 'magnification' element that media can provide to policy issues is what Hall stressed above all others in contests for policy authority. However, no two hosts or shows are the same. Different hosts and shows across the networks produce varying audience numbers and ratings and, therefore, have varying persuasive power in the eyes of the public and the political leadership vying for policy authority. The relationship between political elites and TV media is mutually beneficial, as the media gain access to information, and the political elites receive exposure to argue their policy positions and increase public popularity.

In 2009, only 7% of the total positions favourable to fiscal consolidation policies on FOX were presented by or on behalf of Democrats. Yet, Democrats accounted for 24% of the total favourable positions toward fiscal consolidation policies on CNN.

In 2009, although 51% of FOX's overall fiscal policy coverage was favourable to fiscal stimulus rather than consolidation, the discussion context differed from that of its competitors. The methodology accounts for all positions given throughout the TV show, producing quantifiable analytics that limit the potential prejudice or error of the transcriber. For example, in FOX's case, the majority of pro-fiscal stimulus positions that constituted the 51% favourable stimulus coverage were introductory segments featuring Obama or Democratic leadership presenting favourable positions toward the fiscal stimulus, which were followed up by critical commentary from FOX's hosts and guest panels.

This finding is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, political elites and media companies work in tandem and feed off each other in their efforts to set the policy agenda and perpetuate policies that are mutually beneficial to their interests. In 2009, although a conservative narrative developed focused on limiting government spending increases and structuring more tax cuts in the bill, most of the Republican establishment were still discussing the need for government spending and stimulus in some manner. For instance, 45% of pro-fiscal stimulus positions were held by Republicans in CNN coverage, 55% on FOX, 57% on ABC, 50% on CBS, and 65% on NBC, as shown in Figure 10. Considering all TV coverage except for Fox was highly favourable to fiscal stimulus policies in the 2009 debate, FOX was also an outlier in contrast with the Republican leadership. In February 2009, many Republican elites were calling for stimulus needs. However, the messaging from FOX hosts and the Republican guests invited to

the show often drew attention to deficits, inflation, and the need for fiscal restraint during the budget debate.

By February and March of 2010, the political discourse, media spotlight, and public interest had shifted dramatically toward public debt and the fiscal deficit. In addition to the drastic shift in broader fiscal policy goals in TV coverage from 2009 to 2010, attention to the federal budget and various stimulus programs was significantly lower. Regarding positions presented, there was a 69% decrease in arguments for either broader fiscal strategy in 2010.

In February and March 2010, the TV headlines varied between the companies. CNN's coverage primarily focused on the partisan battles and concerns over the growing deficit, which was reflected in the introductions to their TV segments, which aired highlights titled 'Paying for the Promises' and 'Where to Cut' and 'Jobless rate to go down' and 'Obama and GOP Trade Accusations on the Budget Deficit' (CNN). The highlights aired on FOX and MSNBC grew increasingly partisan. MSNBC focused primarily on three issues: 1) the delegitimisation of the Tea Party movement, 2) the need for more federal funds for struggling states, and 3) the resistance of the GOP to healthcare spending. Highlights on MSNBC throughout 2010 included 'Discord within the Tea Party movement is likely to mar this weekend's convention.' 'Is it fair for Republicans to blame President Obama for trillion-dollar deficits when he inherited trillion-dollar deficits?' (February 1). Additionally, 'Tough time to be a tea party. Palin is still in everybody else bags.'

Furthermore, headlines in the broadcast coverage focused primarily on the deficit: 'Mountain of Debt' and 'Ocean of Red' (ABC); 'Paying for the Promises' and 'Where to Cut' and 'Jobless rate to go down' and 'Obama and GOP Trade Accusations on the Budget Deficit' (CNN). Policy discourse had drastically shifted toward consolidation in both broadcast and cable networks.

In 2010, host commentary on CNN and MSNBC was nearly split between the polarising fiscal strategies. CNN hosts accounted for 35% of overall pro-fiscal stimulus commentary and overall pro-consolidation positions and thus had no gap. MSNBC hosts accounted for 35% of pro-stimulus and 33% of pro-consolidation positions. Conversely, FOX hosts presented zero positions favouring fiscal stimulus in 2010, constituting 30% of pro-consolidation coverage.

Unsurprisingly, CNN had the least polarising positioning regarding explicit host endorsements. The company's ideological positioning was more centrist than FOX and MSNBC, and it branded itself as the only remaining cable TV news network to deliver non-partisan news.

As there are only three key players in the cable news market in the United States, CNN sought to capture a wider audience and achieve higher ratings by appealing to both Democrats and Republicans.

The hosts of each company, who are themselves TV celebrities, are critical indicators in our micro-analysis of the overall coverage. The hosts are most familiar to the audiences and have unique persuasive appeal. TV personalities are most persuasive because viewers selectively choose their favourite TV hosts. Therefore, unsurprisingly, cable companies choose to structure news programs and commentary that promote the host's opinion more than that of other actors. It is commonplace that the networks consistently recite the types of discussion that 'opposition' networks attempt to promote to their audiences. The hosts implicitly and explicitly encourage the audience to believe that the 'other side' promotes extreme or unfounded ideologies, further isolating audiences within their information cocoons and amplifying distrust between partisan viewers.

Research on selective exposure, as mentioned in the literature review, demonstrates that audiences tend to be highly selective in what news they consume and often return to familiar sources that align with their ideological views. Audiences of FOX and MSNBC continue to return to either programming with the expectation of explicit commentary from the host personalities. There needs to be more clarity in the alignment to the political left or right regarding crucial policy issues discussed by primetime hosts on FOX and MSNBC. However, by branding itself as the more neutral and centrist cable news network, CNN exhibited far less direct commentary from the primetime hosts and much more commentary from a variety of actors, despite also displaying favouritism toward some.

Interestingly, favouritism toward either political party by direct media representatives (i.e. hosts and analysts) is evident and insightful in the company's policy agenda. Each network promotes specific ideologies to appease its audience and ensure high ratings, which are then monetised or used as part of its own business and political interests to convince its audience to favour one ideology over another. The distinction between FOX, CNN and MSNBC is captured in the favourability toward either broad policy by each cable company's direct hosts and representatives. Analysing the gap, or difference, between direct media hosts and employees' favouritism for fiscal stimulus or consolidation is incredibly insightful.

In 2009, CNN had the smallest gap (10%), as 13% of overall pro-fiscal stimulus coverage was promoted directly by CNN's hosts, yet CNN's hosts constituted only 3% of pro-fiscal consolidation coverage. FOX had a more significant gap (19%), as 31% of FOX's pro-consolidation coverage was delivered by FOX hosts, in contrast to 12% for fiscal stimulus measures. MSNBC had the most significant gap (26%), as 28% of pro-stimulus and 2% of pro-consolidation policies were presented by MSNBC hosts. Our 2010 results, which show direct media host favouritism toward either stimulus or consolidation policies, are crucial to the discussion section concluding the results chapter. This section aims to provide further insight and understanding into the research area, specifically the dominance of the conservative crisis narrative in Europe and, as detailed in this thesis, the United States.

In 2010, host commentary on CNN and MSNBC was nearly split between the polarising fiscal strategies. CNN hosts accounted for 35% of overall pro-fiscal stimulus commentary and overall pro-consolidation positions and thus had no gap. MSNBC had a narrow gap (2%), with hosts accounting for 35% of pro-stimulus coverage and 33% of pro-consolidation. Conversely, FOX hosts presented zero positions favouring fiscal stimulus in 2010, constituting 30% of pro-consolidation coverage.

By February 1, 2010, the change in broader fiscal goals was evident. The scope of importance shifted from the stimulus to the deficit to health spending. The peak of the healthcare debate culminated on March 23, 2010, when Obama passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The Republican's win in the congressional midterm elections in November 2010 resulted in the greatest landslide victory for either party in over 70 years.

Many external pressures on media operations contributed to the pressure on politicians and influenced the direction of policy discourse. Noteworthy among these external pressures coordinated by special interest groups is the Tea Party movement. Almost half of the 60 Republicans who won in the House of Representatives were those who campaigned as Tea Party Candidates or self-identified with their ideologies. The Tea Party movement is an ideological movement that emerged in mainstream politics around April 2009. The movement was developed through a series of wealthy interest groups, think tanks, and political advisory groups, along with hundreds of paid activists, to put pressure on political leaders deemed not fiscally conservative enough.

The Tea Party movement criticised the Democratic agenda regarding fiscal budget plans and the government's role in extreme economic events in general. However, it also targeted specific politicians within the Republican Party who did not go far enough to counteract spending measures pushed by the Obama administration and the Democrats in power. Under normal economic activity, the movement would be of little interest to American voters, as spending levels and fiscal budgets are hardly a top priority for the average voter. However, the magnitude of the 2009 recession amplified fiscal policy issues to the top of the public spotlight. We found significant disparities between the cable company's coverage of the Tea Party movement and its proponents. Surprisingly, MSNBC gives much coverage to the Tea Party, but not to their ideology, but to their mismanagement and for-profit dealings as an organisation. FOX and CNN, however, produced coverage that highlighted the ideologies and proponents of the movement, which resulted in a further elevation of the movement into mainstream policy debates.

Figure 8. Fiscal Stimulus vs. Consolidation – Cable and Broadcast 2009

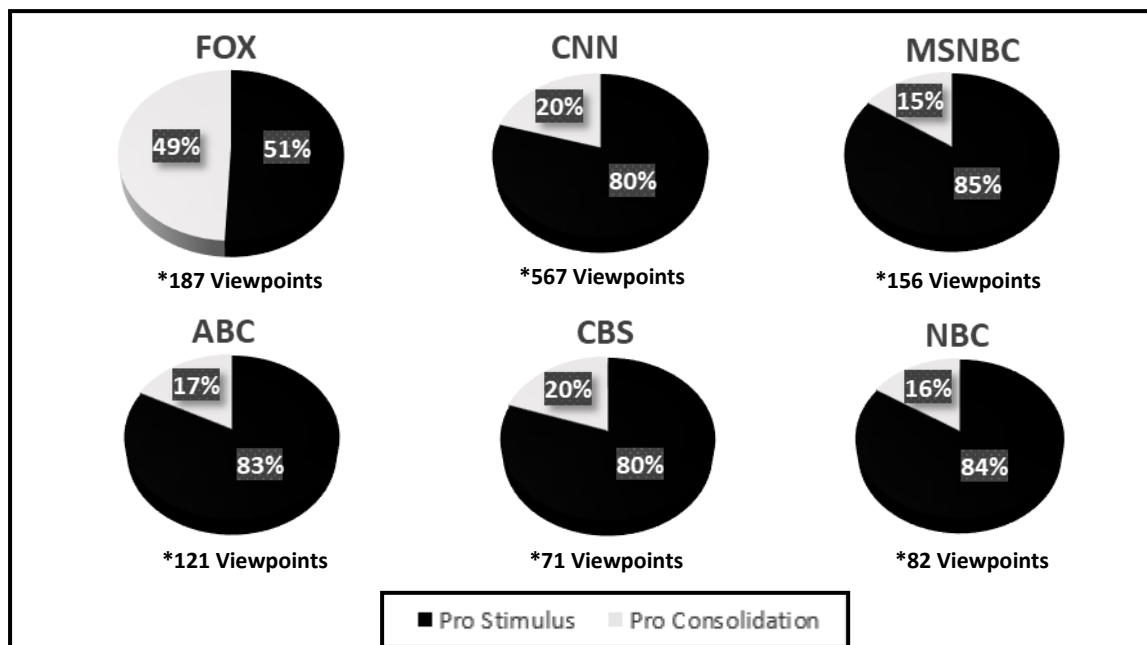


Figure 9. Fiscal Stimulus vs. Consolidation – Cable and Broadcast 2010

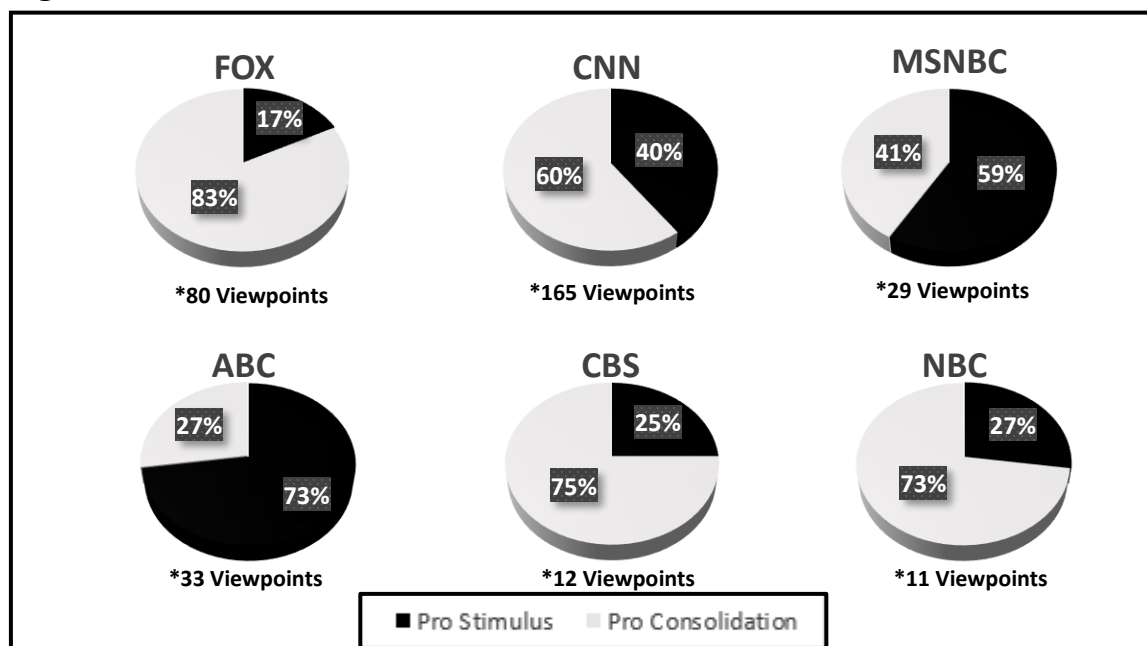


Figure 10. Fiscal Stimulus vs Consolidation by Actor Group – Cable 2009

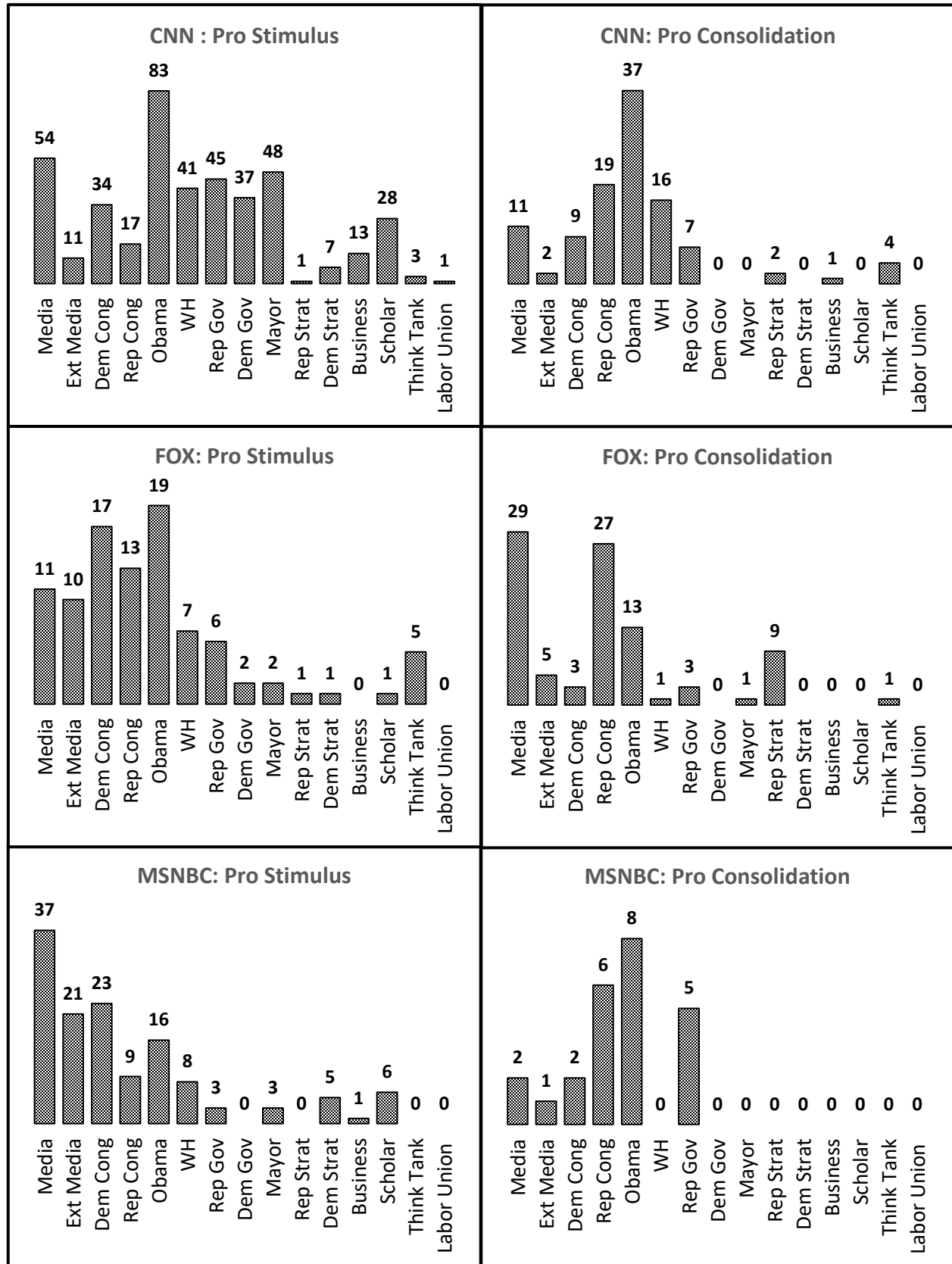


Figure 11. Fiscal Stimulus vs Consolidation by Actor Group – Cable 2010

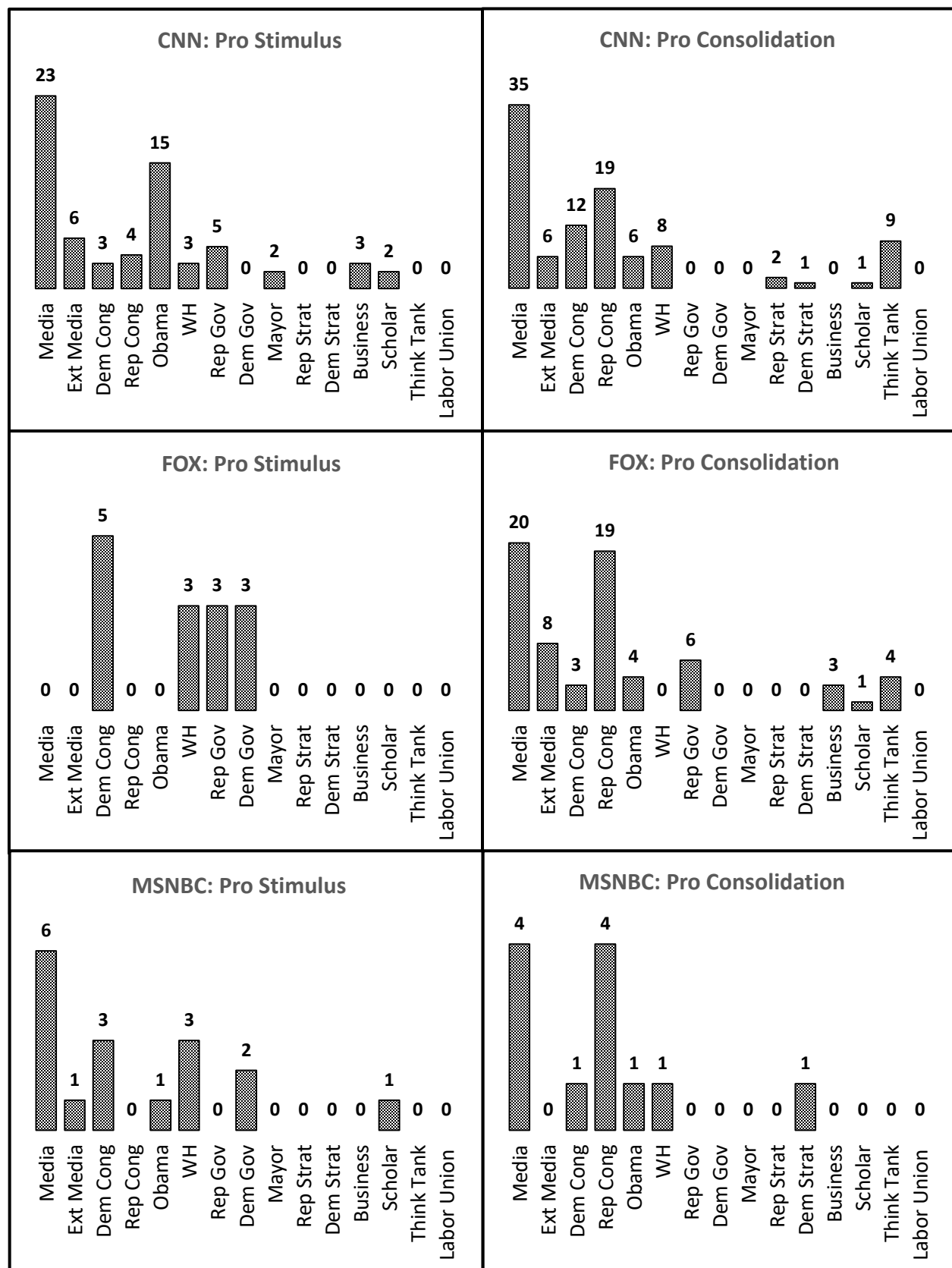


Figure 12. Pro-stimulus vs Consolidation by Actor Group – Cable 2009 and 2010

<u>2009</u>										
Pro-stimulus										
	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	13%	3%	29%	18%	15%	11%	3%	7%	1%	0%
FOX	12%	11%	27%	21%	21%	2%	0%	1%	5%	0%
MSNBC	28%	16%	18%	21%	9%	2%	1%	5%	0%	0%
Pro-consolidation										
	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	10%	2%	49%	8%	26%	0%	1%	0%	4%	0%
FOX	32%	5%	15%	3%	42%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%
MSNBC	8%	4%	33%	8%	46%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<u>2010</u>										
Pro-stimulus										
	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	35%	9%	27%	5%	14%	3%	5%	3%	0%	0%
FOX	0%	0%	21%	57%	21%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSNBC	35%	6%	24%	29%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%
Pro-consolidation										
	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	35%	6%	14%	13%	21%	0%	0%	1%	9%	0%
FOX	29%	12%	6%	4%	37%	0%	4%	1%	6%	0%
MSNBC	33%	0%	17%	17%	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

6.3 Spending Preferences in Coverage

In this subchapter, we examine the favouritism of both broader fiscal policy strategies in detail, focusing on the specific spending positions highlighted in TV media coverage during the peak of the 2009 and 2010 federal budget debates. The subsection is organised in the following order. Firstly, the overall shift in spending attitudes is analysed (Figure 13), and more specific preferences are identified as most prominent in the coverage (Figures 14-15). Secondly, the diversity of actors (Figures 16-18) involved in the coverage is assessed, particularly the two actor groups we argue are most influential: the hosts and partisan leaders. Thirdly, excerpts from 2009 and 2010 TV transcripts support the findings of our actor group analysis and the tribalism expressed particularly between FOX and MSNBC. Finally, the origins of the Tea Party movement and its impact on the healthcare debate and voter attitudes toward public spending, in general, are discussed. Our analysis offers original quantitative insights into the magnification of the movement and the heterogeneity of actors and commentary presented by each cable network affiliated with the Tea Party political organisation.

Before we detail the shifts in sentiment towards spending between 2009 and 2010, it is essential to highlight the skewed emphasis toward spending in contrast to taxation policies throughout the post-crisis debate. Spending dominated the policy discourse on taxation concerns in our 2009 and 2010 findings. In 2009, 72% of overall coverage, including cable and broadcast, was allocated to spending rather than taxation policies, a proportion that rose to 74% in 2010. The magnification of spending policies among cable networks was greater than among broadcast networks. In 2009, 83% of coverage focused on spending policies averaging across all three networks. CNN presented the highest proportion of spending-oriented discussion with 86%, followed by FOX at 83% and MSNBC at 80%. The more commentary-focused content in cable news, which generates higher viewers and ratings, perpetuated spending in the national spotlight as the core of the fiscal debate.

Unsurprisingly, the results indicate greater heterogeneity between companies in the shift in spending preferences promoted in contrast to broader fiscal strategies. Moreover, it is interesting that both political parties and moderates shared similar sentiments about the concept of a stimulus being required to evade an economic catastrophe in 2009 and the ideology of fazing down the stimulus after the initial and substantial fiscal efforts. The construction of the stimulus led to further

polarisation of the issue, which is reflected in the evolution of content and the actors involved across the networks.

Assessing all the TV news companies collectively, arguments for greater spending measures outweighed opposition to spending in 2009, despite FOX being a stark outlier. Coverage on CNN and MSNBC favoured pro-spending measures in 2009, as pro-spending commentary constituted 54% of CNN's and 65% of MSNBC's total coverage. The broadcast companies also presented favourable spending coverage, as pro-spending arguments averaged 56% throughout our 2009 data. CBS led with 64%, followed by ABC at 54%, and NBC at 49%.

By 2010, CNN's pro-spending coverage dropped to 48%, outweighed by coverage opposing spending or calling for spending cuts. Conversely, on MSNBC, 69% of the 2010 coverage constituted pro-spending positions. Figures 15 and 16 analyse the specific spending policies in greater detail, which provided evidence of several noteworthy shifts in fiscal spending attitudes. Collectively, in 2009, 7% of cable TV coverage concerned spending cuts, yet by 2010, it constituted 41% of coverage. However, there was only a 3% increase among broadcast networks. The broadcast networks focused on specific spending projects and healthcare issues, presenting less opposition to spending increases than cable networks. Unlike the other five TV companies analysed, FOX's coverage remained highly critical of increased public spending in both 2009 and 2010, as 73% of positions opposed spending increases or argued for greater cuts.

Although there were many discrepancies in spending preferences in 2009, besides FOX's coverage, there was minimal opposition to spending increases overall. FOX was the only outlier in terms of overall favourability. National TV news's microscope was highly fixated on the total price tag, given the magnitude of the record-breaking stimulus effort, but also on specific spending projects, especially 'earmark' spending. Earmark spending is a political process for allocating public money to specific projects and has been increasingly condemned for being politically rather than empirically justified. Furthermore, infrastructure spending was among the few categories that actors in the media and political leaders across the ideological spectrum treated favourably.

Additionally, I find commonalities in the data regarding the types of actor groups included in the policy debate. Firstly, there is a need for more direct representation in the commentary from corporate or labour union actors. No labour union representation was found across all companies, which is surprising given the monumental economic event. Secondly, there was a lack of local

government representation on FOX and MSNBC. CNN involved many more local representatives than the other networks in 2009. However, in 2010, few representatives from local governments were included in policy coverage and commentary amongst all the companies. In 2009, local government representatives accounted for only 52 positions out of 878 total spending positions presented or 6% of CNN's coverage. Only 1% of FOX's 412 total spending positions and MSNBC's 230 total spending positions included local government officials. In the 2010 dataset, the involvement of local government is nearly non-existent in all cable coverage. CNN had the highest with 2 of 186 total positions, or 1% of total spending positions presented. No positions presented by local government were recorded in FOX or MSNBC's 2010 spending coverage.

However, our investigation also revealed stark contrasts among all companies in terms of the types of actors selected to participate in the public debate and provide commentary on specific policy issues. As we previously discussed, this is also not surprising, given the unique ecosystems of information that have been created to appeal to specific partisan audiences or voters. What is surprising, and one of our more noteworthy findings, is the gravitation toward Republican commentary and figureheads in both left-leaning and right-leaning news organisations. This is particularly surprising to analyse in our 2009 dataset, as the moment marked a transformational shift in power to the Democrats and a time of utmost uncertainty regarding the future of the Republican agenda and leadership.

The contrast of attitudes toward spending was most apparent in commentary on FOX and MSNBC. The scale of FOX viewership dwarfs both CNN and MSNBC, dating back to the inception of cable TV news. The dynamics of the TV media landscape and its relationships with political leadership and audiences are crucial to advancing our understanding of its role in contests for policy authority. Our results build on this understanding by analysing the methods used by each company to appease its audience, boost ratings, and utilise its agenda-setting power to drive policy discourse. FOX's relationship with the Republican party and its voters is unrivalled in the TV news market. As Williamson et al. (2011) and others note, FOX has evolved into more than a political apparatus, having cultivated a conservative ecosystem that is highly unique among its competitors. For this reason, it is conceivable that FOX has the most consistency in brand recognition compared to CNN, MSNBC, and the broadcast networks, as they have for decades promoted the company as the lone wolf of conservative content on national TV news.

CNN is considered the more centrist of the three major cable news networks and appeals to moderates on both sides of the partisan spectrum. However, CNN's struggles with ratings and viewership are well documented. Since the 2009 crisis, CNN has shifted increasingly to the left as it struggles with its identity and producing content that engages its audiences. Surprisingly, our 2010 findings indicate that the network amplified more centrist Republican figureheads than Democratic leaders throughout the fiscal policy debate.

For instance, the number of Republican positions presented in CNN's 2009 news coverage constituted nearly twice the total viewpoints on spending as those of Democrat representatives. As seen in Figure 18, out of 878 total spending positions, including both pro and opposed, 157 (18%) were held by Democrats and 303 (36%) by Republicans. Moreover, Fox's coverage was slanted significantly toward Republican representation, as out of 412 total spending positions, 46 positions (11%) were held by Democrats, and Republicans presented 162 positions (39%). Interestingly, even on MSNBC's coverage, 75 positions (33%) out of 230 total positions were presented by Republicans, whereas only 34 positions (15%) were presented by Democrats.

MSNBC is the only cable news network that presented more Democrat viewpoints on spending in 2010 than Republican ones. As Figure 18 illustrates, 34 (23%) out of 146 total positions were presented by Democrats, compared to 23 (16%) by Republicans. Fox's 2010 coverage presented 23 spending positions out of 140 total from Democrat (16%) and 52 from Republican (37%) actors. Similarly, CNN's coverage had more than double the number of fiscal spending positions from Republicans (20%) compared to Democrats (9%), as Democrats presented 16 of the 186 total spending positions, while Republicans presented 38 positions. The stark differences in coverage, primarily focusing on one political party's actors on FOX and MSNBC, are not surprising given the recent research unveiled concerning selective exposure, which suggests that most political news audiences seek information sources that reaffirm their pre-existing viewpoints. Simultaneously, the greater demand for more partisan commentary has reshaped the structure and content of primetime TV news cycles as TV news companies aim to bolster ratings and viewership.

The detailed findings indicate that the executives' strategic aims are to protect and promote the corporate interests of the networks. Despite Democrats winning the presidency and controlling both houses of Congress, the spotlight remained on Republican representatives, with the discussion

focusing more on Republican protests and grievances than on the Democrat agenda and the record-breaking fiscal stimulus packages. For CNN and MSNBC, who rely on appeasing Democrat voters more than FOX, the context of Republican positions was in stark contrast to FOX's Republican representatives. There was minimal cross-over between individual politicians between FOX and its competitors.

The domination of the conservative viewpoints is documented in the literature and further supported by our analysis of policy favouritism and company branding. Firstly, our results support the findings of other scholars that the conservative narrative not only dominated public discourse but was also surprisingly presented on more centrist networks, such as CNN. Furthermore, the results also affirm the unique strategies each company employs to appeal to its audience and shape the political discourse. Hall and Blyth argue that dictating the political discourse of the day is the main derivative of policy authority.

In the more partisan coverage found on MSNBC and FOX, the host plays a significantly greater role in presenting policy positions, as opposed to other actor groups that would typically be involved in government budget policy debates. For example, in 2009, CNN's hosts presented 105 spending positions out of the 878 total spending positions in their coverage or 12%. However, FOX and MSNBC hosts presented 29% of 412 total positions and 25% of 230 total spending positions, respectively. Our finding that more commentary is facilitated directly by the hosts is substantiated by recent research into the growing tribalism of news audiences and the restructuring of news content toward greater commentary-focused content, which aims to meet the increasing demand for such content.

Our findings in both the stimulus analyses (Figure 12) and spending analyses (Figure 18) indicate that the more partisan the network's coverage, the more influential the direct media hosts are in presenting policy positions. In other words, the greater the proportion of policy positions presented by the hosts, the more partisan the news content was. Furthermore, the celebrity status that TV host personalities evoke is a relatively new phenomenon that has evolved within the TV media. TV programming has been restructured to accommodate greater commentary-oriented segments, over which the hosts have more control. Audiences are highly selective in the news they select. The hosts are figures that audiences select, which strongly indicates the favourability displayed toward one policy over the other. The same phenomenon is not observed in more centrist

TV networks such as CNN and broadcast companies. Our unique methodology and robust dataset provide a better understanding of how pronounced the role of the media hosts was in the post-crisis discussion.

In most cases, the policy debate between partisan outlets concentrated more on the messengers, primarily party leaders and advisors. I find an abundance of excerpts from the transcripts that illustrate the fixation on the perception of who the figureheads of the 'opposition' party and media are, as well as the different methods used to solidify or discredit certain figureheads for each audience. Our findings suggest that rather than debating the efficacy of such programs through historical precedence and empirical evidence, the discourse was largely marginalised to discrediting specific political figureheads and purveying the 'oppositions' figureheads and ideologies as out of touch or extreme. This increasingly popular tactic is designed to drive audience engagement and ratings and amplify political jostling to create the perception of which party has the upper hand regarding policy authority.

An example of this strategy occurs on February 24th, 2009. MSNBC's host David Shuster, a former employee of FOX News, leads the primetime segment with a video clip of Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, a top Republican figurehead, complaining that Congress should not be spending \$140 million on "something called volcano monitoring." Jindal states, "Instead of monitoring volcanoes, what Congress should be monitoring is the eruption of spending in Washington, D.C."

Following the clip, Shuster responds, "First of all, monitoring active volcanoes helps local governments in Alaska and Hawaii get people out of the way when the time comes. It also helps those communities minimise damage. Secondly, just six months ago, Governor Jindal urged Congress and the Bush administration to allocate hundreds of millions of dollars for hurricane protection." However, Shuster's rebuttal then turns from the substance of Jindal's position toward Jindal himself. Stating, "Governor Jindal acknowledged his request would cost at least \$100 million. Engineers would say it would be \$1 billion. There's nothing wrong with building hurricane levees for Louisiana or monitoring volcanoes in Hawaii and Alaska. Both programs create jobs and serve the greater good by possibly saving lives. The problem is Jindal's hypocrisy."

To bolster his criticism, Shuster invokes Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman's comments regarding the matter. Krugman wrote, "The intellectual incoherence is stunning. The

party of ideas has become the party of Beavis and Butthead." Shuster then redirects the target of Krugman's comments, which were aimed at the broader Republican party toward Jindal. Shuster further satirises Jindal saying, "Beavis and Butthead? Well, Krugman did not say which one Jindal is. Nonetheless, all of us at 1600 agree with the larger point."

In the same MSNBC show segment, host Shuster transitions to Jindal's rebuttal of Obama's economic speech the night before. Shuster poses the following question to the guest panel: "The GOP is trying to recover from a big defeat in 2008. It is trying hard not to be seen as the party of 'no' and rising star Governor Jindal was a disaster last night, by many accounts. So what's the GOP's strategy now?" Guest panellist and Republican strategist John Feehery responds, "The stagecraft was horrible. The delivery was horrible. Frankly, that's a very difficult setup, following a president. I've been involved in a lot of those responses. They almost invariably are complete disasters, and this was." Following Feehery's observation, David Brooks, editor at the New York Times, argues, "to come up at this moment in history with a stale government is the problem, we can't trust the federal government -- it's just a disaster for the Republican party. The country is in a panic now. They might not like the way the Democrats have passed the stimulus bill. But the idea that government is going to have no role, that federal government has no role in this, that in a moment when only the federal government is big enough to actually do stuff, to just ignore all that and say the government's a problem, corruption, earmarks, wasteful spending, it's just a form of nihilism."

Exactly one month later, on March 24th 2009, MSNBC returned to Jindal's policy argument against spending on disaster relief and prevention, as primetime host Rachel Maddow again targeted Jindal for using volcano monitoring spending as an argument that the government was overspending on frivolous initiatives. Maddow mocks Jindal, headlining the show with "Governor Bobby 'What is a Volcano' Jindal is today's worst person in the world." Maddow starts the segment "A month ago tonight, he [Jindal] gave his wonderful response to President Obama's address to the Joint Session of Congress. That's when he criticised the stimulus plan... This just in. Mt. Redoubt, the 10,000-foot volcano 100 miles southwest of Anchorage, Alaska erupted for a sixth time this week, sending volcanic ash as hard as rock fragments with jagged edges that can puncture skin and even vehicles like airplanes. The eruptions are expected to continue for weeks or even months and will be monitored - oh, no, they won't be monitored because Gov. Jindal didn't know

what volcano monitoring was. Instead, he had that \$140 million of funds for volcano monitoring redirected into a Republican think tank devoted to coming up with better jokes for his next speech."

Also targeted in the March 24th MSNBC segment was Republican senator Charles Grassley. Maddow states, "'Take the GOP big guns senator on the economy, Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa. He's the ranking Republican on the Finance Committee. His best-known contribution to the economic crisis response thus far was his suggestion that some people should kill themselves. Remember that? AIG executives should just off themselves?...Now remember this is the Republicans' top guy on the economy. His analysis of what's going on. President Obama is a socialist, quote, 'There's a big trend towards socialism with this budget. Whenever the government does more, there's less for the private sector. That's a movement towards socialism.' So Senator Grassley thinks if the president isn't a commie, at least his budget is, duly noted. Senator Grassley's suggestion for how to get us out of the recession? A three-year spending freeze. He's proposing in the middle of a recession, a recession that's caused by and prolonged by not enough spending. The Republicans' big dog on the economy, in other words, wants the government to enact an anti-stimulus plan for three years. It's like taking a joke that didn't get any laughs the first time and telling it again three times louder."

The singling out of Grassley continued the next day on MSNBC. During David Shuster's March 25th segment, guest panellist Daniel Gross, an editor at Newsweek, adds to the defence of Obama and Democrat spending plans and insults towards Senator Grassley. Gross argues, "Senator Grassley talking to the Washington Times is an example of a loony talking to the moonies. When the economy is shrinking at a six per cent rate, which is what it did in the fourth quarter, 99 out of 100 economists would tell you that it is not only stupid but criminal for the government to think about not spending money during this period."

The sole mention of the Tea Party in our 2009 dataset appeared on the FOX News show "On the Record with Greta Van Susteren." The show initiates with the headline "Tea Party" Protesters Demonstrate Against Stimulus Bill and features Dick Morris, a Tea Party organiser and conservative campaign donor who was involved in many 2010 congressional races. Dick Morris was highly influential in targeting specific Republican primary races to beat out 'traditional Republican candidates with those who shared the more hard-line ideologies of the tea party movement.

The emergence of the Tea Party and its role in key policy debates is well-documented in the political science literature. However, quantifying the extent of the Tea Party on policy outcomes is challenging and thus lacking in the research. Our unique methodology provides thousands of data points, enabling us to measure the extent of the Tea Party's exposure to TV news during the peak of the spending debates. The sudden and rapid emergence of Tea Party ideologies in American politics, as well as their impact on the 2010 spending debates, is captured within our timeline. In February and March of 2009, we found only one mention of the Tea Party on FOX News. This finding was expected, as Williams et al. documented the timeline of the tea party's emergence and found only three instances in their analysis of the tea party being mentioned in 2009. The Tea Party was categorised in our methodology as a think tank, as it is a political advocacy group. As Figure 19 illustrates, think tanks were a small minority of opinions presented on TV in the 2009 dataset. This represents only 1% of CNN's spending coverage and 2% of FOX and MSNBC's coverage (Figure 17). However, by 2010, most viewpoints opposing spending increases or in favour of spending cuts were presented by political advocacy groups, with the Tea Party and its affiliated groups comprising the overwhelming majority. Think tanks were responsible for 8% of CNN and MSNBC's total spending viewpoints presented and 12% of FOX's spending positions (Figure 17).

Published in 2011, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of the Republican Party* by Vanessa Williamson, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggins remains one of the most widely cited works in academia regarding the evolution of Tea Party ideologies, the role of media as a facilitator, and the political consequences. In the article, the authors detail the ideology's origin and explain the political movement's impact on fiscal policy debates and the Republican Party. The authors present several findings and insights that bring clarity to the Tea Party ideologies and their persuasiveness throughout major fiscal policy debates and also provide greater context for the subsection of my spending results. First, the authors help identify who helped organise the political advocacy groups that formulate the broader ideology and what the Tea Party demographic is. According to the authors, FOX News is the "key outlet, echoed by other conservative outlets, [which] helped to create and sustain the Tea Party mobilisation in the first place (pg. 29)."

Supporting their claims, a CBS/New York Times National Poll found that 63% of tea partiers watched FOX, in stark contrast to the 11% of all voters polled that indicated watching

FOX. Moreover, only 11% of tea partiers polled claimed to watch one of the top three broadcast networks.

The authors illustrate a phenomenon between CNN and FOX in the early coverage of the Tea Party. A chain of events in which FOX News slowly introduced the terminology and ideology of the Tea Party in March 2009, the month before the national rally of the Tea Party. In contrast, no other mainstream competitor had done so. Suddenly, a massive spike in coverage occurred in April, surrounding the national Tea Party rally on both CNN and FOX. In the months leading up to April 2009's large Tea Party rally, which saw the ideology catapulted into mainstream politics and media, there is nearly zero mention of the Tea Party on CNN. Later in 2009, identical spikes in CNN coverage occurred during the July rally and the August town halls organised by the Tea Party. Moreover, unlike all the other networks, FOX maintains consistent coverage of the Tea Party from March 2009 and throughout the rest of the year. The authors note the same occurrence of two other separate large spikes in CNN coverage in 2009, during the July rally and August town halls organised by the Tea Party.

The authors argue that the anticipatory coverage of the Tea Party on FOX, observed in the weeks leading up to coordinated Tea Party events, led to reactive coverage on CNN. Supporting this argument, the authors cite work by Dreier and Martin (2010) as one example among many recent studies that identify ways conservative media drive other mainstream news sources. "The Tea Party remains a significant presence on Fox News even when actual political happenings are not occurring. In the phenomenon's infancy, the Tea Party idea is kept steadily available to Fox viewers" (pg. 29). Furthermore, the authors argue, "Fox News has explicitly mobilised its viewers by connecting the Tea Party to their own brand identity" (p. 29).

Willamson et al. argue that FOX's connection to the Tea Party movement extends well beyond a steady stream of Tea Party coverage, which was also more favourable toward the Tea Party than any of its mainstream news competitors. According to Media Matters (2009), at the onset of Tea Party coverage on FOX, before anyone had heard of the Tea Party, FOX was referring to upcoming Tea Party events as "FNC [Fox News Channel] Tea Parties." Many top TV personalities at FOX, including Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Neil Cavuto, and Greta Van Susteren, even broadcast their shows from Tea Party events. Moreover, on September 12, 2009, the Tea

Party rally was the largest Tea Party event of both 2009 and 2010 and was sponsored by lead FOX host Glenn Beck's "912 project."

According to Williamson et al., "At least 115 Tea Parties registered on the Tea Party Patriots website have a name including some variation of 9/12, such as the "Wyoming 912 Coalition. In 2010, the Tea Party Patriots, which FreedomWorks sponsored, coordinated an event to boost membership. The new Tea Party membership event was promoted as a "special offer for Glenn Beck listeners" alongside Glenn Beck's image (Williamson et al.). Williamson et al. argue that the event was the formalisation of the "long-time ties between the pro-business lobby and the conservative media's grassroots mobilisation efforts."

FOX's top personalities consistently favour Tea Party ideals. However, direct references to the Tea Party were only somewhat prevalent throughout the discourse. Instead, guest pundits with close ties to the Tea Party movement and interest groups were promoted abundantly more than its more left-slanted rivals, MSNBC and CNN.

A popular FOX host, Bill O'Reilly, consistently featured Dick Morris, a tea party financier, on his show 'The O'Reilly Factor'. For example, on February 17 2010, in the closing segment, O'Reilly asks Morris what he thinks of the status of Arnold Schwarzenegger and the surge of Tea Party ideologies into the mainstream. Morris decries Schwarzenegger's policy stance on taxation, stating, "He's a Republican, but he's not a real Republican. He's a kind of middle-of-the-roader...He neatly went along with the tax increases and everything else the legislature was doing. And these states, like California, Michigan, and New York, become black holes. You know. The taxes go up. The rich people move out. Poor people move in. Welfare costs increase. Medicaid costs increase. Taxes go up. More business goes out."

O'Reilly then transitions to the Tea Party movement, whereby he argues that the New York Times is portraying the movement as one of "far right loons". Morris responds, "The Tea Party movement is as authentic a mainstream American movement for the right as moveon.org and the anti-war sentiment and the Michael Moore crowd were for the left. And it's about time that the Republican Party developed a grassroots presence. The Republican party has been the product at one time Wall Street and now small business, but not the grassroots. And the Tea Party movement was really kind of started with Joe the Plumber during the election. It really is the rebirth of that. And they are the hope of this party, not a right-wing militia group."

On February 25, 2010, Fox host Sean Hannity interviewed Alaska Governor and 2008 Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin. Palin, one of the largest public figures in government to identify as a 'Tea Partier' tells Hannity of the movement "I'm such a believer in freedom, and that's what the Tea Party is all about...it is to form a whole new machine and a whole new process via a third party. Let's get in there and take over one of the parties. Take over the Republican Party and Tea Partiers, and get them to see the light...get them to understand what it is that built this country. Get back to the foundation of America."

Further exemplifying this, on March 2, 2010, Fox host Van Susteren asked Fox correspondent Carl Cameron if endorsements had made a major impact in the Texas Senate race, which featured both Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and Republican Governor. Cameron replies, "Absolutely. Sarah Palin came out early and backed the governor. The governor has the support of many Tea Party organisations across the state of Texas. He has gone out of his way to court them. Kay Bailey Hutchison has amassed a tremendous number of sort of establishment Republicans from Washington, but that had not helped her in the sense that it has raised questions about whether or not she is representing Washington or her home state of Texas." Hutchinson went on to lose the election to the Tea Party sponsored candidate. The significance of this exchange on FOX news is that the perception created that "establishment" Republicans represent Washington. Not their local states, while simultaneously presenting favourable coverage while detailing the Tea Party's support of Governor Rick Perry, establishes a narrative in the conservative ecosystem, which is replayed and recycled. If you have the support of establishment Republicans, you are part of the rotten establishment. However, if you have the endorsement of the new Tea Partiers, you are part of a new wave of Republicans who care about fiscal conservatism.

Sean Hannity, FOX's primetime and most popular host spanning over a decade, was one of the biggest promoters of the Tea Party on the network. On March 31 2010, during the peak of the healthcare debate, Hannity spent lots of time on his show promoting his new book "Conservative Victory: Defeating Obama's Radical Agenda", and the book tour, whereby Hannity had several high-profile political figures with close association to the Tea Party movement give speeches with Hannity across the country and at several Tea Party rallies. Those high-profile political figures included Sarah Palin, the Republican governor of Alaska; Michelle Bachmann,

the Republican congresswoman of Minnesota; Tim Pawlenty, the former Republican governor of Minnesota; Haley Barbour, the former Republican governor of Mississippi; and Bobby Jindal, the current Republican governor of Louisiana.

The healthcare reform bill was covered in connection to Tea Party ideologies on all cable TV networks. However, the political ideology had only become mainstream a few months before, in the summer of 2009.

There are differing views on the origins of the Tea Party movement and the individuals, financiers, and activists whose interests promoted such ideologies. This contrast extends to academic literature. That's why it is crucial to analyse how the most influential political news outlets, cable news, defined and magnified the political ideology and the actors involved. On MSNBC, where the audience and commentary slants left on the ideological spectrum, the coverage of the tea partiers consisted highly of disdain and sarcasm, often referring to often referring to activists in the movement as 'crazies' or 'loonies'.

The coverage interprets the group as a coordinated effort to derail the Democrat agenda, whereas on FOX's coverage, the Tea Partiers are defined as a grassroots movement. MSNBC's first show in our dataset on February 1 2010, starts with the highlight 'Discord within the Tea Party movement is likely to mar this weekend's convention'. MSNBC host Chris Matthews opens the show with, "Up next, for a political movement with so much bluster, why are so many big-name conservatives bagging this year's Tea Party convention? Get it? Bagging, tea party?" Matthews continues throughout the segment, calling into question the group's for-profit structure and the substantial payments they made to high-profile conservative political leaders, such as Sarah Palin, the former Governor of Alaska and Vice-presidential running candidate in 2008, at the time of the Tea Party convention in Nashville. Following Matthews' commentary on the 'discord' within the Tea Party movement, guest commentator David Corn, the Washington bureau chief of 'Mother Jones Magazine', perpetuates a story of greed and anger between the activists and followers of the Tea Party movement. Stating, "I think the thing that really ticked off the Tea Party people themselves is that they were charging 550 dollars a head; the dinner is going to be serving steak and lobster. And the Tea Party people, I may disagree with them, but they tend to be modest income grass roots activists at the core -- at the heart of the movement... It looks like somebody is trying to make a buck off of them."

Host Matthews then returns to the topic of Sarah Palin's \$115,000 speaker fee to head the national convention in Nashville at the start of February 2010 and the controversy it created once uncovered by journalists at Mother Jones. Guest host Jay Newton-Smith, Washington Correspondent for 'TIME Magazine', then expands on the idea that the tea partiers are grass: "The whole point of the Tea Party is to be grass party roots. It's to be bottom up, rather than top-down, saying this is what we are and this is who we are. That's where I think a lot of the struggle is coming from. It's people saying, you're not speaking for me. I'm a Tea Party activist and I'm not going to this thing. So there's a lot of anger. There's a lot of struggling to define themselves here." Later, on February 1, at primetime, 8 pm, MSNBC host Keith Olbermann satirically opened his show by highlighting those who were seemingly distancing themselves from the Tea Party movement. Olbermann exclaims, "Tough time to be a tea party. Palin's still in, everybody else bags. Scott Brown says, "Tea party? Tea party, who?" Olbermann then retraces a clip of an interview Brown gave to Barbara Walters, in which Walters asks Brown about it. Scott Brown had just won the election in Massachusetts, and Walters pointed out that the Tea Partiers were key to his victory before asking Brown what he thought of the future of the Tea Party movement. To this, Brown disagreed, stating that the Tea Partiers were not influential in his victory.

The end of Olbermann's show illustrates 3 points: 1) the dysfunction and greed within the organisation of the national tea party convention, 2) the actors using the tea partiers ideologies pre-election and distancing themselves post-election from the ideology and movement, 3) portraying the members of the tea party as loonies or crazy. Olbermann's guest commentator Margaret Carlson from Bloomberg News responds to Olbermann's suggestion that "the tea party is to the Republican Party what the evangelicals were to George Bush -- they were nice to have before the election, and afterwards, forget my phone number?" by arguing that, unlike the "Christian right that was united around policy issues The Tea Party is a conglomeration of desperate views. It's birthers and Birchers and vaccine- deniers and anti-papists and militiamen and secessionists."

Coverage on MSNBC fixated on those state leaders within their party obstructing Obama's economic policy agenda by insinuating they are afraid of the tea partiers. On March 1, 2010, MSNBC host Ed Schultz made an argument that highlights the sentiment popular among Democrat voters by going after those in the party who refer to themselves as "blue dog Democrats" because of their more centrist ideological positioning and willingness to side with conservatives on policy

votes. Schultz argues that the record-breaking number of voters who showed up for Obama, over 60 million, did so because 'they were promised change'. Shultz states, "The middle class was promised a seat at the table for universal health care and the right to organise within the workplace without intimidation. However, we've had to wait because Blue Dog Democrats have been trying to cover their backside, kowtow to the 'party of no'. Well, now the time is up. The number one offender in all of that, in my opinion, has been Arkansas Senator Blanche Lincoln. She's an obstructionist as well. The senator from the Wal-Mart state has really stuck it to the Democrat base time and time again. She has, let's see, fought the public option, she has gone after the unions, did not give them any support. She has sided with Wall Street. The Democrats in Arkansas have had enough."

Host Schultz then turns to the announcement of the challenger to Lincoln, Lieutenant Governor Bill Halter, and plays a clip from Halter's campaign. Following the clip, Schultz argues, "I like it. It sounds to me like this guy isn't going to be calling up lobbyists to see how they are ought to vote on stuff. I mean, that doesn't sound like a guy to me who is afraid of any Tea Party crazies out there. See, over here on the left, we don't have any Tea Party. But we do have middle class folks, even in Arkansas, who want crazy things like health care reform. And they all want a fair shake in the workplace as well. What Democrats really want is to have Democrats act like Democrats."

On MSNBC, the commentary defines the group, similarly to FOX, as a grassroots movement mainly comprised of middle-class people, which aligns with the messaging from the tea party perpetrators and organisers. The stark difference is that MSNBC portrays the Tea Party voters as people who are being taken advantage of by people with other self-serving interests. They are careful not to alienate those who feel attachment or sentiment to the movement but cast suspicion and disdain on those who are elevating the movement. On FOX, the perpetrators of the tea party are invited on as guest commentators and interviewees, and the host commentary surrounding the activists and organisers is positive and sympathetic. Also, as MSNBC covered, the "dysfunction happening within the movement, FOX is covering the size of the Tea Party crowds and even going so far as to say that many were stuck in traffic when showings were not as high as anticipated.

Figure 13. Dominant Spending Positions - 2009 and 2010

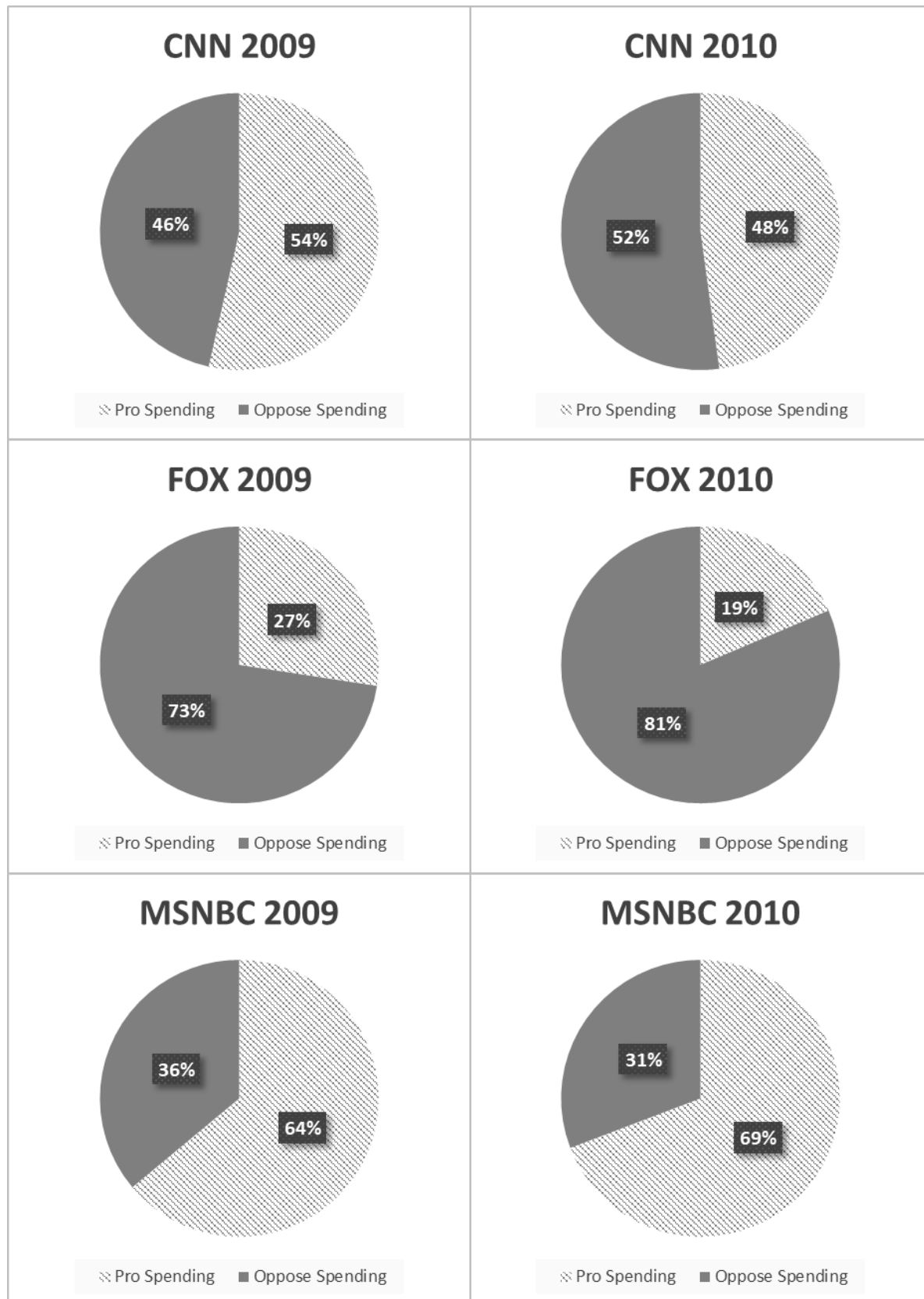


Figure 14. Specific Spending Preferences in Cable Coverage – 2009 and 2010

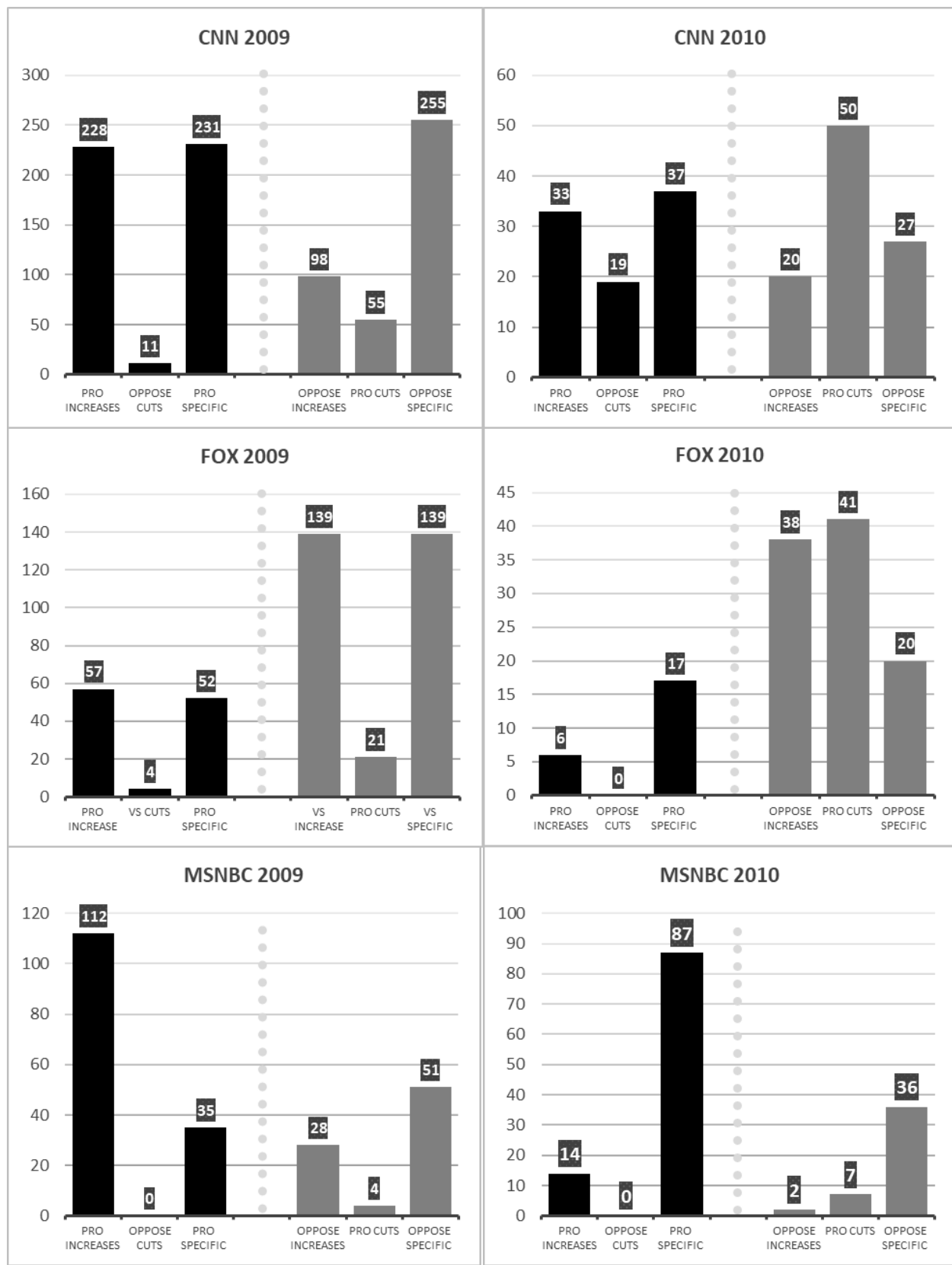


Figure 15. Specific Spending Preferences in Broadcast Coverage – 2009 and 2010

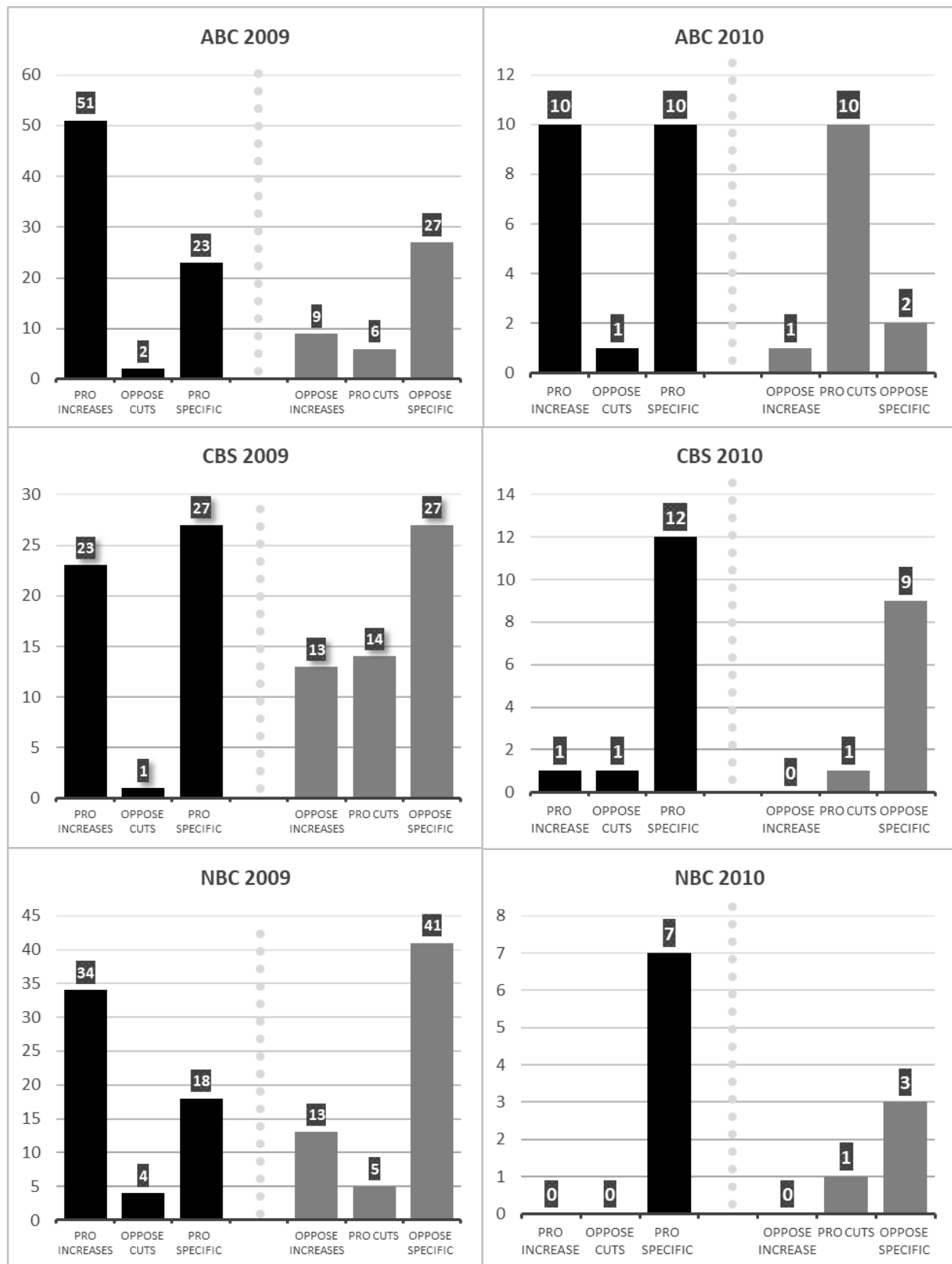


Figure 16. Spending Positions by Actor Group – Cable 2009

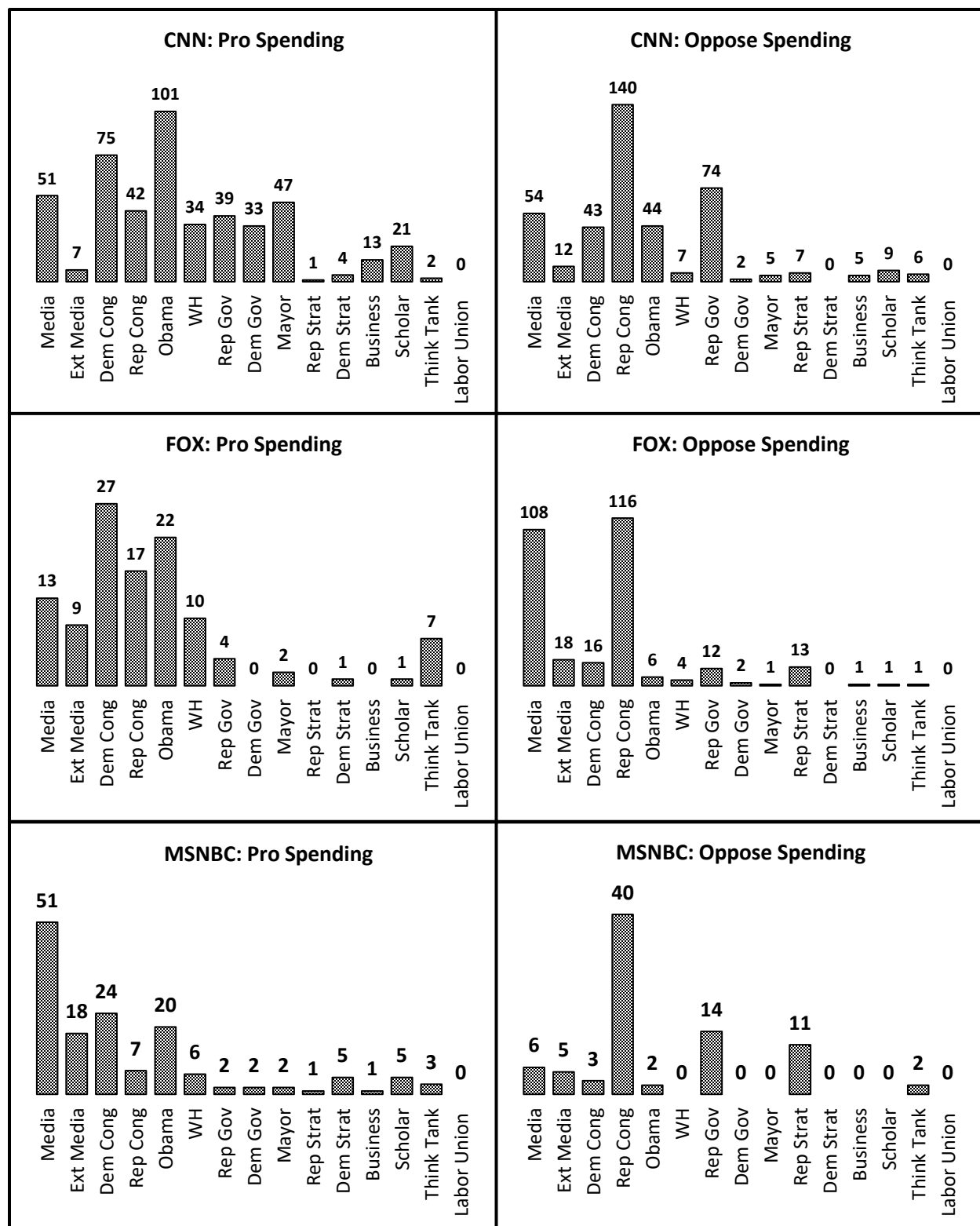


Figure 17. Spending Positions by Actor Group – Broadcast 2009

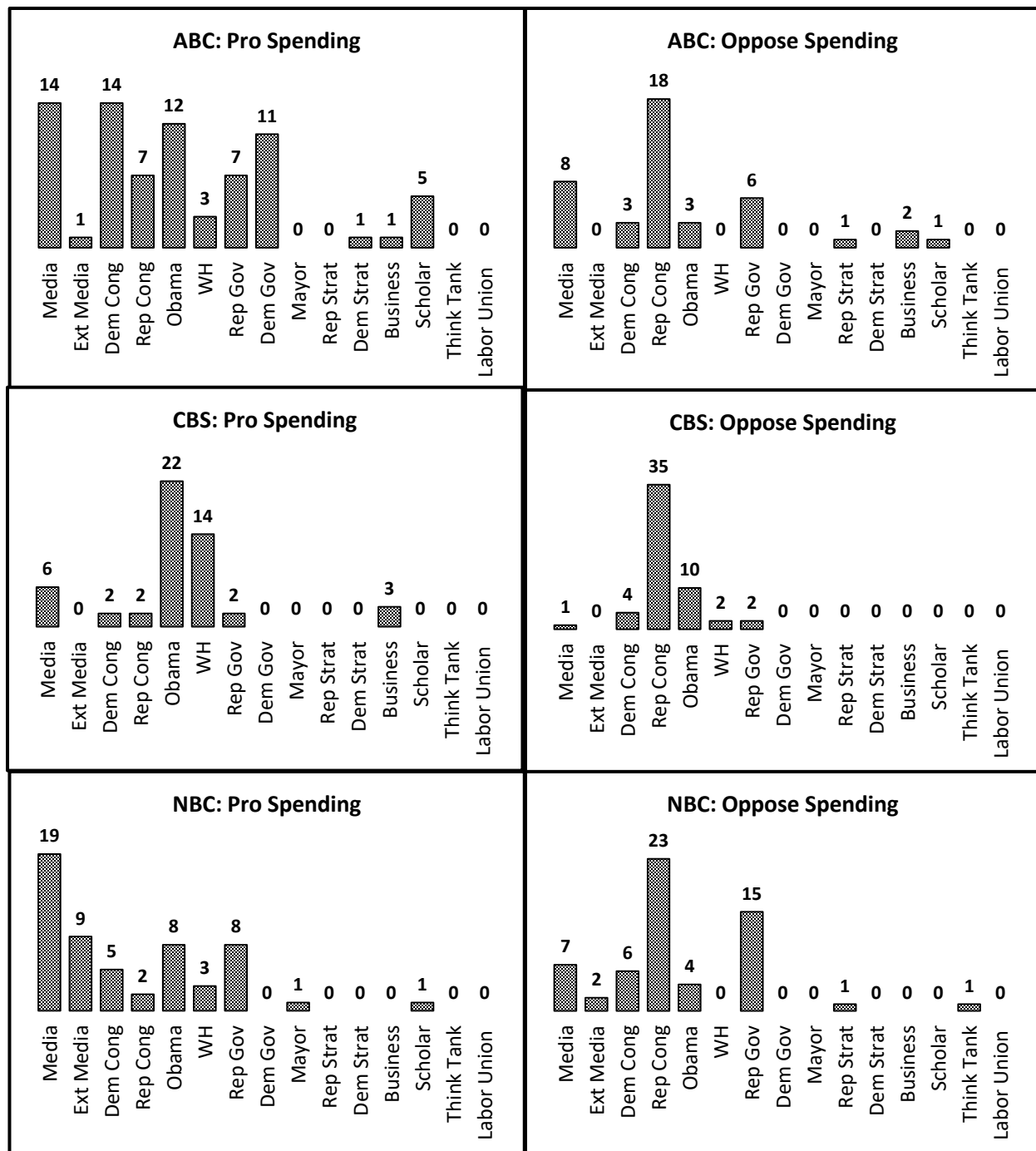


Figure 18. Spending Positions per Actor Group – Cable 2009 and 2010

2009

Pro Spending

	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	11%	1%	29%	24%	17%	10%	3%	4%	0%	0%
FOX	12%	8%	28%	25%	19%	2%	0%	1%	6%	0%
MSNBC	35%	12%	18%	21%	7%	1%	1%	3%	2%	0%

Oppose Spending

	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	13%	3%	13%	11%	54%	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%
FOX	36%	6%	3%	6%	47%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSNBC	7%	6%	2%	4%	78%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%

2010

Pro Spending

	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	42%	3%	27%	11%	6%	2%	0%	6%	2%	1%
FOX	4%	4%	8%	69%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSNBC	49%	8%	10%	28%	4%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%

Oppose Spending

	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	32%	6%	8%	6%	34%	0%	0%	0%	13%	0%
FOX	27%	6%	1%	4%	42%	0%	3%	2%	15%	0%
MSNBC	9%	11%	2%	13%	42%	0%	0%	0%	22%	0%

6.4 Taxation Preferences in Policy Coverage

According to our findings, the media's focus on taxation was substantially outweighed by spending in 2009 and 2010. In 2009, I found that 72% of overall positions between cable and broadcast companies focused on spending and 28% on taxation issues. Similarly, in 2010, taxation represented 26% of total coverage. I find significant differences in the favourability of coverage and how taxation is addressed on each network. Both cable and broadcast TV coverage favoured greater tax cuts or protecting existing tax cuts in 2009 (Figure 19-20). Cable was slightly more favourable overall than broadcast.

Among the cable companies, FOX News presented the most favourable coverage toward greater tax cuts or maintaining the pre-existing tax structure, with 84% of the 175 total tax positions recorded in 2009 (Figures 19-20). Of 278 total taxation positions recorded in CNN's policy coverage, 72% favoured greater tax cuts and maintaining existing tax structures. The least favourable toward greater tax cuts for cable companies was MSNBC's coverage, as 64% of the 95 total taxation positions favoured greater tax cuts. NBC was most favourable among the broadcast networks in 2009, with 69% of positions representing pro-tax cuts or maintaining the existing tax structure. ABC and CBS coverage both averaged 58%.

By 2010, taxation arguments were seldom mentioned in the policy coverage. Additionally, attention to federal budgets dropped substantially compared to the 2009 debate, which resulted in limited data points for taxation coverage analysis for several companies. In 2009, we recorded 721 taxation positions between cable and broadcast companies; however, in 2010, that number decreased to 185 total positions, representing a 74% decrease.

In 2010 (Figure 19), FOX and CNN's coverage was highly favourable towards tax cuts and breaks to an even greater extent than in 2009. Roughly 94% of FOX's 77 total taxation positions and 84% of CNN's 75 arguments favour greater tax cuts or oppose tax increases. MSNBC's coverage differed from both, with 64% of 11 recorded positions opposed to greater tax cuts or maintaining the existing tax structure. Broadcast coverage also favoured greater tax cuts despite the limited taxation positions presented on broadcast TV during our 2010 timeframe. Of CBS's three recorded taxation positions, 86% of ABC's seven and 67% of NBC's 12 positions were all favourable to greater tax cuts or reducing tax burden (Figure 20).

One stark difference between the companies in 2010 is the specific category 'pro-tax cuts' as we see coverage in both MSNBC and FOX News completely diverge in different manners. For instance, pro-tax cut opinions on CNN's coverage grew from 28% of overall tax positions presented in 2009 to 45% in 2010. However, Fox's pro-tax cut positions fell from 19% of 2009's discourse to 9% in 2010. Similarly, on MSNBC's programming, pro-tax cut positions fell from 24% of overall coverage to 9%.

The differences are emblematic of the shift in taxation discourse and the rising popularity of the conservative narrative that framed Obama and the Democratic taxation agenda as an attempt to raise taxes on most Americans. The main divergence between FOX and MSNBC is that the more prevalent taxation policies presented on FOX's coverage are associated with opposition to tax increases due to how taxation policies were framed on the network.

For instance, as pro-tax cuts fell on FOX and CNN's coverage in 2010, opposition to tax increases grew substantially on FOX's programming. On FOX, roughly 84% of the overall 73 taxation arguments opposed tax increases, representing a 19% increase. On CNN, 39% of the 75 total taxation positions oppose tax increases, representing a 5% decrease. MSNBC has limited data compared to both CNN and FOX, as three of its 11 total taxation positions in 2010 opposed tax increases. FOX is a stark outlier, and the results signal a clear shift in taxation policy narratives, which will be explored further in the discussion.

The framing is unique to MSNBC and CNN because FOX presents more commentary critical or in opposition to left-leaning media and political leaders. Therefore, more of the policy discourse portrays the left-leaning agenda as an effort to increase public spending and tax burdens on business owners. On MSNBC, the limited arguments in favour of greater tax cuts represent the overall lack of taxation discourse on the network. The White House was addressing Obama's promise to eliminate certain tax breaks for those earners over 250,000, and MSNBC's coverage mirrored a more friendly alignment with that agenda than did CNN or FOX News.

February 2009 was the most monumental month in US fiscal policy history, as the battle over policy outcomes was particularly consequential. Obama's approval rating was at a historic high of 68%. One of his most marketed policy changes on the campaign was to repeal the Bush tax cuts that apply to individuals making over \$250,000. American anti-greed and anti-financial sentiment reached an all-time high in modern politics. Obama presented a means for voters to push

back on what many believed to be the core of the crisis: greed and the business class. It is understandable, under this pretext, that the taxation discourse in the early stages would revolve around taxing the wealthy and corporate class.

Notable in our findings is the commonality of favourable coverage toward tax cuts among all media companies for those earning over \$250,000. One of the dominant policy issues facing the Obama administration, and the greatest forces of resistance, was whether to repeal the Bush tax cuts that favoured the wealthiest income groups. In 2009, most media attention was concentrated on spending and potential tax increases for the wealthy rather than Obama's budget proposal to make permanent tax cuts for middle- and low-income groups.

In 2009, 29% of overall taxation positions favoured tax increases on the wealthy, but this had decreased to 13% by 2010 (Figure 19). The substantial shift in the one-year time frame is driven primarily by the drop in attention to taxation policy as a whole and less magnification on the wealthy and corporate class. On Fox, 86 of the 175 total taxation positions, or 49%, were in the context of those making over \$250,000 presented in 2009 (Figure 19). CNN's coverage presented 278 total taxation positions, and 146 (53%) were in the context of business or wealthy taxation positions. Moreover, 51% of the 157 arguments favouring tax cuts pertained to only wealthy individuals. Out of 95 total arguments presented on MSNBC's programs, 58 arguments or 61%, were relative to wealthy and small business taxation policies. The emphasis on the wealth tax was abundant in all cable company coverage. However, Figure 19 highlights the stark differences in favourability toward increasing or maintaining tax cuts for wealthy Americans between each company. When isolating only taxation arguments concerning the rich or business class, MSNBC and FOX's coverage were on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, as 45% of MSNBC's tax coverage was favourable toward greater tax cuts for the wealthy in comparison to FOX's 74% favourability. CNN's coverage also favoured wealthy tax breaks, accounting for 55% of total positions (Figure 19).

Similarly, the broadcast coverage in 2009 amplified debates concerning tax breaks for businesses and individuals making over \$250,000 annually. On ABC 25, 57 taxation arguments, or 53%, were concerned with the wealthy or corporate class. Of CBS's 74 total taxation positions, 43 or 58% concerned the wealthy or corporate class. NBC's coverage had the lowest concentration of all six companies analysed, with 42% of 52 total tax positions of either group.

Isolating only tax positions regarding the wealthy and corporate class, we observe a difference between cable and broadcast coverage. Broadcast coverage tends to favour tax increases on the wealthy and business class. Out of 25 total tax arguments concerning the business class throughout ABC's 2009 coverage, 60% favoured tax increases on the business class. On CBS's programming, 58% of 43 total wealth tax positions favoured greater tax hikes. NBC's program was evenly split, with 50% of total positions in favour of tax hikes.

Taxation on the wealthy was at the forefront of the public debate, magnified by TV media. Many Americans believed the fiscal stimulus package to be a bailout for the rich. The erosion of trust in a capitalistic system could be felt globally. Our findings, as represented in Figures 19-20, indicate the extent to which attention is focused on wealthy individuals in the tax debate. Figures 21-22 illustrate the overall attitude toward wealth taxation in each company's coverage and the types of actors most prevalent in the taxation debate concerning wealthy individuals.

As seen in Figure 22, the actor groups 'President Obama' and the 'White House' encompassed the most favourable positions toward tax increases on the wealthy throughout CNN and FOX's 2009 coverage. Therefore, the coverage promoting tax increases on the wealthy was primarily driven by reporting directly on President Obama's comments rather than utilising commentary, whether from a host or guest pundit. The hosts' commentary is especially important when analysing the ideological slant of the coverage, as we noted in our results earlier. In other words, the favouritism of the host commentary is most explicitly connected with the media brand and audiences' ideological slant. Whereas the positions derived from guest commentary are not always under the complete control of news executives and owners, the host's commentary is. Although broadcast coverage was still favourable to greater tax cuts in 2009, it was considerably less favourable than cable, primarily due to the focus on Obama and the government, as well as the limited host commentary. NBC's coverage was most favourable toward greater taxation cuts, with 69% of 52 total recorded positions in favour. Of 74 total positions, 59% of CBS's coverage and 57% of ABC's 47 total taxation positions favoured greater tax cuts.

The hosts' commentary in more partisan news outlets, such as FOX and MSNBC, is much more abundant than that of other types of actor groups involved in the coverage discourse. This all relates to the dynamics of the media brand and audience, which we discussed earlier. Throughout the entirety of the discursive struggle, I find that two types of actor groups —the hosts and the

partisan leaders —were most influential in shaping the audience's understanding of taxation as a policy issue. On FOX, host commentary accounted for 27% of the overall taxation positions presented, compared to 20% on MSNBC and 11% on CNN.

The partisan commentary from all TV media relative to taxation was highly skewed toward Republican representatives and viewpoints, which I found pretty surprising. This was the case when considering the overall taxation positions and when considering more specific policies such as wealth and small business tax policy positions. Republican congressional leaders and strategist taxation viewpoints outnumbered Democrats by double digits on all three-cable companies' coverage. FOX had the largest partisan gap, as they seldom invite Democrat guests or express Democrat commentary to the degree of their competitors. Eighty-six taxation positions regarding wealthy individuals were recorded on FOX in 2009, and Republican viewpoints outnumbered Democrat viewpoints by 34%, which rose to a 39% gap when considering the 175 total taxation positions. Out of 146 total taxation positions relative to the wealthy on CNN, 17% more Republican viewpoints were expressed than Democrat, which rose to 25% when accounting for the 278 total positions. Similarly, MSNBC's coverage featured 10% more Republican viewpoints throughout the wealth taxation policy debate, including 58 viewpoints, and the Republican skew rose to 26% when analysing the 95 overall tax positions.

The host commentary and partisan breakdown were very telling of the ideological positioning related to specific taxation policy favouritism. The contrast between MSNBC, FOX and the conservative news ecosystem is depicted on March 2nd, 2009, by MSNBC host Chris Matthews. On the primetime MSNBC show 'Hardball' Matthews argues what he sees as the new conservative narrative while simultaneously and purposefully elevating a figurehead of opposition. In this case, the figurehead of opposition is conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh, well known for making controversial and fringe views as a figure in the conservative news ecosystem. In the 'Hardball' introduction segment, Matthews states, "Rush Limbaugh says it's about money, about the rich being punished with higher taxes, the poor benefiting from the Great Society programs that linger, Wall Street getting unfairly blamed for it all. That's what he's selling, the old-time religion of capitalism." Subsequently, a video clip enters the frame of Rush Limbaugh stating, "I want Barack Obama to fail if his mission is to restructure and reform this country so that capitalism and individual liberty are not its foundation. Why would I want that to succeed?" Matthews "The

White House is happy about this; they think it's great that he's the leader of the opposition, based on the reception his speech got at the Conservative Political Action Conference this Saturday... So is Rush the de facto leader of the Republican Party now? It's what Rush wants, and it's what some on the right seem to accept. It's what the Obama people want. Is it what the Republican voters want? That's our question tonight."

On February 22nd, 2009, the week after Obama released his first budget proposal, CNN host Kate Bolduan highlighted the line drawn in the sand between the Republican establishment and the Obama agenda regarding wealthy tax cuts. Bolduan initiates the show, stating, "Obama's first budget to be released on Thursday promises to cut the federal deficit in half by the end of his first term. That means slashing \$1.3 trillion down to \$533 billion by 2013. How? Obama proposes scaling back spending on the war in Iraq, streamlining government, and letting the Bush tax cuts expire for people making \$250,000 or more a year." Following her question, an interview clip of Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell remarks "ask yourself whether increasing capital gains taxes, dividend taxes and taxes on small business is a great thing to do in the middle of a deep recession. Most of my members will think that's not a smart move."

One of the cornerstone objectives of Obama's bold new agenda was relying on tax increases from those making over \$250,000 to offset the ballooning deficit. As detailed throughout this subsection, one of the only commonalities to emerge in the coverage of all US TV media companies analysed is the favouritism of tax cuts for the wealthy. Commentary or headlines favouring tax increases on the wealthy or any modelling showing the budget impact of such measures were minimal. CNN's coverage relies less on host commentary and explicit partisan commentary panels, which is reflected in the diversity of the actor groups engaged in the policy discussion, from the broad policies to spending to taxation measures. However, our results indicate a significant focus on the conservative viewpoint on CNN's coverage.

In contrast, MSNBC's coverage was more in tune with the government's ideology regarding tax preferences and policy messaging. For example, on February 26th 2009, MSNBC host Chris Matthews continuously played a clip of Obama stating that 95% of Americans would not see a tax increase if Bush tax cuts for those over \$250,000 were repealed. In the clip, Obama states, "The recovery plan provides a tax cut, that's right, a tax cut for 95 per cent of working families. And by the way, these checks are on the way."

Whereas, On FOX News, pundits such as Dick Morris, a Republican strategist that became well-known after working in senior roles for the Clinton presidential campaigns, were constantly featured using incendiary language to describe the government's taxation policy agenda. Moreover, Morris became prominent in promoting and supporting tea party organisations and ideologies throughout the 2009 and 2010 policy discourse. On February 26th, 2009, FOX host Bill O'Reilly remarked to Morris, "So the Reagan trickle down, and Bill Clinton, as you say, that is gone. And now the vision is we're going to tax the rich. He's going to raise my taxes and your taxes. To about 42 percent. We're going to be getting." To which Morris responds, "Blood that's going to trickle."

In February 2009, with control of both congressional houses and monumental pressure to bring about the economic change he campaigned on, President Obama was clear on his administration's budget agenda. The goal was to produce the greatest fiscal stimulus package in history but also to do it with unprecedented levels of spending. As Obama's senior advisor stated on February 6 before Obama rolled out his economic blueprint to Congress, "There are tax cuts in our plan that will help the middle class, but tax cuts alone are not going to get this economy moving again or people back to work."

By February 24th, President Obama's approval rating was 63%. In the crisis's initial weeks, almost all attention and commentary focused on the need for a stimulus and arguments over spending allocation. However, the media spotlight gradually swayed toward the growing Republican narrative. The vast majority of the party argued that the ballooning deficit required more immediate attention and that stimulus spending needed to be more limited. Republicans argued that a greater emphasis on tax cuts in structuring the fiscal plan would provide the required stimulus. Obama vowed to institute national health care reform, reduce defence spending, particularly in the Iraq war, and raise taxes on the wealthy by repealing the tax cuts given to the top 2% during the Bush era, pertaining to individuals making more than \$250,000 annually.

At the onset of the policy debate, Republicans had just conceded significant political power and were manoeuvring toward a collective narrative on the crisis. One policy issue that the broader Republican party primarily agreed on was a preference for tax cuts in structuring the stimulus package. Republicans favoured greater tax breaks to spending increases, whereas the Democrats largely supported 'stimulus' spending and considered it critical to climb out of the crisis.

In the first record for Fox News, on February 2, host Neil Cavuto's opening remarks are "debating that nearly \$900 billion stimulus bill today, several states now pushing their plans, cutting taxes, instead of increasing spending." Cavuto transitions to his guest Democratic governor of Missouri Jay Nixon. Nixon was a unique political player as a Democrat in a highly conservative state. Nixon ran on a platform of fiscal discipline when he replaced outgoing Republican Matt Blunt in January 2009 and on the National Governors Association website his 'about page' features "the governor's commitment to fiscal discipline helped protect Missouri's AAA credit rating" as his premier accomplishment.

As guest Nixon begins to expand on job creation plans in Missouri, Fox host Cavuto interrupts to say "and that includes tax cuts right?" Understanding his audience and unique positioning, Nixon responds, "I'm working with Democrats and Republicans. Our Republican speaker has been wonderfully helpful as we have moved forward already in this process so that folks create jobs. We are here to help, giving those companies the tax breaks it needs to create more good-paying jobs." Nixon bolsters the policy position of tax cuts over spending increases. Nixon interestingly refers to the Republican speaker as "our" Republican speaker which is indicative of the political divide of his constituents. Both individuals possess value to one another. The host, Cavuto, is magnifying and providing further merit to the greater tax break for businesses narrative, which Nixon is invited on for a friendly interview to bolster this narrative. Nixon strengthens his appeal to FOX and conservative voters in Missouri as a figurehead of fiscal discipline and an arbitrator of greater tax cuts. The fact that he is a Democrat bolsters the argument that FOX is making to its audience in the policy positions merit, and the messenger Nixon provides a different element of appeal in that it is reaching out to audiences and voters across the political aisle.

On February 7th 2009, on MSNBC, Republican Governor of Mississippi Haley Barbour lamented the Democrats for their spending initiative, which ceded power to the big government. Barbour argues "there needs to be a stimulus package. The problem with this one is, it's got hundreds of billions of dollars of things in it that aren't needed We need more tax cuts and we need less social policy in this. And the spending ought to be focused on things that create jobs." Governor Barbour's following comments constitute an early central talking piece regarding spending measures that the Republicans. Barbour states "what we don't need is our taxpayers being

saddled down with a trillion dollars that's going to be paid off by our children and grandchildren.” The premise is that relying more on taxation measures would not incur the levels of fiscal debt proposed by Obama and the Democrats.

February 26 2009, President Obama releases his budget blueprint entitled ‘A New Era of Responsibility: Renewing America’s Promise.’ Based on this blueprint, the Office of Management and Budget projected that spending would increase by nearly a third in 2009 and revenue would drop by at least 13%. The week surrounding this blueprint was one of the most consequential of the entire fiscal debate. On FOX, the verbiage of the hosts and guests was notably different and more incendiary. During Bill O’Reilly’s primetime slot, host, Bill O’Reilly says to guest pundit Dick Morris, an influential Tea Party conservative, “So the Reagan trickle down, and Bill Clinton as you say, that is gone. And now the vision is we’re going to tax the rich. He’s going to raise my taxes and your taxes to about 42 percent to which Morris responds “blood that is going to trickle.” On MSNBC, there was a similar challenge to host David Shuster’s tax ruling and guest commentary. February 24th, Michelle Bernard compares the budget to class warfare in the US. On the 26th, Shuster invites Republican Minority Leader John Boehner.

The rhetoric around the fiscal deficit significantly amplified from February 26th, 2009, upon Obama releasing his budget blueprint entitled “A New Era of Responsibility: Renewing America’s Promise. Based on this blueprint, the Office of Management and Budget projected that spending would increase by nearly a third in 2009 and revenue would drop by at least 13%. The budget deficit was projected to be 1.8 trillion by end of the fiscal year, which included a projected 3.5 trillion in spending.

On MSNBC, host David Shuster addresses the change in posturing on February 26. After highlighting the projected fiscal year ahead, Shuster states, “And while deficits were not an issue for Republicans the past eight years, now the GOP is promising a fight. We will get to that in a moment. The show then transitions to a video of Republican minority leader John Boehner arguing, “I think we just ought to admit we’re broke. The era of big government is back, and Democrats are asking you to pay for it.”

The Bush tax cuts were designed to help fund new healthcare legislation. Most of Shuster’s February 26th show focused on minority leader Mitch McConnell in a segment named “Hypocrisy Watch.” Shuster blasts McConnell for demanding the same budget for Republicans as the year

prior even though they lost seven seats and didn't require a budget that size and compares it to the hypocrisy of Republicans' anti-spending stance.

Shuster's show focuses on how the White House deals with Republicans arguing that letting the Bush tax cuts expire is an increase in tax at the worst possible moment on small business and charitable donations. Shuster pushes back on the representative Allyson Schwartz of Pennsylvania. She's vice chair on the Budget Committee that people are worried about how the tax on people making over \$250,000 will negatively impact charitable organisations.

Even on MSNBC, we observe host pushback on taxation on wealthy measures. On February 26, Congresswoman Allyson Schwartz of Pennsylvania, vice chair of the Budget Committee, was pressed by host David Shuster. David Shuster begins the segment by asking Chuck Todd, NBC News Chief White House Correspondent and Political Director, about how Obama's administration's budget blueprint is landing with Republicans. Shuster states to Todd "while deficits were not an issue for Republicans the past eight years, now the GOP is promising a fight...as far as the initial criticism from Republicans -- the deficit's too high -- how is the White House dealing with it?" Todd replies by raising the prospect that Obamas administration is concerned with t. Stating "they are a little concerned about the tax debate in particular. Republicans are jumping on that. They knew the Bush tax cuts were going to be allowed to expire. However, the provision in there to fund the health care mechanism here, the fund they are trying to create in order to pay for the switchover for when actual health care legislation gets passed, is based on closing a tax break for those same income earners, \$250,000 or more. Thus, Republicans are jumping on that as a tax increase. So they're a little concerned on that."

From the onset, even the left-slanting coverage more aligned with Obama's agenda is magnifying the concern around tax increases concerning high-income earners and the problematic politics of implementing tax increases and not losing significant voter sentiment. The language around the deficit becomes increasingly contextualised regarding freedoms as Americans. The Republicans argue that the tax increase in spending is an intrusion on liberties and a return to big government unseen in the modern era. For instance, on February 26th on MSNBC, Republican Jeb Hensarling argued that the American people did not vote for such drastic spending measures stating, "I cannot remember a time in American history where so few voted so fast to spend so much." Following the video clip of Hensarling's argument, MSNBC host David Shuster and co-

host Chuck Todd downplay the statement. Shuster follows up from the clip by stating, “it’s a great sound bite, but is the White House essentially betting that the public will have some patience both with the economic problems and sees this big spending as really the only solution to get us out of it?” To which Chuck Todd replies “the deficit issue has not popped up as a campaign issue. Frankly, not since 1992, when our friend Ross Perot had those charts and graphs out, did the public start caring about the deficit.” Todd goes even further, saying, “Frankly, Republicans were the ones pulling the levers of government basically for most of the last eight years, that they are not going to have credibility yet with the voters. Maybe four years, six years, eight years down the road, that can change, but over the next year or two, I think the Obama White House and Democrats in general feel as if that the attack from the Republicans are going to ring hollow.”

The empirical findings outlined in Chapter 6 provided a structured account of how U.S. television media framed the fiscal crisis and its policy responses, with attention to actor visibility, partisan discourse, and shifting ideological emphasis. The results highlighted the prominence of Republican-aligned perspectives across all networks, and demonstrated how the fiscal stimulus initially received broad media support in 2009 before giving way to increasing calls for fiscal consolidation in 2010. Moreover, the data revealed stark contrasts in how different networks foregrounded certain actor types, with media hosts and national figures dominating coverage while local government voices largely disappeared by 2010. These patterns of representation are not merely descriptive—they point to deeper dynamics in the construction of policy authority and the shaping of public economic understanding.

Chapter 7 builds on the empirical findings to critically engage with literature on media power, policy paradigms, and elite discourse. It synthesises how television media functioned as an active agent in reinforcing dominant ideological structures. Through patterns of framing, actor visibility, and discursive legitimation, the chapter examines how media coverage constrained Keynesian alternatives, normalised neoliberal logics, and symbolically marginalised dissenting actors. It argues that television played a central role in shaping the discursive conditions under which economic paradigms are either stabilised or contested.

Figure 19. Taxation Positions in TV Cable Coverage – 2009 and 2010

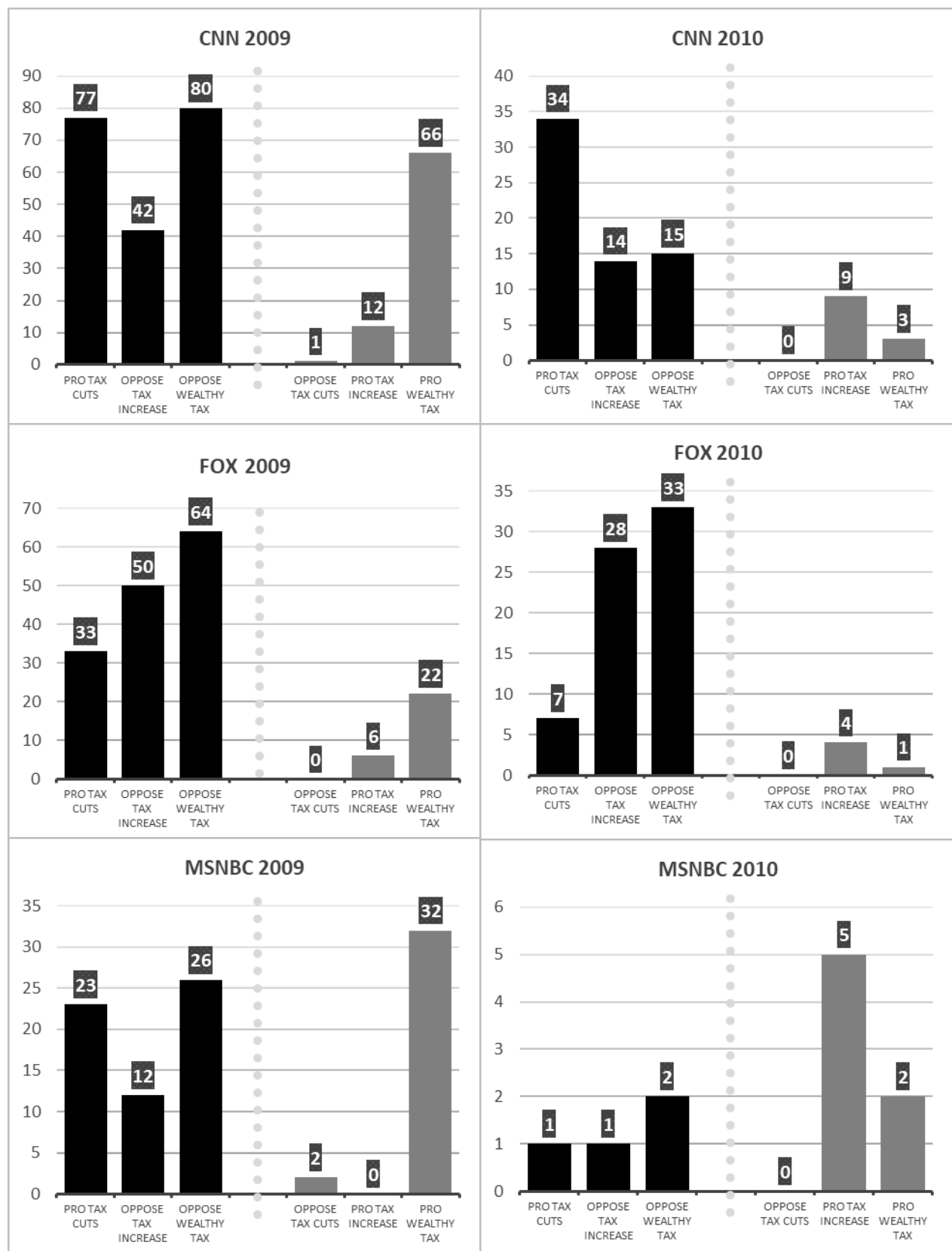


Figure 20. Taxation Positions in TV Broadcast Coverage – 2009 and 2010

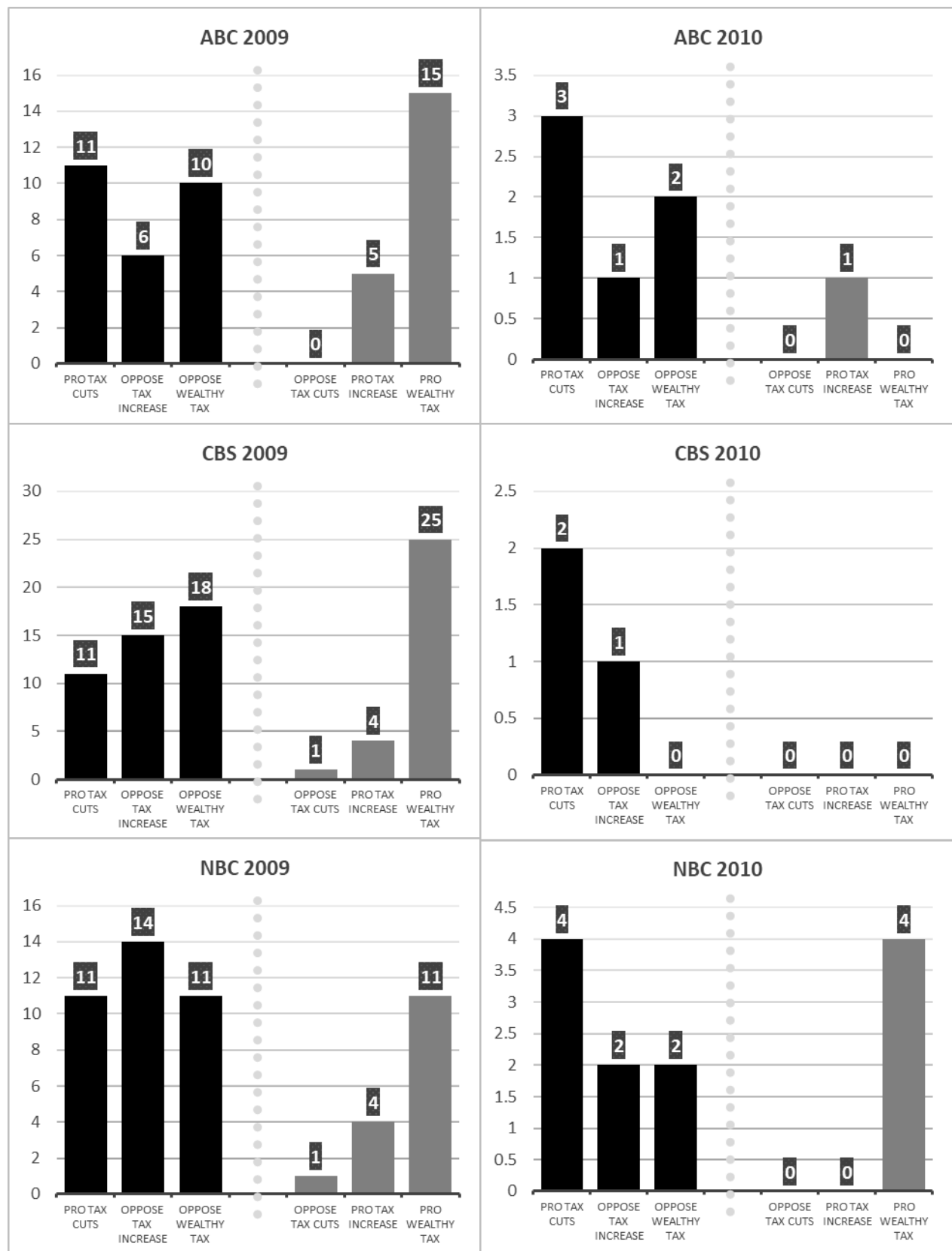


Figure 21. Taxation on Wealthy Positions in Cable Coverage - 2009 and 2010

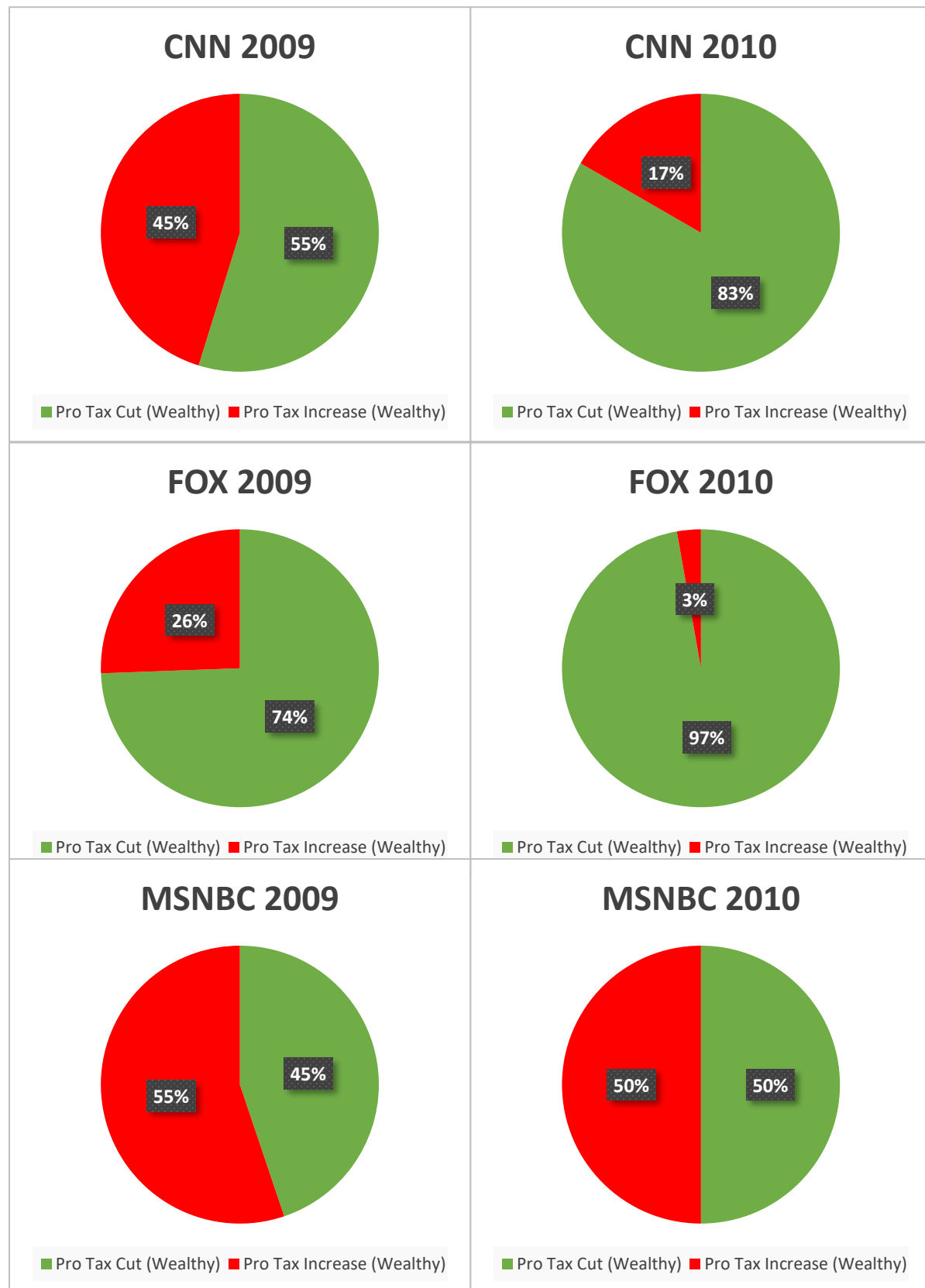


Figure 22. Taxation on Wealthy Positions by Actor Group – 2009 and 2010

2009

Pro Tax Increase for Wealthy

	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	6%	2%	74%	11%	2%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%
FOX	18%	18%	45%	9%	9%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSNBC	31%	16%	28%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Pro Tax Cuts for Wealthy

	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	18%	5%	4%	13%	53%	0%	4%	3%	3%	0%
FOX	23%	13%	0%	9%	55%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSNBC	27%	12%	0%	0%	54%	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%

2010

Pro Tax Increase for Wealthy

	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	33%	0%	67%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
FOX	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSNBC	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Pro Tax Cuts for Wealthy

	Media	Ext Media	Obama & WH	Dem	Rep	Mayor	Corp	Scholar	Think Tank	Labour Union
CNN	13%	0%	7%	13%	53%	0%	0%	0%	13%	0%
FOX	34%	11%	3%	6%	26%	0%	6%	0%	14%	0%
MSNBC	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Chapter 7. Discussion and Conclusion

While much has been written about the causes and consequences of the 2008 financial crisis, the role of the media in presenting policy alternatives and its impact on shaping the political discourse surrounding crisis events and policy solutions has been relatively unexplored. (Mercille, 2013; Pirie, 2012; Quiring & Weber, 2012; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Langer, 2015). Additionally, the implications of the crisis for our understanding of social learning and the forces dictating policy change between the state and society remain underexamined. This gap is especially notable given the popularity of television media as the primary source of political news for American voters and television's pronounced role in mediating authority and shaping public perceptions of legitimacy during moments of institutional rupture. This thesis draws on the theoretical frameworks developed by Hall (1993) and Blyth (2012) regarding the forces that drive social change.

Blyth's attention to the paradoxical tensions within Hall's framework has led to a resurgence of attention in the literature on media's role in policymaking. Blyth argues that policy authority is critical in this debate, but his work leaves scholars with many new research questions regarding the factors that most encompass policy authority. Hall's original theory regards the media as a critical element in social learning and the struggles between actors in the state versus society. This thesis examines the role of television media in shaping policy authority by introducing an original methodology and conceptual and categorisation frameworks for analysing how different media companies covered the crisis.

This discussion chapter builds on the empirical findings of Chapter 6 by interrogating the deeper ideological and communicative forces shaping media coverage of the 2009–2010 fiscal crisis. It examines how television news framed economic policy debates, legitimised certain actors over others, and ultimately contributed to the persistence of dominant fiscal paradigms. Anchored in Hall's three orders of policy change and Blyth's emphasis on persuasion and discursive authority, the chapter applies the categorisation and conceptual frameworks—distinguishing between actor types, policy domains, and ideological positions—to interpret how media systems filtered, constrained, or reinforced the conditions for paradigm change. Chapter 7 is divided into seven subchapters.

Subchapter 7.1 outlines the key empirical findings, showing a strong Republican skew in actor visibility and a marked shift from stimulus support in 2009 to consolidation by 2010. It

highlights how media hosts and partisan dynamics shaped the presentation of fiscal policy across networks.

Subchapter 7.2 applies the thesis's conceptual and categorisation frameworks to analyse how televised fiscal discourse during the 2009–2010 crisis shaped public understanding and constrained possibilities for paradigm change. While early media coverage allowed Keynesian measures to appear viable, they were framed as temporary fixes, and the rapid return to austerity reflected a deeper continuity with neoliberal norms. By mapping shifts in actor visibility, policy framing, and symbolic representations of “the public,” the subchapter demonstrates how television media served as both a gatekeeper and an active participant in stabilising the dominant economic paradigm.

Subchapter 7.3 shows how television media amplified the Tea Party movement and helped consolidate a conservative fiscal narrative in 2010. Despite Democrats holding power, Republican and Tea Party voices dominated coverage, especially through media hosts. This ideological shift helped reframe stimulus as reckless and legitimated austerity as common sense.

Subchapter 7.4 examines how TV networks used hosts, strawman actors, and emotional framing to persuade segmented audiences during fiscal debates. It highlights the rise of commentary-driven formats and celebrity hosts, especially on FOX and MSNBC. These strategies shaped perceived legitimacy and helped entrench partisan narratives.

Subchapter 7.5 compares the U.S. case to Britain and Ireland, where conservative crisis narratives also dominated media discourse. While all cases show limited academic visibility and a shift toward fiscal consolidation, the U.S. stands out due to its unique media landscape, Tea Party influence, and original stimulus scale.

Subchapter 7.6 reflects on the study's limitations, including its labour-intensive manual methodology and exclusion of print and social media. Despite constraints, the approach allowed for depth in analysing television's role in shaping fiscal discourse. Future research could expand to other media forms, countries, or crises to test and extend the study's insights.

Subchapter 7.7, the conclusion, synthesises the thesis's central findings, demonstrating that US television media played an active role in shaping fiscal policy discourse during the 2009–2010 crisis by curating actor visibility, framing policy alternatives, and reinforcing neoliberal assumptions. Through an original categorisation framework grounded in Hall and Blyth's theories,

the study traces how media dynamics contributed to the marginalisation of Keynesian voices and the symbolic erosion of Democratic policy authority, despite initial elite and public support.

Through this layered discussion, this chapter bridges the empirical results with the theoretical discussion, and categorisation and conceptual frameworks, demonstrating how television media discourse operates as an active force in shaping the limits and possibilities of fiscal policy change.

7.1 Key Findings Overview

For clarity, the key results overview is organised in the same order as the results section, beginning with the actor overview. The most notable and unexpected finding from the actor analysis was the substantial skew toward Republican viewpoints throughout the discourse in both 2009 and 2010, involving all cable and broadcast companies. The results suggest that Republicans received more coverage than Democrats across broadcast and cable coverage. For CNN, the total positions were split between 28% Republican and 16% Democrat, whereas FOX 26% were Republican and 8% Democrat. Isolating only partisan opinions and commentary, seen in Figure 4 for cable and Figure 6 for broadcast, the significant skew toward Republican viewpoints is most apparent. The average in 2009 for cable companies was 69% Republican, and broadcast was even higher, at 72% Republican-skewed.

Also, it is easily identifiable that CNN relied more on hard news reporting than its competitors. Figure 6 above illustrates the total number of actors in the policy coverage. In 2009, Obama received more than double the coverage on CNN (19%) than FOX (9%). Finally, the largest gap (15%) in representation among a specific actor group was the policy positions presented directly by media hosts. Media host's opinions represented 12% of CNN's total coverage and FOX's 27%. This wide gap can be explained by the evolution of media messaging strategies and branding, which will be discussed in more detail throughout this section. Surprisingly, Democrat Congressmen received nearly the same coverage for CNN (11%) and FOX (9%).

Following the actor framework are the fiscal stimulus versus consolidation framework findings, which provide a broad visualisation of the policy discourse before exploring more specific spending and taxation policies.

One prominent finding from the broad policy framework was the monumental shift in attitudes toward expansionary spending and the stimulus effort after one year of policy debate. The fiscal policy coverage of all six US TV media companies analysed in 2009 was highly favourable of fiscal stimulus efforts apart from FOX News. In 2009, there were 992 recorded positions in favour of either fiscal stimulus or fiscal consolidation. Out of those positions, 744 (75%) favour fiscal stimulus, and 248 (25%) favour fiscal consolidation. By 2010, the empirical chapters indicate an extreme shift in coverage and attitudes toward public debt and the fiscal deficit. Of the 245 total positions for either stimulus or consolidation, 110 (37%) favoured fiscal stimulus, whereas 191 positions (63%) supported fiscal consolidation. The 2010 results indicate a 38% drop in support for fiscal stimulus efforts and a 38% increase in favouritism toward fiscal consolidation programs in contrast to the previous year.

Second is the significant skew FOX had in presenting and hosting Democrats compared to Republicans. In 2009, FOX presented 187 positions in favour of either fiscal stimulus or consolidation. Of the 187 positions, 12% were presented by Democrat representatives and 32% by Republicans. FOX's 20% gap in partisan representation was an outlier compared to its competitors (Figure 11). CNN's coverage presented 531 broad policy positions, whereby 16% were presented by Democrats and 17% by Republican representatives. MSNBC's coverage presented 156 positions, and Democrat representatives presented 19% and 15% by Republicans.

The second key finding is the unexpected finding of the stimulus's popularity among Republicans presented in the media at the start of the 2009 debate. Regarding Republican support, 45% of pro-fiscal stimulus positions were Republican in CNN coverage, 55% on FOX, 57% on ABC, 50% on CBS, and 65% on NBC (Figure 11).

Spending is the following policy framework to discuss. A critical finding in the spending analysis when assessing all the TV news companies was that arguments for greater spending outweighed opposition to spending in 2009. Although, FOX was a stark outlier. Pro-spending commentary comprised 54% of CNN's and 65% of MSNBC's coverage. The broadcast companies also presented favourable spending coverage, as pro-spending arguments averaged 56% throughout our 2009 data. CBS led with 64%, followed by ABC at 54%, and NBC at 49%.

Also significant is that in 2009, less than 7% of cable TV coverage concerned spending cuts, yet by 2010, it constituted 41% of coverage. Despite the significant transformation in cable

coverage, there was only a 3% increase among broadcast networks. The broadcast networks concentrated on specific spending projects and healthcare issues and presented less opposition to spending increases than cable networks. Unlike the other five TV companies analysed, FOX's coverage remained highly critical of increased public spending in both 2009 and 2010, as 73% of positions opposed spending increases or argued for greater cuts.

Furthermore, local government representation on FOX and MSNBC was surprising. CNN involved many more local representatives than the other networks in 2009. However, in 2010, only some representatives from local governments were included in policy coverage and commentary amongst all the companies. In 2009, local government representatives accounted for only 52 positions out of 878 total spending positions presented, or 6% of CNN's coverage and only 1% of FOX's and MSNBC's coverage. In the 2010 dataset, the representation of local government is nearly non-existent in all cable coverage. CNN had the highest with 2 of 186 total positions, or 1% of total spending positions presented. No positions presented by local government were recorded in FOX or MSNBC's 2010 spending coverage.

Partisanship was also a critical component to the spending discourse. MSNBC is the only cable company that presented more Democrat viewpoints on spending in 2010 than Republican. As Figure 17 illustrates, 23% of the total spending positions were presented by Democrats in contrast to 16% presented by Republicans. Fox's 2010 coverage presented 16% of total spending arguments from Democrats compared to 37% from Republicans. Similarly, CNN's coverage had more than double the number of fiscal spending positions from Republicans (20%) than Democrats (9%). The stark differences in covering primarily one political party's actors on FOX and MSNBC is not surprising given the recent abundance of research concerning selective exposure, which suggests most political news audiences seek information sources that reaffirm their pre-existing viewpoints. Simultaneously, the greater demand for more partisan commentary has reshaped the structure and content of primetime TV news cycles, as TV news companies aim to bolster ratings and viewership.

For example, in 2009, CNN's hosts presented 105 spending positions out of the 878 total spending positions in their coverage or 12%. However, FOX and MSNBC hosts presented 29% of 412 total positions and 25% of 230 total spending positions, respectively. Our finding that more commentary is facilitated directly by the hosts is substantiated by recent research into the growing

tribalism of news audiences and the restructuring of news content toward greater commentary-focused content to facilitate the growing demand for such content.

In the taxation section, there were five key takeaways. Firstly, there is an extraordinary skew toward spending throughout the policy discourse in 2009 and 2010. In 2009, roughly 72% of overall positions between cable and broadcast companies focused on spending and 28% on taxation issues. Similarly in 2010 taxation represented only 26% of the overall fiscal policy coverage. Secondly, in 2009, there was overwhelming support for greater tax breaks or maintaining the existing tax structure across all cable companies and broadcast coverage. The average between the three cable companies in the proportion of arguments in favour of tax cuts or maintaining existing cuts was 73% and an average of 61% among all broadcast coverage. The popularity is intriguing, given that President Obama and his White House's priority was to revoke the tax breaks given to those making over 250,000 during the Bush administration. President Obama made it a highlight of his campaign before winning the presidency.

The third of our five key taxation findings is that by 2010, taxation arguments were seldom mentioned in the policy coverage, as shown in Figure 19-20. In 2009, we recorded 721 taxation positions between the cable and broadcast companies, but in 2010, that number decreased to 185 total positions, a 74% decrease. Fourth is the drastic shift in discussing specific taxation policies between 2009 and 2010. By 2010, there was a sharp reduction in the more commentary-oriented FOX News and MSNBC regarding 'pro-tax cut' arguments and a greater emphasis on opposition to tax increases. Pro-tax cut positions fell 10% on FOX and 15% on MSNBC from 2009 to 2010. However, as pro-tax cut positions were less frequent, tax arguments opposing tax increases increased. For instance, as pro-tax cuts fell on FOX and CNN's coverage in 2010, opposition to tax increases grew substantially on FOX's programming. On FOX, roughly 84% of the overall 73 taxation arguments opposed tax increases, an increase of 19%. This is crucial in how the taxation policy narrative and discourse changed between 2009 and 2010. We expand on this key finding further in the sections ahead.

Fifth, it is apparent that taxation on the wealthy and business class became the focal point of the 2009 discourse. The culmination of consistent messaging from Republican political leaders and FOX News commentary, together with the emergence of the Tea Party movement, was at the root of this transition. In 2009, 29% of overall taxation positions favoured tax increases on the

wealthy, but this percentage only constituted 13% by 2010, as seen in Figure 19. The substantial shift in the one-year time frame is driven primarily by the drop in attention to taxation policy as a whole and less magnification on the wealthy and corporate class. On Fox, 86 of the 175 total taxation positions, or 49%, were in the context of those making over \$250,000 presented in 2009. CNN's coverage presented 278 total taxation positions, and 146 (53%) were in the context of business or wealthy taxation positions. Moreover, 51% of the 157 arguments favouring tax cuts pertained to only wealthy individuals. Out of 95 total arguments presented on MSNBC's programs, 58 arguments or 61%, were relative to wealthy and small business taxation policies. The emphasis on the wealth tax was abundant in all cable company coverage. However, Figure 19 highlights the stark differences in favourability toward increasing or maintaining tax cuts for wealthy Americans between each company. When isolating only taxation arguments concerning the rich or business class, MSNBC and FOX's coverage were on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, as 45% of MSNBC's tax coverage was favourable toward greater tax cuts for the wealthy in comparison to FOX's 74% favourability. CNN's coverage also favoured wealthy tax breaks, accounting for 55% of total positions (Figure 19).

Similarly, the broadcast coverage in 2009 amplified debates concerning tax breaks for businesses and individuals making over \$250,000 annually. On ABC 25 of 57 taxation arguments, or 53%, concerned the wealthy or corporate class. Of CBS's 74 total taxation positions, 43 or 58%, concerned the wealthy or corporate class. NBC's coverage had the lowest concentration of all six companies analysed, with 42% of 52 total tax positions.

Isolating only tax positions regarding the wealthy and corporate class, we observe a difference between cable and broadcast coverage. Broadcast coverage favours tax increases on the wealthy and business class. Out of 25 total tax arguments concerning business class throughout ABC's 2009 coverage, 60% favoured tax increases on business class. On CBS's programming, 58% of 43 total wealth tax positions favoured greater tax hikes. NBC's program was even on either side, with 50% of total positions favouring tax hikes.

This subchapter identified key asymmetries in actor visibility and ideological representation across television networks, showing how media coverage privileged particular fiscal positions and political voices, especially Republican-aligned state actors during the 2009–2010 crisis period. While these patterns are significant in themselves, their deeper analytical value

lies in how they illuminate the processes through which policy meaning is constructed and authority is legitimated.

Subchapter 7.2 advances this analysis by systematically applying the conceptual framework developed in earlier chapters to interpret and clarify the empirical results. Specifically, it re-engages the categorisation scheme, distinguishing actor types, fiscal orientations, and ideological positions—to explore how televised discourse mediated the process of social learning, how persuasive narratives reinforced or constrained fiscal alternatives, and why the crisis failed to produce a paradigmatic shift. In doing so, the chapter moves from identifying what was visible in the media to analysing how that visibility shaped the boundaries of economic possibility.

7.2 Social Learning, Evolving Policy Narratives, and the Actors

This subchapter interprets the empirical findings and patterns detailed in the previous chapter and subchapter through the thesis's conceptual and categorisation frameworks. It clarifies how these findings relate to the dynamics of persuasion, actor legitimacy, and paradigm continuity. The analysis begins by critically reassessing Mark Blyth's claim of a Keynesian moment during the 2009–2010 crisis. It applies Hall's three-order framework to argue that the crisis produced second-order adjustments rather than a paradigmatic shift. The chapter then systematically integrates the conceptual and categorisation frameworks to interpret shifts in media discourse, actor visibility, and network-level asymmetries. Through this approach, it reveals how persuasive framing, feedback loops, and symbolic constructions of "the public" shaped the boundaries of fiscal legitimacy. The categorisation scheme is applied throughout to map how media representations of fiscal policy actors, issue framing, and partisan alignment reinforce policy paradigms. Situating these evolving patterns within Hall's model of policy change clarifies how shifts in visibility and discourse were embedded within broader processes of social learning.

Although this subchapter critiques Mark Blyth's claim that the crisis ushered in a temporary paradigmatic break, it does so by engaging with the internal tensions and evolutions in Blyth's work. In his 2013 article, "Paradigms and Paradox: The Politics of Economic Ideas in Two Moments of Crisis," Blyth argued that the United States was "Keynesian for a year," suggesting that the early response to the 2008 financial crisis, particularly the fiscal stimulus, represented a temporary departure from neoliberal orthodoxy. This framing implies that the initial policy shift

constituted a third-order change, according to Peter Hall's framework —a rethinking of policy goals and the role of the state in economic management.

Blyth's subsequent work in *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (2013) complicates and partially undermines the stronger implications of his earlier claim. In *Austerity*, Blyth offers an account of how austerity politics resurged across Western democracies despite the apparent market failures of neoliberal financial governance. He notes that stimulus policies were framed as temporary responses rather than as signs of a lasting ideological reorientation. "What is odd," Blyth writes, "is not that we had a fiscal stimulus... but that after such a complete market failure, austerity came back with a vengeance" (p. 6). He goes on to stress that the core institutional pillars of neoliberalism, central bank independence, inflation targeting, and capital mobility, remained untouched (p. 215). These acknowledgements are challenging to reconcile with a claim that even a temporary third-order change occurred.

This thesis builds on those later insights to argue that no third-order shift took place, even temporarily. Instead, the crisis generated what Hall would term second-order change: a recalibration of policy instruments and objectives within a still-dominant neoliberal paradigm. While Blyth is right to note that the stimulus represented a moment of discursive fluidity, the framing of those measures as exceptional and temporary precluded the kind of ideational contestation needed to produce a paradigmatic rupture. By 2010, austerity had not only returned but had been rhetorically realigned with moral narratives about responsibility and public debt, aided by the symbolic constructions and legitimating role of television media. In this sense, Blyth's own analysis of the return to austerity aligns more closely with second-order stability than third-order transformation.

Blyth's (2013a) reasoning that the United States was "Keynesian for a year" overlooks neoliberalism's structural and ideological durability and undermines one of the elements Blyth emphasises as most critical in determining a paradigmatic shift: time. Fiscal consolidation, targeting spending cuts and debt reduction, became the dominant narratives once the direness of the moment had subsided. If Keynesian thinking had overtaken neoliberal thinking, the state's emphasis would have been heavier on social welfare. However, the state prioritised global market stability despite the significant long-term consequences of public debt.

Blyth's interpretation does not account for how early Keynesian-style policies were designed to maintain or restore the capitalist system rather than transform it. Though there were clear indicators that the stimulus package would boost demand, stabilise the economy, and improve unemployment rates, it was designed to be limited and selective. The primary focus was on reinforcing the financial industry and supporting Wall Street rather than implementing redistributive measures that would encompass a paradigmatic shift toward Keynesianism. Despite the state's critical role in stabilising the economy, the interventions were mainly targeted to reinforce the neoliberal paradigm through enormous bailout packages to wealthy corporations.

This interpretation becomes clearer when viewed through Hall's theory of policy change and the distinction between different orders of transformation. The state's crisis response at its most extreme juncture did not surpass what Hall terms a second-order change, as policies were adjusted but did not challenge the underlying assumptions of the neoliberal paradigm. The quick return to austerity and market-oriented policies after the crisis demonstrated the resilience of neoliberal ideational path dependency and institutional embeddedness.

These patterns are evident when the 2009–2010 fiscal discourse is examined in greater detail. Television media's early response provides a case study of how second-order change can mimic deeper ideological shifts. In the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis, televised media granted considerable attention to Keynesian fiscal tools, framing stimulus policies as emergency responses necessary to restore economic stability. This framing, however, prioritised speed and efficiency rather than ideological re-evaluation. While some analysts, including Blyth, interpreted this moment as a rupture with neoliberal orthodoxy, the patterns of representation and framing captured in this study suggest otherwise.

These conclusions are reinforced by the categorisation framework developed in this thesis, which provides empirical insight into how television media discourse shaped, limited, and ultimately reaffirmed the neoliberal order. By systematically tracking actor visibility and fiscal preferences across state and society, the framework shows that Keynesian arguments were selectively represented and often framed as short-term solutions. As such, the empirical results underscore that while surface-level policy adjustments occurred, the discursive space remained tightly bounded by neoliberal assumptions, precluding a genuine third-order transformation.

At this point in the subchapter, I will further illustrate how the categorisation frameworks introduced in this thesis align with Peter Hall's "three-order framework" of policy change, which categorises change into incremental shifts (first-order), significant adjustments (second-order) and potential paradigm shifts (third-order). The three frameworks I introduce provide a detailed lens for analysing the policy debate over fiscal stimulus and fiscal consolidation by tracking media positions and the evolving representation of state and societal actors. The analysis highlights how these changes reflect social learning processes and various levels of policy change.

A first-order change in fiscal policy from 2009 included the expansion of unemployment benefits, as well as tax credits given to individuals, families, and businesses for immediate relief, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). While the ARRA represents a second-order change due to its large scale, the specific measures of extending unemployment benefits or providing tax credits represent a more incremental, first-order change within the broader neoliberal framework. Extending unemployment benefits was a policy adjustment enacted to provide immediate relief to individuals who were most vulnerable and impacted by the recession without challenging the underlying principles of the neoliberal order. However, it did not fundamentally alter the neoliberal and market-oriented approach to fiscal policy that had endured for the last 40 years. It was a large-scale temporary addendum to the existing social safety net rather than rethinking the government's role in the economy. Media outlets played a role in legitimising these adjustments by reinforcing the idea that fiscal intervention was necessary to address the crisis. In this sense, the categorisation framework captures how first-order changes occur when existing policy tools are recalibrated and adapted to suit contemporary needs without altering the core paradigmatic structure.

The categorisation framework captures first-order shifts in fiscal discourse by isolating temporary adjustments in tax policy preferences that address short-term crisis conditions without altering the underlying paradigm. A striking pattern emerged in 2009, where media coverage overwhelmingly favoured extending or introducing tax cuts. Across cable networks, FOX supported tax cuts or maintaining existing cuts in 84% of its 175 total tax positions, CNN in 72% of its 278, and MSNBC in 64% of its 95. These positions, tracked through subcategories such as "Pro Tax Cuts," "Maintain Tax Cuts," and "Oppose Tax Increases," reflected tactical measures aligned with neoliberal principles of limited state extraction and market incentives. Notably, 51%

of the 157 total pro-tax cut arguments pertained specifically to high-income earners, yet these were discursively framed not as redistributive reversals but as pragmatic stimulus tools. The actor coding reveals that many of these positions were delivered by White House spokespeople or centrist Democrats, suggesting elite consensus rather than ideological rupture. The categorisation framework's disaggregation of tax types and its attention to both source and target enabled the empirical capture of these instrumental recalibrations—hallmarks of Hall's first-order change.

The contraction of tax discourse by 2010 further illustrates this continuity. Total taxation positions across cable and broadcast networks declined by 74%, from 721 in 2009 to just 185 in 2010. Although there was a sharp rhetorical pivot, particularly on FOX, toward opposing tax increases—with 84% of FOX's 2010 tax positions falling into this category—this shift remained within the boundaries of existing fiscal orthodoxy. By contrast, arguments supporting tax increases on the wealthy fell from 29% of total positions in 2009 to just 13% in 2010. Significantly, when support for progressive tax reform emerged, it was largely driven by government actors rather than media framing or input from civil society. For example, 74% of CNN's 2009 Pro Wealth Tax Increase positions originated from figures in the Obama administration, further underscoring that these ideas lacked discursive autonomy. The categorisation framework's issue-specific taxonomy and actor-based coding thus revealed not only which policy instruments were endorsed but also whose voices conferred legitimacy upon them. The findings show that television media played a key role in amplifying short-term, instrument-level adjustments during the height of the crisis while gradually re-normalising paradigmatic continuity as uncertainty subsided. This disaggregated method also captures first-order adjustments in spending.

The categorisation framework captures first-order adjustments in fiscal discourse by empirically distinguishing between support for general government spending and advocacy for specific, targeted initiatives such as infrastructure, healthcare, or earmarks. In 2009, general pro-spending positions accounted for 46% of total cable coverage, while specific spending increases—including categories such as Pro Infrastructure Spending, Pro-Health Spending, and Pro Earmark Spending—accounted for an additional 19%. Among broadcast networks, CBS led with 64% pro-spending, much of it directed at specific programme categories. These distinctions reveal that while aggregate support for spending appeared robust, it was often contingent on narrowly defined projects deemed politically safe or economically uncontroversial. The categorisation of pro-

spending arguments into general and specific subtypes illustrates how media discourse permitted short-term expansions in state activity while still operating within the boundaries of an instrumentally constrained paradigm. These were tactical recalibrations aimed at short-term stimulus rather than long-term ideological repositioning—consistent with Hall's first-order change, wherein policy tools are revised without altering the overarching goals or assumptions of economic governance.

In 2010, the discourse on spending shifted toward fiscal restraint, yet the framework reveals that this, too, reflected first-order dynamics. Pro-spending cuts surged across cable networks, rising from 7% of total coverage in 2009 to 41% in 2010, while Specific Spending Cut categories—such as Anti-Earmark Spending and Anti-Stimulus Program Cuts—accounted for 22% of the 2010 total. This distinction is crucial. While calls for across-the-board fiscal discipline became more prominent, many were anchored in specific objections to earmarked projects or programme inefficiencies rather than in principled opposition to public spending as such. For example, FOX persistently criticised Democratic proposals tied to healthcare and state-level relief while avoiding blanket denunciations of military or security-related expenditure. This selective targeting illustrates how the discourse around spending cuts functioned as a practical adjustment rather than an ideological overhaul. Actor-level analysis supports this reading: in both years, media hosts and administration figures dominated pro-spending and pro-cut arguments, with minimal visibility for civil society voices or labour actors. By distinguishing between general and specific spending positions and tracing the sources presenting them, the categorisation framework makes visible how television media largely contained fiscal debate within the realm of first-order adjustments.

As defined by Hall, second-order changes are more substantial policy shifts that redefine the acceptable tools and strategies within an existing paradigm but do not entirely replace the underlying assumptions of that paradigm. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009 is a clear example of a second-order change in US fiscal policy. The ARRA was a historic and grand-scale Keynesian-inspired stimulus package aimed at counteracting the economic downturn by providing large-scale government relief through increased public spending, tax cuts, and credits for low- and middle-income earners, as well as increases for high-income earners.

While ARRA represented a bold and significant response to the crisis, it did not mark a fundamental departure from the broader neoliberal policy framework. Instead, it was a major

adjustment within that framework, employing Keynesian tools (such as fiscal stimulus) to address the immediate economic crisis. I classify the ARRA as a second-order change because it involved a substantial shift in policy approach (increased government spending and public investment). Still, it remained within the overall neoliberal paradigm that emphasised market principles and fiscal conservatism in the long term.

The coverage of the ARRA in 2009 reflected strong media support for Keynesian-style government intervention as a temporary measure to combat the crisis. However, by 2010, as the initial crisis panic began to subside, the TV media discourse began shifting toward fiscal austerity, reflecting a return to neoliberal solutions.

The categorisation framework highlights the potential for a third-order change by mapping the ideological divide between Keynesianism and neoliberalism. The media's framing of public anxiety and Wall Street's concerns aided its portrayal of the fiscal stimulus packages as necessary to combat the economic crisis, which significantly shaped public opinion and contributed to the amplification and popularity of government interventions. However, as economic recovery began, television media shifted its focus toward fiscal consolidation, reflecting a change in public attitudes and increasing support for a more subdued state approach in the mid to long-term recovery.

This shift in media narratives reflects the social learning process, whereby state and societal actors are influenced by new information and changing circumstances and adapt their ideological stances and fiscal policy positions. By 2010, the shift in television media coverage towards austerity, coupled with a muted focus on tax cuts, particularly for the wealthy, that transpired in 2009, illustrated that neoliberal ideas were regaining dominance. This reversal in media tone between 2009 and 2010 marked a critical moment of ideational re-entrenchment.

The fiscal policy categorisation framework's focus on the changing media narratives provides further insight into how crises activate opportunities for paradigm contestation. Hall and Blyth both argue that crises prompt an evaluation of the dominant paradigm and create opportunities for new ideas to emerge. Media outlets like FOX consistently favoured austerity, while CNN, despite early support for Keynesian measures, also shifted toward consolidation as neoliberal arguments strengthened.

This trajectory supports Hall's argument that although paradigms undergo significant adjustment during uncertainty, third-order shifts are difficult to achieve and slow to materialise.

The combination of fiscal categorisation and the conceptual framework used in this thesis enables a granular analysis of how social learning and policy evaluation unfolded in response to the crisis.

To connect my critique of Blyth's claim of a temporary paradigm shift to the empirical analysis, the following section outlines how the thesis's conceptual and categorisation frameworks operationalise these debates. These frameworks categorise the fiscal positions and visibility of discrete actor categories, also illuminating the discursive strategies through which legitimacy is constructed in televised policy discourse. One fundamental dynamic, explored alongside actor categorisation, is how the media invoke and frame "the public" during moments of fiscal contestation—often shaping the moral and ideological terms of the debate in the process.

While the categorisation framework used in this thesis does not code "the public" as an explicit actor category, it is crucial to understanding how legitimacy and persuasion are constructed in fiscal discourse. Rather than being represented directly, "the public" is discursively produced—invoked by other actors to justify or oppose economic policies. Media hosts, the President, political leaders, and think tank representatives frequently claim to speak on behalf of "ordinary Americans," "hardworking taxpayers," or "middle-class families," thereby using symbolic constructions to frame fiscal preferences as public will. These references are analytically significant because they substitute for institutional representation, allowing the interests of abstract publics to be attached to specific paradigmatic outcomes. This symbolic construction is shaped by the editorial choices of media networks that mediate which visions of the public—and which fiscal responses—gain narrative traction.

The discursive invocation of "the public" plays a central role in shaping the ideological boundaries of economic legitimacy. When television media elevate narratives of overburdened taxpayers or deficit anxiety, they actively construct a political imaginary in which certain fiscal responses appear more aligned with public interest than others. In periods of crisis, this symbolic representation intensifies: "the public" becomes a battlefield for narrative contestation and moral justification. As such, understanding how "the public" is framed and appropriated in media discourse is essential to tracing the processes of persuasion and the mechanisms through which policy paradigms are reinforced or destabilised.

In addition to tracking empirical positions, the categorisation methodologies also demonstrate the media's structural function as a paradigm gatekeeper. Cable television curates the

political and economic debate, deciding which actors from the state and society are represented and the types of arguments and economic principles allowed to circulate and gain traction. This curatorial role also extends to the symbolic construction of "the public," a theme which will be explored in greater depth later in the subchapter to illustrate how media narratives selectively shape perceptions of popular will and fiscal legitimacy.

Critical to this thesis is the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 5.1, which illustrates and describes the relationship between media and persuasion as an intermediary between the state and society in the social learning process. Cable television companies, CNN, FOX, and MSNBC, framed the crisis and policy paradigm alternatives in substantially different ways, aligning with specific ideological stances supporting their interests. The role of television media in the conceptual framework is to highlight how media actors perform as intermediaries between actors in the state and society, offering persuasive narratives that shape public understanding and, ultimately, the adoption of policy solutions. This intermediary function of media, situated at the intersection of state and society, is best understood through the theoretical frameworks developed by Peter Hall and Mark Blyth, both of whom emphasise the centrality of ideas, institutions, and actor interaction in shaping policy change.

The theoretical framework for this paper builds on the works of Peter Hall's *Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State* (1993) and Mark Blyth's *Paradigms and Paradox: The Politics of Economic Ideas in Two Moments of Crisis* (2013), both of which examine how economic ideas and political paradigms shape public policy. Hall's contributions to understanding paradigm change as a process of social learning provide the foundation for interpreting media's role in mediating the struggle of policy authority between state and societal actors.

Blyth extends Hall's work by examining the paradoxes that arise when dominant economic ideas face significant crises. In *Paradigms and Paradox* (2013), Blyth argues that economic ideas often encounter resistance and contradiction, particularly in unexpected crises. For example, Blyth's analysis of the 2008 financial crisis shows how neoliberal ideas faced increasing scrutiny as they failed to provide solutions to the crisis. Both scholars argue that policy paradigms are a negotiation among the state, society, and the media, resulting in the agenda-setting of policymaking and the shaping of policy direction. This theoretical foundation provides the lens through which the empirical material is interpreted. The study puts these ideas into practice using

a conceptual and categorisation framework linking economic paradigms to actor roles and discursive structures.

The multifaceted categorisation frameworks enable the ability to track actor types and specific fiscal preferences, which provides insight into the policy learning process, how persuasion shapes policy debates, and how the dynamics of policy change can lead to paradigm shifts. The shifting narratives, captured in the categorisation of media coverage, actor positions, and policy stances, highlight the role of media as both a space for social learning and a powerful agent of persuasion, capable of altering the trajectory of policy paradigms over time.

The three categorisation frameworks introduced in this thesis offer new methods and insights for analysing the shifting discourse on fiscal policy occurring on cable and broadcast television outlets during the crisis. The framework provides a comprehensive view of television coverage by categorising positions on fiscal stimulus and consolidation, as well as specific spending and taxation preferences. The design of the methodology to capture more granular levers of the budgetary debate helps capture the essence of Hall's three-order framework in his theory of policy paradigms and social learning. Applying our findings to Hall's three orders of change, the empirical data provides a deeper understanding of how policy evolves. At the same time, categorising actor positions allows us to see how state and society actors engage in the process of social learning.

The conceptual framework used in this thesis draws on Hall's insights, organising key elements such as the roles of state and society actors, the Keynesian vs. neoliberal dichotomy, and the roles of media and persuasion. By organising these elements, the framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how policy positions evolve, making the distinctions between broad policy aims such as fiscal stimulus vs fiscal consolidation, to the more granular instruments used to achieve policy aims in spending vs taxation and the differing roles of state vs society actors that reveals the persuasive element of televised media narrative construction.

The state and society represent the two primary actor groups involved in policymaking. The state encompasses all levels of political leadership, from the President and the White House to Congressional leaders, state governors, and local mayors. Society includes business leaders, think tanks, interest groups, and external media actors and organisations. The relationship between state actors, societal groups, and television media plays a crucial role in how political struggles are

waged in public view. The state often needs media platforms and public support to defend its policies. Similarly, political elites use television media to reinforce or challenge the policy agenda and garner public credibility. At the same time, different sections of society try to shape the policy agenda by participating in politics and using the media to amplify their voices.

As outlined in the conceptual framework, media outlets operate within structural constraints—such as ownership models, audience segmentation, and partisan alignment—that shape which perspectives are elevated and which are excluded. The thesis adopts the view that television media functions as an intermediary actor with its own institutional logic and persuasive capacity. The framing choices of cable news networks—what issues to magnify, which actors to feature, and how crises are narrated—are editorial decisions shaped by ideological orientation, financial incentives, and target audience expectations. Such dynamics raise critical questions about whether media participation fosters pluralistic debate or instead entrenches selective paradigmatic narratives aligned with institutional branding and political alliances. These conditions help explain why elite commentators, fiscal conservatives, and deficit-focused narratives maintained persistent visibility, while perspectives such as labour advocacy, progressive taxation, and redistributive policy were marginalised in the televised fiscal debate.

By categorising actor types (state vs. society) and policy issues (spending vs. taxation), the frameworks highlight the roles different actor groups play in shaping the policy discourse and how TV media outlets bridge the interests of the state and society. This framework helps to map out how each group contributes to the policy discourse and how the media amplifies or muzzles particular voices, whether from the state or society. The media's representation of key policy issues shows how the social learning process unfolds and how existing paradigms are challenged, modified, or replaced. In this sense, the categorisation frameworks offer a dynamic view of how policy paradigms evolve and how media and public discourse act as central agents in facilitating or hindering policy change.

As Hall described, social learning involves how elite actors interact, share ideas, and adapt their understanding of policy issues through exposure to new information and perspectives. The categorisation framework captures this dynamic process by organising media coverage and actor positions over time, showing how framing issues like fiscal stimulus and consolidation evolve.

After discussing the conceptual and categorisation frameworks, the next portion of the subchapter focuses on the empirical findings detailed in Chapter 6. These findings provide insight into the dynamics of the fiscal policy discourse during the 2009 and 2010 debates concerning the fiscal stimulus.

Before turning to the analysis of which actors gained visibility and discursive authority, it is important first to examine how the core fiscal issues themselves—stimulus, consolidation, spending, and taxation—were framed and contested across the networks. These issue-level framings offer critical insight into the discursive field in which actors operated and into how certain policy logics were made to appear legitimate, urgent, or untenable during different phases of the crisis.

The policy debate regarding fiscal stimulus saw a significant shift from 2009 to 2010. In 2009, there was overwhelming support for fiscal stimulus across all media outlets, with over 70% of media coverage favouring the stimulus package. FOX News, however, stood out as an outlier, with more coverage of fiscal consolidation and far less support for the stimulus. By 2010, the support for fiscal stimulus had waned, and a substantial amount of the TV coverage favoured fiscal consolidation. The partisan divide remained stark, with FOX offering significantly more coverage of Republican viewpoints, CNN presenting moderately more Republican views, and MSNBC presenting mostly Democrat viewpoints.

The evolution of spending narratives across television media between 2009 and 2010 demonstrates a marked shift in how fiscal legitimacy was constructed. In 2009, arguments in favour of increased public spending dominated the televised discourse. Among cable networks, pro-spending commentary constituted 54% of CNN's coverage and 65% of MSNBC's. Even among the broadcast networks, which tend to adopt a less overtly partisan posture, pro-spending narratives were prevalent: CBS led with 64%, followed by ABC at 54%, and NBC at 49%, contributing to an average of 56% across all broadcast coverage. By contrast, FOX remained a consistent outlier, with 73% of its coverage in both years opposing public spending or advocating for spending cuts—reflecting a staunchly anti-Keynesian editorial stance.

What is particularly striking is the rapid transformation that unfolded in 2010. Across all cable networks, coverage advocating for spending cuts increased from 7% in 2009 to 41% in

2010—an almost sixfold rise. This dramatic shift indicates a redefinition of the fiscal narrative, one that reframed stimulus not as a solution but as a liability.

The analysis of taxation discourse reveals both a clear asymmetry in fiscal issue salience and a notable shift in narrative construction between 2009 and 2010. Across all six networks, fiscal coverage in both years was overwhelmingly skewed toward spending, with taxation comprising only 28% of total fiscal policy coverage in 2009 and dropping further to 26% in 2010. Even when taxation was discussed, arguments overwhelmingly favoured tax cuts or the preservation of existing tax breaks. In 2009, support for tax cuts accounted for an average of 73% of cable coverage and 61% across the broadcast networks, despite the Obama administration's stated policy priority to repeal the Bush-era tax cuts for high-income earners. This disconnect between political agenda and media discourse highlights the media's role in selectively legitimising specific fiscal priorities while marginalising others.

By 2010, the discourse on taxation had not only declined in prominence, dropping by 74% in total mentions but also shifted in tone. Across FOX, CNN, and MSNBC, arguments in favour of tax cuts decreased, while opposition to tax increases became more pronounced. On FOX News, for instance, 84% of the total taxation positions in 2010 opposed tax increases—an increase of 19% from the previous year—signalling a discursive pivot toward austerity-aligned rhetoric. This was especially evident in coverage focused on the wealthy and corporate class.

In 2009, arguments about increased taxation on high earners comprised a substantial portion of the total: 49% on FOX, 53% on CNN, and 61% on MSNBC. Yet this emphasis faded markedly by 2010, as the visibility of wealth-based taxation positions declined and oppositional framing intensified. These shifts illustrate how taxation, particularly as it concerned affluent individuals and corporations, was reframed through a lens of economic anxiety and political polarisation, narrowing the space for redistributive narratives and reinforcing the broader contraction of Keynesian discourse already observed in the coverage of spending.

Understanding how these fiscal issues were framed provides essential context for interpreting the dynamics of actor representation and legitimacy. Media outlets curated who appeared credible, or oppositional within each fiscal narrative. The following section applies the actor categorisation framework to trace how visibility, ideological alignment, and discursive authority were distributed across networks and over time.

One of the most intriguing findings from the actor analysis is the substantial skew toward Republican viewpoints across cable television in 2009 and 2010. This was unexpected, given the large-scale victory of the Democratic Party and President Obama, as the party took control of the House, Senate, and the White House in 2009. Moreover, the empirical findings demonstrated substantial initial support for Obama and the Democratic administration's policies in 2009. The results indicate that Republicans received significantly more media coverage than Democrats, particularly on FOX and, surprisingly, on CNN. CNN presented more balanced coverage, yet it also presented more Republican viewpoints in both 2009 and 2010. MSNBC, as the most left-skewed network, unsurprisingly presented more Democrat viewpoints, but the overall pattern of Republican dominance in media coverage is abundantly clear.

The representation of media hosts is revealing to TV news persuasion strategies. In 2009, CNN's hosts presented about 10% of the total coverage, whereas FOX and MSNBC hosts presented between 25% and 30% of all policy opinions. The extremely high concentration of opinions directed by the media hosts suggests that they are potentially the most influential individuals in shaping the tone and direction of policy debates. As noted in Chapter 4, cable news companies have evolved to be more commentary-centric as demand for commentary-oriented news has surged. The consequence of the fiscal policy discourse in 2009 and 2010 is that increasingly partisan hosts contribute to a more ideologically driven discourse, which is evident in my empirical findings.

At the heart of this thesis is the assertion that policy paradigms are dictated through processes of persuasion, visibility, and symbolic contestation. Media outlets, as demonstrated by the empirical findings, actively curate the visibility and legitimacy of actor groups, generating feedback loops that profoundly shape public understanding and policy possibilities.

Importantly, the empirical framework measures the quantity of actor representation and also the ideological alignment and frequency of each actor group within cable news coverage. This approach enables the thesis to chart the discursive terrain over time and identify which actors were amplified, marginalised, or symbolically constructed during key periods of contestation.

The findings demonstrate that FOX allocated disproportionate airtime to Republican congressional actors and its own media hosts. In 2009, 30% of FOX's fiscal policy positions came from Republican members of Congress, compared to just 17% on CNN. Democrat representation

was more balanced across outlets, with Democrat Congressmen accounting for 11% on CNN and 9% on FOX. However, FOX's hosts accounted for a striking 27% of total fiscal commentary, and similarly, MSNBC hosts encompassed 25% of commentary, compared to 12% on CNN. This pattern suggests that FOX and MSNBC's editorial strategy substituted expert or institutional voices with partisan media hosts, creating a self-reinforcing discursive cycle in which ideological positions were validated internally within the network.

Such skewed representation has significant implications for understanding feedback loops. As media hosts became more dominant actors in the fiscal debate, especially at FOX and MSNBC, the boundaries of legitimate discourse narrowed. Host-led commentary was not only more frequent but also more explicitly ideological. Given FOX's viewership dominance over MSNBC and CNN's surprising slant toward Republican representation, the discursive direction often echoed Republican talking points. For instance, Sean Hannity's appropriation of Senator McCain's "generational theft" rhetoric exemplifies how hosts drew selectively from political elites to frame deficit spending as a moral violation rather than an economic strategy. These rhetorical choices resonated with FOX's audience demographics and were then fed back into the political sphere, with Republican politicians responding to media-amplified narratives.

CNN, by contrast, maintained greater heterogeneity in actor representation. While its coverage still leaned toward Republican voices (28% Republican vs. 16% Democrat overall), it also featured a broader array of state and societal actors. For instance, local government leaders accounted for over 11% of CNN's stimulus-favourable coverage in 2009—a striking contrast to FOX and MSNBC, where mayoral voices barely registered (2%). Moreover, CNN's coverage included greater representation of scholars, economists, and think tanks, with 7% of pro-stimulus positions coming from academic sources, compared to just 1% at FOX. This broader engagement with expert and localised actors helped maintain a more pluralistic discursive space, which temporarily allowed Keynesian alternatives to surface as legitimate.

While opposition party voices featured prominently across all networks, their treatment diverged in ways that reflected each outlet's ideological lean. FOX, in particular, disproportionately featured Republican critiques of Democratic proposals but rarely allowed full Democratic responses, often cutting away or limiting rebuttal space. In contrast, CNN frequently engaged Republican officials in live interviews and panels, offering space for counterarguments

against the stimulus. Yet, Democrats were less frequently featured in critical segments about fiscal restraint. This asymmetry in platforming opposition actors structured what kinds of challenges appeared legitimate. It elevated conservative fiscal arguments as rational critique while often portraying progressive alternatives as partisan overreach. These editorial asymmetries shaped actor legitimacy, elevating certain oppositional stances as persuasive while marginalising alternative policy logic that might support paradigm disruption. By structuring oppositional legitimacy along pre-existing ideological lines, media outlets reinforced first- and second-order contestation while shielding the dominant paradigm from systemic challenge.

The actor categorisation framework also reveals how different actor types were leveraged to support competing paradigms. In 2009, CNN and MSNBC presented significant Republican support for the stimulus, with 45% and 55% of Republican commentary, respectively, being pro-stimulus. This challenges the conventional assumption of a strict partisan divide and demonstrates the early fragility of neoliberal orthodoxy. Yet, FOX systematically undermined these voices by shifting the interpretive emphasis from stimulus to long-term deficit anxiety. Even when presenting pro-stimulus positions, FOX often embedded them in hostile commentary segments that framed such policies as irresponsible. This editorial strategy reveals how representation alone does not guarantee discursive legitimacy; the framing context determines whether an actor's position reinforces or challenges the dominant paradigm.

Across all networks, the shift from stimulus to consolidation resulted in a sharp reduction in local and academic voices, while partisan actors and media hosts gained discursive ground. FOX presented 30% of all pro-consolidation positions through its own hosts and excluded stimulus-supportive actors entirely by 2010. CNN's host representation equalised across both paradigms (35% for stimulus and consolidation), indicating a pivot toward more assertive framing strategies. MSNBC, although maintaining left-leaning coverage, mirrored the trend with 33% of consolidation coverage driven by hosts.

The empirical categorisation also exposes the absence of certain voices. Labour unions, despite the crisis's devastating impact on employment, were completely absent from all cable coverage. Corporate actors, although referenced, were rarely given a direct voice as commentators. The result is a fiscal discourse overwhelmingly populated by partisan elites and media figures, with organised interests largely excluded from direct participation. This structural exclusion

reinforces Hall's insight that paradigm shifts require institutional ruptures; without countervailing voices in the public sphere, elite consensus remains resilient. The actor framework thus documents not only who spoke but who was systematically silenced—a critical insight for understanding why Keynesianism failed to consolidate as a new paradigm.

Despite their frontline role in implementing stimulus projects, local government actors were rarely featured in fiscal coverage, particularly in 2010. In 2009, CNN provided some visibility, with local officials accounting for 10% of its pro-spending discourse. But by 2010, even CNN's representation dropped to just 1%, and FOX and MSNBC offered none at all. This absence reflected a structural marginalisation of actors positioned to offer pragmatic insights about policy delivery and local impact. Instead, networks prioritised federal voices, media hosts, and national-level partisan actors, distancing fiscal debate from tangible outcomes in local economies. The exclusion of local actors from fiscal discourse undermined opportunities for grounded persuasion and reduced the perceived legitimacy of stimulus policy as a public good, contributing to the reassertion of national-level ideological narratives over experiential learning. Local officials, had they been featured, might have grounded policy narratives in practical experimentation—a potential trigger for third-order learning that remained unrealised.

Among the state actors analysed, President Obama emerged as the key figure associated with Keynesian interventionism. His promotion of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and frequent televised addresses framed government spending as essential for economic recovery. This agenda positioned him as the symbolic embodiment of a more active fiscal state. The empirical data show that his visibility was central to the pro-stimulus discourse, particularly on MSNBC and CNN in 2009.

President Obama and the White House were among the most frequently represented state actors in 2009 media coverage, particularly in discussions supporting fiscal stimulus. According to the empirical data, MSNBC devoted significant coverage to amplifying Obama's stimulus agenda. Hosts such as Chris Matthews and Ed Schultz routinely opened segments with questions framed around how the White House planned to tackle unemployment or respond to Republican deficit critiques. Obama's televised addresses were generally covered positively, often accompanied by guest pundits who defended the administration's Keynesian rationale.

CNN also gave considerable visibility to the White House in 2009, framing Obama as leading a historic interventionist response. While more balanced than MSNBC, CNN coverage often reinforced the notion that Obama's approach aligned with public expectations for bold economic leadership. However, the tone shifted in 2010. As CNN commentary began to focus more on deficits and debt, the White House appeared less frequently and was often portrayed as navigating a political balancing act.

FOX News maintained a consistently critical stance. In 2009, its commentary positioned Obama as the architect of an overreaching fiscal agenda, often invoking terms like "socialism" and "reckless spending." By 2010, FOX's emphasis shifted toward linking the White House to long-term debt and fiscal mismanagement, with an increasing focus on anti-government sentiments and Tea Party narratives.

The evolving representation of Obama and the White House across cable networks aligns with Hall's distinction between second and third-order change. In 2009, the prominence of the White House in MSNBC and CNN coverage reflected a moment of second-order adjustment: fiscal tools (e.g., large-scale stimulus, targeted relief) were recalibrated without challenging the core tenets of the existing paradigm. This was visible in how Obama's policies were framed as emergency responses rather than long-term structural alternatives. Even when Keynesian rhetoric was adopted, it was instrumental and time-bound. According to Hall's framework, second-order change adjusts instruments but leaves overarching policy goals intact—a pattern substantiated by the way networks, especially CNN, presented Obama's agenda as practical rather than ideological.

However, the rapid erosion of White House visibility in 2010 coverage—particularly on CNN and FOX—and the reframing of Obama as fiscally irresponsible or politically constrained signalled a missed opportunity for third-order change. The diminishing emphasis on Obama's fiscal leadership, coupled with the media's increasing alignment with deficit narratives, effectively closed the discursive space required for such a paradigm shift. Instead, the categorisation framework shows how elite actor coverage, including that of the President, was subordinated to frames of austerity and responsibility, reinforcing the neoliberal paradigm's resilience despite early signs of Keynesian resurgence.

This evolution in how Obama and the White House were portrayed—highly visible and central in 2009, increasingly marginalised or reframed by 2010—reflects how actor emphasis across networks helped define the boundaries of legitimate fiscal intervention.

In early 2009, President Obama employed a dual rhetorical strategy, framing fiscal stimulus as both urgent and transformative while also committing to deficit reduction and long-term fiscal discipline. The networks variably emphasised this balancing act. CNN showcased both sides of Obama's messaging, airing his pro-stimulus appeals in February and his subsequent remarks at the fiscal discipline summit later that month. MSNBC largely ignored the deficit-focused framing, instead showcasing Obama's calls for expansive investment and middle-class support, which included a Keynesian-style redistributive element to afford such progressive measures. Conversely, FOX elevated his deficit reduction rhetoric to recast his stimulus policies as contradictory, often using Obama's own words to validate critiques of overreach and "generational theft." These patterns illustrate how television media selectively reframed presidential authority, either legitimising or fragmenting Obama's symbolic role as a Keynesian reformer—shaping persuasion and actor legitimacy through interpretive emphasis. This contradictory messaging was seized upon differently across networks, ultimately diluting the coherence of a Keynesian paradigm shift and restricting policy evolution to second-order instrument recalibration.

Actor category patterns further illustrate shifts in narrative structure and network positioning. These shifts are evident in how different categories of actors—especially societal experts, local government, and non-partisan commentators—were positioned, emphasised, or excluded over time.

In 2009, CNN's fiscal coverage displayed notable pluralism in actor representation. Local government officials accounted for over 11% of CNN's pro-stimulus coverage, far exceeding the 2% observed on FOX and MSNBC. The network also included scholars (7%) and think tanks (4%) as fiscal commentators—categories almost absent from FOX. This distribution suggests that CNN initially framed the fiscal crisis as a multi-stakeholder issue, invoking a range of perspectives consistent with technocratic deliberation. However, this inclusivity receded sharply by 2010. CNN's local government representation dropped to 1%, scholarly contributions halved, and the presence of think tanks diminished. This shift coincided with a broader editorial pivot away from

pluralistic analysis and toward partisan host commentary. This erosion in actor diversity reflects how persuasion, actor legitimacy, and paradigm continuity are shaped not merely by political shifts but by editorial choices that reconfigure the terms of social learning. This shift from diverse, multi-level representation to a narrowed, elite, and host-led discourse curtailed the reflexivity required for third-order change, reinforcing second-order adjustments within the prevailing neoliberal framework.

FOX's trajectory, by contrast, began with a sharply ideological narrative and became progressively more insular. Early 2009 segments occasionally included dissenting Democrats or economists to criticise aspects of the ARRA or stimulus measures. Yet, by late 2009 and especially into 2010, FOX programming abandoned such pluralism, consolidating its narrative around Republican officials, media hosts, and the symbolic figure of the burdened taxpayer. The evolution here was not merely one of position (from anti-stimulus to pro-austerity) but of actor function: FOX hosts shifted from commentators to dominant agenda-setters, frequently recycling a narrow range of ideological talking points through high-frequency repetition and visual cues.

Both CNN and FOX leveraged "fringe" actors—those who defied conventional partisan alignment—not to expand the debate but to validate predetermined narratives. CNN frequently showcased Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger for his pro-stimulus stance, whereas FOX omitted him. FOX, instead, highlighted conservative Democrats like Senator Conrad and Rep. Minnick exclusively when they endorsed fiscal restraint. These voices were deployed not to pluralise discourse but to manufacture ideological legitimacy across party lines. Their repetition created a symbolic bridge between partisanship and policy credibility, even as broader actor diversity remained minimal. These cases illustrate how actor legitimacy can be symbolically constructed through repetition, reinforcing existing paradigms while narrowing the discursive boundaries of persuasion and policy learning. These symbolic inclusions served to cosmetically diversify discourse without enabling deeper questioning of policy goals or assumptions—thereby stabilising a second-order consensus.

MSNBC's pattern was more ideologically consistent, maintaining a pro-stimulus line throughout the period. However, its internal emphasis shifted from elite actors in 2009 (e.g., Obama administration officials and mainstream Democrats) to greater attention in 2010 on progressive voices. This shift is accompanied by growing frustration with perceived Democratic

concessions to austerity and reflects MSNBC's partial repositioning from a supportive echo chamber to a left-critical watchdog.

These evolving patterns underscore the media's role in shaping the cast of legitimate voices. As political stakes intensified, discursive diversity narrowed across all three networks—albeit in distinct ways—reshaping public understanding of economic responsibility and state legitimacy.

While taxation debates sharpened in 2010, spending narratives were central to framing the crisis response from the outset. The way government spending was constructed—as rescue, waste, investment, or overreach—varied significantly across outlets and evolved over time. In early 2009, CNN and MSNBC framed public spending in largely instrumental terms, portraying it as a necessary intervention to stabilise demand and avert systemic collapse. Phrases such as "shovel-ready projects" and "relief for working families" were frequently used, particularly by Democrat-aligned actors and policy intermediaries.

By contrast, FOX News consistently cast spending as excessive and politically motivated. Even during the height of the crisis, FOX commentators questioned the efficacy and legitimacy of stimulus measures, linking them to partisan interests and moral hazard. As 2010 approached, all three networks began to reflect a more critical tone—CNN by spotlighting inefficiencies in implementation and MSNBC by expressing frustration that spending did not go far enough to support vulnerable groups.

By 2010, media hosts had become the dominant narrators of fiscal policy, particularly regarding public spending. On FOX, hosts accounted for 30% of all pro-consolidation commentary and entirely excluded pro-spending views despite broadcasting pro-stimulus clips from Democratic leaders in 2009. CNN's host commentary equalised at 35% for both paradigms, reflecting a shift toward editorial equilibrium rather than analytical consistency. MSNBC hosts pushed an increasingly populist defence of spending, with 49% of their coverage supporting stimulus expansion. These changes were not merely editorial; they marked a structural realignment in how the legitimacy of public spending was constructed, often marginalising economists, local officials, or labour voices in favour of more ideologically resonant personalities. The ascendance of hosts as framing agents demonstrates how the persuasive architecture of fiscal discourse increasingly rested on media actors themselves, narrowing space for deliberative contestation and

limiting the scope of paradigm change. According to Hall's arguments, this marked a regression from instrumental debate (second-order) to reinforcement of established values.

The actor categorisation results show that spending debates served as proxies for deeper ideological positions on the role of government. These narratives—while ostensibly economic—functioned as boundary markers for legitimacy, signalling whether expansive fiscal action was framed as prudent, reckless, or insufficient.

Taxation narratives, too, evolved sharply, especially as deficits came to dominate fiscal discourse. While spending debates dominated in 2009, taxation gained salience in 2010 as concerns about deficit reduction and debt sustainability came to the fore. Yet, how taxation was framed and by whom varied considerably across the networks, reflecting deeper ideological commitments and the visibility of strategic actors.

FOX News consistently framed taxation through the lens of burden, inefficiency, and moral grievance. Across both years, taxation was linked to rhetorical invocations of "hardworking taxpayers," "government overreach," and "punishing success." Republican governors and congressional actors—often featured prominently—voiced strong opposition to progressive taxation and redistribution. These were bolstered by media hosts who invoked the "generational theft" narrative and cast higher taxes as anti-American or fiscally irresponsible. Notably, taxation was rarely discussed as a corrective measure to address income inequality or public investment needs; instead, it was viewed as a moral affront to economic autonomy.

CNN offered a more mixed representation. In 2009, several actors—particularly Democrat congressional members and academic commentators—framed progressive taxation as necessary to finance stimulus spending and correct structural inequality. However, this narrative weakened in 2010, as coverage increasingly focused on deficit concerns and bipartisan appeals to fiscal prudence. The visibility of tax justice arguments diminished, and CNN hosts and centrist Democrats began to emphasise middle-class tax burdens and fears of long-term debt accumulation. The framing thus shifted from structural critique to short-term pragmatism, diluting the earlier narrative of redistribution.

MSNBC remained the most consistently favourable to tax-the-rich discourse. Its hosts and progressive Democrat guests frequently articulated taxation as a mechanism of social responsibility and economic justice. In segments from early 2010, unemployment benefits and

spending were explicitly tied to calls for higher taxes on top earners and corporations. However, even here, the taxation debate was reactive—responding to Republican criticisms rather than setting the terms of the debate. Labour voices and tax justice advocates were often invoked symbolically rather than given direct representation, underscoring the limits of progressive visibility even within sympathetic media ecosystems.

These taxation narratives, filtered through actor categories and editorial alignment, illustrate how each network curated fiscal legitimacy. The discursive marginalisation of redistribution, especially in mainstream coverage, reflects how taxation remained tethered to ideological defaults, precluding deeper contestation of fiscal authority and responsibility.

Throughout the stimulus and taxation debates, two conspicuously absent actor groups were labour unions and corporate representatives. Across all cable networks, labour unions presented no fiscal positions, and corporate actors constituted only 1–3% of all positions. This absence is striking, given the economic stakes for both constituencies. Labour's exclusion, in particular, diminished any substantive challenge to the framing of austerity from the perspective of working-class vulnerability. The absence of key societal actors reveals how discursive legitimacy is not only granted but also withheld, narrowing the policy discourse and foreclosing transformative debate through omission.

As state actors responded to perceived public sentiment, that sentiment was already refracted through media narratives dominated by partisan hosts and selective visibility of actors. The thesis captures this recursive loop through its conceptual framework and empirical results, which include changes in actor prominence, partisan balance, and media-host dominance over time. These shifts reflect a mediated process of agenda-setting that privileges continuity over transformation. In this regard, the categorisation framework developed grounds for abstract theories of policy paradigms and social learning in observable media practices. By linking actor visibility and issue framing to policy discourse trajectories, the thesis clarifies how cable news facilitated the re-entrenchment of neoliberalism in the wake of the 2009 crisis.

In sum, the actor categorisation framework provides the empirical architecture for tracing how television media shaped fiscal policy discourse, mediated between state and society, and contributed to the reassertion of dominant paradigms. The recursive feedback loops it reveals through the conceptual framework, between media framing, elite adaptation, and symbolic

representation of "the public," underscores the central argument of this subchapter: that social learning in times of crisis is not an empirical or academic exercise, but rather a politically and institutionally mediated process in which television media plays a critical role.

The observed discursive trends across the networks closely align with the fiscal categorisation framework developed in Chapter 5. In 2009, the predominance of pro-stimulus discourse, particularly in CNN and MSNBC coverage, represents a second-order policy change, with temporary adjustments to fiscal instruments without challenging the dominant neoliberal paradigm. The use of terms such as "economic rescue," "relief for working families," and "shovel-ready projects" reflects a pragmatic adjustment in policy framing rather than an ideological transformation. By 2010, the television coverage spotlight on deficit reduction and consolidation, especially on FOX, resulted in a critical challenge to the popularity of Keynesian policy alternatives and signalled a return to the neoliberal orthodoxy.

These patterns reflect the conceptual framework's feedback loops between society, media, and the state. Media narratives shaped perceived societal anxieties—such as deficit panic and anti-tax sentiment—and, in turn, amplified these fears, creating a closed loop that constrained social learning and narrowed policy imagination. The interaction between actor visibility, framing, and policy preference is central to understanding how persuasion unfolds in televised crisis discourse.

The following section examines how different actor types employed rhetorical strategies and contributed to the construction of economic legitimacy through media performance. The interplay and dynamic feedback loop between actors from the state, society, and media, as developed in the conceptual framework, reveals a complex web of interdependence rather than a simple hierarchy of influence. My empirical results demonstrate that certain paradigms were elevated due to their resonance within this triadic system of legitimacy.

In 2009, scholarly voices made up a modest but visible portion of pro-stimulus commentary—7% on CNN and 5% on MSNBC. These actors framed fiscal policy in empirical and historical terms, often invoking lessons from the Great Depression or counter-cyclical theory. Yet in 2010, scholarly input dropped precipitously across all networks. On FOX, it disappeared entirely. On CNN and MSNBC, scholars accounted for fewer than 3% of total fiscal commentary. Their disappearance coincided with the media's growing emphasis on political contestation and deficit anxiety. As expertise waned, ideological simplification took its place. The diminishing

visibility of scholars as policy intermediaries signals a shift in the architecture of persuasion—from expert framing toward affective and partisan reinforcement, undercutting the potential for paradigm learning. Hall's third-order change requires a shift in the epistemic authority of policy discourse; the exclusion of scholars curtailed that possibility, leaving policy values largely unchallenged.

Policymakers, attuned to the evolving media landscape, recalibrated their rhetorical and policy priorities in response to shifting media narratives. President Obama's pivot to deficit reduction by early 2010, despite earlier commitments to stimulus spending, reflects this mediated policy learning. The conceptual framework models this feedback loop as one in which state actors respond not directly to societal demands but to media-framed perceptions of those demands. These mediated perceptions then feed back into elite discourse, narrowing the field of plausible policy alternatives and bolstering the status quo. Hence, even as the crisis initially opened space for Keynesian discourse, the absence of a sustained third-order shift—as per Hall's framework—can be partially explained by this self-reinforcing dynamic between perceived public sentiment, elite responsiveness, and media curation.

Importantly, this thesis extends existing theories by empirically demonstrating how the categorisation of actor types, fiscal preferences, and discursive shifts can make visible the underlying mechanics of this feedback loop. The actor categorisation framework operationalises Hall and Blyth's abstract claims about social learning by tracing how the visibility, legitimacy, and alignment of different actor categories shift across media platforms and over time.

For example, the reduced visibility of local government actors and the increased prominence of partisan media hosts in 2010 signal a consolidation of ideological framing authority. Similarly, the empirical drop in tax justice discourse and the silencing of redistributionist arguments are not random but structured by the media's iterative reinforcement of a fiscal narrative palatable to elite, corporate, and conservative interests.

The contribution of this thesis lies in rendering these feedback loops empirically legible through an original, reproducible categorisation methodology. By quantifying the representation, alignment, and rhetorical strategies of fifteen distinct actor categories, this study offers a new lens for analysing policy discourse as a dynamic interplay of persuasion, framing, and structural

constraint. In doing so, it clarifies why moments of apparent ideological rupture—such as the Keynesian resurgence of 2009—so often regress into paradigmatic restoration.

The capacity of television media to forge coherence between elite agendas and symbolic constructions of "the public" reveals a powerful mediating function—one that is central to the perpetuation or disruption of economic orthodoxy. By theorising and evidencing this function through a novel empirical framework, this thesis makes a substantive contribution to the study of policy paradigms, media power, and the conditions under which genuine transformation may—or may not—occur.

These framing dynamics are best understood through the feedback loops outlined in the conceptual framework. Television media did not merely reflect elite positions or societal concerns; it actively mediated between the two, creating iterative discursive cycles that perpetuated these concerns. Anti-tax sentiment and deficit anxiety, for instance, were both products of political rhetoric and media framing but also served as input from perceived public sentiment. As media hosts amplified these concerns, policymakers began responding to the discursive environment rather than independent economic data. The state's recalibration of policy preferences in 2010—shifting from stimulus to deficit reduction—demonstrates this loop in action: media framed "the public" mood, elites reacted to that framing, and further coverage solidified the new consensus. In this sense, media coverage became a critical vector for social learning—but one that often reinforced ideological continuity rather than disruption.

By focusing on third-order change, this thesis aims to explore the profound and disruptive nature of these transitions and their implications for theory and policymaking. Moreover, how TV media plays a critical role in shaping how paradigms change by serving as a conduit for policy authority and actors in the state and society. TV media companies help shape the discourse around policy alternatives, strengthening or weakening the credibility of policy actors and act as a platform for public debate. TV is the primary form of media for transmitting policy ideas to the public and providing a platform for political leaders, business leaders, economists, academics, and civil society actors to communicate their ideas. By framing issues and policy narratives, presenting expert opinions, and providing political leaders with a direct line of communication with the masses, TV coverage moulds how policy changes are perceived, adopted, and legitimised.

Through this, TV media can either accelerate or slow the process of paradigm shifts, playing a pivotal role in policy authority.

The role of TV media in paradigm shifts and its relationship to authority is four-fold: TV serves as a platform for policy authority, a broker of authority during crises, a platform for debate, and a key player in mobilising public support.

TV is a platform for policy authority, as illustrated in the conceptual framework presented in the methodology, see Figure 1. Political leaders make TV appearances to argue policy positions. TV serves as an authoritative source of information for the public. For example, Obama made frequent TV appearances to promote his budget agenda in the hopes of garnering more public support. TV serves as a broker of authority during crises. The way the crisis was framed on TV affected public perceptions of the legitimacy of government action, and during the 2009 crisis, the economic stimulus packages were subject to intense scrutiny. TV serves as a platform for debate, amplifying or hindering policy ideas. During the crisis, TV debates helped popularise Keynesian ideas, such as government intervention in the economy. Media framing plays a key role in mobilising public support for specific policies. For instance, the acceptance of austerity or Keynesian ideologies was shaped by TV discussions. It can also amplify social movements, such as Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party, which advocate for specific policy ideas.

One of the more subtle but powerful discursive mechanisms observed in the coverage was the symbolic construction of "the public." Although rarely granted voice as an autonomous actor, "the public" was constantly invoked—especially by state representatives and media hosts—as a referent in debates over taxation, debt, and spending. This aligns with the conceptual framework's understanding of how society exerts indirect pressure on the policy process via mediated discourse. Phrases like "what the American people want," "taxpayer outrage," or "burdening future generations" served not only to legitimise particular positions but also to marginalise oppositional views, which were framed as elitist or detached. In Hall's terms, these symbolic deployments reinforce existing paradigms by appearing to embody common sense, thereby stalling deeper levels of ideational contestation.

An analysis of US cable news coverage during the 2009 financial crisis reveals that "the public" was less a speaking subject than a rhetorical construct—invoked by various actors to validate or critique economic policies. Across ideological lines, the public was framed not through

direct engagement but via elite actors who claimed to speak on its behalf. This pattern underscores the representational power of media discourse, particularly in moments of economic uncertainty, where the legitimacy of state action is contested and redefined.

On right-leaning networks such as Fox News, the dominant construction of the public was that of the taxpayer—a responsible, self-reliant citizen unfairly burdened by state intervention. For example, during a segment of *The Sean Hannity Show* (February 12, 2009), Hannity argued:

"The American taxpayer is footing the bill for a stimulus plan that rewards failure and punishes responsibility." This formulation positions "the public" as inherently opposed to deficit spending, casting fiscal conservatism as a moral obligation. Republican-aligned actors—such as Congressional Republicans, Republican Governors, and Republican Strategists—frequently reinforced this frame. On *Fox & Friends*, Governor Bobby Jindal stated: "We shouldn't saddle our children and grandchildren with debt just to grow government today. The American people know that spending isn't stimulus."

These statements draw on the taxation dimension of the framework, constructing "the public" as contributors to state revenue who are entitled to fiscal restraint. Notably, while the language centres "the public," it excludes those who might benefit from stimulus spending, rendering them invisible or morally suspect.

By contrast, on liberal and centrist networks such as MSNBC, "the public" was more frequently represented as economically vulnerable. Media hosts and Democratic actors articulated a narrative in which the public was seen as requiring state intervention to survive the crisis. On *The Rachel Maddow Show* (March 3, 2009), for instance, Maddow remarked: "Real people are losing their jobs and their homes—not just numbers on a spreadsheet. The public needs a government that acts."

President Obama's speeches were routinely broadcast to reinforce this framing. In one nationally televised address, he asserted: "The American people are looking to us to act—not out of ideology, but out of the urgency of their lives." Here, the public is constructed as a moral community harmed by market dysfunction and deserving of government support. This aligns with the Keynesian paradigm and with actors in the spending-oriented segment of the framework, including labour unions, Think Tanks, and Democratic governors.

Across both ideological settings, however, direct representation of ordinary individuals was rare. When members of the public appeared, they were carefully curated—small business owners on Fox criticising regulation or laid-off workers on MSNBC underscoring economic hardship. These individuals served as narrative illustrations rather than complex agents, reinforcing the dominant ideological script rather than complicating it.

Ultimately, cable news functioned as an arena of symbolic contestation, where "the public" was constructed to serve divergent paradigmatic ends. The findings demonstrate that the public's role in televised crisis discourse was not one of spontaneous expression but rather one of mediated invocation—one that materially shaped how economic ideas gained or lost legitimacy during the critical moments of 2009.

This section outlines the progression of policy narratives in the first year following the passage of the stimulus. As the categorisation framework demonstrates, these evolving narratives were products of recursive feedback between state actors, media framing, and public sentiment. Television networks selectively elevated some narratives while marginalising others, resulting in a feedback loop where public concern over debt reinforced media emphasis on austerity, shaping political messaging.

In 2009, FOX presented coverage that was highly critical of Obama's fiscal agenda. Many of FOX's hosts and pundits equivocated the ARRA stimulus package and increased government spending to "socialism" and "theft" from younger generations. The narrative from FOX and the political leadership invited into the debate lambasted Obama's fiscal agenda supporting government overreach. It argued on TV that an overreliance on government was against US patriotism and the founding fathers' wishes. The dominant narratives centred on higher taxes and an unprecedented debt burden amid soaring deficits. The framing of the stimulus effort centred on wasteful spending and the long-term consequences of the stimulus.

MSNBC's 2009 coverage mostly supported President Obama's economic policies, emphasising that large-scale government intervention was necessary to address the deep recession caused by the financial crisis. The ARRA stimulus package helped prevent a depression and stabilise the economy. MSNBC portrayed the stimulus as an investment in America's future, focused on job creation and stabilising the financial system and economy. Hosts and pundits

frequently highlighted the positive aspects of the recovery plan, including investments in much-needed infrastructure, renewable energy, and healthcare.

As anticipated, CNN, the more centrist-leaning network, presented commentary that was more even-toned in 2009. It simultaneously acknowledged the direness of the economic situation and the historic mandate of the voters supporting Obama's big-government vision while also presenting scepticism over the long-term consequences. CNN offered a more nuanced framing of the big government approach, covering both the support for Obama's fiscal agenda and raising questions about the substantial size and effectiveness of the stimulus.

In 2010, the effects of the ARRA stimulus package became more evident as the economy began to stabilise. However, with high unemployment and greater deficits, the long-term consequences of the stimulus became the subject of intense political debate. The political landscape had shifted as the Tea Party movement pressured political leaders to be more austere. Even when Keynesian tools were temporarily adopted in 2009, they were rarely articulated as part of a long-term ideological alternative. This asymmetry of articulation—where neoliberalism operates as an unquestioned default, and Keynesianism must justify its legitimacy—reflects a fundamental bias in the media landscape.

The power of persuasion in televised policy discourse lies in the content of arguments, the selection of actors, and the use of framing. The overwhelming visibility of Republican voices, particularly in FOX and CNN coverage, and the prominence of partisan media hosts suggest that the authority to define economic "common sense" was unevenly distributed. The categorisation framework captures this asymmetry: elite state actors and ideologically aligned media figures dominated representations of both stimulus and consolidation, while societal actors advocating redistributive or progressive alternatives were marginalised. This reflects Hall's assertion that paradigm reinforcement often depends on who is authorised to speak within the policy arena. In this context, persuasion becomes a question of mediated legitimacy.

By 2010, FOX's commentary was more pointed than it had been a year before. Fox News host and pundit commentary primarily emphasised that the stimulus had failed to deliver promising results. Fox argued that the economic recovery was slowing after the initial spending, and they pointed to the unprecedented national debt as a sign of fiscal mismanagement. FOX began to increase calls for cutting government spending, and the network started to align closer with

growing support for the Tea Party movement, which was organised in response to what it viewed as excessive government intervention.

MSNBC's 2010 coverage was highly sympathetic to Obama and the White House's political position. Unlike on competing networks, the hosts and pundits argued in favour of further stimulus funding to accelerate recovery efforts. Particularly spending targeted at unemployment. For instance, host Chris Matthews's show 'Hardball' on February 1, 2010, begins with the headline, "How does the White House plan to use the budget to get the unemployment rate down from 10 per cent? Is it fair for Republicans to blame President Obama for trillion-dollar deficits when he inherited trillion-dollar deficits?" The network continued to support significant government intervention but increasingly questioned why there was not more emphasis on job creation and targeted relief for working-class families. It also emphasised the 2010 midterms, noting that the Republicans' anti-stimulus stance could stall further progress.

However, when discussing the midterms, unlike its competitors, MSNBC was highly critical of the Republican agenda and policy narratives. On March 4, 2010, MSNBC host Ed Schultz sarcastically exclaimed to his guest pundits, "Michael Steele and the RNC, well, they have made another major embarrassing goof, putting together a 2010 game plan where they encourage fear-mongering and insult their own donor base. "Politico" got a copy of a presentation." Schultz begins reading the pages, "From page 30, Republicans admit that if they had power, they would sell influence in the White House, House and Senate. But since they do not, they are selling the idea that donors can, quote, "save the country from trending toward socialism." From page 31, the Tea Party's favourite sign, President Obama as the Joker, plus pictures of Nancy Pelosi as Cruella Deville. I have a hard time reading. I cannot believe they actually think this is a strategy."

CNN's 2010 coverage reflected a growing concern about the national debt and deficits, but commentary also supported ongoing stimulus efforts. CNN illuminated the political tension between Democrats advocating for continued stimulus and Republicans calling for austerity. The network framed the economic recovery as a delicate balancing act, highlighting the impact of the 2010 midterms, during which fiscal conservatism was gaining momentum. Moreover, CNN greatly magnified the growing pressure of the Tea Party movement and further legitimised its political power.

At the beginning of February, CNN launched a special spotlight, "Welcome to the Tea Party," a specialised program focusing solely on the Tea Party movement and its advocates. On February 4 2009, CNN's morning headline reads, "The Tea Party movement can change Washington politics." CNN Host Christine Romans announces, "Welcome to the Tea Party. CNN is putting the spotlight on the growing political movement that has Democrats and Republicans in its crosshairs...our Jim Acosta digs deeper on a tea party showdown in the race for Florida's Senate seat." This senate race became a highly publicised showdown between newcomer and Tea Party advocate Marco Rubio and traditional Republican Florida Governor Charlie Crist.

During this program, CNN host Jim Acosta states, "For Republican Florida Governor Charlie Crist, it's the hug that just won't let go. His embrace of the President and of the stimulus program at this town hall meeting last year could cost this once-rising GOP star a shot at a US Senate seat." Acosta then transitions, "Rubio takes his message of smaller government and lower taxes to Tea Party rallies...and his YouTube page features Tea Party activists venting their anger at Washington. Polls show Rubio has closed a 30-point gap and may just win the party primary...Crist, by contrast, is no Tea Party animal... For groups like the Tea Party Express, there's no contest." The video programming then cuts to Joe Wierzbicki, an advocate for the Tea Party Express, stating, "Republicans embracing massive taxing and spending policies? No. That's not what the Republican Party is supposed to be about, and that's what Charlie Crist did."

Despite initial conditions that might have permitted a paradigmatic reorientation, signalled by Obama's electoral mandate and broad stimulus support in 2009, was undercut by media-led legitimization of austerity and the Tea Party movement, actor asymmetries, and narrowing discursive windows. As Hall and Blyth argue, crises may open space for change only when new paradigms are meaningfully articulated, institutionalised, and legitimised.

While cable networks initially provided discursive space for Keynesian instruments—particularly through the visibility of Obama, local officials, and policy experts—this pluralism was rapidly eclipsed by a shift in narrative control to partisan hosts, deficit-focused actors, and symbolic appeals to taxpayer restraint. The empirical pattern aligns with Hall's model of second-order change: policy instruments and justifications shifted temporarily, but the overarching goals and assumptions of the dominant paradigm remained intact. This consolidation was a mediated

process in which television networks constructed actor legitimacy, reinforced particular framings, and ultimately constrained the conditions for third-order transformation.

This subchapter has demonstrated how television media shaped fiscal discourse during the 2009–2010 period by selectively amplifying specific paradigmatic logics and suppressing others. Through empirical analysis guided by the conceptual and categorisation frameworks, it has traced how issue framing, actor visibility, symbolic representations, and feedback loops reinforced second-order recalibrations while constraining the space for third-order transformation. Television outlets did not merely reflect political preferences but actively curated the boundaries of fiscal legitimacy. In doing so, they contributed to a broader process of social learning—one that ultimately stabilised rather than disrupted the neoliberal paradigm in the wake of the crisis. The following section examines how the conservative resurgence, amplified by television news, influenced the fiscal narrative in 2010 and contributed to the consolidation of austerity-focused discourse across the political spectrum.

7.3 Television, the Tea Party, and the Conservative Resurgence

In the wake of the 2009 economic crisis, there has been a minimal investigation into the role that media had in shaping fiscal policy debate and public attitudes about specific fiscal policies, which has been highlighted by scholars such as Mercille (2013). Perplexingly absent is a case study of the US whereby we see a temporary shift of paradigms, as Blyth would argue. The US presents a unique case study in two ways. Firstly, it is the first analysis of the US media in the subject area. Secondly, unlike the European case studies, the United States adopted a much different approach to the crisis by implementing an unprecedented Keynesian stimulus, which included massive amounts of fiscal expansionary spending to counteract the effects of the crisis.

The inattention in the literature regarding how policies were presented to the public is “paradoxical”, as Mercille would argue, given the magnitude of the crisis and “the impact of the media on popular perceptions and in shaping public debates about economic policy.” This thesis attempts to address the gap in literature by presenting a first-of-its-kind look into the US as a case study and television as a medium rather than print. We have adopted a unique methodology that goes beyond its predecessors by looking at the different types of elevated actors to make arguments in the media and the frequency to which specific policies are elevated. The existing case studies

are limited by the style of the medium and editorials, which a single editor and voice produce to analyse. Our framework considers all voices on a television program, including pre-recorded clips introduced during commentary segments.

Our thesis applies a unique categorisation framework to conceptualise the crisis coverage regarding social learning and the learning process. We adopt the framework set forth by Hall, which was subsequently expanded on in a post-crisis context by Blyth. Blyth's furtherance of Hall's work by identifying the paradoxical tensions of social learning is paramount to the context of our findings.

Our thesis argues that TV media in the US during the peak months of the fiscal debate in 2009 and 2010 amplified the conservative narrative and provided a platform for Tea Party ideologies to become legitimized amongst the public and political leadership. Our results indicate that in addition to the skewed elevation of conservative figureheads and narratives was the absence of attention to President Obama and the White House. It is plausible and conceivable that the spotlight of TV media would focus more on Obama, his administration, and congressional Democrats, given the profound political moment and triumph of taking the power of all three main pillars of government. However, I find the discourse to fixate more on conservative figureheads.

Blyth argues that by Bayesian logic, a new paradigm should have emerged following the 2009 crisis, given its critical failure. Blyth argues that authority is the lynchpin separates the two logics, and ultimately tips the scale toward constructivist theorists. Our thesis expands on Blyth's notion of policy authority by applying it to the television industry and its role in the policymaking process.

The role of media hosts has evolved rapidly, and become more influential, since the early 2000s when cable TV became the primary source of political information for US voters. As seen in Figure 5, from 2009 to 2010 the host delivered more commentary in all cable companies in 2010 than the year before. Foremost has been the transition from hard news reporting to more commentary and opinion-structured content; stemming from neoliberal policymaking to more audience engagement and favourable ratings. Hard news reporting is not controversial or emotive; the more emotive and partisan the content, the more engaged the audience.

In 2009, out of the 364 total viewpoints promoted on its shows 32% were done directly by the hosts and MSNBC paid pundits, see Figure 5. Similarly, FOX News content was heavily

dependent on the viewpoints of its hosts, representing 27% of 774 total viewpoints. CNN was an outlier across all actor types, relying more on hard news reporting of Obama and the White House. CNN's hosts promoted only 12% of its total 1687 viewpoints. However, viewpoints promoted by Obama and the White House resulted in 28% of the total viewpoints in contrast to 12% on MSNBC and FOX.

Interestingly, by 2010, CNN's hosts' delivery of policy commentary jumped substantially, encompassing 34% of total coverage. MSNBC hosts viewpoints that also represent 37% of all arguments presented. FOX's emphasis on its hosts delivering content directly dropped slightly to 25%, as it involved more Republican governor viewpoints in 2010, from 4% in 2009 to 13% overall.

One of the most noteworthy findings from our results is the degree to which political actor types were covered. For instance, how often were Obama and the representatives of the White House covered? FOX and MSNBC had minimal coverage of the President and the White House. On MSNBC, it constituted 12% of coverage and dropped to 9% in 2010. Obama and the White House also comprised 12% of overall coverage, which fell to only 5% in 2010. On the other end of the spectrum, CNN presented a much higher proportion of viewpoints made by Obama and the White House, representing 28% throughout 2009 and 20% in 2010.

A critical finding of our thesis aligns with findings in case studies involving Britain and Ireland, which indicate that the conservative narrative of the crisis ultimately dominated printed commentary. Regarding the partisan discourse involving congressional leaders, governors, and local politicians, I find Republican viewpoints far outweighed Democrats even on more left-slanted news outlets such as CNN and MSNBC, as seen in Figure 4. FOX, unsurprisingly, was most skewed toward Republican arguments, making up 79% in 2009 and 76% in 2010. CNN also, and surprisingly, was highly skewed toward Republican leader arguments in the policy debate, as 65% of total partisan arguments in 2009 and 69% in 2010 were Republican. Astonishingly, MSNBC, the most left-slanted outlet of the bunch, presented 60% Republican viewpoints in 2009 but that number fell to 40% in 2010.

Additionally, this extends across all broadcast company coverage, as seen in Figure 6. The average between the broadcast companies was 75% of viewpoints skewed toward Republican leaders. The lowest among the three was ABC, as Republican viewpoints constituted 60% of total

partisan viewpoints in 2009 and 59% in 2010. The most Republican-skewed was NBC, with 82% in 2009 and 67% in 2010. CBS was also highly skewed toward Republican viewpoints, as leaders' viewpoints represented 82% of total partisan viewpoints.

At the onset, this thesis contrasts the Britain and Ireland case studies whereby both authors find a skew towards the conservative narrative in media's coverage of the crisis, which they argue helped perpetuate neoliberal ideologies to remain the top policymaking priority. Our research poses the question: How did each party explain the 2009 crisis, and how did TV companies present each party's narrative? Will the conservative narrative of the crisis dominate, as was the case in Ireland and Britain's case studies?

The skew toward Republican arguments in TV coverage is evident across both cable and broadcast coverage, which partially explains the rapid trajectory of the conservative narrative, but what other factors led to the conservative narrative outweighing the narratives proposed by the Democrats who were holding all branches of power? Ultimately, this question is what Hall and Blyth argue: the stem of policy authority and the relationship between state and society.

One element of the partisan debate that had an enormous impact on further substantiating the conservative narrative in the media spotlight and in the public's perception of the crisis was the emergence of the Tea Party movement. The emergence of the Tea Party became a highly funded political apparatus to challenge conservative political leaders around the country to be more fiscally conservative than they were posturing and threatening to challenge those that they view as problematic to its small government principles. The group quickly elicited high-profile financiers and spokespeople, which is demonstrated in the lack of media attention in our 2009 dataset and the emergence in our 2010 dataset.

Tea Party representatives were categorised under think tanks. In 2009, I found a single mention of the movement on FOX News, but in 2010, they were prevalent on every TV news outlet, including the most left-slanted MSNBC. For instance, on CNN, I observe a 7% uptick in representation from think tanks, which are almost entirely Tea Party advocates and representatives. On FOX, an 8% uptick occurs in think tank representation in the policy debate driven by Tea Party spokespeople. On MSNBC, there was a 5% rise in the overall representation of think tanks due to the Tea Party.

One Tea Party advocacy group, the ‘Tea Party Express’, expresses its mission statement on its website: "Propelled by millions of Tea Party supporters across the country, Tea Party Express has become the most aggressive and influential national Tea Party group in the political arena. We are committed to identifying and supporting conservative candidates and causes that will champion Tea Party values and return our country to the Constitutional principles that have made America the “shining city on a hill.” Tea Party Express is proud to stand for six simple principles: 1) No more bailouts; 2) Reduce the size and intrusiveness of government; 3) Stop raising our taxes; 4) Repeal Obamacare; 5) Cease out-of-control spending 6) Bring back American prosperity” Furthermore, the Tea Party Express also includes an about us page on their website, which establishes their origins from the famous Rick Santelli rant, which was explored by scholars Williams et al.

The Tea Party Express's about us page declares, “The Tea Party Express came into existence as the tea party movement was awakened by the famous Rick Santelli rant that swept across the country in February 2009. The political establishment could not ignore this power as the grassroots movement exploded onto the scene. Now, after nine national bus tours and several regional tours that hosted over 500 rallies, the Tea Party Express has become nationally recognised for making a difference in critical elections.

Blyth argues that, critical to his argument, constructivist logic won over Bayesian in Hall’s dilemma. By Blyth’s own account, he argues, “we were all Keynesians for 12 months” following the crisis, but the fact that neoliberalism ultimately prevailed is why he suggests there was no paradigm shift. This element is central to Blyth’s argument that the 2009 crisis is a further example of how Constructivist logic must trump Bayesian logic in Hall’s social learning model. Our results are interesting in this regard, as we see the gradual perpetuation of neoliberal arguments from 2009 to 2010. The debate that began in early 2009 fixated almost entirely on Keynesian growth models and a mechanism to counteract increasing instability. However, by 2010, the script had flipped almost entirely, and we see the elevation of arguments to pushback on these Keynesian concepts. Arguments that the state was interfering in private markets and recklessly spending became forefront on primetime TV.

One critical difference between the analysis undertaken in this thesis and those existing in the literature is the introduction and rapid surge of the Tea Party movement and its effect on the

evolution of the conservative narrative and perceived policy outcomes in the media. It has been widely acknowledged that media and political leadership amplified the agenda of Tea Party advocates and organisers. This impact is unique to the US experience post-crisis and did not extend to Europe or Britain. Our study explores the movement's effect on policy authority during 2010 and how each company covered the emerging ideological group.

The most notable findings from the total actor coverage analyses are as follows. Firstly, there was a significant increase in policy stances presented by think tanks and political advisory organisations in 2010. The increase was primarily a result of the rapid and meteoric rise in coverage of Tea Party-affiliated ideologies. Tea Party ideologies were expressed directly by the TV hosts and by having Tea Party-associated guests on the shows and covering Tea Party events and demonstrations. Secondly, there is an abundance of fiscal policy stances coming from directly employed media hosts and analysts. Thirdly, there needs to be more commentary allocated to the coverage by experts in the field of federal budgeting, such as academics and economists. The coverage of independent scientists and academics was minimal across all TV news platforms.

Many investigations and analyses have been conducted concerning the Tea Party movement and the pressure it exerted on political races and policy issues, primarily surrounding federal budgeting. However, only some existing studies into the movement's effect on specific policy issues have presented quantifiable aspects of that impact in US TV news coverage surrounding the 2008 economic crisis. Our results provide insights into how each TV media company covered the Tea Party ideologies, the types of actors representing the movement ideologies (i.e. TV hosts vs Tea Party Representatives)

Our February and March 2009 analysis covers the peak of fiscal policy discourse in the United States. President Obama passed the largest fiscal stimulus and government spending bill in the modern economic era. During these two critical months, the Tea Party movement had yet to emerge in the national discourse relative to federal budgeting. Our findings lend additional support to this claim. Coverage of the Tea Party movement in February and March of 2009 was sparse in US TV policy coverage. FOX coverage included the most references to the movement, with eight transcripts (7%) out of 110. CNN included commentary concerning tea party ideals in 5 (3%) of 194 transcripts. None of the 30 MSNBC transcripts analysed referenced the Tea Party movement.

However, the meteoric rise of the Tea Party ideology into mainstream American politics is well evidenced by the findings in our 2010 analysis.

Surprisingly, regarding the number of transcripts out of the total analysed per company that included discussion of the Tea Party, both MSNBC and CNN more consistently provided policy coverage that included mentioning the Tea Party than FOX in the 2010 analysis. Out of 13 MSNBC transcripts analysed, 6 (46%) included discourse on the Tea Party, and of 116 CNN transcripts, 29 (25%) included discourse on the Tea Party, whereas of the 70 FOX transcripts, 17 (24%) mentioned the Tea Party.

Since its inception into American Politics, the Tea Party and associated organisations have remained a major political player. Among the high-status political figures at the time was Alaskan Senator and Vice President candidate Sarah Palin. Two of the three current Republican primary challengers for the 2020 presidential election are Tea Party politicians: former governor and congressman of South Carolina Mark Sanford and former Illinois congressman Joe Walsh. Additionally, a significant portion of important positions in the government are currently filled by those with Tea Party affiliations, notably former Vice President Mike Pence, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and current congressional Republicans such as Texas congressmen Ted Cruz and Ron Paul, South Carolina's senator Tim Scott, and Florida's senator Marco Rubio.

The results of our analysis show that FOX News presented favourable viewpoints on the Tea Party movement through explicit commentary from popular hosts such as Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reilly, and Sean Hannity. On March 19th, 2009, FOX News host Neil Cavuto introduced his segment, stating, "Speaking of the Tea Partiers, normally would not connect the well-acclaimed actor Jon Voight with Tea Partiers, but he is a big supporter of their effort." Furthermore, popular political analysts such as Dick Morris played a critical role in FOX's policy discourse,

Dick Morris was one of the most frequent commentators on FOX during the timeframe of our analysis. Morris is introduced into each television program under various credentials, such as former Democratic President Bill Clinton's Advisor and author of "Fleece" and FOX news analyst. However, the penetration of the tea party extended beyond FOX News and was provided with a platform on CNN, despite minimal representation and underwhelming following compared to where most voters ideologically aligned at the time. Nevertheless, the exposure in the media intensified and changed the policy discourse. Republicans were forced to pledge their allegiance

to small government and embrace Tea Party ideologies or face a coup of resistance from within their party. FOX News was one of the primary facilitators of the movement. Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck consistently reported on the movement with favourable commentary. Moreover, Dick Morris was one of the most frequently used actors in the commentary in both 2009 and 2010.

This subchapter illustrated how the conservative resurgence, embodied by the Tea Party movement and amplified through television media, reoriented the fiscal discourse in 2010 toward austerity and deficit reduction. As the findings revealed, the visibility of Republican actors and the strategic use of media hosts played a decisive role in legitimising this ideological shift, despite the initial Keynesian window opened by the 2008 crisis. This media-led consolidation of conservative narratives raises fundamental questions about how policy authority is constructed and distributed across the mediated political field. Subchapter 7.4 turns to this issue by examining how representational hierarchies in media coverage—particularly the selection, omission, and framing of actor types—help determine who is authorised to speak, whose interests are legitimised, and which paradigms are permitted to gain traction in the public imagination. Drawing on the actor categorisation framework, this next section interrogates the media’s role in curating the boundaries of policy legitimacy and further explores how persuasion operates through selective visibility, ideological alignment, and symbolic appeals.

7.4 Persuasion Techniques

This subchapter explores the strategies employed by TV news companies in delivering content, including the use of diverse hosts and analysts to appeal to specific audience segments. It discusses the shifting programming structures of major cable news networks like CNN, FOX, and MSNBC over time, with MSNBC notably transitioning towards more commentary-heavy content to counter FOX's conservative leanings. This subchapter also explores persuasion techniques utilized by TV news companies, including the hiring of opposition figures or strawman actors to represent opposing viewpoints. It examines the impact of partisan polarization on news coverage and its consequences for public discourse and political understanding. Cross-media employment is another way TV companies can position or strategize to appeal to different voter segments. Celebrity media hosts offer a unique appeal to different voter demographics and typically have

already received lots of public exposure instead of hiring a new host with limited exposure and recognition.

Persuasion techniques were found to differ drastically between the cable companies. One example of a persuasion technique common in both cable and broadcast coverage is utilizing different survey data. On March 1st, 2009, ABC host George Stephanopoulos begins the show by refuting his guest Republican senator Eric Cantor's argument that government spending will redistribute wealth, not stimulate the economy. Stating "But the public seems to be siding with President Obama...61% say they trust President Obama." Following this exchange, a poll appears indicating that only 26% of surveyed voters trust Republicans to handle the economy. Other branding and persuasion tactics include hiring the opposition or competition figureheads or hiring strawman to represent the competing ideological stance of the companies, or presenting fringe actors that have across the aisle appeal or are known to jump party lines with their policy preferences.

The strawman strategy consists of an actor hired to portray the ideological counterbalance to the hosts or the majority of opinion in the room. This individual would represent the ideological voice of the left on FOX, or the ideology of the right on MSNBC. The strawman strategy is constructed for several strategical reasons including to provide the perception of an ideological equilibrium, or fairness, to the political discourse. Usually, the role of a strawman is to make the ideas of the 'opposition' seem unhinged or extreme. For instance, the strawman may provide intentionally bad arguments for the opposition ideology they are meant to be representing or may be hired because the individual is underqualified or ineffective. Moreover, they may be qualified and constantly outnumbered by hosts or analysts during each discourse, or spoken over, or given limited opportunity to refute the policy ideologies being promoted. Furthermore, the strawman actor strategy also takes form in that they push back on certain policy issues, taking policy positions that reasonably align with the majority of the political party they're meant to be representing, but ultimately by the end of the show they either agree with, or appear to be convinced by, or just appear to submit to, the general ideologies or arguments that were meant to prevail by the host or the majority of the panel. Some strawman actors are meant to simply provoke emotional discourse rather than provide substantive arguments. Emotional discourse is proven to engage audiences more effectively than civil discourse.

How news content is delivered on TV has evolved drastically in the last two decades. Each company analysed has formulated unique strategies for structuring their news content, including persuasion tactics and packaging. Employment strategies are gravely important and diverse across TV news platforms. The actors' TV media companies employ range from guest commentators to permanent analysts and hosts with unique qualifications and varying degrees of recognition that appeal to specific target audiences.

TV media requires news delivery strategies, whether through interviews, edited packaged segments of news clips and commentary, live coverage events, or panel commentary. TV companies deliver content at different times of the day and compose the message delivery in vastly different ways. Furthermore, whereas editorial articles are submitted mainly by authors with minimal celebrity status or media exposure, TV media hosts and celebrity personalities are some of the most recognisable faces in the United States. TV media celebrities have millions of social media followers and high-profile friends in both industry and entertainment, and they make more money than some of the most famous athletes in the country. TV media hosts are often more well-known to voters than political leaders and have greater public followings than most political leaders. Moreover, the exposure of cable TV celebrities is much more significant and frequent than that of print authors. As Peter Hall states, political power essentially constitutes the ability to drive the policy discourse of the day, which Blyth argues inherently extends to the reputation and recognition of the policy messengers.

The era of neoliberal policymaking has shifted the policy paradigm of television news in the United States. As deregulation and market-oriented policies rose in the 80s and 90s the policies dictating media ownership, censorship, and advertisement changed. This has had many consequences, one of which is the gradual dominance of the hosts role and prominence in culture. As TV programming censorship has relaxed as the result of neoliberalism, the demand for more commentary-oriented news content has surged. The role of the host has become a position of celebrity. Additionally, these same market forces have forced the state to adapt its traditional methods of power, which has muddled the ability to decipher one from the other, as is the case with television news company's.

In 2012, New York Times Journalist Alessandra Stanley stated on behalf of MSNBC's repositioning, "MSNBC has pumped up its ratings by recasting itself as a left-leaning riposte to

Fox News, and that's fine. Fox long ago proved that many viewers like to hear cable anchors echo what they already think; MSNBC is just playing catch-up...And that leaves fewer choices for viewers who like their election coverage with informed commentary without a twist of bias. They must DIY on the Internet or C-Span or turn to PBS or CNN. And, unfortunately, because CNN's ratings are so low, there is a danger it will disappear or turn to a more marketable model." Since 2009, MSNBC repositioned toward more commentary-heavy content and further left on the ideological spectrum to counter FOX's coverage; MSNBC has surpassed CNN in ratings and viewership figures.

Although cable TV companies are becoming moderately more homogenous in terms of news structuring, the strategies for news content delivery remain highly diverse. CNN, FOX, and MSNBC employ various strategies to deliver news content that serves their financial and political interests. The strategies the individual companies use to target specific voter segments or ideologically aligned viewers and to expand, persuade, and appeal to their existing viewership base. Outstanding ratings and viewership numbers translate to increased revenues and persuasive power. FOX has by far the largest viewership base compared to CNN and MSNBC, equally roughly the size of both competitors combined. FOX has been incredibly successful in maintaining its branding and growing its viewership base.

Beyond strawman actors, there are what I call 'fringe' political actors. Fringe actors often have some bi-partisan appeal. In our analysis, we found a notable example: Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger—a moderate Republican voice but also one of the most well-known celebrities in the world. Schwarzenegger's economic policy stances were constantly mocked on FOX News in the 2009 and 2010 policy debates. However, on the other networks, especially CNN, he is the most promoted republican governor and received abundant favourable coverage. Schwarzenegger had a friendly relationship with President Obama and aligned with the president on several of his fiscal policy proposals.

The partisan divide in trusting specific types of actors such as scientists, transcends to what Blyth argued was the missing lynchpin in Hall's policy learning paradox, policy authority, which stems from recognition. As Blyth points out, policy learning cannot be deduced to a process of cognition, for "politics is not just about who thinks, it is also about recognition: who gets to

(authoritatively) speak”. The success of the policy advocate is limited by the recognition, exposure, and credibility of the actor advocating specific policy solutions.

While Subchapter 7.4 examined how television networks structure and deliver persuasive fiscal narratives, the following subchapter turns to a comparative analysis. Subchapter 7.5 contrasts the U.S. case with existing studies from Britain and Ireland, highlighting key similarities and differences in how media systems and political contexts shaped crisis interpretation and policy discourse.

7.5 Contrast of US Findings to Existing Case Studies

I compare the findings in the United States with the two existing case studies in Britain and Ireland. Pirie finds that attention to the “overdevelopment of the financial sector” was relegated in news coverage in Britain. The conservative party and media focused on promoting the economic issue as a public debt crisis. Pirie finds that in 2010, Prime Minister Cameron emphasised over-dependency on the state, hurting the nation’s private-sector competitiveness. Concern shifted from financial sector regulation and dependency to protecting financial sector competitiveness while minimising social costs from the crisis.

Moreover, Pirie states that the Labour Party was equally accountable for this narrative, for their social democratic imperatives are constantly secondary to their neo-liberal goals (Hall, 2003; Smith, 2009). The Labour Party, Pirie notes, is a “neo-liberal social democratic hybrid,” yet the social imperatives are constantly “subordinated” to neo-liberal factors (Gamble & Kelly, 2001; Hall, 2003). After all, the Labour Party significantly contributed to public-sector marketisation (Leys, 2001; Pollock, 2004; Pirie, 2012).

Concurrently, the Conservative’s approach was “rebalancing” by focusing on further financial deregulation, less welfare spending, and less public investment in non-financial industries (Pirie, 2012). Thus, neither party produced an alternative narrative. Partisans’ unwillingness to take fault in their past policy direction and failure to communicate crisis events led to a dominant crisis narrative of fiscal budgets and sovereign debt, which the media amplified. Pirie argues that in Britain, media coverage overly relied on political leaders’ interpretation of the crisis, further constrained policy alternatives.

In the Irish case study, Mercille finds that editorials disproportionately emphasised neoliberal policy reactions. For example, an article entitled ‘Cut Public Sector...Or Face Meltdown’ maintains that ‘Government support for the public sector will only lead to ruin’ (Sunday Independent, 18 October 2009). Furthermore, Irish print editorials were largely skewed toward conservative talking points overall.

This thesis finds evidence to support a similar skew toward conservative viewpoints, which constrained the public’s attitudes toward different potential policy outcomes and shifts in response to the crisis. However, this study’s political context, media dynamics, and approach differ substantially from the existing literature, which I detailed in the previous subchapters of this discussion. Additionally, the conceptual framework is applied to the empirical chapter, providing a new lens to analyse the role actors in state and civil society have in perpetuating or challenging policy alternatives and narratives.

This study is the first quantitative content analysis of US TV economic policy coverage encompassing the types of actors presenting their viewpoints. The existing research is limited to a few case studies in Britain (Pirie) and Ireland (Mercille). Mercille’s print media analysis identified the authors of editorials and opinion pieces by different industries, but that applied to a single author, whereby journalists comprised over 82% of the articles analysed. Most of the top print media sources analysed in the Irish case study were considered right-leaning. Pirie’s methodology offers more variety as he purposefully chose an ideologically diverse group of print news companies.

A challenge and potential opportunity in my research approach was constructing a framework unique to TV media. Numerous types of actors’ present policy opinions in TV media compared to existing print analyses. Deciphering what the ideological lean or partisan lean in one program can be more complex for several reasons. Firstly, constructing a methodology tailored for television transcript analysis required a calculus for a variety of actor groups involved, and assorted opinions in one segment. Secondly, some TV transcripts are very lengthy and often involve several topics of discussion. Furthermore, it is important to consider the weight given to the host’s commentary, given the host’s relationship with the audience.

The originality of this research offers several significant contributions and unique insights to the existing literature. Foremost, as far as I am aware, this is the first content analysis of

Television transcripts relative to fiscal policy following the 2008 crisis. The mainstream TV news industry in the US is limited to 6 total companies, which made it possible to analyse the entire industry rather than selecting a portion of the industry. Unlike the existing print analyses in the research, an original methodology was constructed to calculate the frequency of specific fiscal policy stances presented by various actor groups. Furthermore, the analysis presented in this paper is the first case study of US fiscal policy decisions and media coverage surrounding the 2008 economic crisis. Contrarily, most of the top Television news sources in the US are considered left-leaning, although the highest-rated and viewed TV company, FOX, is right-leaning.

Moreover, Mercille's methodology is constructed to analyse policy stances in relation to fiscal consolidation. The US provides a unique case study due to the critical differences in policy alternatives and competing narratives that emerged in discourse, as the US, unlike most in the G20, is engaged in the largest fiscal stimulus effort on record.

Also, this thesis extends beyond analysing solely policy or party favouritism in the coverage. The methodology presented in this study makes it possible to capture the different groups of actors that are most frequently presented by each media company and the specific positions favoured by each group. Sometimes, the messengers are as crucial as the message.

One limitation of Mercille's study, and that of other print article analyses into policy issues, is the dependency on the transcriber to accurately interpret the editor's policy stance, which is not always explicit. Each article is categorised as one author's policy stance in a binary manner, without any indication of how frequently the policy stance was reverberated throughout the piece or other policy stances that may have been mentioned but not emphasised as most favourable by the author. The original methodology offered in this paper undertakes a more objective and systematic approach by capturing the frequency of every policy position presented by every actor throughout the discourse. The analysis resulted in thousands of data points, whereby the subjective nature of the transcriber is limited by increasing the margin of error of the transcriber. Furthermore, it is often the case throughout the TV transcript that an individual repeats their policy stance more than once throughout the commentary, which provides greater reassurance as the individual evaluates policy arguments. Capturing the frequency of policy positions is essential in accurately depicting favouritism. All the data collected in this analysis is organised chronologically and is traceable to each policy position recorded in the transcription, whereby others can recreate the

analysis and be traced for any potential errors made by me, the transcriber. The British and Irish studies cannot be replicated similarly to ensure validity. Although this approach is more time-intensive, it undoubtedly provides more robust findings. Also, constructing a non-automated approach enabled the capture of sarcasm and humour that would not be possible with a potential automated data collection.

The first major similarity between my US case study and the existing studies in Ireland and Britain is the focus on the media's interpretation of the crisis and the policy narratives each company aims to amplify. To further understand this relationship and its significance, we also assess the political environment in each country, differences in the media mediums analysed, and emerging policy narratives.

The US research and Pirie's British example share several similarities in approach. Pirie chose the Sun, the Mirror, the Guardian, the Daily Telegraph, and the Financial Times, providing a template that was a variety of medium types. Pirie states that he purposefully chose them to have a balance of varying political skews. The Telegraph and Sun supported the conservative party in 2010. The Mirror and Guardian are both left-slanted top newspapers. Lastly, the Financial Times was selected to represent the economic elite class.

Pirie's primary finding and argument was that The Labour government failed to articulate the origin of the crisis and focused solely on the repercussions. Simultaneously, political leaders on the right argued it was due to leftist incompetence, which the right-wing media then amplified to a greater degree. Pirie explains his findings in the context of social learning, arguing in the introduction that "economic crises create political space to pursue reforms that would face insurmountable opposition in periods of greater stability. What is critical in determining the nature of the space created is not simply the materiality of the crisis but how the crisis comes to be understood by the general population." My thesis also contextualises the findings from a political economy lens and discusses the media's role in the policy learning process.

Pirie presents a critical insight that depicts the stark contrast between how academia in Britain contextualised the crisis compared to media and how the discourse lacked any acknowledgement of academia. Pirie argues, "There is nothing exceptional in the existence of a divergence between dominant media and academic debates. What is striking, however, is the lack of any clear relationship between the two." Pirie argues that the findings support the idea that the

media in Britain adopted a narrative of the crisis that lacked nearly any sense of intellectual support. The results from this thesis and the US case study demonstrate a similar phenomenon. In 2009, academic opinion contributed only 4% of opinion on CNN, 1% of MSNBC's total coverage, and no representation on FOX in 2009. In 2010, academic representation in the media coverage was merely 2% on CNN and 1% on MSNBC and FOX.

Similarly to Pirie's findings in the British post-crisis experience, I find that in the United States, the conservative narrative revolving around public spending dominated the policy discourse within a year of Obama's progressive stimulus push. The US 2010 results indicate a 38% drop in support for fiscal stimulus efforts and a 38% increase in favouritism toward fiscal consolidation programs in contrast to the previous year. In 2009, less than 7% of cable TV coverage concerned spending cuts, yet by 2010, it constituted 41% of coverage. Furthermore, we see a drastic shift in right-wing news coverage. FOX News arguments in opposition to increased spending rose.

By 2010, public attitudes toward public spending and media attention had substantially shifted. In the US, the discourse gradually evolved from the stimulus and unemployment to the debt burden and worries of greater government spending and involvement. The issue of healthcare reform and the involvement of the Tea Party movement are two key differences in how the conservative narrative became a priority over the left.

As we can see in the data, financial reform and other forms of reform, such as increasing the taxation burden on wealthy and business-class individuals, were a significant part of the discourse in February and March 2009. However, the focus on the elite class and any institutional overhauls was minimal by February and March 2010. t

The significant distinction in the US case study was that the crisis was seen more as national than international. This starkly contrasts how the public in Ireland and Britain immediately interpreted the crisis. Obama was entering the White House on high poll numbers, replacing an 8-year-serving Republican president on a campaign promising "change." The US was proposing the largest expansionary spending effort in modern history. The price tag would dwarf all other expansionary packages around the world. Furthermore, the Tea Party movement, which would launch into political jostling and transform the Republican party, was a unique phenomenon to the US and did not occur in Europe or Britain.

The political environment in Britain was unique to the US. The SUN infamously switched sides and began backing the conservatives in September 2009 after supporting the Labour Party for over a decade. In June 2009, the Labour Party lost control of all its remaining English city councils.

Our findings also partially support Pirie's argument that the crisis was relegated to one of fiscal consolidation due to the partisan narratives that emerged at the onset. On the right, the media portrayed the Labour government's "profligacy" crisis despite minimal support for such an argument. On the left, media companies more aligned with the government concentrated on the fiscal consequences without establishing the crisis's root cause. Pirie argues it is the Labour government's failure to identify the cause that ultimately led to

Mercille also finds a heavy skew toward fiscal consolidation, but his approach and arguments significantly differ from Pirie's. Firstly, Mercille does not address the crisis from the standpoint of social learning or try to answer what media's role in persuading the public and political elites of the efficacy of certain policy alternatives. Additionally, Mercille does not choose a balance of print mediums. His approach is more narrowly focused on editorials within the Irish print. The next section of the discussion chapter highlights some of the limitations of the research design, before reaching the thesis conclusion, which links the theoretical background with the research design and questions, and illustrating the significance of the research findings.

7.6 Limitations of Study and Implications for Future Research

The methodology undertaken in this thesis offers many new insights to the research area that we hope inspires other scholars. However, as with all research proposals our methodology presents several limitations and obstacles. Foremost is time consumption. Taking a non-automated approach to data collection and quantitative modelling offered unique insights and robust findings but at the expense of analysing larger sample pools. I manually transcribed each TV transcript, totalling in the hundreds, and categorizing specific policy positions as well as the type of actor presenting the policy opinion. Additionally, it would have been too time consuming to include other forms of media such as print and social media. Hopefully other scholars can use this as inspiration to further investigate these two news mediums in the context of policy authority and social learning.

One other limitation that presented itself was that not all of the TV transcripts are equally robust between companies and even between segments in the same company. Some transcripts were missing partial text and some clearly missing entire segments of the show.

One aspect of our methodology was also determining the sweet spot of differentiating relevant TV segments using the LexisNexis database. Moreover, transcripts for some shows may be extensive, totalling over ten thousand words for instance, whereas another may only have a few sentences to transcribe which makes contextualizing policy positions more difficult.

Future research could also include a scope beyond Britain and the US to further investigate media's role in forming public opinion and the opinions of lawmakers in times of economic uncertainty. Furthermore, it would be interesting to analyse other major economic events and observe any deviations from our findings in 2009-10.

While these limitations inevitably constrained the breadth of the study, they do not detract from its central contributions. Rather, they highlight the methodological and conceptual choices made to prioritise depth over scope, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how televised media shaped fiscal discourse during a critical moment of economic upheaval. With the empirical and theoretical groundwork now established, the concluding subchapter draws together the main findings of this thesis, revisits the central research questions, and reflects on the broader implications for understanding media's role in shaping fiscal paradigms and political authority in times of crisis.

7.7 Thesis Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate how US television media conceptualised the 2008–2010 financial crisis and its policy responses and how the distribution of actor visibility in televised discourse influenced the construction of fiscal legitimacy and policy authority. Using a conceptual framework grounded in Hall's theory of policy paradigms and social learning and extended by Blyth's insights on ideational contestation, the study developed and applied a novel categorisation methodology to analyse how competing economic narratives were framed and filtered by television networks during a moment of profound political and economic uncertainty.

At its core, the research examined how televised discourse produced the potential for paradigmatic transformation, particularly in the aftermath of a crisis that exposed the structural

flaws of neoliberal economic governance. Through a comparative, mixed-methods analysis of cable news coverage across FOX, CNN, and MSNBC, this thesis mapped the ideological contours of televised debate—revealing sharp cleavages in actor representation, fiscal framing, and partisan alignment. In doing so, it demonstrated that media institutions did not passively reflect elite debates but played an active and selective role in curating the boundaries of policy legitimacy. The analysis of actor categories, spending and taxation frames, and symbolic constructions of “the public” made visible how discursive authority was unevenly distributed and how these dynamics contributed to the resilience of the neoliberal paradigm despite initial signs of a Keynesian resurgence.

The role of TV media has evolved. Interestingly, the focus on economic paradigm shifts throughout this study has led to more profound revelations. The television industry is a paradigm whose evolution is closely tied to shifts in politics and the economy. The ideologies that drive television policy reflect economic and political policy changes—for example, decades of neoliberalism have led to substantial deregulation and market-oriented policies, transforming limitations on media ownership, censorship, and advertising. The effect was colossal and is one of the primary contributors to the success of television news. Moreover, it has contributed to the greater reliance on commentary-oriented news to drive viewership engagement.

This thesis aims to understand further how TV media in the US interpreted the financial crisis between 2009 and 2010 and how it may have forged public perception. Additionally, this thesis explores research into the policy learning process and what Mark Blyth calls ‘policy authority’ by analysing media companies’ methods for presenting certain policy narratives and competing for political outcomes. This thesis aims to build on current political economy research and the role of media in policy learning, as well as its impact on both state and society. In recent years, several scholars have made significant contributions to understanding economic events through a generative process involving actors and collective interests in both the state and society. This thesis builds on this foundation to explore the impact of TV media on policy authority.

This thesis offers five significant contributions to the study of political economy, media, and fiscal policy discourse. First, it provides the first comprehensive case study of US television media coverage during the 2009 economic crisis within this field of research. In contrast to existing case studies centred on the UK and Ireland, where fiscal consolidation was swiftly adopted, and

austerity narratives dominated media coverage, the US case followed a markedly different path. Here, the crisis emerged domestically, the initial policy response was expansionary, and the media landscape was both nationally focused and deeply polarised. These characteristics necessitated the development of a more refined and layered methodology capable of capturing the fragmented, ideologically diverse, and actor-rich nature of US broadcast debate.

Second, the study advances methodological innovation by developing a new analytical framework tailored to the analysis of fiscal discourse on television news. This framework stands out in two respects: it is the first actor-based categorisation system designed specifically for broadcast media, and it offers the first real-time empirical tracing of the rise and rapid decline of neo-Keynesian support during the crisis. The empirical findings show a 38% reduction in stimulus-friendly narratives within a year, accompanied by the growing prominence of fiscal consolidation themes. Through actor-level analysis, the framework reveals how groups such as the Tea Party gained influence by being selectively platformed by specific networks to reshape the terms of the policy debate.

Third, the research presents a systematic mapping of actor visibility and argumentation within cable news, enabling a granular understanding of how fiscal policy is constructed and contested in this medium. Unlike print journalism, television comprises multiple competing voices—hosts, pundits, clips, and political figures—each vying for narrative authority. The categorisation framework enables an empirical dissection of which actors are most visible, what policy positions they advocate, and how these patterns diverge by network. This approach sheds new light on the inner workings of television media's persuasive capacity and how network branding intersects with policy discourse.

Fourth, the thesis presents a distinctive argument regarding CNN's specific role in shaping the fiscal conversation and influencing public legitimacy. Positioned as a centrist and ostensibly neutral outlet trusted across party lines, CNN exercised disproportionate influence in constructing the boundaries of credible policy debate. While less explicitly partisan than FOX or MSNBC, CNN's tonal shift in 2010 subtly legitimised conservative fiscal positions by giving greater prominence to moderate Republican perspectives and marginalising more interventionist alternatives. This analysis complicates prevailing understandings of media bias by demonstrating how the performance of neutrality can itself operate as a vehicle for ideological consolidation.

Finally, the study contributes to broader political economy scholarship by reasserting television news as a central actor in the articulation and evolution of policy paradigms. Drawing on Hall's theory of paradigm shifts and Blyth's emphasis on ideational authority and social legitimacy, the thesis conceptualises TV media not merely as a channel of communication but as a structural force in policymaking. The empirical chapters demonstrate how networks act as intermediaries between state and societal actors, shaping the discursive space in which specific ideas gain traction while others are foreclosed. The categorisation framework thus serves not only as a methodological tool but also as a lens through which to understand the media's role in mediating power and delimiting the scope of paradigm change.

Taken together, these contributions address significant empirical and conceptual gaps in existing scholarship while showcasing the value of the thesis's original framework and theoretical orientation. The findings underscore the importance of media analysis in understanding fiscal policy dynamics and offer a foundation for future research into the ideational mechanisms that govern policy transformation. The findings and contributions outlined above not only address the empirical and conceptual gaps in the existing literature but also demonstrate the effectiveness of the thesis's novel methodological framework and theoretical orientation. The findings underscore the importance of media analysis in understanding fiscal policy dynamics and offer a foundation for future research into the ideational mechanisms that govern policy transformation.

The primary research questions posed in this thesis were: 1) How did TV media in the United States conceptualise the crisis, and how does that contrast to countries favouring austerity programs at the onset? Furthermore, 2) What types of actors were most prevalent in the discourse, and how does that relate to policy authority?

The answer to the first question is more explicit. As expected, the onset of the crisis yielded a much more dynamic discussion than the British and Irish studies. However, the overall broader fiscal debate between neo-Keynesian and neo-liberal, fiscal stimulus vs fiscal consolidation, was surprising. The results show a high level of favouritism towards President Obama's fiscal agenda and expansionary efforts at the onset of the crisis, including among Republican leadership. However, similarly to its European counterparts, the US policy debate became rapidly dominated by the conservative narrative concentrating on consolidation programs and reducing public

spending despite the Democrats controlling power in the Senate, House of Representatives, and White House during the heightened periods of fiscal debate.

Comparing data from February and March 2009 to the same months in 2010, the peak of fiscal policy debate, support for fiscal stimulus efforts dropped 38%. Coverage arguing for greater fiscal consolidation efforts constituted 63% of coverage between cable and broadcast by 2010. Empirical findings indicate a moderate skew toward Republican viewpoints, even in more left-leaning coverage, in both cable and broadcast news throughout the 2009 and 2010 debates.

As seen in Figure 4, the political skew of each company was also surprising in that significantly more Republican viewpoints were expressed than Democrat ones, which contributed to the erosion of policy authority held by Democrats at the start of the crisis. Gradually, the magnification of the stimulus package was relegated to neo-liberal narratives promoting fiscal consolidation and warning of the dangers of ballooning deficits. In the beginning, the conservative narrative is best surmised by the late Senator John McCain as “generational theft,” a term which dominated conservative media at the time. However, unlike in the Irish and British case studies, the conservative narrative evolved due to the unprecedented efforts of special interest groups, including the Tea Party, which put political pressure on Republicans in power and redefined what fiscal conservatism meant in the United States. The movement still has repercussions today. The conservative narrative shifted to more emotive language about being a patriot and alluding to the founding fathers, essentially calling into question an individual’s patriotism if they opposed the ideology of the group.

Before answering the second research question, it is essential to recall why Blyth argued authority was so instrumental and the elements Blyth argues define authority. To recap, the paradoxical forces that generate social learning. The Bayesian logic explains paradigm change as a gradual accumulation of empirical anomalies, eventually resulting in paradigm succession. The Constructivist logic explains paradigm change as a “political struggle” that stems from the incommensurability of “truth claims.” Resulting in anomalies and failures being “underdetermined by [the] evidence” (Blyth, 2013a). Authority, Blyth states, is the key to how the two causal logics interact to explain ideational and institutional change, functioning as the “conceptual bridge” between them. Hall argues that media is highly influential regarding “shifts in the locus of authority.”

The creator of the social learning process framework, Thomas Kuhn, emphasises 'persuasion' in examining how one ideological paradigm replaces another. In his 1993 publication, Hall alludes to media as one of the most important elements capable of influencing the social learning process. Blyth focuses on what defines policy authority. To Blyth, authority is derived from 'recognition.'

This study combines the ideas of all three scholars regarding persuasion, media, and authority and applies them to the analysis findings. Competing ideologies and collective interests group and compete through media companies. This has led to differences in trustworthiness attributed to specific actor types due to polarisation. Persuasion and recognition are linked, and one needs recognition to be persuasive. In our analysis, recognition can help explain why we see cleavages in the types of actors each company choose to promote and elevate most in the fiscal policy debate. As seen in Figure 5, CNN was the only media company to present an academic perspective on the crisis, albeit a limited one.

Pirie highlights that one of his most surprising findings in the British case study was the complete lack of connection between academic consensus and media coverage of the crisis. Pirie states, "There is nothing exceptional in the existence of a divergence between dominant media and academic debates. What is striking, however, is the lack of any clear relationship between the two." I find that similarly, in the United States, television coverage regarding the different narratives of the crisis and policy alternatives were utterly absent of "intellectual support" and that the only actor types with recognition during 2009 and 2010 were political elites and media hosts. In 2010, we see a divergence from this domination in the surge of special interest group activity leading up to the midterm election and critical budgetary policy debates, such as healthcare spending.

Labour Union representation was non-existent in both years, which is not entirely surprising given the erosion of labour unions in the United States. However, the finding serves as another example of the differences in the dynamics of the debate in the US compared to Britain and Ireland. In Britain and Ireland, the Labour Union's representation was identified as a voice in the debate. Surprisingly, actors representing the business class were minimal in the debate. The entire policy debate centred on media hosts and political elites, primarily within Congress. This helps explain how the infiltration of special interest groups, such as the Tea Party, has such a

significant impact. The barrier to entry in terms of recognition is high. Those invited to discuss policy on a TV program are often part of other elite establishments.

Recognition also relates to the impact special interest groups had on the policy discourse. The phenomenon of special interest groups is also explored in the empirical chapters. The most transformative of these groups in 2010 were the Tea Party representatives, categorised under think tanks. In 2009, I found a single mention of the movement on FOX News, but by 2010, it was prevalent on every TV news outlet, including the most left-leaning MSNBC. For instance, on CNN, I observe a 7% uptick in representation from think tanks, which are almost entirely Tea Party advocates and representatives. On FOX, an 8% uptick occurs in think tank representation in the policy debate driven by Tea Party spokespeople. On MSNBC, there was a 5% rise in the overall representation of think tanks due to the Tea Party. The attention from all three cable companies legitimised the movement in the eyes of many Americans and conservative voters. It put internal pressure on Republicans to be stricter in fiscal conservatism or risk being challenged in an election by an interest group with wealthy donors.

The content approach undertaken in the methodology provides a means to answer both questions. This study provides empirical evidence. This thesis utilises Peter Hall's policy paradigm framework, which provides a theoretical foundation to investigate the paradigm struggle that the crisis provoked. Additionally, Mark Blyth's application of Halls' framework to the 2009 crisis significantly contributed to Halls' theory, highlighting the importance of authority and recognition in the social learning process.

How media companies have evolved over the era of neo-liberal policymaking and the technological advances that have coincided during that time has led many to argue that media has transitioned from being a facilitator of new ideas to one that inhibits new social and political ideas from emerging and from disrupting the power and distributional relations of elite groups (Bagdekin, 2000; Mercille, 2013, 2014; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Langer & Sagarzazu, 2017). As world-renowned journalist, author, and scholar Ben Bagdekin states regarding media "self-serving" censorship: "Some intervention by owners is direct and blunt. However, most of the screening is subtle, and some do not even occur at a conscious level, such as when subordinates learn by habit to conform to owners' ideas. But subtle or not, the ultimate result is distorted reality and impoverished ideas."

The categorisation framework captures 15 different actor types, two broad policy categories (stimulus vs consolidation), six specific spending policies, and six specific taxation policies. The methodology focuses on the most heightened periods of the fiscal debate, which occurred in February and March in both 2009 and 2010. In total, including all six US TV news companies, 511 TV transcripts were analysed in 2009 and 271 transcripts in 2010, producing thousands of policy arguments to analyse.

The methodology provides a unique insight into how each company addressed policy issues by introducing a frequency-based model and a categorisation framework encompassing all types of actors involved in the debate. This hopes to address several gaps in the literature. First, there needs to be a US case study on how media covered the post-crisis debate in the context of neoliberalism and policy learning. As highlighted earlier in our thesis, television remains the primary source for Americans regarding political news and is considered more trustworthy than social media and the internet.

The only existing similar case studies are limited to print media and the debates that have occurred within Ireland and Britain. By focusing on television, this thesis offers further insights into the types of actors that are magnified in the debate and utilised to bolster perceptions in the state and society about economic events. Lastly, unlike the print media case studies, our analysis contrasts the different types of television news sources, broadcast and cable. The analysis of cable news presents unique contrasts to the European case studies, as the news content is heavily opinionated and features more extreme commentary than in other geographical locations. Our analysis draws on recent research into growing polarisation in news audiences and content creators, as well as how special interest groups and wealthy individuals attempt to infiltrate policy debates to illicit favourable outcomes.

The findings from this thesis's original methodology provide unique insights into how each media company interpreted the crisis, and we question why this is the case. The case studies that partially inspired this research, in Ireland and Britain, indicated a substantial skew toward conservative policy framing, but under vastly different political environments and for different reasons than the US. For example, the crisis in Ireland and Britain was not seen as a national crisis but a global one. However, given that the crisis originated in the United States, it was primarily viewed as a national political issue.

The broader significance of this study lies in its conceptualisation and operationalisation of television media as an active participant in the policymaking process rather than as a passive transmitter of political debate. Drawing on the theoretical foundation established in Chapter 2 and the conceptual design outlined in Chapter 5.1, this thesis develops and applies a three-dimensional framework that captures the dynamic interactions among actor visibility, fiscal paradigm alignment, and issue framing. These dimensions—(1) state versus society actors, (2) Keynesian versus neoliberal preferences, and (3) spending versus taxation framing—serve as analytical tools to systematically identify where, how, and why particular economic ideologies gained or lost discursive legitimacy during a moment of elevated political uncertainty.

The empirical core of the thesis, particularly the findings in subchapters 6.1 through 6.4 and their interpretation in 7.2, reveals that television news coverage during the 2009–2010 fiscal crisis did not merely reflect underlying policy conflicts but played a structuring role in reinforcing neoliberal orthodoxy. Although initial coverage in early 2009 allowed for the temporary mainstreaming of Keynesian narratives—particularly around the Obama administration's stimulus agenda—this discursive space quickly contracted. As Chapter 7.2 demonstrates, key actors such as labour representatives, local officials, and progressive economists were progressively sidelined in favour of Republican elites, conservative governors, and media hosts. In parallel, the White House's visibility sharply declined from 2009 to 2010, undermining its symbolic authority at a moment when contestation over fiscal policy was most intense.

This retreat from Keynesian framing was not ideologically neutral. It coincided with a shift in issue framing from economic rescue and recovery to deficit control and fiscal restraint. The categorisation framework shows how spending policies—initially framed as emergency measures to stabilise the economy—became reframed as reckless overreach, particularly by FOX and, to a lesser extent, CNN. The consolidation of anti-tax sentiment, combined with the moralisation of fiscal responsibility, marked a return to neoliberal assumptions about the appropriate role of the state in economic life. By 2010, these media narratives had contributed to the foreclosure of third-order change, as Hall's framework defines it, and effectively narrowed the conditions under which new policy paradigms could be legitimised.

Chapter 2 laid the theoretical foundation for understanding how paradigms evolve and become contested during periods of crisis. It emphasised the role of television in shaping public

understanding and policy legitimacy by mediating between competing ideologies. Drawing on Hall's work on social learning and paradigm shifts, as well as Blyth's theory of authority and ideational reinforcement, the chapter situates television as a site where policy paradigms are not only debated but also constrained. Subchapter 2.5's emphasis on the persuasive and structural role of television helps explain why Keynesianism, despite momentarily gaining traction, failed to dislodge the underlying assumptions of the neoliberal paradigm.

Chapter 5 then translated this theoretical lens into a methodologically coherent research design. Subchapter 5.1 outlined a conceptual framework that embedded Hall's orders of change within a triangular model of state, society, and media interaction. This framework captured not only the ideational content of fiscal debates but also the institutional and symbolic processes by which specific policy alternatives gain visibility, authority, and legitimacy. Subchapter 5.6 introduced the categorisation scheme used to operationalise these dimensions across 511 transcripts in 2009 and 271 transcripts in 2010. Together, these chapters ensured that the study's empirical design was tightly integrated with its theoretical foundations.

Subchapter 7.2 represents the most sustained application of this framework. It systematically interpreted the empirical results through the lens of social learning, framing, and feedback loops. In doing so, it challenged Blyth's post-crisis suggestion that the U.S. experienced a short-lived third-order shift. Instead, it argued that the crisis yielded only second-order adjustments—temporary modifications to fiscal instruments and goals that left the underlying paradigm intact. The subchapter demonstrated how media curation shaped the trajectory of policy debate, particularly by amplifying deficit concerns, emphasising symbolic appeals to “taxpayers,” and increasing the prominence of partisan commentators over institutional experts.

Moreover, the recursive media-state-society dynamics identified in Chapter 7.2 expose how legitimacy is not simply distributed but produced through curated discourse. The symbolic construction of “the public,” analysed in detail in the later stages of 7.2, illustrates how public sentiment is invoked rhetorically to justify ideological positions—rather than measured or engaged with directly. This finding extends Hall's model by showing how media framing acts as a substitute for institutional learning, replacing deliberation with emotive cues, moral binaries, and populist appeals.

Subchapter 7.3 adds a further dimension to this analysis by focusing on the rise of the Tea Party and the broader conservative resurgence. It argues that television media—especially FOX, but increasingly CNN and even MSNBC—played a pivotal role in legitimising this movement during a period when Keynesianism was still formally entrenched in public policy. The analysis reveals that conservative actors were not only overrepresented but often positioned as default interpreters of fiscal legitimacy, particularly concerning tax policy. This reassertion of fiscal conservatism, framed as a populist revolt against government excess, aligned closely with neoliberal values and hastened the erosion of Obama’s policy authority. The subchapter’s comparison of actor visibility, particularly the dramatic decline of White House representation and the rise of host-driven commentary, reinforces the thesis’s central claim: television media played a crucial role in limiting the discursive possibilities for paradigmatic change.

Taken together, the findings of this thesis show that the failure to achieve third-order change in the United States following the 2009 financial crisis cannot be attributed to a lack of economic alternatives or insufficient public support. Instead, the failure is best understood as a consequence of how media platforms mediated and constrained the policy discourse. The categorisation framework developed here makes that mediation visible: it identifies the actor types, discursive strategies, and ideological framings that conditioned the circulation of fiscal ideas. In doing so, it provides a novel contribution to political economy research by empirically demonstrating how paradigmatic resilience is maintained through media logics of visibility, legitimacy, and emotional resonance.

More broadly, the thesis contributes to a rethinking of television’s role in the political economy of crisis. It challenges accounts that reduce media to either a neutral venue or a mere amplifier of elite consensus. Instead, it offers an account of media as a structurally embedded actor whose influence is mediated through symbolic construction, actor curation, and narrative framing. It underscores how television news, particularly in its cable format, operates within a political economy shaped by commercial pressures, ideological alignment, and audience segmentation. In this environment, the potential for ideational innovation is actively foreclosed through editorial decisions that prioritise spectacle, oversimplify complexity, and reinscribe dominant norms.

In sum, this thesis offers a framework for understanding how economic crises produce arenas of ideological containment. By integrating Hall’s orders of change with a categorisation

scheme rooted in actor visibility and discursive framing, the study reveals the mechanisms by which fiscal policy authority is constructed, challenged, and ultimately reabsorbed into familiar paradigmatic boundaries. These findings suggest that future research must attend not only to the content of economic ideas but also to the institutional environments—like television media—that shape their reception, representation, and resilience.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the television media landscape—particularly in its cable format—functions not merely as a conduit of political communication but as a site of ideational reinforcement where paradigmatic alternatives are evaluated, legitimised, or excluded. The empirical and conceptual tools developed in this thesis reveal that during the 2009–2010 fiscal debate, television did not operate as a neutral platform for deliberation but rather as an active arbiter of policy authority. Through actor amplification, strategic issue framing, and recursive feedback loops between the state, media, and society, television networks shaped the cognitive and emotional architecture within which economic responses were judged. These findings make a substantial contribution to political economy and media studies by illustrating how paradigm shifts are not only fought within institutions of formal policymaking but are mediated and often contained through discursive channels deeply embedded in the media system.

As long as the discursive frameworks that sustain policy legitimacy are shaped by commercially driven, ideologically skewed media systems, the horizon for radical policy transformation will remain structurally constrained—even in moments of rupture. This thesis, therefore, calls for future research to attend not only to policy content but to the symbolic and institutional intermediaries that shape its public meaning.

References

- Alesina, A. & Perotti, R. (1995). Fiscal expansions and adjustments in OECD countries, *Economic Policy*, vol. 21, 207–47
- Alesina, A., Perotti, R. & Tavares, J. (1998). The political economy of fiscal adjustments, *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, vol. 29, no. 1, 197–266
- Alesina, A. and Ardagna, S. (2010). Large changes in fiscal policy: taxes versus spending, *Tax Policy and the Economy*, vol. 24, 35–68
- Baker, D. (2010). The myth of expansionary fiscal austerity, Centre for Economic and Policy Research
- Baker, A. (2013a) 'The new political economy of the macroprudential ideational shift', *New Political Economy*, 18:1, 112–139.
- Baker, A. (2013b). 'The gradual transformation? The incremental dynamics of macroprudential regulation', *Regulation and Governance*, 7:4, 417–434.
- Baker, A., & Underhill, G. R. D. (2015). Economic ideas and the political construction of the financial crash of 2008. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 17(3), 381–390.
- Bal, M. (2009) *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press).
- Ball, L., Leigh, D. & Loungani, P. (2011). Painful medicine, *Finance & Development*, vol. 48, 20–3.
- Ban, C. & Gallagher, K. (2015). IMF, Great Recession, Policy Change. *Governance*, 28: 131–146.
- Baum MA. (2003). *Soft News Goes to War: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy in the New Media Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Baum MA, Groeling T. (2007). Crossing the water's edge: elite rhetoric, media coverage and the rally- round-the-flag phenomenon, 1979–2003. *John F. Kennedy School Gov. Faculty Res. Work*.
- Baum, M. A., & Potter, P. B. K. (2008). The relationships between media, public opinion, and foreign policy: Toward a theoretical synthesis. 11(1) 39–65.
- Blanchard, O. & Leigh, D. (2013). 'Growth Forecast Errors and Fiscal Multipliers', IMF Working Paper no. WP/13/1
- Blyth, M., Goldstein, J., Keohane, R. & Sikkink, K. (1997). "Any More Bright Ideas?" The Ideational Turn of Comparative Political Economy. *Comparative Politics*, 29(2), p.229.
- Blyth, M. (2002) *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century*: Cambridge University Press.
- Blyth, M. (2013a). Paradigms and Paradox: The Politics of Economic Ideas in Two Moments of Crisis. *Governance*, 26(2), pp.197–215.
- Blyth, M. (2013b) *Austerity: The History of A Dangerous Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Blyth M. (2013c) The Austerity Delusion. Why a Bad Idea Won Over the West, *Foreign Affairs*, 92 (3), May–June.
- Boone, Catherine. (1992). *Merchant Capital and the Roots of State Power in Senegal 1930–1985*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Braun, B. (2015). Preparedness, crisis management and policy change: The euro area at the critical juncture of 2008–2013. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 17(3), 419–441.
- Burstein, Paul. (2003). "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda." *Political Research Quarterly*, 56: 29–40.
- Caballero, R. J., Farhi, E., & Gourinchas, P. O. (2008). Financial crash, commodity prices and global imbalances (No. w14521). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Cahill, D. (2011). Beyond Neoliberalism? Crisis and the Prospects for Progressive Alternatives. *New Political Science*, 33(4), 479–492.
- Callinicos, A. (2012). Commentary: contradictions of austerity, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 65–77.
- Campbell, J. L. & Pedersen, O. K. (2010) 'Knowledge regimes and comparative political economy', in D. Béland and R. H. Cox (eds), *Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 167–190.
- Carstensen, M. B. (2011) 'Paradigm man vs. the bricoleur', *European Political Science Review*, 3:147–167.
- Chomsky, N. (1997). *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*. Seven Stories Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1999). *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*. Seven Stories Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2009). *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10(1), 103–126.
- Chwieroth, J. M. (2010) 'How do crises lead to change? Liberalizing capital controls in the early years of new order Indonesia', *World Politics*, 62:3, 496–527.
- Crotty, J. (2012). The great austerity war: what caused the US deficit crisis and who should pay to fix it? *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 79–104.
- Crouch, C. (2011) *The Strange Non-Death of Neo-Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity).
- De Ville, F., & Orbie, J. (2014). The european commission's neoliberal trade discourse since the crisis: Legitimizing continuity through subtle discursive change. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(1), 149–167.
- DellaVigna, S., & Kaplan, E. (2007). The fox news effect: Media bias and voting. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122(3), 1187–1234. doi:10.1162/qjec.122.3.1187
- Dellepiane-Avellaneda, S. (2015). The political power of economic ideas: The case of 'Expansionary fiscal contractions. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 17(3), 391–418.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Esser, F., Reinemann, C., & Fan D. (2000). "Spin Doctoring in British and German Election Campaigns: How the Press Is Being Confronted with a New Quality of Political Pr." *European Journal of Communication* 15: 209–39.
- Fell, A. (2008) *Network governance for sustainable development*, Lulea: Lulea University of Technology.
- Finnemore, M. & Sikkink, K. (1998) 'International norm dynamics and political change', *International Organization*, 4, 887–917.

- Fischer, F. (1993) 'Policy discourse and the politics of Washington think tanks', in F. Fischer and D. Forester (eds), *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press), 21–42.
- Gamble, A. & Kelly, G. (2001) Labour's new economics. In: S. Ludlam and M. Smith (eds.) *New Labour in Government*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Garrett, R. K., & Stroud, N. J. (2014). Partisan paths to exposure diversity: Differences in pro- and counterattitudinal news consumption. *Journal of Communication*, 64(4), 680-701. doi:10.1111/jcom.12105
- Geddes, Barbara. (1994). *Politician's Dilemma: Building State Capacity in Latin America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giavazzi, F. & Pagano, M. (1990). 'Can severe fiscal contractions be expansionary? Tales of two small European countries', *NBER Macroeconomics Annual*, 5:75–111.
- Giavazzi, F. & Pagano, M. (1996) 'Non-Keynesian effects of fiscal policy changes: International evidence and the Swedish experience', *Swedish Economic Policy Review*, 3:3, 67–103.
- Giavazzi, F., Tappelli, J. & Pagano, M. (2000) 'Searching for non-linear effects of fiscal policy: Evidence from industrial and developing countries', *European Economic Review*, 44:7, 1259–1289.
- Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78:1360-1380.
- Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2012). The end of the UK's liberal collectivist social model? The implications of the coalition government's policy during the austerity crisis, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, 105–26.
- Grossmann, M., & Hopkins, D. A. (2016). *Asymmetric Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Guajardo, J., Leigh, D. & Pescatori, A. (2011). 'Expansionary Austerity: New International Evidence', IMF Working Paper no. WP/11/158.
- Haas, P. M. (1992) 'Introduction: Epistemic communities and international policy coordination', *International Organization*, 46, 1–35.
- Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Hajer, M. (1993) 'Discourse coalitions in practice: The case of acid rain in Great Britain', in F. Fischer and J. Forester (eds), *The Argumentative Turn* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 43–76.
- Hall, P. (1986). *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, P. (1989). *The political power of economic ideas*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hall, P. (1993). Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain. *Comparative Politics*, 25(3), p.275.
- Hall, P. (1997). "The Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas in the Comparative Political Economy of the Industrialized Nations," in Mark I. Linchbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, eds., *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- Hall, P. (2001). (ed. With David Soskice) *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hall, S. (2003) New Labour's double-shuffle. *Soundings* 24: 10–24.

- Hall, P. A. (2013). Brother, Can You Paradigm?. *Governance*, 26(2), 189-192.
- Hamilton JT. (2003). *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press
- Happer, C., & Philo, G. (2013). The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 1(1), 321-336.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2010). *The enigma of capital and the crises of capitalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Hay, Colin. (1996). "Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the 'Winter of Discontent'." *Sociology* 30: 253-277.
- Hay, Colin (2004) Ideas, interests and institutions in the comparative political economy of great transformations, *Review of International Political Economy*, 11:1, 204-226
- Hay, C. (2011) 'Pathology without crisis? The strange demise of the Anglo-liberal growth model', *Government and Opposition*, 46:1, 1-31.^[1]_{SEP}
- Heclo, H. (1974). *Modern social politics in Britain and Sweden: From relief to income maintenance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Helleiner, E. (2014) *The Status Quo Crisis: Global Financial Governance After the 2008 Meltdown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Herman, E. S. & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Media*, New York, Pantheon
- Holsti OR, & Rosenau J. (1984). *American Leadership in World Affairs: Vietnam and the Breakdown of Consensus*. Boston: Allen & Unwin
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687.
- Hyun, K. D., & Moon, S. J. (2016). Agenda setting in the partisan TV news context: Attribute agenda setting and polarized evaluation of presidential candidates among viewers of NBC, CNN, and fox news. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 93(3), 509-529. doi:10.1177/1077699016628820
- International Monetary Fund. (2010). Will it hurt? Macroeconomic effects of fiscal consolidation, *World Economic Outlook*, October, 93-123
- Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the united states. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1) doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-05111-073034
- King, L., Kitson, M., Konzelmann, S. & Wilkinson, F. (2012). Making the same mistake again- or is *this time* different? *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1-15.
- Kingdon, J. (1984). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Kinsella, S. (2012). Is Ireland really the role model for austerity? *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 223-35
- Kirshner, J. (2014) *American Power after the Financial Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- Kjaer, A.M. (2004) *Governance*, Cambridge: Polity Press..
- Kuhn, Thomas. S. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kuehn, D. (2012). A note on America's 1920-21 depression as an argument for austerity, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 155-60.

- Langer, A. I., & Sagarzazu, I. (2015). Are all policy decisions equal? explaining the variation in media coverage of the UK budget. *Policy Studies Journal*
- Lehmbruch, G. (2001) 'Institutional embedding of market economies: The German model and its impact on Japan', in W. Streeck and K. Yamamura (eds), *The Origins of Nonliberal Capitalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 39–93.
- Leys, C. (2001) *Market Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest*. London: Verso.
- Mackintosh, S. (2014). Crises and Paradigm Shift. *The Political Quarterly*, 85(4), 406-412.
- Mann, M. (1997) 'Has globalization ended the rise and rise of the nation-state?', *Review of International Political Economy*, vol 4: 472–96.
- McChesney, R. (2004). *The Problem of the Media: US Communication Politics in the 21st Century*, New York, Monthly Review Press.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2),
- McDonald, L. E., & Morgaine, K. (2016). Progressive and conservative “Freedom” through the lens of FOX and MSNBC. *SAGE Open*, 6(3), 215824401666371. doi:10.1177/2158244016663717
- Mercille, J. (2013a). The role of the media in fiscal consolidation programmes: the case of Ireland. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 38(2), pp.281-300.
- Mercille, J. (2013b). European Media Coverage of Argentina's Debt Default and Recovery: distorting the lessons for Europe. *Third World Quarterly*, 34(8), 1377-1391.
- Mercille, J. (2014). The Role of the Media in Sustaining Ireland's Housing Bubble. *New Political Economy*, 19(2), pp.282-301.
- Moore, M. (1997). Societies, Politics, and Capitalists in Developing Countries: A Literature Survey.” *Journal of Development Studies* 33(3):287–363.
- Mutz, D., Sniderman, P. & Brody, R. (1996) *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press).
- Mutz, D., & Reeves, B. (2005). The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust. *American Political Science Review*, 99(1), 1-15. doi:10.1017/S0003055405051452
- O'Neill, D., & Harcup, T. (2009). "News Values and Selectivity." In *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, eds. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, International Communication Association Handbook Series. New York: Routledge. 161-74.
- Painter, M. & Pierre, J. (2005). Challenges to state policy capacity: Global trends and comparative perspectives, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Peet, R. (2011). Inequality, crisis and austerity in finance capitalism, *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, vol. 4, 383–99.
- Perotti, R. (2011). 'The “Austerity Myth”: Gain Without Pain?', BIS Working Paper no. 362, 1–57
- Pierre, J. & Peters, B.G. (2000) *Governance, politics and the state*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Pierre, J. (2009). Reinventing governance, reinventing democracy?. *Policy & Politics*, 37(4), 591-609.
- Pierson, P. (2000) 'Increasing returns, path dependence and the study of politics', *American Political Science Review*, 94:2, 251–267.
- Pirie, I. (2012). Representations of economic crisis in contemporary Britain, *British Politics*, vol.

- 7, no. 4, 341–64.
- Pollin, R. (2012). US government deficits and debt amid the great recession: what the evidence shows, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 161–87.
- Pollock, A. (2004) NHS PLC: The Privatisation of our Health Care. London: Verso.
- Popov, V. (2012). Russia: austerity and deficit reduction in historical and comparative perspective, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 313–34.
- Powlick PJ. (1995). The sources of public opinion for American foreign-policy officials. *Int. Stud. Q.* 39:427–51.
- Price, V., & Tewksbury, D. (1997). "News Values and Public Opinion: A Theoretical Account of Media Priming and Framing." In *Progress in Communication Sciences*, eds. Barnett G. and Boster F.J. Greenwich, CT: Ablex. 173-212.
- Quiggins, J. (2012) *Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk among Us* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Quiring, O. & Weber, M. (2012). Between usefulness and legitimacy: media coverage of governmental intervention during the financial crisis and selected effects, *International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 17, 294–315.
- Reed, M. S., A. C. Evelyn, G. Cundill, I. Fazey, J. Glass, A. Laing, J. Newig, B. Parrish, C. Prell, C. Raymond, & L. C. Stringer. (2010). What is social learning? *Ecology and Society* 15(4)
- Reilly J. (1995). *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: Chicago Council For. Relat..
- Rein, M. & Schön, D. A. (1994) *Frame Reflection Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies* (New York: Basic).
- Resnick, S., & Wolff, R. (2010). The economic crisis: A Marxian interpretation. *Rethinking Marxism*, 22(2), 170-186.
- Rhodes, R. (1996). The new governance: governing without government, *Political Studies*, vol 44: 652–67.
- Roe, E. (1994) *Narrative Policy Analysis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- Rosamond, B. (2013) 'Three ways of speaking Europe to the world: Markets, peace, cosmopolitan duty and the EU's normative power', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16:1, 133–148.
- Rose, M., & Baumgartner, F. R. (2013). Framing the poor: Media coverage and U.S. poverty policy, 1960-2008: Framing the poor. *Policy Studies Journal*, 41(1), 22-53.
- Rothstein, B. (2005) *Social Traps and the Problem of Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Sabatier, P. (1993) 'Policy change over a decade or more', in H. C. Jenkins-Smith and P. Sabatier (eds), *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach* (Boulder, CO: Westview), 13– 40.
- Sawyer, M. (2012). The tragedy of UK fiscal policy in the aftermath of the financial crisis, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 205–21.
- Scheufele, D., & Tewksbury D. (2007). "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models." *Journal of Communication* 57: 9-20.
- Schmidt, V. A. (2014). Speaking to the markets or to the people? A discursive institutionalist analysis of the EU's sovereign debt crisis. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(1), 188-209.

- Schroeder, E., & Stone, D. F. (2015). Fox news and political knowledge. *Journal of Public Economics*, 126, 52-63. doi:10.1016/j.jpubeco.2015.03.009
- Schumpeter, J. (1950). *Capitalism, socialism, and democracy*. New York: Harper and Row
- Shiller, R. (2008) *The Subprime Solution: How Today's Global Financial Crisis Happened, and What to Do about It*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Shoemaker, Pamela J., & Stephen D. Reese. (2013). *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century*. New York: Routledge.
- Sikkink, K. (1991). *Ideas and institutions*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Sorensen, G. (2004) *The transformation of the state: Beyond the myth of retreat*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Stanley, L. (2014) "We're reaping what we sowed": Everyday crisis narratives and acquiescence to the age of austerity, *New Political Economy*, 19:6, 895–917.
- Stiglitz, J. E. (2009). The Anatomy of a Murderer: Who Killed America's Economy? *Critical Review*, 21(2–3), 329–339.
- Stiglitz, J. E. (2009). The current economic crisis and lessons for economic theory. *Eastern Economic Journal*, 35, 281-296.
- Stiglitz, J. E. (2011). Rethinking macroeconomics: What failed, and how to repair it. *Journal of the European economic association*, 9(4), 591-645.
- Stiglitz, J. (2010) *Freefall: Free Markets and the Sinking of the Global Economy*. London: Penguin.
- Stimson, James. (2004). *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stone, D. (1988) *Policy Paradox and Political Reason* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman).
- Stone, D. (1989). Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas. *Political Science Quarterly*, 104(2), p.281.
- Stone, D. (2011). Ideological media bias. *Journal Of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 78(3), 256-271. doi: 10.1016/j.jebo.2011.01.013
- Strömbäck, J. & Esser, F. (2009). Shaping Politics: Mediatization and Media Interventionism. In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatization: Concepts, Changes, Consequences* (pp. 205–223). Peter Lang.
- Strömbäck, J., & Kaid, L. L. (2009). *The Handbook of Election News Coverage Around the World*. Routledge.
- Strömbäck, Jesper, Michael Karlsson, & David Nicolas Hopmann. (2012). "Determinants of News Content. Comparing Journalists' Perceptions of the Normative and Actual Impact of Different Event Properties When Deciding What's News." *Journalism Studies* 13: 718-28.
- Stroud, N. (2008). Media Use and Political Predispositions: Revisiting the Concept of Selective Exposure. *Political Behavior*, 30(3), 341-366.
- Taylor, J. B. (2009). The financial crisis and the policy responses: An empirical analysis of what went wrong (No. w14631). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Tett, G. (2009) *Fool's Gold: How Unrestrained Greed and Corrupted a Dream, Shattered Global Markets and Unleashed a Catastrophe*. London: Abacus.
- Thornton, M. (2010). Hoover, Bush, and great depressions. *Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics*, 13(3), 86.
- Tiftt SE, Jones AS. (1999). *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family behind the New York Times*. Boston: Little Brown & Co.

- Underhill, G. R. D. (2015). The emerging post-crisis financial architecture: The path-dependency of ideational adverse selection. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 17(3), 461-493.
- Wade, R. & Sigurgeirsdottir, S. (2012). Iceland's rise, fall, stabilisation and beyond, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1, 127-44
- Waisbord, Silvio. (2011). "Can Ngos Change the News?". *International Journal of Communication* 5: 142-65.
- Warner, M. (2013). The global economy in crisis: towards a new paradigm?. *Asia Pacific Business Review*. pp. 157-161.
- Wendler, F. (2012) 'Debating the European debt crisis'. Paper prepared for presentation to the ECSA- Canada Biennial Conference, 27-28 April.
- Whiting, S. (2001). *Power and wealth in rural China*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitten, G., & Williams, L. (2011). "Buttery Guns and Welfare Hawks: The Politics of Defense Spending in Advanced Industrial Democracies." *American Journal of Political Science* 55: 117-34.
- Widmaier, W., Blyth, M. & Seabrooke, L. (2007) 'Exogenous shocks or endogenous constructions? The meanings of wars and crises', *International Studies Quarterly*, 51:747-759.
- Wolf, M. (2011) 'Thinking through the unthinkable', *Financial Times*, 8 November.