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ATTITUDE FORMATION TOWARDS SOCIALISM:
A STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT'S

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ABSTRACT

America has not produced a socialist movement akin to the one predicted by Karl Marx for the most industrially advanced country. Scholars have attempted to explain the lack of support for socialism (Sombart, 1976; Lowi, 1985; Lipset, 1996) and public opinion polls have shown consistent opposition to socialism (The Psychological Corporation, 1946, 1947, 1948; Pew Research Center, 2011). However, little scientific research is dedicated to explaining the formation of this negative public opinion. This study is designed to explore this issue by applying Zaller's (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model of attitude formation. The model predicts that a lack of knowledge about socialism and a negative elite discourse towards the concept contribute to a heightened negative attitude. The following study examines this premise through a survey of traditional underclassmen attending Penn State Harrisburg. The survey consisted of three main sections: a test of political knowledge and socialist policies, a selection of a commonly used media sources and a demographics section. Data were analyzed using several multiple regression models. Results revealed that undergraduate students have a lack of knowledge about socialism and mostly neutral opinions towards the concept. The multiple regression models supported hypotheses that suggested that lack of knowledge about socialism strongly correlates with negative attitudes about socialism irrespective of one's political affiliation. General political knowledge and media biases were not quite significant though it appears they may still influence opinions. Alternative measures for media bias should be researched before conclusive results can be determined. This research assists in understanding how political attitudes may form in college students and explain why negative attitudes towards socialism are prevalent in America.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since its independence in 1776, the United States has been recognized as an inimitable country built on a unique government. Alexis de Tocqueville coined the term “American Exceptionalism” in the 1830s referring to a country that was “qualitatively different” than any other country in the world (Lipset, 1996). However, regardless of the unique make-up of the United States, when Karl Marx developed his theory regarding socialist revolutions he espoused that “the country that is more developed industrially shows to the less developed the image of their future” (Lipset & Marks, 2000, p. 16). It was from this theory that many early Marxist followers concluded that America would produce the first and most radical socialist movement, as they have been the most industrially advanced society since the late nineteenth century.

However, as time elapsed it became clear that not only would America not produce a socialist movement, but its population would also generally reject the notion of socialism. In a series of surveys conducted by The Psychological Corporation in the late 1940s, they found that Americans had an overall negative opinion of socialist policies and foreign movements. After the fall of the Soviet Union, polling shifted away from opinions towards socialist and communist policies and more towards opinions on socialism as a concept. In 2011, The Pew Research Center found that after exposing participants to the simple word of socialism 60% of American’s reacted negatively. This general dislike with socialism has led many academics in search of an explanation for this attitude (Lipset, 1996; Lipset, & Marks, 2000; Lowi, 1985; Sombart, 1976). However, little empirical research has been conducted to measure and discover a rationale for American opinions towards socialism.

In order to address this problem, this study will measure attitudes towards socialism and subsequently apply Zaller's (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model. This model establishes two key components to attitude formation, the influence of knowledge and elite discourse.

The first component is predicated on numerous studies that have indicated that the formation of an attitude depends on an evaluation of the information they have attained about that object, person or concept (Gerard & Orive, 1987; Kaplan, 1972; Lemon, 1968). Initial evaluations are formulated based on the breadth of knowledge that a person possesses and can be reevaluated with the introduction of new information (Kaplan, 1972). The RAS model builds upon this research by predicting that the more knowledgeable a person is about a specific subject the more likely they will be exposed to information on that subject, be able to correctly understand the new information and properly apply it to their existing schemas resulting in less attitude change (Zaller, 1992). Paradoxically, those who are less informed upon a subject will be less likely to understand new information and more likely to misinterpret it within their existing schemas. This component becomes most influential under the presence of the second component of the RAS model.

Zaller (1992) assumes that elite discourse in the political sphere, such as mass media, has sole responsibility for what ideas are in circulation. In essence, the information originates from what they have selected to share and therefore the general public may not be receiving completely unbiased information. This presumption is supported by research exploring how the mass media attempts to influence and change public opinion (Lenart, 1994; Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005; Scheufele, & Tewksbury,

2006; Simon, & Jerit, 2007; Wettstein, 2011). Two theories have arisen to explain the effects of media on public opinion, agenda setting and framing effects. The RAS model falls more within the framing effects theory in which the media manipulates public opinion based on how the stories are produced and presented and what information is presented (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997). In other words, media frames affect how the public thinks about an issue and therefore what information they have to evaluate. Therefore under the RAS model those exposed to a heavily sided elite discourse are more likely to hold concurrent opinions.

The combination of these two variables suggests that low levels of knowledge about a subject combined with a relatively strong negative elite discourse would lead to high levels of negative opinions within the mass public. Conversely, high levels of knowledge would lead to a mix of opinions within the public regardless of elite discourse. In anticipation of this study, the researcher predicts that the first consequence is the most likely to surface upon the topic of socialism and will analyze primary survey data to assess this hypothesis.

Chapter 2: Foundations of socialism and its history in the United States

Socialism is a complex theory that has been defined differently by many philosophers. This chapter will first provide a comprehensive definition to be used for the purpose of this study. Additionally, in order to understand the problem of socialism in the United States it is necessary to present background information on the presence of socialism within this country. The majority of chapter two will be dedicated to providing a brief history of socialism within this country and why it is still important today. Lastly, the remainder of the chapter will supply readers with an understanding of existing theories for explaining the lack of support for socialism within the United States.

2.1 Defining socialism

For the purposes of this study, socialism will be defined based on the 2013 Oxford English Dictionary Online entry. “A theory or system of social organization based on state or collective ownership and regulation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange for the common benefit of all members of society; advocacy or practice of such a system, esp. as a political movement” (socialism, 2013). However, in an effort to distinguish it from communism, socialism will be referred to as solely an economic system. Therefore, the definition of socialism for this study is as follows:

An economic theory or system of social organization based on collective ownership and regulation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange for the common benefit of all members of society.

2.2 History of socialism in United States

The socialist movement of America found its strongest hold during the late 19th century and early 20th century (Morgan, 1964). The movement began with the creation

of the Socialist Labor Party in 1890 by Daniel DeLeon. Under his leadership the party became a “rigid sect” that argued against the conservative acts of unionist members and called for a coalition of worker’s to bring down the capitalistic system (Morgan, 1964, p. 2). His party gained little support due to its more radical nature and ended by 1900, but DeLeon is recognized as one of the founders of American socialism.

The next major leader was Victor Berger who created The Social Democracy Party in 1898 (Morgan, 1964). His party supported working in unison with the democratic system to foster a gradual progression towards more socialist measures. Under the Social Democracy Party, Victor Berger became the first member to win a national congressional seat (Morgan, 1964). Due to Berger and DeLeon different approaches, the socialist movement was split which greatly reduced their political power.

It was not until Eugene Debs joined the movement that socialists gained support. Under his leadership, the two sides of the movement joined to form the Socialist Party of America in 1901 (Morgan, 1964). Under this name, the socialist movement selected Debs as presidential candidate five times, sent over a thousand members to public office between 1910 and 1912, and reached a party membership high of over 100,000 people (Morgan, 1964). However, this support would not last long as World War I approached. Socialism diminished following the war due to a lack of public support for the Socialist Party of America’s views of pacifism coupled with the perception that the party shared similar beliefs as a communist Soviet Union (Morgan, 1964). Morgan (1964) notes that “the rise of communism further reduced [socialism’s] attractiveness to most American’s, who erroneously identified it with communism....The party of Deb’s and Thomas had...little in common with Russian communism...but the socialists are not likely ever to

escape entirely that kind of thinking” (p. 126). This line of thinking may have influenced more recent American opinions towards socialism.

2.3 History of American opinions towards socialism

Interest in public opinion regarding socialism grew with the rise of the Soviet Union. As the Cold War approached, The Psychological Corporation (1946, 1947, 1948) conducted a series of surveys that asked several questions about communism, socialism, Americanism and the policies associated with them. The 1948 opinion poll indicated that Americans did not fear socialism in the United States as much as they did communism. However, throughout the three surveys there was an overall negative opinion towards socialist policies. In 1946, 67% of respondents considered private capitalism as good Americanism while only about 22% of respondents felt that the government running large businesses would be considered good Americanism. The following year other socialist policies also did not receive much support. Only 30% of respondents supported socialized medicine, 28% supported having everyone on the same financial level and 18% wanted the government to ensure that every man had a job and a living (The Psychological Corporation, 1947).

During the Cold War, polling focused on asking the public if certain policies, the government, or other countries were moving towards socialism. However, there was very little exploration of attitudes about socialism as a concept. More recently, The Pew Research Center (2011) studied public views towards certain political terms including socialism. They found that 60% of Americans have a negative reaction when they think of the word socialism. This is congruent with the 2010 Gallup poll that found 58% of Americans responded negatively to the term socialism (Newport). While research

indicates that Americans hold a relatively negative view of socialism, explaining this negative reaction is more difficult.

2.4 Explaining socialism in United States

In the preface to Marx's *Capital*, he surmised that the most industrially developed country would "show to the less developed the image of their future" (as cited in Lipset, & Marks, 2000, p. 16). By this, he implied that socialism would first appear in the most advanced countries where class inequality and struggle would certainly emerge. Based on these predictions, Marxist leader Werner Sombart (1976) expanded this notion to argue that the United States must therefore "be the one providing the classic case of socialism" with its working class supporting "the most radical of socialist movements" (p. 15). As history has indicated, this did not occur and socialist support has remained relatively low throughout American history. This has led many political scientists to question why socialism failed in the United States with varying explanations.

2.4.1 Class consciousness

The leading ingredient behind the creation of socialism is that some form of class struggle must exist (Lipset, & Marks, 2000). In Marx theory, the proletariat will rise up against the bourgeois in order to ensure equality of resources for all. Several socialist leaders assert that America was founded without the existence of this proletariat class (Lipset, & Marks, 2000). Socialist Victor Berger assessed that "class distinction in America...has not the same historic foundation that is has in Germany, France, or England" (as cited in Lipset, & Marks, 2000, p. 26). In other words, America's working class was not familiar with a history of elite abuse and massive inequality that had affected the feudal systems of European countries. This gave the American people

freedom to expand their economic capabilities without being concerned over class identity. As Friedrich Engels noted, “here everyone could become if not a capitalist, at all events an independent man, producing or trading, with his own means, for his own account” (as cited in Lipset, & Marks, 2000, p. 25). It is this ideal that anyone can become rich in America that has left the population feeling satisfied with current conditions. Sombart (1976) notes that the American worker “feels that he is well, cheerful and in high spirits...he has a most rosy and optimistic conception of the world” (p. 18). This outlook may have prevented the American worker from organizing into a disgruntled socialist party as had occurred in Europe.

Even with the rise of unionism in the late nineteenth century, class consciousness did not form with it. Theodore Lowi (1985) observes that American laborers formed what Samuel Gompers called business unions. These unions agree to work within the current political and capitalistic system in order to advance their conditions. This defies Marxist socialism because unions tend to be the foundations of proletariat consciousness and revolt against the capitalistic system.

2.4.2 Governmental structure

Lipset and Marks (2000) assert that Marx misperceived American socialism because of his overestimation of the power and radicalism of the Workingmen’s parties in the 1820’s and ‘30’s. The parties secured sizable votes in some state and municipal elections, but their support rapidly declined shortly after as their reforms were adopted by the Jacksonian Democrats (Lipset, & Marks, 2000). Morris Hillquilt notes that the ability of both major American parties to absorb the radical ideas of third parties is exclusive to the American system because of “the fear of throwing away” one’s vote on a third party

(Lipset, & Marks, 2000, p. 37). This is predicated on the fact that the United States has a unique voting system consisting of single-member districts in which a simple majority is needed to elect officials. Lowi (1985) notes that this system leads to vote-maximization strategies that prevent voters from supporting third and fourth parties. If a party has little chance of winning, any vote will be considered wasted. However, this explanation does not explain the presence of a two-party system in the United States and may be too simplistic for understanding the socialist situation (Lowi, 1985).

2.4.3 Antistatism

Some argue that the American voting system was not the factor preventing support of socialism in the United States. Louis Hartz (1955) presents a theory stating that Americans were “born free” (as cited in Lowi, 1985, p. 35) with no repressive systems, governmental or otherwise and consequently are wary of anything resembling oppression. This theory has been expanded to include a cultural hypothesis in which Americans have “learned an attitude of extreme antipathy to ‘the state’” (Lowi, 1985, p. 35). While this hypothesis is generalized to the mainstream public, Lipset and Marks (2000) argue that this attitude has also permeated radical groups. They note that the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) both viewed the state as an enemy that they could not rely on and so expounded individualism and antistatism. This antistatist ideology has separated American socialists from those of other countries.

2.4.4 American exceptionalism

The term “American exceptionalism” was first coined in the 1830s by Alexis de Tocqueville to describe the pure uniqueness that constitutes the United States (Lipset, &

Marks, 2000, p. 15). This concept has been applied to explain the American values and ideologies that have made socialism incompatible. Richard Hofstadter noted that, “It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one” (as cited in Lipset, & Marks, 2000, p. 29). This ideology has been coined Americanism, though its definition is not easily constructed. Lipset (1996) asserts that Americanism consists of five concepts: antistatism, laissez-faire, individualism, populism and egalitarianism. Some note that these aspects have already created the “democratic, socially classless, anti-elitist society” that are foundations of socialism, making the need for socialism non-existent (Lipset, & Marks, 2000). However, in a 1947 survey of American attitudes towards Americanism it seems that public opinion held that this ideology was in fact counter to socialist values (The Psychological Corporation). Defining Americanism varies between experts and public opinion, but either way there seems to be a general consensus that it does not support the rise of socialism in the United States.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

While empirical studies have been limited regarding public opinion toward socialism, researchers have provided valuable information relating the process of attitude formation, how socialism has been treated in school textbooks and the influence of the media upon opinions. This chapter will summarize prior studies focused on the aforementioned areas of study. The final section of the chapter will outline questions and hypotheses of this study based on previous research.

3.1 Factors affecting attitude formation and change

3.1.1 Attitude formation: initial information and interaction with stimuli

Attitude formation involves a person evaluating a variety of information and combining these evaluations into a favorable or unfavorable opinion of a specific object, person or concept (Lemon, 1968; Kaplan, 1972; Gerard & Orive, 1987). Lemon (1968) asserts that an opinion is dependent on the number and extremity of each evaluation. If a subject retains strong unfavorable characteristics, it is likely the subject will hold a negative opinion of that stimulus. The more strong favorable characteristics the subject retains, the more likely a positive opinion will form.

One key aspect of attitude formation includes the nature of contact and interactions that a subject has with each stimulus. Even if a subject is exposed to more unfavorable characteristics it is not certain that they will retain a negative opinion. The believability of each piece of information will also affect how a subject forms an opinion. In Kaplan's (1972) study he developed and found support for a formula to determine attitude formation. The formula posits that both the evaluative significance of each piece of information and the level of believability of each piece of information directly

contribute to the initial formation of an attitude.

However, there are other considerations that an individual uses to form an opinion. The subject must be affected by some aspect of the stimulus in order for it to initiate the formation of an attitude. The subject is only motivated to hold attitudes about stimuli if it has “some potential direct or indirect hedonic consequences for him or her” (Gerard, & Orive, 1987, p. 175). In other words, opinions are tools that subjects use to prepare for the interaction with that stimulus. There are several factors related to this idea that influence when and how a subject will form an opinion.

Gerard and Orive (1987) posited that attitude formation is stimulated by conflict of ideas, which creates cognitive dissonance. Therefore, they applied Lewin’s (1935) conflict resolution theory to their model of opinion formation. They hypothesized that the more immediate a transaction is with a given stimulus the more important an individual will feel it is to generate an opinion. This was subsequently proved true in Orive’s (1988) study. In a 2x2 design he found that college students were more confident in their opinions when they were led to believe that they would have to write an essay stating their opinion relatively soon. However, this also implies that the less immediate a stimulus is the more likely an individual will hold a more moderate opinion. Immediacy can also influence the weight of certain information. According to Lewin’s (1935) theory the weight of negative factors can double as the immediacy of interaction increases. This indicates that more pressing stimuli could be evaluated more negatively even if the subject has a wealth of positive attributes. Kenamer (1987) adds to this idea by finding in his study on election debates that just the anticipation of discussion on a given stimulus motivates a person to form a strong attitude. The process of attitude formation can

influence how they are then expressed and whether they are subject to change.

3.1.2 Attitude construction: Opinion expression and factors influencing change

Attitude formation and expression is not simply a passive response based on the accumulation of raw information. Subjects actively participate by processing the information they receive, evaluating it, comparing it to existing schemas and morphing it all into an opinion. How attitude-relevant information is processed can affect how it is later expressed or changed.

In comparing initial attitude formation to the process of attitude change, Kaplan's (1972) study proposed that there is a key ingredient affecting attitude change, preexisting thoughts. In attitude formation he substantiated that the stimulus is "an abstract cipher...toward which [the subject] does not possess an initial attitude or supporting cognitions" (Kaplan, 1972, p. 449). In other words initial attitudes have no thoughts or opinions to which to compare new information. However, with attitude change, his participants already had an initial attitude and the likelihood of that attitude changing was dependent not only on the strength of believability in each new piece of information but also on what impact the new information had on their existing cognitive ideas. In other words, the strength that dissenting information had on a participant's preexisting notions of a stimulus affected whether or not the subject changed their attitude. This process varies between subjects as to how they handle strong opposing information. Several factors including attitude certainty, extremity, and salience can all affect how susceptible an attitude is to change.

Smith, Fabrigar, Macdougall, and Wiesenthal (2008) examined the factors influencing attitude certainty or "the level of subjective confidence or validity a person

attaches to his or her attitude” (p. 281). In their study with undergraduate students, they found that the amount of attitude-relevant information participants store in their memory has a substantial impact on how certain they are of the attitude. The more information participants store, the more certain they are of their opinion. The amount of information participants store was also found to be affected by the consistency of the information they received (Smith, Fabrigar, Macdougall, & Wiesenhal, 2008). Students who were provided with mostly negative or mostly positive information felt more certain of their attitudes than students who were exposed to inconsistent extremes in information. Additional research concludes that attitude certainty can generate greater attitude strength, which is linked with resistance to change (Bassili, 1996).

In addition to attitude certainty, the extremity of one’s attitude can also affect how it is expressed. In Lemon’s (1968) first model, he posits that the extremity of an opinion is dependent on the total extremity of undesirable attributes subtracted from the total extremity of desirable attributes. The extremity of an opinion affects the extent to which an attitude is stable over time and how much it guides and influences behavior and information processing of an individual (Krosnick, & Petty, 1995). The more negatively extreme an opinion is the more likely an individual will retain a negative opinion of that stimulus and the more likely they will partake in activities that undermine the stimuli. As indicated by Kaplan’s (1972) model the more extreme an initial attitude is, the less likely that a person will be impacted by contradicting information.

Lemon’s (1968) second model addresses the salience that the opinion has for an individual. This is calculated by adding up the total amount of extremity of evaluations irrespective of direction. This implies that both negative and positive attributes hold the

same amount of importance to individuals. The importance that an opinion holds is significant for determining the likelihood of attitude expression and change. Holbrook, Berent, Krosnick, Visser and Boninger (2005) conducted a series of nine studies ranging from “everyday memory research” to “tightly controlled laboratory studies” to examine the effect of memory and importance on attitudes (p. 752). Across these studies, they found that the importance of a given opinion had a positive and significant effect on the accuracy of the subject’s memory. Participants were more likely to recall and recognize statements relevant to that attitude. Researchers theorized that personal importance leads participants to selectively expose themselves to attitude-relevant information and then process the information more deeply and richly, than if the opinion was less important to them (Holbrook et al., 2005). This deep thinking mechanism assists the subject in producing stronger opinions, resisting persuasion, and allows them to use their opinion to organize behavior (Holbrook et al., 2005).

Another important consideration is that while people are building stronger opinions their original opinions may not be based on accurate information. Greenwald (1968) showed through an analysis of past research that during persuasive presentations subjects remembered more accurately their reaction to the presentation than what the presenter actually said. This shows that attitude-relevant information that is used to base opinions may not be based on factual information, but rather on a participant’s reaction to certain stimuli or discussion. Smith et al. (2008) found a similar occurrence in their study. They found that participants’ attitudinal certainty were based on the perception that they were knowledgeable about the stimulus rather than the actual knowledge that they possessed. Therefore, because attitude certainty correlates with attitude strength,

perception of knowledge has a greater impact on the likelihood of attitude change than one's actual knowledge base.

3.1.3 Attitude change in college-aged participants

It is important to note the factors that influence college students' attitudes as this demographic is the focus of this study. There are two competing hypotheses that have traditionally connected age and attitude change. The first is called the impressionable years hypothesis and suggests that attitude change is highly susceptible for adolescents and young adults as they enter full adulthood, susceptibility to attitude change drastically declines and then remains relatively consistent through the rest of life (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989). The second hypothesis is called increasing persistence hypothesis and suggests that attitude change persists throughout life and people become increasingly more susceptible to attitude change as they age. Krosnick and Alwin (1989) conducted a study using panel surveys from the National Election Study to test these two hypotheses and found substantial support for the impressionable years hypothesis. Their measures of attitude change both within and between elections indicate that at the age in which traditional students are entering college they are most susceptible to attitude change while attitude stability increases with age. Other research also supports that attitude change occurring in college is likely to remain stable for long periods of time (Hyman & Wright, 1979; Newcomb, Koenig, Flacks & Warwick, 1967; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

3.1.4 Normative Influence

Furthermore, factors that influence college students' attitude change are also debated. Experts have cited two major sources, which influence attitude change. Festinger (1954) in his theory of social comparison processes assumes that subjects need

to consistently evaluate their opinions and to do this they can either check their opinion against social or physical reality. Social reality is called normative influence and involves how motivated a subject is to maintain group conformity. Gerard and Orive (1987) state that the extent to which a subject is concerned with maintaining membership with a given group correlates with the extent to which subjects are willing to hold an opinion deviant to group norms. The more that a subject would like to be a member of a group the more likely he or she will conform their opinions to that of the group. This is based on one's desire for acceptance and social approval of the specific group (Guimond, 1999). However, support for this type of influence varies.

Werner, Sansone, and Brown (2008) led an experiment in which information was provided to high school students about a stimulus through either a guided-discussion or lecture. They found that the discussion condition produced normative influence for students because they were able to compare their attitudes to that of the other subjects participating in the discussion. However, this influence was only strongly indicated in female participants suggesting that gender may influence how likely normative influence may affect attitude change (Werner, Sansone & Brown, 2008).

Newcomb (1958) and Newcomb et al. (1967) found that normative influence of political opinions of college students attending Bennington College had a direct impact on the majority of attitude change that occurred on the campus. When the attitudes towards political views were tested, Newcomb (1958) noted that the longer the students remained at the college, the more liberal their attitudes became. He posited that the fact that the college was relatively small allowed for more cohesion to form among the student body irrespective of the student's major. This cohesion strengthened the effect of

normative influence on attitude change.

Guimond's (1999) study somewhat contradicted these findings. He conducted a longitudinal study to determine if attitudes of college students towards military and sociopolitical values changed from the point of entering college to their junior year and what influences the change. He used a relatively small military campus to discover if students' attitudes would become more conservative over time as Newcomb's (1958) subjects had become more liberal. He found that on the measure of military orientation all students developed increasingly conservative views over time, which is consistent with Newcomb's (1962) findings. However, Guimond (1999) found no normative influence on the measure of sociopolitical orientation. Students who held relatively liberal views at the start of college did not change their attitudes as they spent more time at college and there were differences between various majors (Guimond, 1999). Thus there needs to be additional study on normative influence and attitude change.

3.1.5 Informational Influence

The second check presented by Festinger (1954) is against physical reality or something called informational influence. This type of influence indicates that subjects change their attitudes based on the amount and importance of the information that they obtain. Subjects are less concerned with maintaining group norms and are more concerned with holding the right view (Guimond, 1999). According to this check, conflicting information with existing opinions may influence subjects to change their opinion because they believe that the new information provides them with a more accurate view of the stimulus (Guimond, 1999).

In Werner et al.'s (2008) study of high school students exposed to either a lecture

or a discussion, he also found support for the informational influence. He established that some students in the discussion condition used the discussion to develop a greater interest in the stimulus, which led them to pay greater attention to the information. The greater attention led to deeper processing of the material and if this processing was inconsistent with previous opinions then the subjects were likely to change their opinion. In addition, Werner et al. (2008) found that males were more likely to change their attitudes based on informational influence. Similar support was also found in Guimond's (1999) study.

In Newcomb's (1958) study, he disregarded the effects of informational influence because he assumed that the flow of information would be cancelled out by the group cohesion and normative influence of a small campus. However, according to Guimond (1999) under informational influence, group cohesion and identity does not matter, but the flow of information has an important impact. Guimond (1999) predicted that the different majors in which students were enrolled would influence the type of information that they received on different subjects and would therefore influence changes in opinions. He found that engineering students maintained a conservative sociopolitical attitude throughout college, which is consistent with the normative influences of military orientation. However, Guimond (1999) also found that the humanities and social science students had more liberal changes in their sociopolitical attitudes which cannot be explained by normative influences. This indicates that both normative and informational influences may influence attitude change depending on numerous factors including group cohesion and the flow of information.

3.2 Learning socialism in the United States

The level and quality of knowledge about a given subject can affect one's opinion

on that subject by influencing what characteristics are available for analysis when formulating an attitude. To understand how knowledge of socialism is gathered in the United States, researchers turned to its treatment in the public school system.

3.2.1 Analysis of socialism in secondary school textbooks

Three studies have directly analyzed the presence of socialism in American secondary school systems (Anyon, 1979; Neumann, 2012; & Weil, 1989). Between these studies, the frequency of references to socialism was found to be relatively low. Weil (1989) found that in half of the textbooks he analyzed, socialism did not appear at all and on average only about 10% of textual space was devoted to socialism, communism or other related topics. When these concepts were mentioned, most of this was in reference to foreign countries and historical events. Anyon (1979) found that 12 of the 17 textbooks he examined explained the American Socialist Party. In addition, Weil (1989) found no mention of socialists winning and governing at the local levels in any of the texts. Within several textbook analyses, socialism is distanced from the United States and presented as something foreign, in order to contrast it to the capitalistic and free enterprise system America employs (Anyon, 1979; Weil, 1989; Neumann, 2012). However, Weil (1989) does note that a quarter of the texts do present socialism in a fair light and attempt to be balanced. However, like the other texts they do “fall into an almost reflexive negative characterization” (Weil, 1989, p. 105) of socialism at some point in their analysis.

The American textbooks that do not omit mention and discussion of socialism, frequently misrepresent or vaguely explain the concept. Two studies found that a quarter of textbooks used socialism as interchangeable with the term communism (Neumann, 2012; Weil, 1989). By linking these terms together and failing to properly define and

differentiate these concepts textbooks provide a false knowledge base for students to draw opinions. This finding is coupled with research showing that these textbooks often cast these terms in a negative light. Anyon (1979) recorded that one textbook referred to socialism as a “nightmare...of the American people in general” (p. 370). Weil (1989) noticed a similar trend in the textbooks that he analyzed. U.S. socialists were called German agents or Russian Bolsheviks and one textbook even presented a section entitled “The ‘Reds’ in America.” The lack of defining and explaining socialism may create a gap in public knowledge and may produce bias towards capitalism.

No matter how a text presents socialism there tends to follow some mention of its inferiority to the capitalistic system. Anyon (1979) notes that most of the texts support governmental reform as the only means for economic change, because any other radical methods of change are subtly or overtly delegitimized. After presenting socialism, many of the texts studied would include a statement that implied that capitalism was still superior.

More recent studies have concurred with past findings. For example, Neumann (2012) notes that the text *Economics: Principles in Action* (2003), was the only text to provide a solid explanation of socialism and an equal balance of pros and cons for both systems. However, this balance was presented aside a critical assessment area in which students were asked to consider what they would be willing to give up in order to adopt a socialist government. This implies that adopting socialism requires the surrender of capitalistic freedoms (Neumann, 2012). The dominance of capitalism was further supported by textbook authors failure to report adverse consequences of capitalistic policies.

While communist and socialist countries are portrayed as continuously facing problems and aggressive conflict with neighboring states, Weil (1989) notes that the United States is scarcely held responsible for its actions or its role in conflict is somehow “sanitized” (p. 102). At the national level, certain legislation is presented as entirely successful without addressing the issue of enforcement. For example, antitrust legislation is cited as a huge success in removing power from big business, but in reality these laws were ineffective and had the consequence of maintaining social and economic inequality (Anyon, 1979). The analysis also found that only four of the textbooks he examined mentioned that profit motives of big business owners could have caused the period of low wages during early industrialization (Anyon, 1979).

Two textbook authors suggested that the legislation was simply an evil of industrialization while the other two minimized the problems of the legislation indicating that only a few businessmen used these extreme measures (Anyon, 1979). Anyon (1979) found that the textbooks suggest that workers are at fault for most of their trials and that the capitalism in America allows for anyone to obtain wealth and success as long as they work within the current system. Fourteen of the seventeen textbooks he examined discussed the same three labor strikes that were all major failures for the labor movement (Anyon, 1979). Anyon’s findings imply that labor unions and their actions are rarely successful and can result in violence. Further, Anyon (1979) asserts that “a successful and legitimate labor union is thus implicitly defined by the textbooks as an organization of skilled workers who accept and cooperate with the prevailing corporate and political orderings” (p. 375). Anyon’s findings from the 1970s supports that while socialism is mostly negatively portrayed in textbooks, capitalism is nearly flawless.

While these analyses indicate that the treatment of socialism in textbooks has not changed in the past 30 years, there are some limitations. Between the three studies, only 37 textbooks were analyzed for content, which is a relatively small subset of all history textbooks created in the past three decades. These studies also used a subjective form of analysis indicating that another researcher may have interpreted the material differently. The studies also do not address how the material is applied within the classroom setting and whether supplemental materials regarding socialism are provided. Even with these concerns, American history textbooks tend to treat socialism with a bias (Anyon, 1979; Neumann, 2012; Weil, 1989).

3.2.2 Social causes and effects

To understand why this bias appears in textbooks it is important to consider why textbooks are used. Anyon (1979) attributes the current situation to the foundation of teaching social sciences in public schools. The Social Studies Committee of the National Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education advocated the new curriculum during the industrial period. The committee desired a subject in which students would become “more intelligent in their work, more patient under oppression, and more hopeful as to the future” (Anyon, 1979, p. 381). In other words in creating this new curriculum the organization hoped to prepare students to support the capitalist system. This policy has notably continued by the other governmental bodies.

The National Council for the Social Studies defines “an effective citizen as one who has the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to assume the ‘office of citizen’ in our democratic republic” (Neumann, 2012, p. 37). This implies that the one role of a citizen of the United States is to respect the capitalistic system and that public schools

need to teach students how to do so. Other policies are more deliberate in their attempts to focus solely on American capitalism. Neumann (2012) notes that the Texas State Board of Education requires an economics course titled Economics with Emphasis on the Free Enterprise System and Its Benefits. This policy requires students to learn about the American economic system with little mention of alternatives. In addition, as Texas has a large student body and purchases a vast majority of textbooks, publishers tend to cater their texts to what the Texas Board of Education is seeking. This is reinforced by public opinion placing little emphasis on the teaching of socialism in public schools. A 1990 Gallup poll examining attitudes towards public school found that only 24% of the nation would require communism/socialism to be taught in the public schools (Elam,1990). This lack of public concern mixed with policies emphasizing the importance of the capitalistic system has contributed to the partiality in current social science textbooks. As textbooks are only one avenue in which knowledge is obtained, it is more difficult to analyze how they affect public knowledge.

Berti (1991) conducted a study to examine the effect of different textbooks on Italian seventh grade students' understanding of capitalism and socialism. She chose two different texts, one that was known to present a vast amount of information on economics and one that was more of a traditional book used. She had two different geography classes use the books and then tested the children's economic knowledge at the end of the class. About 62% of all students could correctly label the capitalist system and most could explain what it meant, while about 55% of students could label the socialist system. However, in explaining the differences between the two systems most students did not understand that in a socialist system ownership is collective in nature and that the

decisions regarding production and prices are different as well (Berti, 1991). This misperception of socialism occurred for both of the texts used, indicating that even the most robust efforts to teach these systems can fail to teach children the differences between capitalism and socialism. Berti's (1991) findings juxtaposed against Neumann's (2012) findings that there is little effort in United States public school textbooks to teach socialism in public school systems, simply magnifies the problem.

Anyon (1979) makes the assumption that if social agencies like schools embed biased views in the information they provide, "then they provide invisible intellectual, internalized, and perhaps unconscious boundaries to social choice" (p. 383). In other words, the bias in these textbooks may impede the public from choosing their own views by not providing access to and knowledge on alternatives. This is supported by a study conducted by *The Psychological Corporation* (1950) regarding opinions towards socialism during this time period.

The study indicated that 75% were against socialism in this country. However, there is a disconnect between being against the term socialism and actual socialist policies (The Psychological Corporation, 1950). Policies like peace-time price control, food subsidies for farm products, and government rules requiring union labor on government building are all considered socialist by over half of the sample and are therefore only supported by about 20% of the population (The Psychological Corporation, 1950). However, policies like government-owned flood control and electric power projects, minimum wage law, and payroll taxes to provide for old age, unemployment and other benefits are not considered socialist by most of the population and are therefore favored by a larger proportion (The Psychological Corporation, 1950).

These policies would be considered socialist by experts and yet they are denied by public opinion. This shows that there was a misunderstanding in the American public as to what constitutes socialism and what does not, which could influence how subsequent textbooks were written. While there is no evidence that this is related to bias in public school textbooks, it does indicate that the American public lacks knowledge on the subject of socialism.

3.3 Elite discourse/media effects on public opinion

The media has always been connected in the literature with political attitudes because it serves as an important information-gathering tool. In 1922, Lippman noted that the political world is “‘out of reach, out of sight, out of mind’ [because] for most Americans it is a world known almost exclusively through mass media” (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997, p. 196). It is how the media impacts and influences public opinion that is of interest to experts. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2006) note that all sorts of political agencies attempt to shape media agendas to impact how news about an issue are received. These messages can spread through mass media and affect public opinion by determining which issues or which characteristics about each issue are made salient for people. There are two competing theories regarding just how the media influences and changes public opinion.

3.3.1 Agenda setting and priming effects

The first theory is called agenda setting or the tendency for media to selectively cover certain topics and issues over others. This tendency influences public opinion by indicating to the public which topics are of greater importance and are therefore more salient when evaluative judgments are to be made (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997). Another

term used that is similar to agenda setting is called priming. This refers to the tendency of the public to evaluate political leaders on the basis of the events and issues made salient by the media (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997). While some research indicates several important differences between these two concepts (See definitions in McCombs, & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar, & Kinder, 1987), for the purpose of this study we will treat them as substantially related concepts.

Coming from a cognitive perspective, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2006) note that both of these theories rely on “memory-based” models of information processing. In other words, both agenda setting and priming assume that opinions are based on the most salient or accessible information to the subject when they are asked to give an opinion. If the process of story selection and the news values that guide which issues are newsworthy tends to exclude some issues and favor others it will provide subjects with an “an uneven set of information” (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997). Therefore, the accessibility of some issues is more likely to be recalled during evaluative judgments than others. Price and Tewksbury (1997) deem this the accessibility effect, which states that the more frequent and recent an issue or construct is activated the more likely it is to be temporarily more accessible within the subject’s memory.

In a study examining the effects of late night comedy show appearances on candidates overall ratings, Moy, Xenos, and Hess (2005) examined the effects of priming. They found that priming positively increased public opinion for the candidates. This was a result of the candidates’ ability to express the caring side of him or herself, which primed viewers to rate him or her more favorably in the week following the show. In other words, the caring characteristic of the candidate was made more accessible within

the viewer's memory. Their findings indicated that there was less of an effect for candidates who had already frequently been in the media prior to their appearance on the late night show indicating that priming effects may be more effective for more novel issues, events, and people (Moy et al., 2005; Lenart, 1994).

Similar to the accessibility effect is the idea that mere exposure to an issue repeatedly will influence a more positive opinion in subjects. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2006) note that this mere exposure effect may assist in explaining how agenda setting actually influences behavior. However, Lenart (1994) argues that this effect is only accurate when considering if the media message is positive or neutral toward the issue. If the initial presentation of an issue is negative than the exposure effect may be lessened or even reversed. Lenart (1994) suggested higher education may also lessen the effects of agenda setting.

3.3.2 Framing effects

The second theory is referred to as issue-framing and involves the media's manipulation of considerations participants use in forming opinions about issues. This refers to the different ways in which stories are produced, what information about an issue receives attention, and how it is presented (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997). Scheufele and Tewksbury (2006) note that the main difference between agenda setting and framing is that the former influences *whether* the public thinks about a given issue and the latter influences *how* the public thinks about an issue.

Entman (1993) defines framing as the selection of "some aspects of a perceived reality and [making] them more salient in a communicating text" (p. 52). He gives the example of the "cold war" frame that dominated the news during that period as

highlighting certain conflicts, identifying their source as communist, offering judgments and supporting certain solutions such as the United States supporting the non-communist side (p. 52). This he argues clearly affects subjects evaluative responses because they process information about one interpretation and have little concerning alternatives. In other words, frames in the media influence public opinion by making certain characteristics about an issue more salient than others.

This idea differs from the accessibility models of agenda setting and priming because frames affect how an issue is understood by subjects rather than which issues are important (Scheufele, & Tewksbury, 2006). By adopting media frames subjects can place the issue in the proper context with which to evaluate and interpret the issue (Wettstein, 2011). This is especially important for concepts that are more difficult for the public to comprehend. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2006) provide the example of stem cell research. This concept is rather complex for the “lay audiences” and so the use of frames in the media allows subjects to connect complex issues with existing simpler issues or concepts. Framing is an applicability effect in that how an issue is presented or how certain characteristics are emphasized results in certain thoughts being activated and used in evaluation of that issue.

Simon and Jerit (2007) applied framing effects in their study of the usage of specific vocabulary in discourse about partial-birth abortion. They found that the elites who favored a ban on this abortion were more likely to use the term “baby.” In an experimental design they sought to determine if use of the term “baby” versus “fetus” in a newspaper article was more likely to engender support for a ban on partial-birth abortions. What they found was that not only did elite terminology influence the frame in

which the media presented information about partial-birth abortions but the frames used by the media also affected public opinion. Their experimental strength was quite strong but in applying a time series analysis on the issue the strength became weaker, which suggests initial framing effects are stronger, but may lessen over time.

In another study regarding framing effects, Wettstein (2011) found that the salience of the most abundant media frame (i.e. the most commonly proposed view on an issue) in a given time period increased the likelihood that the public would speak in terms of that frame. In other words, in discussing the major issue in the media they would discuss the issue in terms of the abundant media frame. However, Wettstein (2011) did not find that the abundant media frame influenced or changed public opinion. This could be because the public opinion was already extreme and resistant to persuasion. Another explanation is that attention is an important ingredient for a strong framing effect (Scheufele, & Tewksbury, 2006). This means that while a consistent frame was found in the media and discussion little attention was given to how that frame relates to evaluative judgments.

3.3.3 The role of interpersonal discussion

The final aspect of media effects that should be addressed is how media priming, framing and agenda setting affect attitudes while considering the role of interpersonal discussion. As noted previously there are two types of influence in attitude formation and change, normative and informational. The media represents an informational variable, but its interaction with the normative influence of interpersonal discussion should also be noted. In his model combining the influences of mass media and interpersonal communication, Lenart (1994) notes that interpersonal communication has the effect of

distorting some aspects of information that originate from media sources. In his studies, he found that viewing a debate combined with an informal discussion regarding the issue effects vary (Lenart, 1994). For instance, when a homogenous group agrees on the issue during discussions, the influence of the media strengthens. Conversely, a heterogeneous group discussion will weaken the effects of the media. Thus, the effects of interpersonal discussion can influence how effective the media is at priming, agenda setting and framing the issues.

Interestingly, Zhou and Moy (2006) note that interpersonal discussions can also influence what is covered in the media. When the media does not properly address issues, public discussion can cause the media to reassess how it has treated a certain issue. In the case studied by Zhou and Moy (2006) the online discussion frames surrounding the murder trial of Su increased the news value of the issue and forced the media to begin covering it. In addition prior to the media covering the issue, online discussions were able to influence how the media would frame the issue. This effect faded as the media began covering the event, but the initial impact of the online discussions indicate that the public can have an impact on how the media frames issues. This contradicts research that supports the framing theory and claims that the arrow of causation regarding frames is reversed. This research indicates that the effects of media on public opinion cannot be addressed in a vacuum and must include the influence of the interpersonal context.

3.4 Current study hypotheses

Prior research has examined the formation of attitudes in terms of accumulating knowledge and subsequently applying that knowledge base to reach an opinion. Research has also examined the impact of several external factors such as the role of the media in

influencing one's opinions. While this research has been applied to a variety of political issues and topics, it has yet to be studied in regards to American opinions of socialism. Research indicates a lack of education about socialism in American textbooks as well as a negative media environment towards socialism. The current study attempts to connect these two factors to a consistent negativity towards socialism among the US citizenry with a focus on collegiate underclassmen.

The study will first examine if there is an overwhelming negative attitude towards socialism among underclassmen students at Penn State Harrisburg. I predict that participants will display little knowledge about socialism and other political matters. Subsequently, this research will seek to identify a negative elite discourse about socialism within the media environment. From subsequent research, the researcher posits that a lack of knowledge combined with a negative elite media environment will correlate with negative opinions towards socialism.

Chapter 4: Data and Methodology

The current study is designed to understand if knowledge and elite media discourse relate to student's opinions towards socialism. Chapter 4 will outline the current sample and how participants were selected. It will also discuss what the questionnaire utilized and the data analyses used to test hypotheses for this study.

4.1 Participants

Participants were first and second-year undergraduate college students from Penn State Harrisburg as of the fall of 2014 ($N = 254$). Participants were recruited through introductory level classes including Political Science, Criminal Justice and English. Professors in charge of these classes were contacted through e-mail and the researcher then attended each class to recruit participants. All participants who fully completed the questionnaire were included in the study except for participants above the age of 21 or those within their junior or senior year of college. The exclusions were included to ensure that only traditional college aged students were participating in the study, as nontraditional students do not factor into the impressionable years hypothesis (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989).

After the exclusions were applied, 148 students were included within the study. A majority of students were within the Freshman class ($n = 129$; 87.2%) and the mean age was 18.24 ($SD = 0.732$).

4.2 Measurements

The questionnaire was constructed based on Zaller's (1992) RAS model for determining political opinions. The first section of the survey was designed to address basic political knowledge based on Carpini and Keeter's (1993) five-item recommended

knowledge index. This section includes questions based upon their five items as well as two additional political knowledge measures taken from the U.S.'s naturalization civics test (See appendix A).

The second section is designed to measure knowledge on the traditional philosophy of socialism. Each measure presented two or three choices, one of which described socialism. Prior research indicates that American's notion of socialism may have become synonymous with communism based on its treatment in school textbooks (Neumann, 2012; & Weil, 1989). Each dichotomous presentation was chosen to reflect the differences between socialism and communism to force participants to differentiate between the two concepts (See appendix A).

The third section of the questionnaire examined participant's interactions with news media. Participants selected the media sources that they interacted with most frequently, including a TV source, a newspaper source, and an online source (See appendix A). In follow-up questions participants were asked how often they spent time interacting with each media source.

The final section of the questionnaire examined basic demographic characteristics including age, major, year of college, political affiliation, and opinions toward political and economic philosophies including socialism (See appendix A).

After the surveys were completed, the researcher indicated the bias of each media source selected. For the majority of the media sources, the researcher relied on previous studies that identified conservative, liberal or neutral leaning in the sources (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005, Lichter, R. S., Rothman, S., & Lichter, L. S., 1990). Those with conservative leanings were coded as having negative bias towards socialism and those

with liberal leanings were coded as having positive bias towards socialism. However, not every news source from the questionnaire was studied for partisan bias. This obstacle required an alternative method for indicating news source's bias towards socialism.

The researcher first researched each source to determine if a media source self-identified under a party identification and several were coded as such. For the remaining media sources, the researcher downloaded 15 news stories from each source containing mention of socialism or socialist. After removing identifying features and randomly assigning each story a number, the researcher examined the quality of the statements including socialism, coding them as positive, negative or neutral in tone. Finally, each source was coded as having negative, positive, or neutral bias towards socialism depending on how the 15 stories were coded. For participants who chose multiple news sources, an aggregate of bias was used. For example, if a participant chose a negative leaning source and a positive leaning source they were coded as having a neutral exposure to socialism.

4.3 Analyses

The survey data was analyzed using a multiple regression model. For the measure of opinion towards socialism, the following equation was employed:

$$\text{Opinions on socialism} = \text{Political Knowledge} + \text{Socialism Knowledge} + \text{Media Bias}.$$

The dependent variable, opinions on socialism, was measured using a 3-point scale of positive opinion, no opinion/neutral opinion and negative opinion. The independent variable political knowledge was included to be consistent with Zaller's (1992) reception axiom as he predicted that the more politically aware an individual is the more likely they are to be exposed to and understand political information in the media.

Socialism knowledge is an additional independent measure of “cognitive engagement” (Zaller, 1992) included in this model to understand how information and comprehension of a specific political topic effects opinions on that topic. Media bias is included as a measure of how elite discourse bias affects individual’s attainment of information on a subject. This variable was based on an aggregate of the TV news source, the newspaper news source and the online news source that each participant chose.

In subsequent models, independent variables were added or altered for additional analysis. The first variable added was partisan identification. Including this variable indicates if party identification is a stronger determinant of opinion than the other variables. This is consistent with Zaller’s (1992) resistance axiom, which states that individuals are more likely to resist information inconsistent with their political dispositions. A second form of media bias measure was also used for analysis. This version took into account the frequency with which participants interacted with each source. It was based on the bias in the media source that each participant chose as most frequently used. This is included in response to Zaller’s (1992) accessibility and response axioms. He holds that the salience of information on a certain topic influences their opinion on that topic. This study posits that the greater time an individual is exposed to the media source the more likely it is to influence their opinions.

The final regression model sought to examine the interaction effects of two variables. The researcher hypothesizes that political affiliation and media bias could interact as they may heavily correlate with each other. For example, a person who identifies as a democrat may be attracted to media with a liberal bias or vice versa. Therefore, the last regression model combined these two variables into one interaction

variable to test its affects on opinions towards socialism.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

After collecting the data, it was examined using several descriptive analyses, a correlation matrix and regression models. Chapter 5 reports the results of these analyses as well as a discussion of these results. The discussion section presents interpretation of results coupled with a discussion of limitations of this study and future directions in this line of research.

5.1 Results

5.1.1 Descriptive analysis

In order to test the hypothesis it was first necessary to investigate if the three components existed within the subject pool. Of the 109 participants who completed the dependent variable question, only 33% responded that they had a negative opinion towards socialism. Only a third of participants who responded endorsed feeling negatively about socialism, indicating that negativity towards socialism may not be as prevalent as hypothesized. However, analysis of participant's knowledge of socialism is consistent with this study's hypothesis. Nearly half of all participants, 49.3% of 148, answered half of the socialism knowledge questions correctly and over a quarter (28.4%) of respondents were only able to answer two questions correctly about socialism. These findings indicate that there is a substantial lack of knowledge in regards to socialism among this sample of college underclassmen.

Finally, this study investigates a widespread negative elite discourse towards the topic of socialism within the media. After examining 37 different sources, results indicated a relatively neutral treatment of the topic of socialism across sources. About half (48.6%) of sources were impartial in their treatment of the topic, while the remaining

sources distributed evenly between a positive or negative bias towards the subject. In addition, participants also evenly chose negative, positive, and neutral media sources. This finding indicates that not only is there not an overwhelmingly negative media environment towards socialism displayed in this sample, but no one bias is more popular within this college student environment. Even though there is not substantial negativity toward socialism among respondents or within the media environment, it is still essential to consider what factors influence opinions towards socialism.

5.1.2 Correlations

	<u>Variables</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Opinions of Socialism							
2	Political Knowledge	-.179						
3	Socialism Knowledge	.581***	-.174*					
4	Bias in Media (aggregate)	.007	.040	.158				
5	Political affiliation	.354***	-.148	.139	-.051			
6	Interaction variable (Party x Media Bias)	.110	-.116	.039	.225**	.158		
7	Bias in Media (Frequency)	-.133	-.026	-.112	.177*	-.066	.061	

Notes: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

A simple correlation model (Table 1) reveals two significant variables in relation to opinions of socialism. Socialism knowledge was strongly positively correlated with

opinions of socialism, $r(109) = .581, p = .000$. This is consistent with the hypothesis in that low levels of socialism were expected to result in negative opinions towards the subject. In addition, political affiliation was also found to have a positive relationship, though a moderate one, to opinions of socialism, $r(109) = .354, p = .000$. As both of these variables have strong statistical significance it is necessary to compare them in a regression model to determine if which has a stronger impact on opinion.

Of the other variables, two were just below statistical significance, political knowledge, $r(109) = -.179, p = .62$, and bias in media by frequency, $r(109) = -.133, p = .178$. While they do not reach statistical significance in a correlation it is possible that these variables may reach significance in the presence of other variables or impact significant variables within a regression model. Only three other correlations reached statistical significance in the matrix. The first is that of socialism and political knowledge, $r(109) = -.174, p = .034$. This is an unexpected result as the relationship is negative and two knowledge variables would seem to have a positive relationship. The other two significant relationships are between media bias variables. This is not unusual as the variables pull from the same exact data.

5.1.3 Regression Models

The results of the initial regression model are presented within Table 2. As predicted, levels of socialism knowledge positively correlated with opinions on socialism. This variable was statistically significant ($\beta = .590 (109), p < .000$) and indicates that the less a subject knows about socialism the more likely they are to hold a negative view about socialism. The other two variables were not found to be statistically significant.

Table 2
Regression model: Negative to positive opinions of socialism

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Std Error</u>	<u>Std Beta</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
(Constant)	-0.670	0.196		-3.427	.001
Political Knowledge	-0.031	0.031	-0.080	-0.992	0.324
Socialism Knowledge	0.153	0.021	0.590	7.195	0.000
Bias in Media (aggregate)	-0.070	0.059	-0.095	-1.177	0.242
Adjusted R ²			0.341		
N			109		

Table 3 exhibits the factors influencing opinions on socialism when political affiliation is added to the model. Participant's knowledge of socialism ($\beta = .519$ (109), $p < .000$) remains the most significant factor in determining one's opinion of socialism. In addition, political knowledge and bias in media factors still did not reach statistical significance. Political affiliation was found to be statistically significant ($\beta = .229$ (109), $p < .001$), but it was not the most significant variable as was expected. The impact of this variable is important as it moved the political knowledge and bias in media variables

Table 3
Regression model: Opinions of socialism including political affiliation

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Std Error</u>	<u>Std Beta</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
(Constant)	-0.831	0.183		-4.542	0.000
Political Knowledge	-0.060	0.024	-0.165	-2.476	0.015
Socialism Knowledge	0.142	0.018	0.519	7.676	0.000
Bias in Media (aggregate)	-0.084	0.053	-0.103	-1.581	0.116
Political Affiliation	0.173	0.050	0.229	3.472	0.001
Adjusted R ²			0.422		
N			109		

closer to significance than within the previous model. This model also has the most explanatory power of all models tested within the study ($R^2 = 0.422$).

Table 4 portrays the factors affecting opinions on socialism when an alternative media bias measure is used. Instead of aggregating the biases of the three media sources

Table 4

Regression model: Opinions of socialism with alternate media bias variable

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Std Error</u>	<u>Std Beta</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
(Constant)	-1.016	0.222		-4.577	0.000
Political Knowledge	-0.022	0.031	-0.058	-0.720	0.473
Socialism Knowledge	0.129	0.020	0.513	6.343	0.000
Bias in Media (Frequency)	-0.065	0.081	-0.064	-0.805	0.423
Political Affiliation	0.213	0.056	0.305	3.798	0.000
Adjusted R ²			0.398		
N			109		

that each participant selected, this variable reflects the bias of the source each participant selected as viewing most frequently. However, the alternative variable did not reach statistical significance and negatively affected the model. The aggregate media bias variable would have been significant at an 88% confidence interval while the new variable is only significant at a 56% confidence interval. This indicates that an aggregate variable of media bias may be the best method for analyzing the media's impact on public opinion. This variable also pushed the political knowledge variable further away from statistical significance and lowered the explanatory power of the model.

Table 5 presents the effects on opinions of socialism when political affiliation and bias in media are combined as an interaction variable (Political Affiliation x Media Bias (aggregate)). While this variable did not reach statistical significance it did have a

significant impact upon the model. Socialism knowledge remained the most significant variable ($\beta = .535$ (109), $p < .000$), but now the political knowledge variable has become significant as well ($\beta = -.199$ (109), $p < .004$). This variable is negatively correlated with opinions on socialism indicating that the less political knowledge a subject has, the more likely they are to have a positive view of socialism. Although this has impacted the

Table 5
Regression model: Opinions of socialism including interaction variable

<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Std Error</u>	<u>Std Beta</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
(Constant)	-0.473	0.164		-2.874	0.005
Political Knowledge	-0.075	0.025	-0.199	-2.937	0.004
Socialism Knowledge	0.148	0.019	0.535	7.983	0.000
Interaction (Party x Media Bias)	0.022	0.020	0.074	1.127	0.262
Adjusted R ²			0.376		
n			109		

results, the interaction variable model has lowered the explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.376$) in comparison to when these two variables are separated ($R^2 = 0.422$).

5.2 Discussion

The researcher applied several regression models to determine the factors that impact opinion formation specifically on the subject of socialism among underclassmen at Penn State Harrisburg. The results indicated that low levels of socialism knowledge and a strong conservative party identification significantly correlated with negative opinions towards socialism. However, levels of political knowledge and bias in individually selected media sources did not reach statistical significance. Even though a strong positive correlation was found in regards to socialism knowledge, further analyses failed to support the initial hypothesis of widespread negativity towards socialism.

Results show that only a third of respondents held a negative opinion towards socialism but nearly half, 47% (109), of participants hold a neutral opinion. The high frequency of neutral opinions is not unusual as research indicates the public seeks to “satisfice” (Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick et al., 2002) or quickly select the first answer that most closely conforms to their opinion. However, this theory may not apply to this study as the “no opinion” option followed both the negative and positive options. Gerard and Orive (1987) may provide an explanation for the high frequency of neutral opinions exhibited within this study. They posit that people are only motivated to hold opinions if the subject holds potential immediate consequences for the individual. Socialism is not a common subject in politics today and appears to be a relatively outdated system. Therefore, it is plausible that the subjects within this study were not motivated to develop opinions about socialism due to its remoteness, which would generate high levels of both neutral opinions and “don’t know” responses. However, further research is needed as the design of the dependent variable as one single question was limited and the answer selection should have had a wider scale that was not limited to only positive, negative or neutral options. Even though widespread negativity was not established the results still revealed that a low level of knowledge is significantly related to negative opinions of socialism.

Consistent with this hypothesis, low levels of both political knowledge and socialism knowledge existed among participants. Subsequently, low levels of socialism had a significant impact upon participant’s opinions towards socialism. This finding is even more important as this variable was found to more closely related to opinions of socialism ($\beta = 0.519$) than party identification ($\beta = 0.229$). This finding is surprising as

party identification is held to be one of the strongest predictors of both vote choice and policy opinions (Achen, 2002; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Franklin, & Jackson, 1983; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002). One study found that party affiliation alone is such a powerful determinant that its predictive powers are merely 13% less than a full vote choice equation, including party identification and other variables such as race, gender, education, age, and income (Bafumi, & Shapiro, 2009). The fact that this study revealed a variable that is more influential than party identification is salient and deserves further attention in subsequent research.

Subsequent research should also attempt to clarify the causal relationship between the two variables. The hypothesis predicts that low levels of knowledge would influence negative opinions of socialism, but alternative possibilities do exist. The correlation demonstrated by the regression model indicates a relationship exists between variables. It is possible that levels of knowledge do not influence opinions but rather the reverse. If someone has a positive opinion of socialism, they may be more likely to seek information about socialism and deepen their knowledge pool. A third explanation could be that a third variable is affecting both knowledge about and opinions towards socialism. Future research should test the casual relationship by ensuring knowledge about socialism precedes the opinion. One possible procedure would be to administer a pre-test regarding socialism knowledge and opinions towards socialism and subsequently provide lessons on the topic of socialism. By manipulating how much knowledge each subject is exposed to, it can be determined if increased knowledge results in more positive opinions.

An additional interesting finding is that socialism knowledge related to opinions even though media bias was not found to be significant. I argue that this is consistent

with Zallar's (1992) reception axiom which states that the more engaged and knowledgeable a person is with politics the more likely they are to withstand attitude change influenced by the media. As most participants interact with a traditional media source as seldom as once a week (33% for broadcast TV sources and 57% for newspaper sources), Zallar's (1992) definition of media cannot be applied to this study.

An alternative explanation is available for why participants with low levels of knowledge of socialism hold negative opinions towards this concept. Prior research indicates that high school history and economics textbooks are heavily biased towards socialism (Anyon, 1979; Neumann, 2012; Weil, 1989). Those participants who retain low levels of knowledge about socialism may have been more easily influenced by the negative bias within these high school textbooks which is consistent with Zallar's (1992) overall theory. However, additional research both upon the treatment of socialism within public high schools and how this may affect opinions is needed before a conclusion can be drawn.

However, the question remains as to why media bias did not reach statistical significance in any of the aforementioned regression models. Two measures of media bias were employed in order to best characterize the concept of media bias, but neither reached statistical significance. The use of self-selection for this measure coupled with limiting participants to choose one media source per category could have affected the results. According to Zallar (1992), the media environment is meant to be a compilation of all of the media sources to which someone is exposed. This study aggregated the bias of a couple of the sources to which each participant is exposed and applied the bias of the most frequently viewed source. Both of these measures capture a very small sliver of

each subject's media environment and could have altered the results. In addition, the second half of participants received additional instructions to fill out this section after it was discovered that people were selecting multiple media sources in each category. These issues with coding and instructions as well as the type of measure used could have impacted the results.

In addition the analysis of each media source may have also contributed to error in the results. Each source's bias was coded as being conservative or liberal while only a select few were examined for their treatment of the topic of socialism. Future research should focus on examining media sources more thoroughly to determine exactly how often they discuss socialism and the manner in which they do so. The researcher did notice that the topic of socialism was rarely mentioned in news articles. This could lead to people being seldom or never exposed to information about socialism within their media environment. Attitude formation and change depends heavily on the presence of external information influencing evaluation of the subject (Lemon, 1968; Kaplan, 1972; Gerard & Orive, 1987). The absence of socialism in the media and the lack of coverage within school textbooks suggest that participants may simply have little to no information from which to draw an opinion consistent with the bias in their media source.

Consistent with this explanation is the concept of agenda setting otherwise known as priming (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997). This theory holds that the media has an effect upon public opinion by deciding what topics to cover and which to exclude. In other words they force the public to draw an opinion upon subjects that they heavily cover. In this study the media are choosing to rarely discuss socialism, which may further increase neutral opinions of the subject, which is consistent with the results. This theory indicates

that the way in which socialism is handled is not what matters, but rather that media sources are rarely discussing the topic of socialism. Therefore, the type of measure employed by this study to indicate media bias would be a useless determinant of socialism opinions. Clearly, further research is needed to understand how and if the media is affecting opinions upon socialism.

In addition to the media's intentional treatment of socialism, we should consider the impact of partisan identification on this variable. An interaction variable was implemented to determine if party affiliation was influencing media selection and therefore the bias variable, but it still did not reach statistical significance. Iyengar and Hahn (2009) show that people select what media to view based on how the source conforms to their preexisting party identification. Based on this conclusion, the interaction variable should have come closer to reaching significance than media bias alone but the opposite occurred. This suggests that there may have been errors in the coding of each media source as either liberal or conservative. Each source was coded based on prior research, but some of the sources had no research conducted upon them due to their recent creation and that they had not been previously characterized as a traditional news source. Future work should be committed to determining if these sources fall under a conservative or liberal frame which may help to prove the effect of media framing (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997) and party identification upon public opinion.

Even though errors existed within the methods of the study, the results indicate a significant connection between levels of socialism knowledge and subsequent opinions. These results should lead to how strong these opinions may be and how likely they are to change. According to the informational influence theory (Guimond, 1999), people may

be influenced to change their existing beliefs if conflicting information provides a more accurate view of the stimulus. This study provides a means of testing this hypothesis in subsequent research as levels of knowledge towards socialism were shown to be relatively low. Attitude certainty is another measure that should be examined in subsequent research to determine the strength of these opinions and how likely they are to change (Bassili, 1996). Finally, it is suggested that a longitudinal study may be beneficial to truly test the impact of the impressionable year's hypothesis (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989) on opinions towards socialism and if these college underclassmen change their opinions throughout their college years.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The process of attitude formation and change is convoluted. While all the pieces influencing attitudes may not be identifiable, this study attempted to uncover potentially influential factors on political attitude formation. The specific focus was on attitudes towards socialism. The researcher hypothesized that two key factors would influence these opinions based on Zallar's (1992) RAS model. The combination of little political knowledge, little knowledge about socialism, and a highly negative media environment should lead to negativity among the participants.

In order to test this hypothesis, the researcher drafted an original questionnaire to measure the three variables and attitudes towards socialism. A total of 148 underclassmen completed the questionnaire and were included within the regression models. The results of four different regression models indicated that two factors had substantial influence upon student's opinions. Across all four models, knowledge about socialism had the most impact upon the subject's opinions. This finding was surprising as prior research (Campbell et al., 1960; Franklin, & Jackson, 1983; Green et al., 2002) would suggest that party identification, which was significant as well, should have the most influence on opinions regarding political issues. Low levels of socialism knowledge were positively correlated with negative attitudes towards socialism, which was consistent with the proposed hypothesis. However, the results did not find support for the influence of political knowledge or media bias upon socialism opinions.

Even though only half of the hypothesis received support from the results, it does not negate the importance of this study. The current study attempted to characterize an abundance of media sources via several methods that could have affected the results. In

addition, this study focused on, at most, three media sources that could influence each subject's opinion. This is far from encompassing the entire media environment that could influence one's opinions. Future research needs to consider both a solid method for evaluating bias in the media environment as well as considering the influence of different forms of elite discourse, including socialization within primary and secondary schools.

Research indicates that high school textbooks treat socialism with a relatively negative bias (Anyon, 1979; Neumann, 2012; Weil, 1989) but little has been done to analyze how socialism is taught in the actual classroom. Regardless, enough evidence exists to suggest that negative attitudes toward socialism may be influenced by a negative elite discourse that exists not in the traditional media but during the socialization of children. This consideration was neglected from the study and should be examined in the future to fully utilize Zaller's (1992) theory. The researcher also accepts that Zaller's (1992) theory may not be the best for explaining the situation with socialism as the study revealed that socialism is rarely mentioned in the media or within the educational system. It is possible that the theory of agenda setting (Price, & Tewksbury, 1997) may explain the media's treatment of socialism and could explain the high levels of neutral opinions found within the study.

The results of this study found a strong correlation between levels of socialism knowledge and opinions about socialism. This substantiates the original hypothesis that low levels of knowledge would trigger negative opinions, even though the intermediary variable of media bias was not statistically significant. An analysis of the media bias measure indicates several problems and suggests future research with alternative measures of elite discourse could rectify the results. Although the original hypothesis

could not be supported, the results are important as they show that knowledge about an issue may be a more influential factor in attitude foundation and change than political affiliation. This finding refutes past research and may influence future research upon political opinions, knowledge, and the impact of party identification. Overall the study did find low levels of knowledge about socialism which impacted subsequent negative opinions and further research could indicate important mediating variables that can help explain the high levels of negative and neutral opinions about socialism.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

By completing the first page you consent to participate anonymously in this study.

Political Knowledge

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. Please refrain from looking up any of the answers. If you do not know the answer you may leave it blank.

#1: Which political party has a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives?

#2: If the president vetoes a bill what majority is needed in Congress to override his veto?

#3: What are the first ten amendments of the Constitution called?

#4: How many senators does each state elect to the U.S. Senate?

#5: What is the name of the current Vice President of the United States?

#6: What is the highest court in the United States?

#7: Which United States political party is more conservative?

For questions 14-22 please circle the option that best describes socialism or a policy it would support. If you do not know the answer you may leave it blank.

#8 (Check ONE) Which best describes socialism?

public ownership of business government ownership of business

#9 (Check ONE) Which best describes socialism?

Distribution of wealth among all citizens based on needs

Distribution of wealth among workers of each company based on individual contribution

#10 (Check ONE) Which best describes socialism?

Economic philosophy Political philosophy Economic AND political philosophy

#11 (Check ONE) Which best describes socialism?

Can only work within a totalitarian regime

Can work within different political systems

#12 (Check ONE) Which best describes socialism?

Willingness to work within a capitalist system

Complete opposition to capitalism

#13 (Check ONE) Which best describes socialism?

Supports freedom of religion Seeks to abolish all religion

#14 (Check ✓ ONE) Which best describes socialism?

Accepts forms of private property including housing or material goods

All forms of private property are abolished

#15 (Check ✓ ONE) Which best describes socialism?

Government makes political and economic decisions for all

Personal choices such as education, employment and health care are left to the individual

#16 (Check ✓ ONE) Which best describes socialism?

All people have equal rights

Government decides who has rights and who doesn't

Media Interaction

Please place a check ✓ next to the answer that best describes you. If you do not know the answer you may leave it blank.

#17: From which source do you receive most of your news from?

TV Radio Print Newspaper Online

#18: Of the following TV and Radio news sources select the one you view or listen to most frequently:

ABC News

BBC News

CBS News

CNN

Comedy Central

Daily Show

Fox News

MSNBC

NBC News

NPR All things considered

Other: Please Specify _____

I don't view any of the above frequently

#18a: If you selected one of the news sources above, how frequently do you view or listen to that source?

More than 3 times a day

2-3 times a day

Once a day

2-3 times a week

Once a week

#19: Of the following Newspaper sources select the one you view most frequently:

Chicago Tribune

The Christian Science Monitor

- Daily News
 Los Angeles Times

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

- New York Post
 New York Times
 Seattle Times
 The Guardian
 The Independent
 The Politico
 USA Today
 Wall Street Journal
 Washington Post
 Other: Please Specify _____
 I don't view any of the above frequently

#19a: If you selected any of the newspapers above, do you view them in print or online?

- Print Online

#19b: If you selected one of the news sources above, how frequently do you view that source?

- More than 3 times a day
 2-3 times a day
 Once a day
 2-3 times a week
 Once a week

#20: Of the following Online news sources select the one you view or listen to most frequently:

- AlterNet
 Center for Public Integrity
 Consortium News
 CounterPunch
 FactCheck
 FAIR
 GlobalPost
 Grist
 Huffington Post
 Media Matters
 MoveOn
 New America Media
 Op Ed News
 Pew Research
 Politifact
 ProPublica
 Religion Dispatches
 TED
 The Daily Beast
 Tomdispatch.com
 TruthDig
 TruthOut

- YouTube
- Other: Please Specify _____
- I don't view any of the above frequently

#20a: If you selected one of the news sources above, how frequently do you view that source?

- More than 3 times a day
- 2-3 times a day
- Once a day
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week

Basic Demographics

Please place a check next to the answer that best describes you. If you do not know the answer you may leave it blank.

#21: Age: What is your age?

- Under 17 17 18 19 20 21 Over 21

#22: Class: Based on the amount of credits you have accrued what is your current class?

- Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

#23: Major: What is your current major? _____

#24: Ethnicity origin: Please specify your ethnicity.

- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic or Latino
- African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Other
- Don't wish to specify

#25: Marital Status: What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Don't wish to specify

#26: Employment status: Are you currently....?

- Employed Part-time for wages
- Employed Full-time for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work but not currently looking for work
- Don't wish to specify

#27: Political affiliation: Do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

- Strong Republican
- Moderate Republican

- Independent
 Moderate Democrat
 Strong Democrat

#28: How would you describe your political views?

- Very conservative
 Conservative
 Moderate
 Liberal
 Very Liberal

#29: Please specify what type of opinion you have towards each of the following words:

Liberal

- Positive opinion Negative opinion No opinion Don't Know

Conservative

- Positive opinion Negative opinion No opinion Don't Know

Capitalism

- Positive opinion Negative opinion No opinion Don't Know

Socialism

- Positive opinion Negative opinion No opinion Don't Know

Libertarian

- Positive opinion Negative opinion No opinion Don't Know

Progressive

- Positive opinion Negative opinion No opinion Don't Know

Communism

- Positive opinion Negative opinion No opinion Don't Know

Appendix B: Coding for bias in media sources

Tv Source	Bias	Newspaper Source	Bias	Online Source	Bias
ABC	0	Chicago Tribune	0	Alternet	0
BBC	-1	The Christian Science Monitor	0	Center for Public Integrity	1
CBS	-1	Daily News	1	FactCheck	0
CNN	0	Los Angeles Times	-1	FAIR	0
Comedy central	-1	New York Post	-1	Global Post	0
Daily show	-1	New York Times	-1	Huffington Post	1
fox	1	Seattle Times	0	Media Matters	-1
MSNBC	-1	The Guardian	0	MoveOn	0
NBC	0	The Independent	-1	New America Media	1
NPR	0	The Patriot News	0	Religion Dispatches	1
		The Politico	1	TED	0
		USA today	0	The daily beast	1
		Wall Street Journal	-1	Youtube	0
		Washington Post	0		
KEY	1	Conservative or negative			
	0	Neutral			
	-1	Liberal or positive			

The biases for the media sources were coded using a three point scale with -1 indicating a liberal or positive slant towards socialism, 0 indicating a neutral slant and 1 indicating a conservative or negative slant towards socialism. The sources were first coded using prior empirical research (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Lichter, Rothman, Lichter, 1990). These included ABC, BBC, CBS, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, NBC, NPR, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, USA Today, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post. Some of the sources self-identified as conservative or liberal on their websites and were coded as such. For the remainder of the sources, I completed a search of the terms socialism or socialist on their online sites. I then copied 10-15 of the most recent articles to word documents and assigned random numbers to each file. Some sources did not mention socialism or did so extremely infrequently in the past 10 years and so were

coded as neutral. Upon saving articles from all the sources I then scanned each article in numerical order and coded its treatment of socialism as either negative, positive or neutral. This allowed me to provide an unbiased assessment as no identifying features were attached to the articles. After all of the files were coded, I took an aggregate of the biases from the 10-15 articles of each source and coded the source as such. A few exceptions arose in the sites of YouTube and TED as these sites combine a variety of user supplied material. Therefore, these sources were coded as neutral.

Academic Vita

Meredith N. Bush

Education:

Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology, Penn State University, Spring 2015
Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science, Penn State University, Spring 2015
Honors in Psychology and Political Science
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Experience:

Research Assistant, Penn State University Public Affairs Department, 2014-present
Supervisor: Dr. Matthew Woessner

Honors Service Learning at 2nd Chance 4 Life Animal Rescue, Fall 2013
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Awards:

- Dean's List
- The President's Freshman Award
- The Evan Pugh Scholar Award – Junior
- The Robert J. Bresler and Carol R. Nechemias Outstanding Political Science Senior Award
- Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society membership