

# **Unraveling the Role of Media in Conspiracy Thinking: Insights from the Czech Population**

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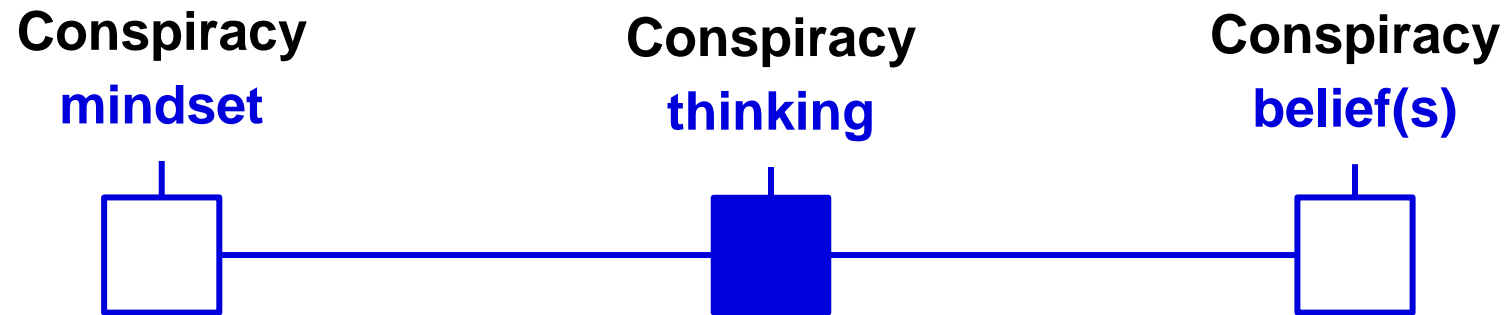
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Digital Media, Democracy and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe  
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# Conspiracy Thinking and (News) Media

- more conspiracy research in recent years (Butter & Knight, 2018)
- individual and societal implications
  - COVID-19, Capitol raid, ...
- diverse results for **political factors**
  - many studies from the U.S.
- limited research on **(news) media use and (news) media attitudes**
  - Corbu et al., 2023; Strömbäck et al., 2023; Walter & Drochon, 2022

# Conspiracy Thinking and (News) Media



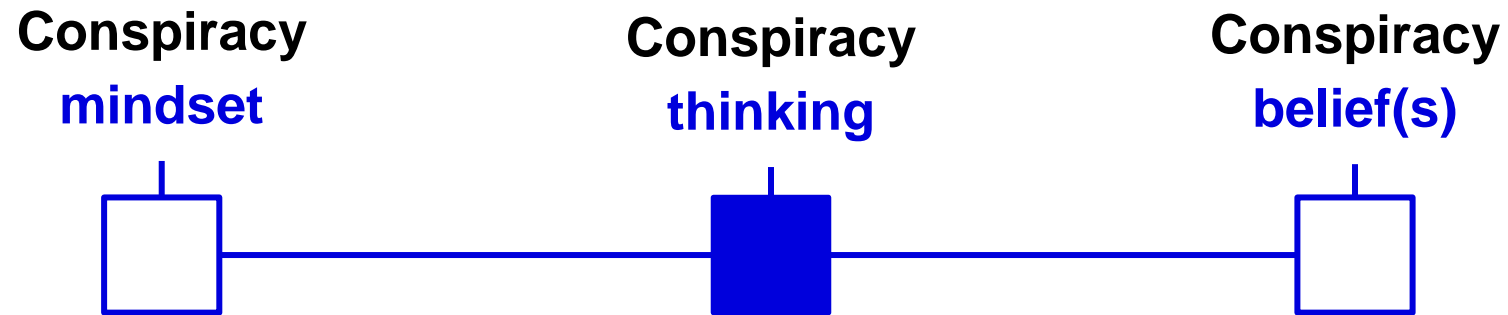
stable disposition to interpret the world and its events as a result of conspiracies

(Imhoff et al., 2022)

specific conspiracy theories that individuals will say are true

(Walter & Drochon, 2022)

# Conspiracy Thinking and (News) Media



**tendency** to interpret events and circumstances  
as results of conspiracies

(Douglas et al., 2019; Strömbäck et al., 2023)

# Hypothesized Relationships

Dependent Variable: Conspiracy Thinking (Čechová, 2018)

higher conspiracy thinking  
lower conspiracy thinking

- gender
- age
- education
- economic situation
- news frequency
- online news use
- public service media
- commercial media
- tabloid media
- alternative media
- trust in most of the media
- trust in journalists
- trust in politicians
- trust in the government and state institutions
- political interest
- ideological leaning (right)

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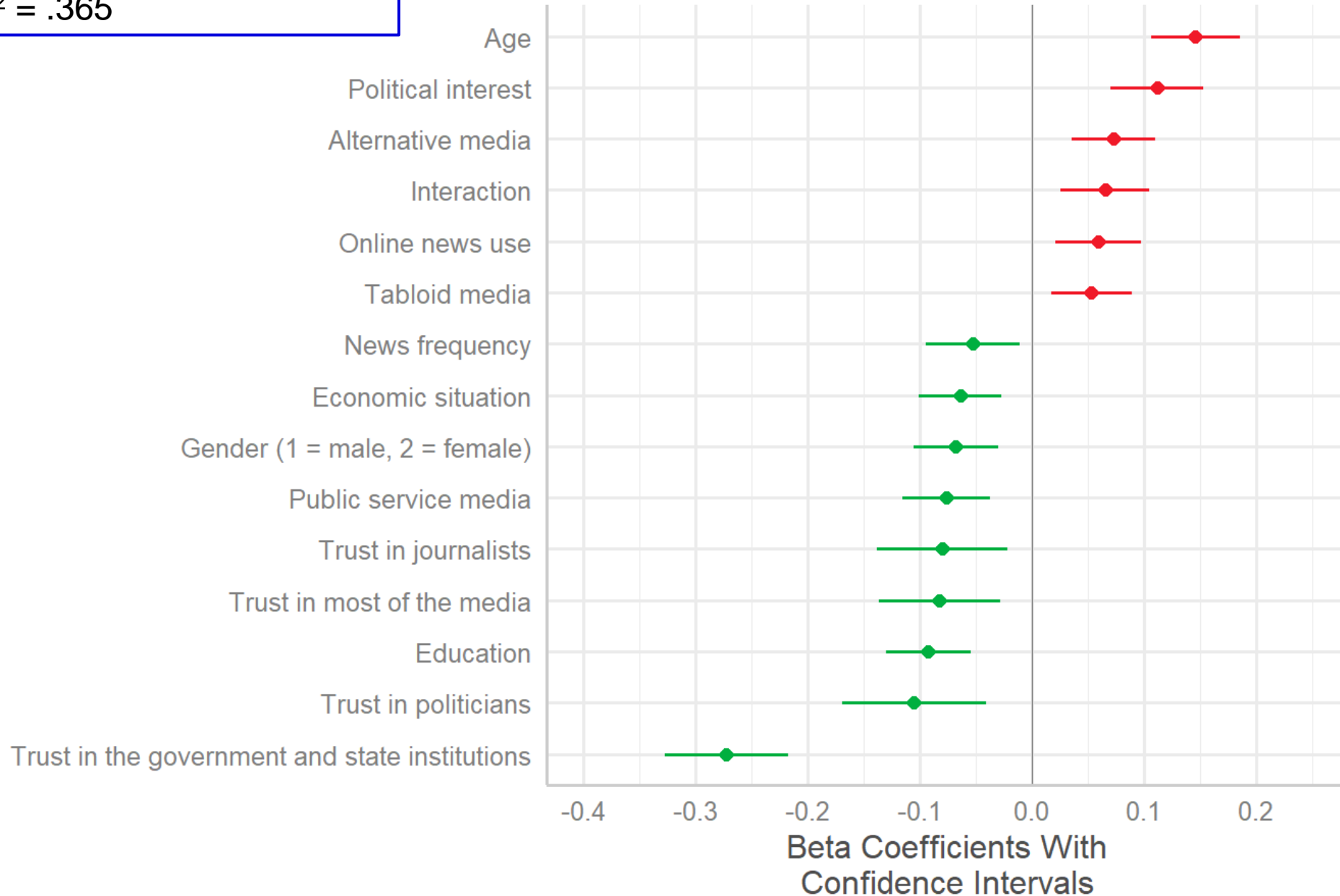
interaction: trust in politicians × trust in journalists

# Methods

- survey data representative of the Czech adult population
  - 18 years and older; quotas of gender, age, education, size of the place of residence, region of the place of residence
  - December 2022
- hierarchical regression
  - control variables, media variables, political variables, interaction
- simple slopes analysis
- $N = 2,340$ 
  - $N = 2,293$  after removing multivariate outliers
  - $N = 1,967$  after listwise deletion

$F(17, 1949) = 67.340, p < .001$   
adj.  $R^2 = .365$

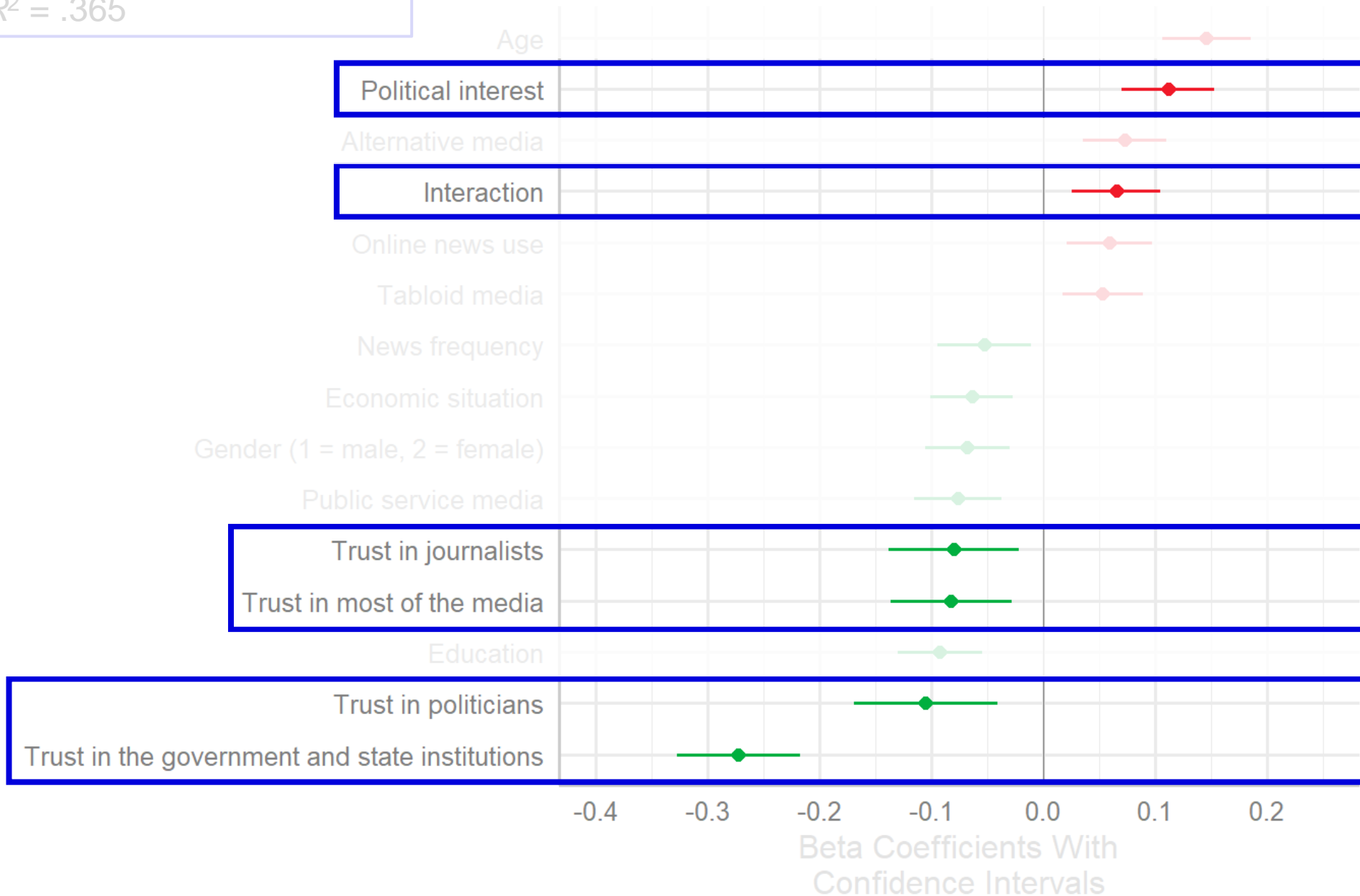
## Significant Predictors of Conspiracy Thinking





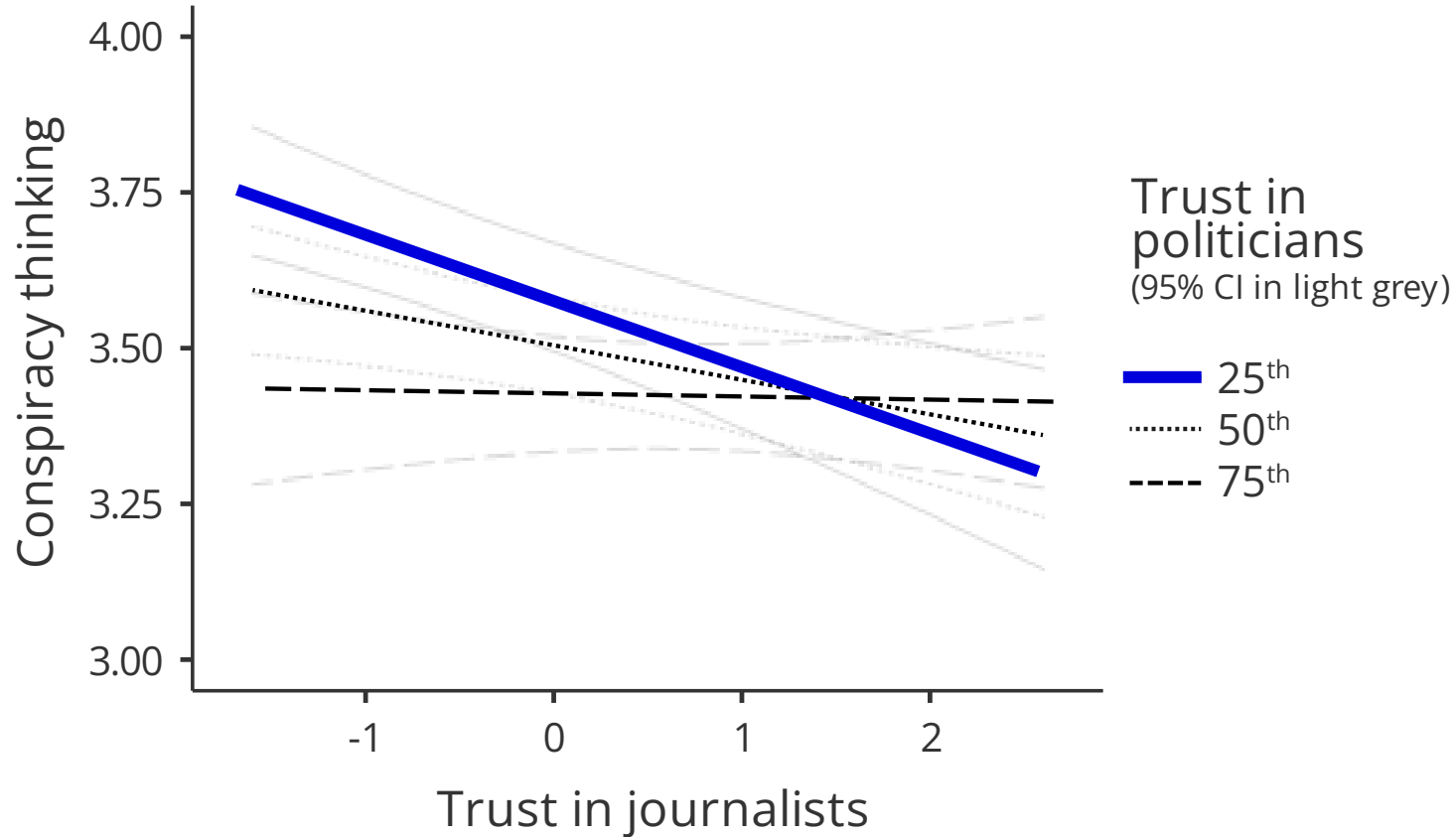
$F(17, 1949) = 67.340, p < .001$   
adj.  $R^2 = .365$

## Significant Predictors of Conspiracy Thinking



# Simple Slopes

Less conspiracy thinking for those with low trust in politicians but high trust in journalists



Percentile	$p$	$\eta^2p$	$\beta$
25 <sup>th</sup>	< .001	.010	-.150
50 <sup>th</sup>	.008	.004	-.078
75 <sup>th</sup>	.859	0	-.007

# Key Findings and Discussion

- important role of **trust** (political, media)
- **interaction** of trust in journalists and trust in politicians
  - low trust in politicians × high trust in journalists → lower conspiracy thinking
- positive relationship of **political interest**, no effect of **ideological leaning**
- possible **contextual dependency** of results

# MUNI

## Thank you!

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Blocks added	Overall Model Statistics						Model Comparisons				
	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$	$F$	$df1$	$df2$	$p$	$\Delta$ adj. $R^2$	$F$	$df1$	$df2$	$p$
Control variables	.095	.093	51.483	4	1962	< .001	—	—	—	—	—
Media v.	.303	.299	70.806	12	1954	< .001	.206	72.919	8	1954	< .001
Political v.	.367	.361	70.545	16	1950	< .001	.062	48.922	4	1950	< .001
Int.	.370	.365	67.340	17	1949	< .001	.004	10.544	1	1949	.001

	Block 1: Control Variables				Block 2: Media Variables				Block 3: Political Variables				Block 4: Interaction			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Gender	-0.132	0.031	-.093	< .001	-0.118	0.028	-.083	< .001	-0.097	0.027	-.069	< .001	-0.095	0.027	-.068	< .001
Age	0.084	0.010	.196	< .001	0.076	0.009	.177	< .001	0.064	0.009	.149	< .001	0.063	0.009	.146	< .001
Education	-0.093	0.017	-.122	< .001	-0.079	0.015	-.104	< .001	-0.069	0.015	-.090	< .001	-0.070	0.015	-.092	< .001
Economic situation	-0.103	0.013	-.168	< .001	-0.052	0.012	-.085	< .001	-0.039	0.012	-.063	< .001	-0.039	0.012	-.064	< .001
News consumption frequency					-0.007	0.011	-.013	.549	-0.029	0.011	-.055	.011	-0.028	0.011	-.052	.015
Online news consumption					0.135	0.035	.078	< .001	0.105	0.034	.061	.002	0.103	0.034	.059	.003
PSM consumption					-0.122	0.030	-.084	< .001	-0.117	0.029	-.081	< .001	-0.110	0.029	-.076	< .001
CM consumption					-0.033	0.041	-.016	.413	-0.054	0.039	-.027	.162	-0.051	0.039	-.025	.190
TM consumption					0.172	0.060	.055	.004	0.160	0.057	.051	.005	0.167	0.057	.053	.004
AM consumption					0.206	0.043	.094	< .001	0.161	0.042	.074	< .001	0.159	0.042	.073	< .001
Trust in most of the media					-0.129	0.018	-.194	< .001	-0.060	0.018	-.091	.001	-0.054	0.018	-.082	.003
Trust in journalists					-0.164	0.019	-.232	< .001	-0.068	0.021	-.097	< .001	-0.056	0.021	-.081	.007
Ideological leaning									0.002	0.006	.007	.696	0.002	0.006	.007	.700
Political interest									0.032	0.006	.117	< .001	0.030	0.006	.112	< .001
Trust in the government and state institutions									-0.177	0.018	-.276	< .001	-0.174	0.018	-.272	< .001
Trust in politicians									-0.046	0.022	-.063	.037	-0.077	0.024	-.105	.001
Trust in politicians × Trust in journalists													0.050	0.016	.068	.001

Percentile	<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2p$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95 % LLCI	95 % ULCI	$\beta$
25 <sup>th</sup> (low)	20.176	1	1949	< .001	0.010	-0.106	0.024	-0.152	-0.060	-.150
50 <sup>th</sup> (med)	7.017	1	1949	.008	0.004	-0.055	0.021	-0.096	-0.014	-.078
75 <sup>th</sup> (high)	0.031	1	1949	.859	0	-0.005	0.028	-0.061	0.051	-.007

*Note.* Simple effects are estimated while keeping other independent variables constant in the full model.



# Conspiracy Thinking (Čechová, 2018)

1. I do not trust mainstream media, I prefer to seek information from less known sources.
2. There is more to most things than we think.
3. All extraordinary events involving people from influential groups are somehow connected.
4. One should stop believing in mass media, politicians, fashion, and such, and learn to trust oneself more.
5. I know many things, but people do not trust me until they get this information in an alternate way.
6. Things happen around us and to us, but most people do not see it and do not know they are being lied to.
7. I can reveal the true purpose of events that remain hidden from the public.
8. Only a few people know as much as I do about the activities of influential groups.
9. Influential groups threaten us, the citizens.
10. The decisions of influential groups may appear to be in the interests of us, the citizens, but in reality, they are directed against us.
11. People in power will always find an excuse to use it against us.
12. We are victims of the lies of those people and institutions that have built up authority.
13. I am strongly attracted to mysteries and hidden facts.
14. Healthy common sense combined with intuition allows any lie and deception to be quickly detected.
15. We, the citizens, should not trust influential groups with anything.
16. Good people in this world suffer because of people who belong to influential groups.