

# WHICH CAME FIRST, THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG?

## QUICK STATS

- ✘ **CONFERENCE:** Spending
- ✘ **TEAM:** National Science Foundation
- **FUMBLE:** \$406,419 for a political polarization grant
- **HOW TO RECOVER THE BALL:** Redirect political science funds toward studies of higher economic and national security merit

A lot of ink has been spilled to explore the link between political polarization and the media.<sup>98</sup> Thanks to NSF, American tax dollars now join the plight. NSF will provide at least \$406,419 to MIT researchers to attempt to answer the question, “Does media choice cause polarization or does polarization cause media choice?”<sup>99</sup>

It is an existential question that will be a surefire conversation-starter at any family dinner, but it is doubtful the substance of the question merits the use of hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars to advance the knowledge of whether MSNBC and Fox News are the cause or result of the American political system. If the government study does confirm a linkage, will the response be to limit the First Amendment right to a free press?

NSF is supposed to advance transformative research, specifically “the pursuit of national

policies for the promotion of basic research and education in the sciences and engineering.”<sup>100</sup> NSF should stick to that pursuit and reserve the questions of political persuasion for think tanks and other disinterested bodies. Polarization has become an increasing and challenging feature of American politics. Perhaps there will be a temporary thaw in the polarization to unite against such frivolous spending of tax dollars.

## **RECOVERY**

NSF reports that it is only able to fund a fraction of the 50,000 research proposals it receives every year.<sup>101</sup> NSF undertakes brilliant research that benefits all American families. Congress should make sure taxpayer dollars are directed toward transformative research. Leave existential political persuasion questions to the talking heads.

***For more information, please visit:***

[Pew Research Center: Political Polarization & Media Habits](#)

[NSF: Collaborative Research: A New Design for Identifying Persuasion Effects and Selection in Media Exposure Experiments via Patient Preference Trials](#)