

Media

Stephen Fisher

`stephen.fisher@sociology.ox.ac.uk`

`http://users.ox.ac.uk/~nuff0084/polsoc`

- ▶ Key issues and methodology
- ▶ Theories of media effects and preference formation
- ▶ Media consumption
- ▶ Media bias
- ▶ Evidence for media effects
- ▶ Internet and social media effects

Key issues and questions

- ▶ Does the media inform and engage the public in political debate?
- ▶ Does it change public opinion?
 - ▶ If so, how and in what ways?
- ▶ To what extent and in what ways are (parts of) the media biased?
 - ▶ Do the media get to choose entirely for themselves what to cover?
 - ▶ To what extent are media effects just reflections of public reactions to events rather than editorial spin?
- ▶ What kinds of people are most likely to be influenced by the media?
- ▶ How has the internet changed things?

Key methodological issues and problems

- ▶ Direction of causality
 - ▶ Was it The Sun wot won it? or was The Sun just a weathervane?
 - ▶ i.e. does the media influence people or follow them?
- ▶ Selection Bias
 - ▶ Does The Mail make people right-wing or do right-wing people read The Mail?
- ▶ Identification of treatment effects
 - ▶ How do we know what it is about the media content that influences people?

Key methodological approaches

- ▶ Cross-sectional survey analysis
 - ▶ Most prone to the problems of causal direction and selection bias
- ▶ Panel surveys: repeated interviews with the same people over time
 - ▶ These help to identify causation from individual-level change over time
 - ▶ Still problems of limited data, panel conditioning and attrition
- ▶ Lab Experiments
 - ▶ Enable us to control the treatment and randomise them to make credible claims of causal effects.
 - ▶ But their artificial environment makes for dubious generalisability
- ▶ Field Experiments
 - ▶ The virtues of lab experiments in the real world, e.g. randomly allocating advertising campaigns
 - ▶ However, treatments often non-partisan

Broad types of media effects

- ▶ Cognitive Engagement
- ▶ Emotional Engagement
- ▶ Persuasion
- ▶ Personalisation of politics
- ▶ Framing
 - ▶ Changing the way someone thinks about an issue
- ▶ Agenda setting
 - ▶ Changing the importance of different issues
- ▶ Priming
 - ▶ Changing the importance of different issues for evaluating a candidate

Zaller (1992) Receive, Accept, Sample (RAS) Model I

A theory of opinion formation based on the following axioms

1. **Reception Axiom:** The greater a person's level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed to and comprehend - in a word, to receive - political messages concerning that issue.
2. **Resistance Axiom:** People tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their political predispositions, but they do so only to the extent that they possess the contextual information necessary to perceive a relationship between the message and their predispositions.
3. **Accessibility Axiom:** The more recently a consideration has been called to mind or thought about, the less time it takes to retrieve that consideration or related considerations from memory and bring them to the top of the head for use.
4. **Response Axiom:** Individuals answer survey questions by averaging across the considerations that are immediately salient or accessible to them.

Zaller (1992) Receive, Accept, Sample (RAS) Model II

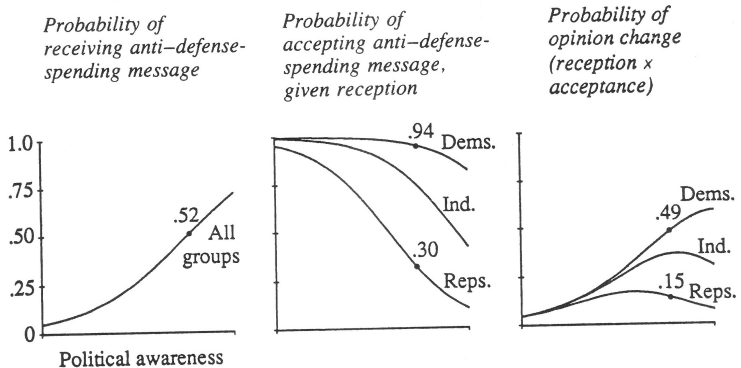


Figure 7.4. Estimated effects of reception and acceptance on changing support for defense spending. Estimates are derived from the change function in Equation 7.7 and the coefficients for the unconstrained model in Table 7.3. *Source:* 1980 and 1982 NES surveys.

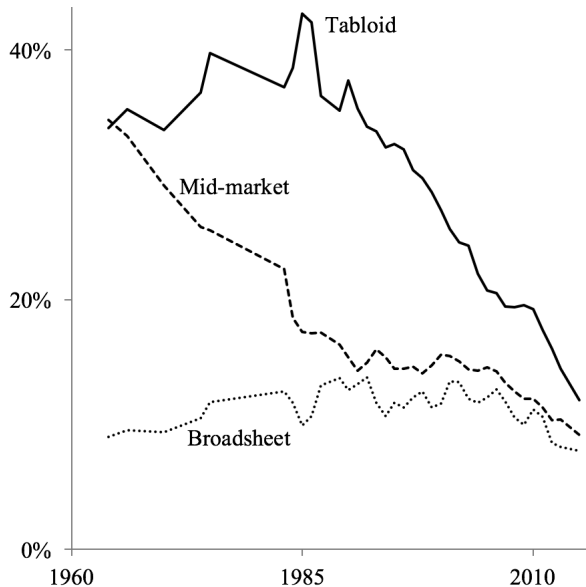
On-line versus accessibility models

- ▶ Zaller's RAS model is an accessibility model
- ▶ But instead of people storing information and then evaluating it when asked their opinion they may keep a running tally of their impressions of someone or something—an on-line model (e.g. Lodge et al. 1989).
- ▶ the information on which the tally is based is discarded
- ▶ Political sophisticates are more likely to show on-line preference formation
- ▶ On-line preference formation is more likely to be relevant for candidate evaluation while the accessibility model is more appropriate for social attitudes

Media consumption

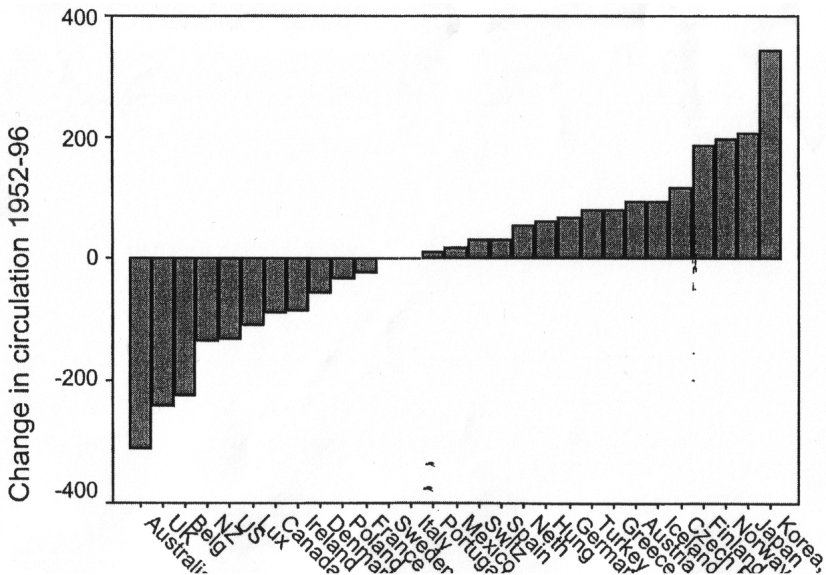
- ▶ Different kinds of media vary over time in usage rates over the post-war period:
 - ▶ Newspaper readership has declined dramatically in some countries but not others
 - ▶ Radio still common
 - ▶ Television rare until 1970s and then a move from broadcasting to narrowcasting starting in the 1980s in US
 - ▶ Internet only really significant since 2000, and still a biased usage to younger and richer people
- ▶ The political impact of these media depend on nature of regulation and journalistic traditions which vary between countries, e.g.
 - ▶ Britain: Radio and television news heavily regulated, but press highly partisan
 - ▶ US: Major TV broadcasters ownership regulations relaxed in 1996. Newspapers unregulated but typically non-partisan.
 - ▶ Continental Europe: typically regulated TV news and variation in the degree of partisanship of newspapers.

Declining Newspaper readership in Britain



Source: British Election Studies 1963-2010; British Social Attitudes Surveys 1983-2015.

Varying Newspaper readership trends cross-nationally



Source: Norris (2003)

Media bias?

- ▶ The media don't simply report the news
- ▶ There is sometimes overt partisan or ideological bias, but sometimes more subtle biases, e.g. towards the zeitgeist
- ▶ Events matter but there are often substantial omissions and biases
- ▶ Puglisi and Snyder (JOP 2011) show that Democrat leaning papers are more likely to cover scandals involving Republican politicians and *vice versa*, even controlling for readership.
- ▶ Althaus et al (JOP 2011) show that even the *New York Times* had surprisingly little coverage of US war deaths and the reporting didn't follow the frequency or pattern of deaths, just the chances of winning.

TABLE 1 Predicting Mentions of American Deaths in War Stories

	Mentions of American Deaths in Individual War Stories			Daily Proportion of War Stories Mentioning American Deaths		
	All Wars	WWI and WWII	Korea, Vietnam, Iraq	All Wars	WWI and WWII	Korea, Vietnam, Iraq
Marginal # Of U.S. Deaths In Past 30 Days (100s)	.004 [†] (.002)	-.003 (.004)	-.008 (.016)	.000 (.000)	-.000 (.000)	-.003 (.002)
Trend In Marginal American Deaths (-1, 0, +1)	.04 (.09)	.09 (.19)	.04 (.10)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.02)
Daily Average Likelihood Of Victory (-1 - +1)	-3.14* (.89)	-3.89 [†] (2.05)	-3.44* (1.07)	-.47* (.14)	-.25* (.11)	-.63* (.19)
Daily Proportion of Stories Describing Combat Ops (0 - 1)	1.50* (.66)	-2.47 (1.60)	2.42* (.72)	.27* (.09)	-.05 (.09)	.32* (.11)
Elapsed Time Since Start Of U.S. Involvement (Years)	-.05 (.05)	.64* (.32)	-.06 (.05)	-.01 (.01)	.04 (.02)	-.01 (.01)
Constant	-2.18* (.41)	-2.91* (1.15)	-2.72* (.36)	.11 [†] (.06)	.05 (.07)	.07 (.05)
Log Likelihood	-637.0*	-209.3*	-419.9*			
Pseudo R ² / R ²	.05	.04	.04	.27	.42	.27
Story <i>N</i> / Day <i>N</i>	1977	897	1080	125	30	95

[†] $p < .10$ * $p < .05$

Note: All models also contain dummy variables for individual wars (not shown). Cells in the left columns contain logistic regression coefficients and cells in the right columns contain unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

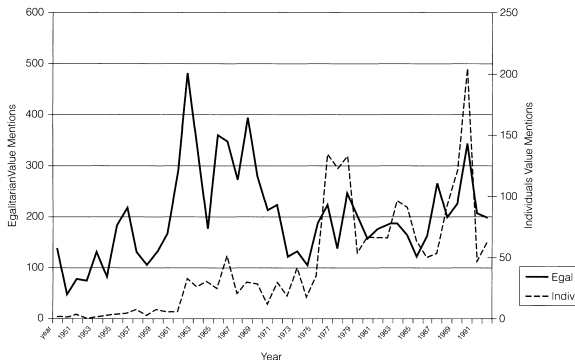
Framing

- ▶ Framing refers to the social construction of reality and the provision of ideas that change the way we interpret events
- ▶ Equivalency frames differ but are logically equivalent
 - ▶ e.g. a 1% chance of dying or a 99% chance of surviving
- ▶ Emphasis frames present different considerations for an issue
 - ▶ e.g. a building development might be portrayed as an economic growth issue or an environmental issue
 - ▶ these kinds of frames are basically just different arguments and considerations

Framing of racial issues in US media

- ▶ Kellstedt (AJPS, 2000) shows that *Newsweek* has applied individualist (self-reliance) and egalitarian frames at different rates to articles about race.

FIGURE 3 Egalitarian and Individualist Value Mentions



- ▶ After controlling for persistence (autocorrelation), the likelihood of an egalitarian frame was higher when economic expectations were higher.

Effects of framing of racial issues in US media

- Kellstedt (AJPS, 2000) shows that egalitarian frames lead to more liberal racial policy preferences but individualistic ones had no effect.

TABLE 3 The Determinants of Racial Policy Preferences

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
Dynamics	0.91** (0.06)	0.91** (0.07)	0.93** (0.06)	0.88** (0.07)	0.52** (0.10)
Egalitarian cues	0.01* (0.00)			0.01* (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
Individualistic cues		0.01 (0.01)		0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
States' rights cues				-0.29# (0.17)	-0.27# (0.15)
Number stories on race				-0.01 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.02)
Policy feedback			0.37 (2.90)		-9.36# (4.92)
Economic expectations					-0.01 (0.02)
Policy mood					0.20* (0.10)
Generational replacement					0.19** (0.05)
Constant	9.13 (6.66)	10.56 (7.39)	8.74 (7.28)	12.59# (7.22)	38.58** (8.75)
R ²	0.86	0.85	0.86	0.87	0.92

Note: N = 43 for all equations.

p < .10, two-tailed

* p < .05, two-tailed

** p < .01, two-tailed

Experimental Evidence for Framing Effects

Chong and Druckman (APSR 2007) provide field experimental evidence that framing effects depend on (the balance of) the strength of arguments and how they relate to the receiver's values.

TABLE 7. Support for the Urban Growth Boundary Policy by Values and Framing Conditions

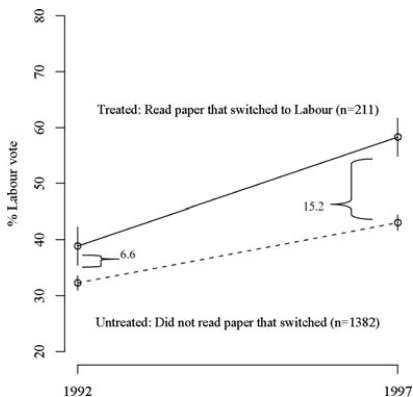
Framing Conditions	Environmentalists	Neutral	Economists
Counter-values frame	4.19 (112)	4.86 (36)	4.63 (38)
Dual frames	4.52 (89)	3.91 (35)	3.37 (29)
Congruent-values frame	5.48 (128)	3.80 (51)	2.88 (40)
Midpoint between counter and congruent framing conditions	4.83	4.33	3.75

Note: Entries are group means, with number of cases in parentheses. Scores range from 1–7, with high scores reflecting support for the policy. Environmentalists give priority to environmental protection over economic growth; Economists give priority to economic growth over environmental protection. The Neutral group is indifferent between the two values. The strong-Pro frame (open space) is the congruent-values frame for Environmentalists, and the counter-values frame for Economists. The strong-Con frame (economic costs) is the congruent-values frame for Economists, and the counter-values frame for Environmentalists. For Neutral respondents, we arbitrarily designate the strong-Pro frame to be the counter frame and the strong-Con frame to be the congruent frame.

Persuasive effect of British Newspapers

Ladd and Lenz (AJPS 2009) show that with panel survey data, those who read newspapers that switched their endorsement to Labour in 1997 (mainly The Sun) subsequently moved more towards Labour than others.

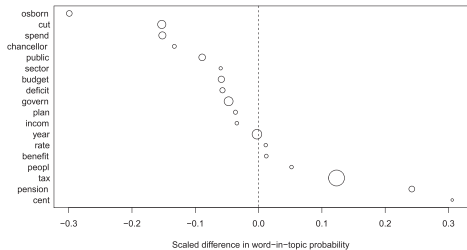
FIGURE 1 Persuasive Effect of Endorsement Changes on Labour Vote Choice between 1992 and 1997



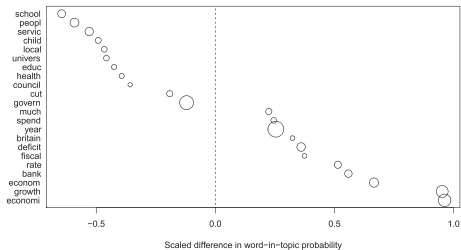
Framing Fiscal Policy in the UK (Barnes and Hicks (AJPS 2018))

- ▶ The Conservative led coalition government implemented austerity after the 2010 election and the Tories won a majority in 2015 despite little economic growth.
- ▶ Most of the media, including the BBC, accepted the need for deficit reduction
- ▶ Big differences in the tone of newspaper content.

FIGURE 3 Relative Frequencies of Most Common Words within Respective Topics



(a) Macro/Fiscal



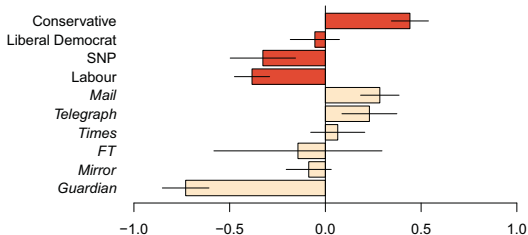
(b) Austerity Trade-Offs

High scores more *Telegraph*, low scores more *Guardian*

How necessary do you think it is for the UK Government to eliminate the deficit over the next 3 years — that is, close the gap between what the government spends and what it raises in taxes?

- ▶ It is completely unnecessary
- ▶ It is not necessary but it would be desirable
- ▶ It is important but not absolutely necessary
- ▶ It is completely necessary
- ▶ Don't know

FIGURE 1 Estimated Coefficients from Ordinal Logistic Model of Attitudes toward the Deficit



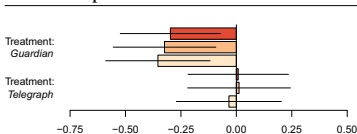
Note: Higher values indicate greater priority on deficit reduction. The top four bars show the estimated coefficients for parties, compared to those who report no affiliation. The lower bars are coefficients for newspapers, compared to those who do not read a paper. Black lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

TABLE 1 Experimental Conditions for Experiment 1

Group(s)	Treatment: Text Shown
Control, <i>Guardian</i> , <i>Telegraph</i>	<p>Recent official statistics show that UK government debt is around £1,600 billion, which is equivalent to around 88% of annual national income. This amounts to approximately £24,600 in debt for each and every person living in the UK.</p> <p>In the year to March 2015, new borrowing by the government—also known as the deficit—was around £94 billion, which is equivalent to 5.1% of annual national income. This amounts to approximately £1,450 in new borrowing in that year for each and every person living in the UK.</p>
<i>Guardian</i>	<p>Politicians and experts disagree on how quickly borrowing should be reduced. Some say that in times of economic difficulty the government should borrow more in order to maintain growth and allow the economy to recover. This would make cuts to public services unnecessary.</p>
<i>Telegraph</i>	<p>Politicians and experts disagree on how quickly borrowing should be reduced. Some say that if we fail to reduce public borrowing quickly the country may face further major economic difficulties, including similar problems to those recently experienced by Greece.</p>

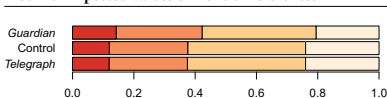
Barnes and Hicks (AJPS 2018): Experimental Evidence

FIGURE 4 Coefficient Plot Illustrating Treatment Effects from Experiment 1 for a Range of Specifications



Note: The top (darkest) bars of each trio are estimates from models with no controls, the middle bars from models controlling for newspaper read, and the bottom (lightest) bars from models including newspaper, income, and 2015 vote. Black lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Higher values indicate greater priority on deficit reduction.

FIGURE 5 Expected Values of Deficit Preferences



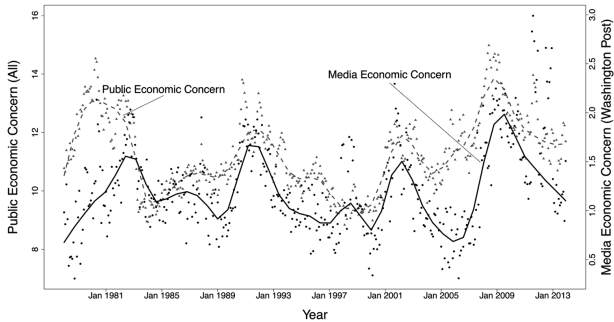
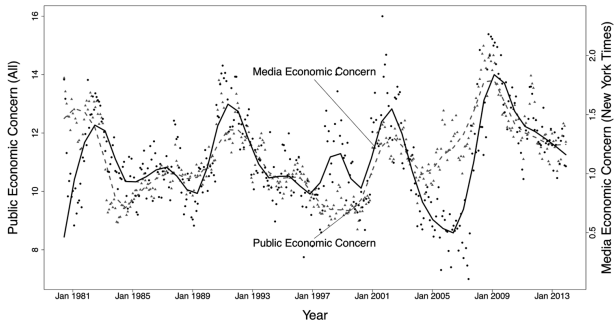
Note: The darkest (leftmost) category is the predicted share of "It [eliminating the deficit in the next 3 years] is completely unnecessary" responses, the lightest (rightmost) the "It is completely necessary" responses, and the intermediate blocs (and colors) the share of responses in intermediate categories, in order.

Small effect magnitude, and no "*Telegraph*" treatment effect might be due to people already clear what they think (c.f. Zaller).

Does newspaper coverage influence or reflect public perceptions of the economy in the USA?

Hopkins et al (R&P 2017)

“Newspaper coverage does not systematically precede public perceptions of the economy, a finding which analyses of television transcripts reinforce. Neither national nor local newspapers appear to strongly influence economic perceptions.”



Priming or Learning? I

- ▶ Lenz (AJPS 2009) argues that some cases of apparent priming are actually learning effects, including European Integration as an issue at 1997 British election
- ▶ Following shows increase in correlation between EU attitude and vote among those who learnt the party positions.

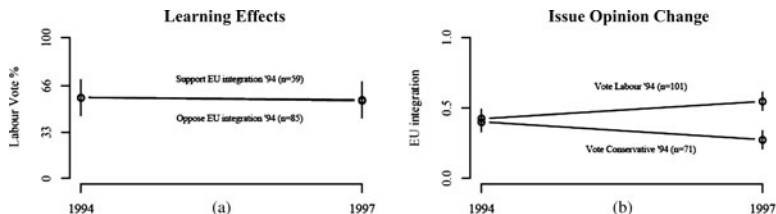
TABLE 1 Priming or Learning? European Integration in the 1997 British Election

	Place Labour as More Pro-European Integration than Conservatives				Attitude towards European Integration Coef.		
	1994	1997	N	%	1994	1997	Diff.
All	–	–	796	100	0.76*** (0.21)	1.23*** (0.21)	0.47 (0.30)
Knew before	Yes	Yes	352	44	2.27*** (0.38)	2.36*** (0.40)	0.09 (0.55)
Learned from	No	Yes	172	22	0.20 (0.36)	2.24*** (0.40)	2.04*** (0.54)
Partially learned	No	Better	101	13	–0.43 (0.48)	0.56 (0.47)	0.99 (0.67)
Never learned	No	No	94	12	–0.88 (0.68)	–1.48** (0.75)	–0.60 (1.01)
Forgot	Yes	No	77	10	0.91 (0.62)	–0.17 (0.65)	–1.08 (0.90)

Priming or Learning? II

- ▶ If this is priming then people won't be changing their opinions on the EU, just judging parties more on EU policy.
- ▶ Given initial EU attitudes, learners didn't change their votes
- ▶ But learners did change their EU attitudes to align more to their prior party preference

FIGURE 1 Do the Apparent Priming Effects Arise among the Learners Because They Are Changing Votes to Match Issue Opinions (Learning Effects) or Changing Issue Opinions to Match Votes (Issue Opinion Change)? Cross-Lagged Plots among Those Who *Learned From*.

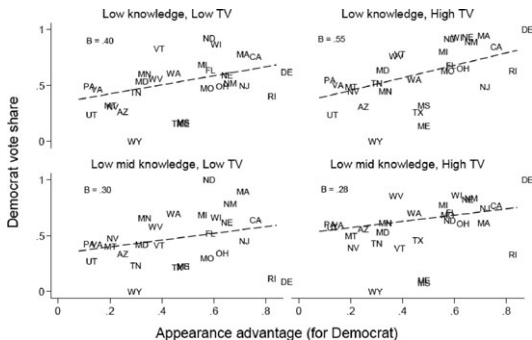


(excerpt from full figure)

TV raises the premium on candidate appearance

- ▶ Better looking candidates do better in elections
- ▶ Appearance effect is stronger for among low knowledge voters
- ▶ Lenz and Lawson (AJPS 2007) show that for these low knowledge voters the appearance advantage is greater for those who watch more TV.

FIGURE 2 Television Encourages Image-Based Voting among the Ill Informed in 2006 Senate Races



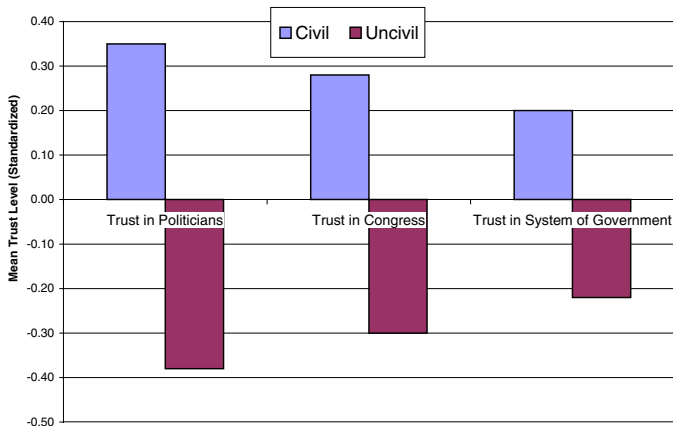
Cognitive Engagement or Videomalaise? I

- ▶ Media increases political knowledge
- ▶ While some claim it also increases interest and political participation, others say the political mud slinging puts people off, leading to video malaise
 - ▶ Bagehot claimed that the cure for admiring the House of Lords was to watch it.
- ▶ Norris et al (1999) found little evidence for effects either way in the 1997 British election campaign

Cognitive Engagement or Videomalaise? II

- ▶ Mutz and Reeves (APSR 2005) provide experimental evidence that televised incivility between politicians increases political interest but at the cost of trust.

FIGURE 2. Effects of Incivility on Trust in Government and Politicians



Effects of the Internet on politics

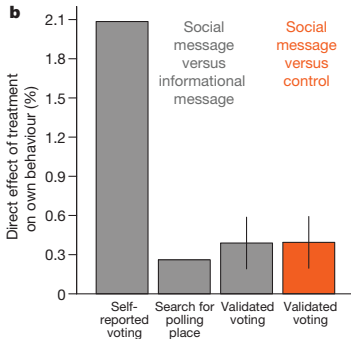
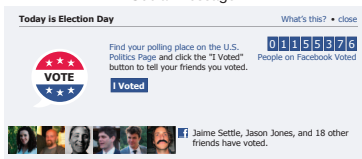
- ▶ Various claims have been made for major effects of the Internet
 - ▶ Good for democracy, e.g. facilitating Arab Spring protests
 - ▶ Polarizing US politics
- ▶ Farrell (An Rev Poli Sci, 2012) argues that the effects of Internet are best understood as a series of mechanisms
 - ▶ lowering of transaction costs
 - ▶ cheaper and easier communication reducing the need for hierarchical organisation of protest activity
 - ▶ e.g. Theocharis (Parly Aff. 2011) shows role of social media in university fees protests
 - ▶ homophilous sorting
 - ▶ easier for people with the same (possibly extreme) interests to find each other
 - ▶ reduced preference falsification
 - ▶ e.g. people more honest about wanting regime change in autocracies

Mobilization on Facebook. (Bond et al. Nature 2012)

a Informational message

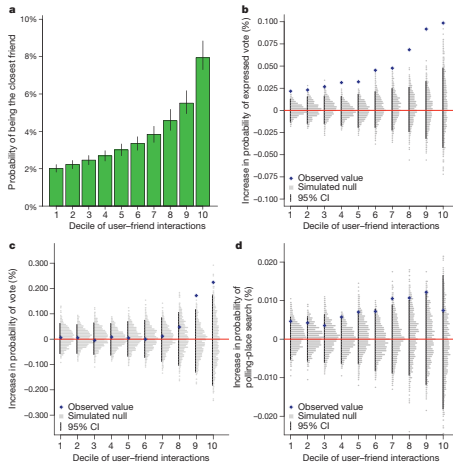


Social message



- ▶ Similarity of the two right-hand columns means no information-only effect.
 - ▶ A negative finding for the classic media civic engagement thesis.
- ▶ Positive (albeit small) effect of the social message indicates a social media effect.

Social Network Effect. (Bond et al. Nature 2012)



Contrary to Gladwell's doubts, there is variation in the strength of ties online, but he is right that stronger ties matter more.

Kalla and Broockman (APSR 2018)

- ▶ Systematic meta-analysis of 40 field experiments.
- ▶ “The best estimate of the effects of campaign contact and advertising on Americans’ candidates choices in general elections is zero.”
- ▶ “Persuasive effects only appear to emerge in two rare circumstances
 1. when candidates take unusually unpopular positions *and* campaigns invest unusually heavily in identifying persuadable voters.
 2. when campaigns contact voters long before election day and measure effects immediately—although this early persuasion decays.”

Fake News

- ▶ Oxford Internet Institute and others found junk news concentrated in right wing groups
- ▶ People who consume fake news consume more real news
- ▶ Nyhan and others: intense partisans look for fake news to confirm beliefs rather than to form them.
- ▶ Little evidence that fake news sways elections: just like the classic Lazarsfeld “minimal effects” thesis
- ▶ So little basis for a draconian policy response, especially when real news is sometimes mistaken

See e.g. Mudde 2018

Misperceptions: Flynn et al (AdvPolPsych 2017)

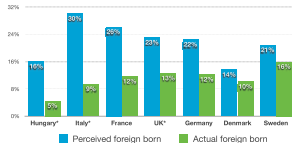


Figure 1. European misperceptions of foreign-born populations. Survey data from ESS (2014 and Ipsos MORI* (2013). Foreign-born population data from Eurostat (2014 data).

- ▶ Misperceptions about scientific, social and political facts widespread
 - ▶ E.g. on climate change, MMR vaccination and autism, genetically modified food, public spending rates.
- ▶ Misperceptions linked to partisanship, e.g. on presidential power to control petrol prices
- ▶ Reactions to corrections differ by partisanship
 - ▶ E.g. Absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq 2003 interpreted as evidence they were never there by Democrats but as having been destroyed by Republicans (Duefler 2004)
- ▶ Corrections can backfire most among those with high political knowledge
 - ▶ E.g. “death panel” corrections for high-knowledge Sarah Palin supporters.

Conclusion

- ▶ Tempting to believe in big and decisive media and social media effects, e.g. Brexit, Trump
- ▶ But ...
 - ▶ In close elections there are many factors that could have made a difference and often unhelpful to fixate on a few
 - ▶ There is a big gap between the prominence of the claims, especially in the media, of (social) media power and the social scientific evidence for the magnitude of the effects
 - ▶ This is partly because of data and research design limitations, so ultimately the extent of (social) media power is unclear, and probably changing.