

Tuning In and Turning Out:
A Study on the Influence of News Media on Voting in the 2004 Elections

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Introduction

James Madison once described, "A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both." (Padover, 346) Why should we care if people are informed on the topic of American politics? Arguably, the individuals making policy decisions, namely legislators and government officials, are the only ones who really need to know the inner workings of American government (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 388). If our democracy is indeed a democracy, however, citizens have the responsibility and privilege of participating in the elections and monitoring of these representatives who are meant to both represent their constituents concerns in the policy making process and ensure that these policies are enacted with an appreciation for its implications upon macro-level government and American life. (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 106) It is important to have a reasonably knowledgeable American public because more knowledgeable citizens are more likely to be tolerant, hold consistent opinions, and vote in elections. More knowledgeable citizens have three characteristics that are essential to upholding an efficient, well-balanced, and accountable democracy. Contrary to some modern conceptions of the relationship between media and the decline of political participation, media use, along with education, tends to be associated with electoral participation. (Wilkins, 1) The history of media has not been a static one. Markus Prior describes the changing news media:

The differences between the media environments in 1935, 1970, and 2005 are impossible to miss. Americans in 1935 had to wait for newspapers to be printed and delivered if they wanted more than short radio news summaries. Newscasters and politicians were right in the living room of many Americans in 1970 on a routine basis, but they left at seven o'clock. For Americans in 2005, they stand by at every hour of the day, ready to

drop a mountain of information at the click of a mouse or the push of a remote. It is difficult to imagine that differences as stark as these have no effect on politics. (Prior, 2-3)

News media plays an ever more prevalent role in today's society with hundreds of cable channels, well-established newspapers, and an Internet blogosphere that expands every day. At the same time, traditional non-media political information sources, such as strong political parties, have been disappearing from the landscape. With an increasing presence in our daily lives, and with the diminished influence of traditional political indicators and heuristics, what role do the media play in our political participation? Are people taking their cues to vote from the media? Is the news piquing their interest in American elections? Does level and medium of use increase a citizen's likelihood of political participation? This paper will examine how usage of online news, newspapers, and television news affects voting behavior in the 2004 election.

Literature Review

Candidates once relied on party organizational strength to reach voters, until electoral changes and campaign regulations began to decentralize the political system. (Wattenberg, 216) Before the late 1960s, candidates had to impress party elites in order to win an election. In the 1960 election, John Kennedy declared his intention to run for the presidency in January and needed only to participate in a few primaries to earn the nomination at the Democratic Convention. This was attributed to the fact that he had successfully proven his ability to leaders and large donors of the Democratic Party who retained control of the nominating process. In 1968, Vice President Hubert Humphrey was nominated for president despite not having run in any primaries. The party establishment appreciated his Vietnam policies that identified with President Johnson's and selected him as a safe choice during a time of great social uncertainty and violence. (Kerbel, 65)

In order to nominate candidates with more widespread support, the McGovern-Fraser Commission established procedures that increased the number of primaries held. At the time of the reforms, seventeen states held primaries (Kerbel, 66). Today's presidential elections include fifty-six primaries and caucuses across the country (Electoral Guide, New York Times.com) and candidates begin campaigning nearly a year before Kennedy did.

The practical implications of these changes extended beyond the party system. Television became the medium of elections, "which in turn legitimated the primary campaign as a seemingly open, democratic way to pick a president." (Kerbel, 66) Candidates have been able to use television, rather than party support, to directly reach

their voters. Indeed, Wattenberg's study on the 1978 elections demonstrates that candidate media expenditures increase as party saliency decreases. (Wattenberg, 227) In effect, campaigns have become more candidate-focused, rather than issue or party focused. (Seib, 9) Television has become the candidate's mode of choice for distributing information to the public.

As discussed earlier, a more knowledgeable voting base makes for a more efficient democratic system. The cost of acquiring political information and using this knowledge to make political decisions is high. This cost barrier presents a potential problem to the process of decision making. According to Page and Shapiro, this limited political knowledge does not necessarily prevent rational public opinion and decision-making. (Page and Shapiro, 388) Anthony Downs posited the theory that we attempt to reduce these time and effort costs by allow others to sift through the information for us. (Mondak, 168) These heuristics, or cognitive cues, are used to promote accuracy and expedience and "form reliable judgments and conserve valuable cognitive resources." (Mondak, 169) If someone holds an opinion on a political leader, for instance, they can look to the decisions and preferences of this leader on political issues in order to guide their judgments of the issues.

When political parties dominated the electoral process, voters could, and in some cases had no choice but to, take cues from party leadership as to what issues and candidates to support. Parties were clearly defined in terms of the ideologies and issues that they promoted. If a voter identified with one of these parties, they had a fairly easy time distinguishing between which should garner their support. As political parties began to lose some of their strength, television gained increasing electoral importance, and new

viewers began tuning into the news, television became a main source of political heuristics. In recent years, the media has retained its power of information and heuristic reporting, and as such, its ability to influence voter decision-making. (Prior, 3-4)

Since the dawn of American politics, there has always been someone reporting on the activities of governmental institutions and players. Thomas Payne famously printed pamphlets to spread his democratic ideals in *Common Sense*. Such works forced readers to question their leaders, their political stance, and the world around them. In 1935, enough daily newspapers were circulated for one in every three Americans to read.

(Prior, 1) Even in 1960, after broadcast television had been introduced, 60% of Americans reported that newspapers provided the most complete coverage of the news and 81% thought that it gave them the clearest understanding of the news. (Bower, 16) By all accounts, newspapers dominated the political information market. The nature and structure of newspapers, however, excluded a significant portion of the American public. Those with low levels of literacy, whose occupations did not allow the time to comprehensively examine a written story, or who were simply uninterested in politics had no other media options for political information sources. (Prior, 26) As such, the relationship between voter turnout and newspaper readership was high, but limited to those of higher interest and education levels. (Chafee and Frank, 48-9)

The first departure from print media came when the broadcasting of radio became possible in the 1920's. During times of crisis, families huddled around their radios during Roosevelt's Radio Addresses during his Presidential terms to hear about the state of national affairs at home during the Depression and abroad in World War II. The intimacy of hearing the voice of leader of the free world served to increase the popularity

of the medium. Not only did people feel more connected to what was going on in the world and the people telling it to them, but they were also given more dimensions and interpretations of stories. This feeling and use of the radio was not consistent or broadly reaching, however. Though utilized heavily during wartime, it remained a predominately entertainment medium in which newscasts were short. (Craig, 28-34)

Broadcast television, introduced mid-century, began as a predominately entertainment medium as well. With the encouragement of public policy makers and network executives, however, television news became more entrenched in daily viewing. (Prior, 59) Network and local news became more prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s as journalists saw it as their responsibility to inform the public, and a matter of prestige to do so better than the competition. (Prior, 67)

Some broadcast political news became a source of entertainment as more focus of stories became based upon the visual element. When John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon faced off in Presidential Debate in 1960, post-debate surveys revealed interesting results: the majority of those who listened to the proceedings on the radio thought Nixon won, whereas the majority of those who watched the event on television gave Kennedy the win. Kennedy looked young and healthy, while Nixon was recovering from an illness and refused make-up. (Kraus, 208-12) No longer could figures deliver speeches without thinking about the superficial aspects of such deliverances: how did they look? Were they looking at the camera enough? Did they have any nervous ticks that needed hiding? What image would they be projecting to viewers? The addition of the image – which can often reveal more than spoken or written words – to the delivery of information to the public made the medium all the more popular.

One main benefit of this technological advance was its ability to reach individuals who would not have otherwise sought out political news. The popularity of the television in the 1950s and 1960s and its limited programming options essentially tricked people into watching the news. (Prior, 14) By 1968, 60% of homes reported owning a television. These televisions, on average, offered 6.8 channels, some of which broadcast the same networks. (Bogart, 146-9) Programming options were few, but the content options were fewer. Broadcast television, and even the early versions of cable television provided “stable content configurations” that other media did not offer as viewers watched television in large and non-selective doses. (Gerbner, 284) The networks covered similar news stories and aired their programs at the same time slot. This homogeneity of content and broad-reaching capability of the medium combined to create a captive audience for network and local news. (Prior, 18)

The popularity of and trust in the medium grew among a larger spectrum of Americans. The effects of broadcast television were not equally distributed among Americans, however. Television news did not provide any new information to individuals who read the newspaper every day. To those who did not have the literacy, time, or interest to read the newspaper, broadcast news opened up a world of information. People with lower education levels tended to be those who were attracted to the moving images and simple words used to illustrate the political landscape. (Prior 14) Kazee conducted a study examining whether politically uninvolved individuals were susceptible to changes in attitude of behavior as a result of media exposure. His causal model illustrated that television exposure related to Watergate had no impact on the attitudes of high interest individuals towards President Nixon, but it was a significant predictor of

attitudes towards the President for people with low political interest. (Kazee, 507) In 1960, only 19% of Americans reported the television news provided the most complete coverage, but by 1980, this figure had risen to 50%. (Bower, 16) By making political information more accessible to a broader range of demographics, broadcast news served to level the playing field of political knowledge.

More citizens became involved in the political process, and this had certain implications for the character of American politics. Turnout during the 1950s and 1960s increased with higher proportions of television households. (Stromberg, 220) The narrowing of the education gap among news users facilitated by the accessibility of television prompted a 1/3 increase in voter turnout. (Prior 84-5) Less educated viewers and voters came into the process with a lower level of political knowledge and less polarized views on political issues. Television coverage both mirrored and compounded the political positions of their moderate viewers by avoiding party labels and extremes. This symbiotic relationship resulted in a more homogenous, temperate approach to politics. (Gerbner, 284)

Whereas broadcast television news offered a few programming options to a large audience, the advent of cable television changed the dynamics of television by targeting a smaller group of viewers with an enormous range of programming options. (Prior, 23) Cable television raised the importance of individual content preferences to extreme levels. If an individual would rather watch an entertainment program than the news, he can choose a channel and theoretically avoid encountering the news completely. This removes the possibility of inadvertent political education by the politically uninterested. On the other side of the spectrum, if one is highly partisan, he can choose to watch a

channel that reports exclusively with one or another ideological bent, or reports on only a certain type of issue. This serves to further polarize already partisan voters and promote the political knowledge of the politically interested. (Prior, 256)

The future of American politics and the media now has another technology with which to grapple. The Internet. The medium has been growing in size and popularity since the Nineties thanks to its blend of print, audio, photographs, and video, with the convenience and access content that other services cannot offer. The Internet offers even more choice than cable does. It allows for individual control over what stories he would like to follow in the news, if any. These users are less likely to read public affairs news than any other use of the Internet. (Tewksbury, 695)

For those who do take an interest in public affairs, the specificity and lack of privacy online allows news outlets and candidates to provide users with information targeted to their interests and preferences. Selnow argues that this leads to a distortion of voter perceptions. Often voters are targeted on single issues, since many interest groups that gather donations and lists of supporters focus on a certain topic. There is a multitude of issues and perspective with which to deal in governmental office, and policy positions are at high risk of becoming watered down with negotiation. When these voters decide to vote in an election based on a candidate's position on a specific issue, they are likely to be disappointed with the performance of said candidate when they get to office. This dissatisfaction is not necessarily healthy for voter turnout. (Selnow, 133)

The initial studies of the media-political participation relationship recognized the use of new media to serve as a source of news and engagement, but only to those who were already engaged in the political atmosphere. Bimber measures Internet availability

against political engagement, using Internet usage data and surveys from a mid-term election. He concludes that the only form of effected participation comes in the form of monetary donations. (Bimber, 53)

Sociologist Paul DiMaggio comes to similar conclusions after examining the relationship. Participation levels were highest in presidential elections when voters were less informed, therefore an increased level of political understanding would not necessarily promote participation. The Internet, however, does not inform or engage any new voters. (DiMaggio, 307) While the Internet lowers the behavioral costs of accessing information, his evidence demonstrates that those accessing this information would have sought it out in any medium available. Fundraising possibilities are the only significant element of political engagement that display a benefit from this lowered behavioral cost, as it offers interested voters convenient opportunities to donate. (Bimber, 66)

Bimber conducted his study during a period in which Internet providers perfected user-friendly computer systems and Internet models. These products began gaining much more popularity in American homes with the release of Windows 2000 and Mac OS X in 2001. (Prior, 13) As mentioned earlier, other theories suggest that the growth of the Internet has impacted the political engagement levels of certain voters. Tolbert and McNeal followed the work of Bimber and DiMaggio just two years later and came to a very different conclusion. They looked at American National Election Studies over three elections to determine whether the media, and the Internet in particular, enhance voter information and thus stimulate political participation. They concluded that Internet access is a strong predictor of political participation, favoring older, strong partisan, and higher education and income demographics. Those with internet access are 12.5% more

likely to vote than those without, while individuals who viewed online political information were 7.5% more likely to do so. (Tolbert, 175) The impact of an individual's access to voting suggests that the Internet is reaching those who would not have necessarily voted – contrary to what previous studies indicated. They attributed this finding to the hypothesis that citizens are dissatisfied with traditional media. (Tolbert, 183)

Hypotheses and Research Design

In light of these changes in media and theory of its influence on voter turnout, I will conduct a quantitative study proposing the following hypotheses: 1) Higher levels of news media use will make a citizen more likely to vote; 2) Use of newspapers, television news, or online news significantly increases a citizen's likelihood to vote, when controlled for education, income, race, religiosity, and partisanship, with newspaper usage having the largest impact, followed by television usage, and online news sources.

These hypotheses will be tested using four different models of logistical regressions to examine the effects of media on voting behaviors, controlled for demographic predictors of voting. The first model will examine the effects of the control demographic variables upon likelihood of voting in the 2004 election. The second model will focus exclusively on the relationship between the independent variables of interest -- various forms of news usage -- and voter turnout in 2004. The third model will include all of these variables in a complete model of voting behavior in 2004. The fourth model will attempt to form a Best Fit model, which includes only those variables that are significant in Model 3. This study will be conducted using results from the 2004 National Election Study, which was collected using face-to-face interviews of a nationally representative sample of adults. This "Large-N" study examines between 950-1064 full cases, depending on the variables included in the model. The final unit of analysis is the increased or decreased odds that a respondent voted in the 2004 election in response to the variables introduced in the models.

I selected the dependent variable, decision to vote in 2004, because it is one of the simplest and most efficient forms of political participation. The act of voting implies a

certain level of interest and knowledge of political affairs, which is a main point of contention among the debate regarding new, specialized media technologies.

The election year 2004 provides interesting circumstances and context for my study. It was the second presidential election for President George Bush, following the heavily covered and controversial 2000 presidential election between President Bush and Vice President Al Gore. This may have prompted more people to follow the media attention to the election. Studies show that elections have become more “low-stimulus”, or of low turnout and interest to voters. While the 2004 election marked a spike in participation and interest, it did not reach as much of the electorate as “high-stimulus” elections of the past had. (Prior, 8) This election year is more characteristic of newer media technology advances than those elections that have previously been studied. It allows us to determine whether these patterns that others have proposed have continued to hold true as the technologies and the voters have developed.

Online news, television news, and newspaper usage were selected as the main independent variables because they have provided the most broad-reaching effects on the public in the past. They will be entered into a model with traditionally predictive demographics of voting behaviors as constant independent variables, which studies mentioned earlier have also employed, namely race, education, income, religiosity, and partisanship. (Tolbert, 173) These variables will help to further specify the effects of news media use on voter turnout.

The main dependent variable studied is whether or not respondents in the study voted in the 2004 elections. This dichotomous variable is coded one equals “Vote” or zero equals “Not Vote”, and the results are self-reported by respondents in the face-to-

face interviews. There are 1,066 cases, and the mean response is .78, indicating that the average respondent reported voting in 2004. It is important to keep in mind that self-reported voting behavior is notoriously over-reported, which could potentially contribute to a lack of explained variance in forthcoming models.

“Age” (Independent Variable ₁) measures the age of respondents. The ages in this continuous variable range from 18-90 years old. The mean age is about 47 years old.

“Democrat” or “Republican” (Independent Variable ₂ and Independent Variable ₃) measure political partisanship by evaluating whether or not respondents identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans, respectively. During a recode of a categorical variable in which respondents identified themselves as one of three parties, one equals “Democrat” or zero equals “Not Democrat”, followed by a recode one equals “Republican” or zero equals “Not Republican”. The latter distinction encompasses those who identify as Independent or as the opposite party. In order to avoid colinearity, the variable identifying respondents as “Independent” and “Not Independent” is dropped. There are 1,195 cases in which 382 respondents identified as Democrats, and 347 as Republicans.

“Black”, “Asian”, “Native American”, “Hispanic”, and “Multiracial” (Independent Variable ₄ through Independent Variable ₈) measure whether respondents identify themselves as Black, Asian, Native American, Hispanic, or Multiracial, respectively. A categorical variable in which respondents identified themselves as one of five races or combinations of races is recoded as a dichotomous variable for each given race where one equals “Given Race” or zero equals “Not Given Race”. The latter describes all reported other reported races, not including the given race. In order to avoid

colinearity, the variable identifying respondents as “White” and “Not White” is dropped. There are 1,204 cases in which 182 identified as Black, 28 as Asian, 12 as Native American, 81 as Hispanic, 876 as White, and 27 as Multiracial.

“High Religiosity” and “Low Religiosity” (Independent Variable ₉ and Independent Variable ₁₀) measure the respondent’s level of religiosity, as determined by frequency of church attendance. A categorical variable in which respondents identified their level of church attendance on a scale between one and five is recoded as a dichotomous variable for each given level of attendance where one equals “High” or zero equals “Not High”, followed by a recode where one equals “Low” or zero equals “Not Low”. In order to avoid colinearity, the third variable identifying respondents as “Middle” and “Not Middle” is dropped. There are 1,204 cases in which 432 identified as having High Religiosity and 408 as having Low Religiosity.

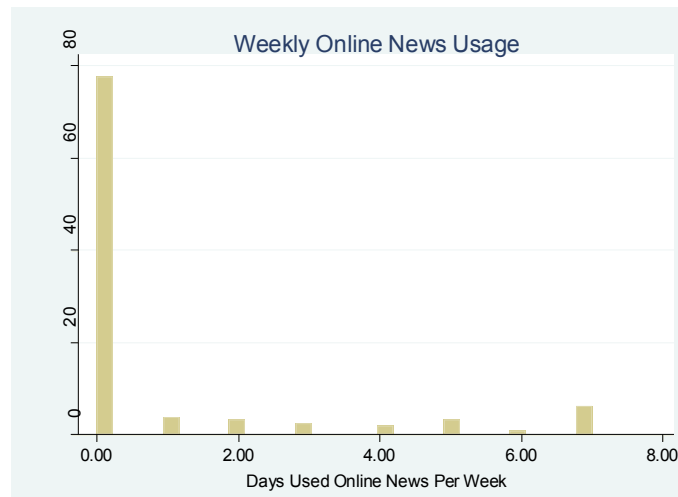
“Education” (Independent Variable ₁₁) measures level of education by evaluating a respondent’s education on a scale between one and seventeen or more years. There are 1,210 cases measuring this continuous variable, and the mean response is 13.7 years of education. This variable will be important to monitor, as it has been identified in previous literature to be a major difference between the users of broadcast television news and users of cable television news and online news.

“Income” (Independent Variable ₁₂) measures level of income by evaluating a respondent’s income in dollars on a scale between one and twenty-three, where one equals “Less than \$2,999” and twenty-three equals “\$120,000 or more”. There are 1,102 cases measuring this continuous variable, and the mean response is 11.0, indicating an average respondent income of \$22,000-\$24,999. This variable and “Education” can often

produce spurious results. By holding both of them constant, we can begin to explain more of the variance in the model for voter turnout.

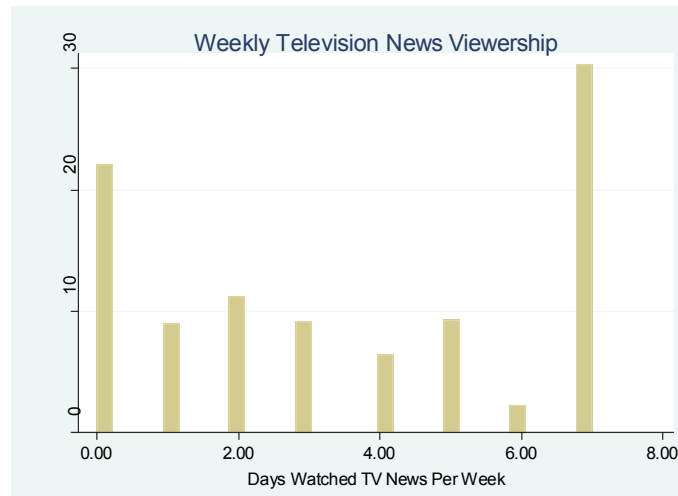
“Online News” (Independent Variable ₁₃) measures level of online news usage by evaluating how many days per week respondents accessed the news online. Online news is not defined in the question posed, and is thus implicitly self-defined by each respondent. There are 1,212 cases, in this continuous variable is coded on scale from one equals “None” to seven equals “Every Day”. As Figure 1 illustrates, the mean response is .93, indicating that the average respondent accessed the news online about one day per week. There is a right skewed distribution of weekly frequency of online news usage.

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Weekly Online News Usage, 2004



Note: Histogram illustrates the percentage distribution of respondents in American National Election Study.

Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of Weekly Television News Viewership, 2004



Note: Histogram illustrates the percentage distribution of respondents in American National Election Study.

Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of Weekly Newspaper Readership, 2004



Note: Histogram illustrates the percentage distribution of respondents in American National Election Study.

“Television News” (Independent Variable ₁₄) measures level of television news usage by evaluating how many days per week respondents watched the news on television. This question does not differentiate between network news and cable news. There are 1,210 cases measuring this continuous variable, which was coded on scale from one equals “None” to seven equals “Every Day”. As Figure 2 illustrates, the mean response is 3.57, indicating that the average respondent watched the news on television

between three and four days per week. There is a fairly wide distribution of weekly frequency on television news viewing.

“Newspaper” (Independent Variable ₁₅) measures level of newspaper usage by evaluating how many days per week respondents read the newspaper. There are 1,212 cases in this continuous variable, which was coded on scale from one equals “None” to seven equals “Every Day”. Figure 3 illustrates that the mean response is 3.07, indicating that the average respondent watched the news on television about three days per week. There is a fairly wide distribution of weekly frequency of newspaper reading, though slightly more right-skewed than television news viewership.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Logistical Regression Estimates of Voting Behavior

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model4
Logit (SE)				
Odds Ratios				
Constant	-4.451*** (.662)	0.391*** (.673)	-4.353*** (.673)	-4.146*** (.547)
Age	0.016*** (.006)		0.005 (.006)	
	1.016		1.005	
Democrat	0.650*** (.207)		0.678*** (.212)	0.689*** (.206)
	1.916		1.970	1.992
Republican	1.206*** (.244)		1.226*** (.247)	1.247*** (.241)
	3.341		3.410	3.481
Black	0.001 (.257)		0.013 (.263)	
	1.001		1.014	
Asian	-2.001*** (.523)		-2.047*** (.539)	-2.005*** (.536)
	0.135		0.129	0.134
Native American	-0.352 (.848)		-0.609 (.901)	
	0.703		0.543	
Hispanic	-0.352 (.328)		-0.362 (.339)	
	0.702		0.696	
Multiracial	0.073 (.597)		-0.024 (.633)	
	1.076		0.976	
High Religiosity	0.471** (.230)		0.504** (.234)	0.449** (.199)
	1.602		1.656	1.567
Low Religiosity	0.125 (.215)		0.153 (.220)	
	1.133		1.165	
Education	0.295*** (.042)		0.267*** (.042)	0.270*** (.040)
	1.343		1.306	1.310
Income	0.053*** (.016)		0.052*** (.016)	0.057*** (.016)
	1.054		1.053	1.058
Online News Use		0.134*** (.046)	0.078 (.051)	
		1.144	1.081	
Television News Use		0.119*** (.029)	0.117*** (.036)	0.129*** (.034)
		1.127	1.124	1.137
Newspaper Use		0.151*** (.029)	0.097*** (.035)	0.110*** (.034)
		1.163	1.102	1.116
N	952	1064	950	950
Pseudo-R2	0.169	0.061	0.195	0.190
LR Chi2	165.27	68.20	190.55	185.10

Notes: Dependent variable is whether or not the respondent voted in the 2004 election, where one equals “Vote” and zero equals “Not Vote”; Figures represent logit and odds ratios parameters; Standard errors in parentheses; z-test results for coefficients * p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. VIF tests revealed no colinearity between IVs.

Table 1 displays a nested model of the results of four separate logistic regression analyses of voting behavior in 2004 on a set of control variables, along with online news, television news, and newspaper usage.

The first model includes the control variables of age, political partisanship, race, religiosity, education, and income. Of these, age, Democratic affiliation, Republican affiliation, Asian identification, education, and income were significant at the $p < .01$ level, and high religiosity at the $p < .05$ level. Examining the coefficients and odds ratios for these variables indicates that they all have a positive relationship with voting, except for Asian identification, which has a fairly large negative relationship. The percentage increase in the likelihood of voting in the 2004 election becomes larger as income (5.3%), age (1.6%), or education (34.3%) increase. Identifying as Democrat (91.6%), Republican (334.1%), or of High Religiosity (60.2%) also increases the likelihood of voter turnout. Identifying as Asian (-86.5%) decreases the likelihood of voting. The pseudo- r^2 value of 0.169 for Model 1 indicates that the model accounts for about 16.9% of the variation in voting behavior in 2004. This is a fair level of explanation, suggesting that the overall model performance is fair.

The second model includes the primary independent variables of online news, television news, and newspaper usage. All of these were significant at the $p < .01$ level, and all displayed a positive relationship with turnout. According to the odd ratios, every day that one uses online news sources increases likelihood of voting them 14.4% more likely to vote in 2004, every day one watches television increases the odds by 12.7%, and every day one reads the newspaper increases their odds by 16.3%. The pseudo r^2 value of 0.061 for Model 2 indicates that the model accounts for about 6.1% of variation in voting

behavior in 2004. This is a small level of explanation suggesting that the overall model performance is poor.

The third model includes all independent variables mentioned above. Of these, Democrat (97.0%), Republican (341.0%), Asian identification (-87.1%), education (30.6%), income (5.3%), television usage, and newspaper usage are significant at the $p < .01$ level, with high religiosity significant at the $p < .05$ level. All of these have a positive relationship with voting behavior, except for Asian identification, which has a negative relationship. It is important to note that online news usage is not significant in Model 3. According to the odds ratios in this model, every day one watches television increases their odds of voting the 2004 by 12.4%, and every day one reads the newspaper increases their odds by 10.2%. The pseudo r^2 value of 0.195 for Model 3 indicates that the model accounts for about 19.5% of variation in voting behavior in 2004. This is a fairly reasonable level of explanation suggesting that the overall model performance is fairly good.

The fourth model includes only those variables that are significant in the Model 3. Of these, all are significant and have a positive relationship with voting behavior, except for Asian identification, which has a negative relationship. According to the odds ratios in this model, every day one watches television increases their odds of voting the 2004 by 13.7%, and every day one reads the newspaper increases their odds by 11.7%. The pseudo r^2 value of 0.190 for Model 3 indicates that the model accounts for about 19.0% of variation in voting behavior in 2004. This is a fairly reasonable level of explanation suggesting that the overall model performance is fairly good.

The significant voting demographics are interesting to note. These variables were chosen as they all have traditionally been thought to have a significant impact on a citizen's likelihood of voting. According to Model 4, however, only half of the original variables are significant. Age, which Tolbert and other researchers on the topic of media use and voting have identified as an important variable, has minimal impact on the model. Partisanship, high religiosity, education, and income perform as expected. The variable of specific minority status upon voter turnout produces unexpected results. Those who identify themselves as Asian are 86.6% less likely to vote than those of non-minority status within Model 4.

Conclusions

In regard to the independent variables of interest, this study both validates and falsifies the hypotheses put forth. News media does have a significant impact on a citizen's decision to vote. Each day per week that viewers watch the news on television makes them 13.7% more likely to vote. Each day per week that readers read the news in the newspaper makes them 11.6% more likely to vote.

In light of previous theory, these results are somewhat surprising. One might imagine that in the current specialized media environment, reading the newspaper would increase likelihood of voting at a greater rate than other mediums, as it requires a higher output of energy on the part of readers. Indeed, newspaper readers are the most likely to vote in Model 2. However, once the model is controlled for demographics, which contribute to likelihood to vote and to read the newspaper, the odds ratio of newspaper readership decreases by 4%. Though increased newspaper readership raises the probability of voting, perhaps the lack of readership overall has contributed to its comparatively lower odds of influencing voter turnout.

This study indicates that, while cable television may be more specialized and offer more non-news choice to viewers, those who choose to watch the news on television are more likely to vote than if they otherwise had not. The significance of television viewership also suggests that there are still individuals who watch television news instead of reading a daily newspaper. In accordance with Prior's theory, these individuals are likely to be less educated or less interested in politics than newspaper readers. Tewksbury argued that cable television viewers are more likely to prefer entertainment to public affairs programming. Perhaps these specialized cable news

channels have responded to this preference shift by making their broadcasts more entertainment-like – focusing on more human-interest, candidate-based stories and adding more eye candy to their presentation. News media outlets spend their days competing with one another for higher ratings and more viewers. It is likely that they would seek to reach as many viewers as possible, which makes it probable that they would make significant attempts to connect with the less educated and less interested viewers that Prior warns have been lost in the technological transition. These results suggest that the uneducated and uninterested are still tuning in at a significant level.

One major hypothesis is falsified, however. According to the conclusions of Tolbert, online news usage has had a significant impact on political participation. Within Model 2, it did have a significant odds ratio, which was even larger than television news use at 14.4%, versus 12.7%. However, once the model is controlled for demographics, online news usage drops in significance and odds ratio. No major online news effect is identified to indicate that it is factor in voting decisions, once the type of the user is held constant. This suggests that those using online news resources are already using broadcast and print sources.

The Internet is a medium that needs both further study and understanding of the definition of use. The Web offers a number of information-giving option other than traditional newspapers that have been transferred to an online format. In this study, “online news” is defined as what ever the respondent believes it to mean. In reality, there are a number of other forms of political engagement or information-gathering online that might promote participation. Individuals can discuss politics with one another in chat rooms, read candidate or issue-based group websites, or read the political musings of

individual bloggers. (Kaye and Johnson, 147-8) If these forms of political interaction were measured separately, we might see a more significant relationship upon voter turnout.

As media technologies have evolved, the mediums of television and newspaper usage remain significant predictors of voter turnout across significant demographic variables, though online news sources do not offer any significant encouragement to vote. Though earlier authors have suggested that the specialized choices provided by cable and its news would alienate uninterested and uneducated voters, it seems that people are still tuning in and turning out. People seem to love the choices that the medium offers, and all indications point to the continuation of this wide range of choice. What implications does this have on the electorate? Whereas broadcast television acted as the great equalizer, cable and satellite television has the potential to act as the great polarizer. In the future, online news sources may present similar effects as cable news, as the measured base of users widens and definitions of news become more clear. Continued research priority should be placed on studying the effects of media on voter turnout as the popularity and style of news offered through these different and emerging mediums change. Media has become an institution of modern life, and its character and its users will be increasingly important to watch in future elections. The tone and technology of media can shape the face of the American electorate and the course of American democracy.

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