

Political Communication: Media and Democratic
Engagement
POLS 418
MWF 10:00-10:50

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Before we get started...

- ▶ Drew has jury duty through 4/22. Check the course website for updates.
- ▶ Wednesday's reading assignment is on the course website.
- ▶ If you have questions, send Drew an email.
- ▶ News

Democratic Engagement

- ▶ Two components to democratic engagement
 - ▶ Political behavior (voting, working for a party, contacting an elected official)
 - ▶ Civic behavior (volunteering in a soup kitchen or forming a neighborhood association)
- ▶ The relevance of political behaviors to democratic engagement seems obvious, but not the relevance of civic behavior. Is civic behavior important to democratic engagement?

Political Efficacy

- ▶ Internal Efficacy-The sense that by participating one can make a difference.
- ▶ External Efficacy- The system (government) is responsive to one's participation.
- ▶ Are efficacious people more likely to consume news or are people who follow public affair more likely to feel more efficacious? How can we explain this relationship?
- ▶ Following the argument that media affects efficacy, what is it about the media that affects efficacy?

Trust, Cynicism, and Alienation

- ▶ Has the media led the public to be more cynical about our government? Are there certain media personalities who we can blame more than others?
- ▶ Generally speaking, when the media talks about congress and the president, the public tends to have more trust in government. Yet, those who listen to talk radio shows tend to have less trust. What explains this difference?
- ▶ Why does negative media coverage lead to more cynicism?
- ▶ Why might different types of media (TV, radio, internet, print) have a different effect on levels of cynicism and trust?

Social Capital and Trust

- ▶ Why is social capital important important to democratic engagement?
- ▶ When this book was written, Facebook had just been launched (both in 2004). Can Facebook foster social capital?
- ▶ If Facebook can foster social capital and given the large number of Americans who use Facebook, then what should we expect with regards to levels of social trust in the United States? Do you think this expectation reflects reality and what might be mitigating this effect?

Media and Intolerance

- ▶ Can we blame the media for intolerance?

Opinion Formation and Stability

- ▶ Young people begin developing political beliefs very early in life (possibly as early as age 5). Given the amount of time that children under the age of 18 spend interacting with media (TV, Internet...) does the media influence young people's beliefs?
- ▶ Can the media help to move public opinion in one direction or another? If so, what about the media's behavior explains these shifts?
- ▶ The main issue in the media over the last few weeks has been the federal budget and a possible government shut down. Has the media shaped the public's opinion on this issue? Are there other examples?

Minimal Effects?

- ▶ How can we reconcile all these media effects reported in this chapter by Delli Carpini with the argument that the media has minimal effects?

The Good and The Bad

- ▶ Is the media good for democratic engagement?
- ▶ What can the media do to improve democratic engagement?