Stimulating or Reinforcing Political Interest:
Using Panel Data to Examine Reciprocal Effects
Between News Media and Political Interest

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DRAFT Abstract

Is the news media merely a tool for those already interested in politics or can the news media stimulate interest in politics? While the news media likely serve both functions, little research has examined these dual functions and how television, print, and online news media differ in their performance of these functions. The author uses simultaneous equation modeling of three-wave panel data from the American National Election Study (2008-09) to examine the roles of different media in both stimulating and reinforcing political interest. The findings demonstrate that television news is a tool for those with prior interest in politics, more than a mechanism to influence levels of political interest. In contrast, online and print news can stimulate political interest to a greater degree than these media serve those with prior political interest. These differing relationships to political interest are explained in terms of the effort and attention required to use these news sources, their information sharing capabilities, and their diversity of content.

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