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Media Matter: How Newspapers and Television News Cover Campaigns and Influence Voters

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How do different media cover politics and affect voters? Are newspapers a boon and television a bane to democratic functioning? While these questions have long been the subject of debate, a variety of methodological hurdles have hampered prior attempts to document media differences and their effects. In this article, I discuss these challenges and offer an approach for overcoming them to the greatest extent possible. I then combine comprehensive media content analyses with an election day exit poll to assess campaign coverage and its effect on voters. I find that television news and newspapers differ substantially in the quantity of coverage but do not drastically differ in terms of content. More important, I find that newspapers, and not television news, play a significant, although potentially limited, role in informing the electorate.

Keywords campaign coverage, newspapers, television, voter learning

Do newspapers matter when it comes to politics? On first glance, the answer seems obvious. Scholars going back to de Tocqueville emphasize the importance of newspapers in creating an informed electorate. Modern surveys lend credence to this perspective by showing that newspaper readers know more about politics than nonreaders (e.g., Robinson & Levy, 1986; Weaver & Drew, 1993). Moreover, newspapers offer quantitatively more and, by some accounts, qualitatively better political coverage than alternative media, especially television news. In short, newspapers allegedly matter because they offer relatively expansive and superior information that leads to a more informed electorate. Or do they?

Surprisingly, concrete evidence for these conjectures remains elusive, and in fact, a number of recent studies suggests that the unique contribution of newspapers in creating an informed electorate is minimal at best (e.g., Neuman et al., 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993; Mondak, 1995). The question of whether newspapers outperform television (and

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other media) remains open due to methodological challenges that even the latest studies have not wholly been able to overcome. I discuss these hurdles in the next section.

I then describe my unique approach to studying the comparative coverage and effects of newspapers and television news. I focus on a single campaign in a single market with four television networks and two major newspapers. Combining comprehensive content analyses with an election day exit poll, I assess newspaper and television news campaign coverage and what voters learn from that coverage. While this approach has some drawbacks, such as its focus on a single campaign, it also—for reasons I will discuss—overcomes the methodological difficulties to the greatest extent possible. I thus not only offer novel evidence about media and learning, but I also highlight the various factors that future studies of media learning need to address.

Learning From the News: Does the Medium Matter?

The emergence and rapid diffusion of television constitutes one of the major technological transformations of the 20th century. Television joined and, in some instances, replaced radio and newspapers as the major means of mass communication. How does the medium of television differ from other media, particularly newspapers?

One difference is that, compared to newspapers, television news has more limited space (i.e., the time of a broadcast allows for fewer words or stories than does the length of a newspaper). As a result, television news typically includes less coverage and information (Robinson & Davis, 1990; Neuman et al., 1992, p. 10; Just et al., 1996, pp. 92–96; Mondak, 1995, p. 78; Vinson, 2003, pp. 27–33; Project for Excellence in Journalism 2004a, 2004b). Another difference is that unless the broadcast is taped, television viewers have no control over the pace at which they receive and then must process information. In contrast, newspaper readers can process information at their own pace (i.e., as they read). Finally, some claim that the visual aspects of television and practices of television news organizations lead to a different product: Compared to newspapers, television news content supposedly emphasizes individuals' attributes such as political candidates' personalities at the expense of issue coverage (i.e., a personalization bias; Keeter, 1987, p. 345; Iyengar, 1991; Graber, 1993, p. 268; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000, p. 229; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Bennett, 2003).[1]

This final difference, however, is debatable. While some of the just cited researchers provide evidence of a greater issue focus (and a smaller personal focus) in newspapers, others suggest that the two media are not so distinct when it comes to political content. For example, in their report on 2004 election coverage, the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2004a) finds that newspapers invoked an issue frame only slightly more often than did television news (16% in newspapers versus 10% on television), and both media focused a sizable plurality of their coverage on strategic tactics (43% in newspapers and 69% on television). Paletz and Guthrie's (1987, p. 18) well-known study of press coverage of Reagan also finds small disparities in the amount of policy coverage.

Do media differences, if any exist, affect voters? Many researchers conclude that the quantity (and possibly the quality) of coverage in newspapers as well as readers' ability to process that information slowly means that the more one reads a newspaper, the more information one will learn about the issues (Robinson & Levy, 1986; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Weaver & Drew, 1993; see also Moy & Pfau, 2000).[2]

When it comes to television, some scholars believe "television news viewing has little effect on issue learning" (Davis, 1992, p. 245; see also Robinson & Levy, 1986; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Mondak, 1995, pp. 76–81). That is, watching increasing quantities of

television news will not lead to knowledge about political issues (because of the paucity of issue information). Others suggest that television news provides some political information, but less than newspapers, thus hypothesizing that "newspaper reading has a stronger effect on knowledge . . . [but] [d]espite weaker effects, television news and debates are sources of issue information" (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004, p. 360).

These claims capture a common lament among political analysts about the rise of television and the concomitant decline of newspapers (e.g., Patterson & McClure, 1976, p. 36; Putnam, 2000, pp. 216–246; Bennett, 2003; see also Neuman et al., 1992, pp. 11, 48–49). However, as I next discuss, evidence for these predictions, particularly concerning the impact of newspapers, has been elusive due to a variety of methodological hurdles.

What Is the Evidence?

Research on media and voter learning offers a mix of conflicting findings. Some find high correlations between newspaper reading and information about issues, and either relatively lower or no correlations between television viewing and information (Robinson & Levy, 1986; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Weaver & Drew, 1993). This supports the hypothesis that voters learn from newspapers and not (or less so) from television.[3]

Others cast doubt on the newspaper reading (as well as the television viewing) and information acquisition relationship. Price and Zaller (1993) find that once they add a statistical control for general political knowledge (i.e., a standard measure of motivation and ability), newspaper and television exposure has little or, in many cases, no effect on information acquisition. They conclude that individuals with general political knowledge tend to be regular newspaper readers and also (independently) possess information about contemporary political issues. Thus, even though newspaper reading does not have a causal impact on learning about issues, there is a high correlation between the two variables (as the aforementioned correlational studies show) absent a control for general political knowledge.

Results from laboratory and quasi-experimental studies echo Price and Zaller's finding. For example, in a series of laboratory experiments, Neuman et al. (1992) find that newspaper reading does not lead to significantly more learning than television viewing (see also Graber, 2001). Mondak (1995) compares Pittsburgh voters who did not have access to the local paper (due to a strike) with Cleveland voters who had access to the paper (during the 1992 campaign). He finds that access to a local newspaper did not affect individuals' information about national and international news. Recognizing the conflicting findings in the literature, Mondak (1995, pp. 10, 76) explains that "although evidence abounds on both sides, it is clear that doubt remains regarding the relative capacity of newspapers to facilitate information acquisition . . . no consensus has emerged from those studies." Moy et al. (2004, p. 535) agree: "Research on the differential effects of newspapers and television on political knowledge has yielded contradictory results."

To see what might be behind these conflicting results, consider the factors for which any study on media learning needs to account (see also Brians & Wattenberg, 1996, p. 177). First, it is critical to control for *individual-level factors* (e.g., general political knowledge, education, age) that might influence information acquisition. Second, analyses must also control for *alternative information sources*. For example, failure to control for interpersonal discussion means that a significant relationship between newspaper reading and information could be the spurious product of both newspaper reading and information acquisition being driven by discussion. Similarly, it is critical to control for other information sources such as advertisements (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996, p. 175) and

debates (Druckman, 2003). As Price and Zaller (1993) argue, many studies that find high correlations between media (e.g., newspaper) usage and information do not control for these alternative forces and, as a result, may be reporting spurious correlations.

The third, rarely recognized, factor concerns the selection of the dependent variable: the type of information. Learning information from a given medium requires that the medium include that information. However, a focus on broadly available and discussed information—such as a major national or international event—makes finding an effect unlikely. For example, citizens presumably did not have to read a newspaper to learn about the Gore-Bush 2000 election controversy, and thus there would be no correlation between newspaper reading and information about the election.[4] Avoiding a bias toward a null finding requires *studying information that is available in the given medium, but not too widely available* (see also Vinson, 2003).

This factor may lurk behind some of the studies that find no relationship. Price and Zaller (1993) focus on various information items that either may not have been notably covered in many newspapers to which the national sample of survey respondents subscribed (e.g., the New York mayoral election result) or may have been too widely known (e.g., a major airplane crash). Similarly, Mondak's (1995) nonfinding may stem from his focus on national and international news that was potentially widely available beyond local newspapers (see also Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Weaver & Drew, 2001). Mondak does not examine whether Pittsburgh voters suffered in their knowledge of local campaigns. One way to deal with this possibility is to *content analyze* the media to see what information is or is not provided, and then control for other information sources (as mentioned).

The final factor concerns the *generalizability of the sample, stimuli, setting, and timing* (see Cook & Campbell, 1979, p. 71). The sample should be broadly representative, since learning processes and media familiarity vary across demographic characteristics such as age and education. Also, to gauge real-world differences, the respondents should have access to the actual quantity, style, and content available in each media. Since the two media often differ along these dimensions, failure to account for these variations makes comparative tests ambiguous. In terms of setting, the respondents should be allowed to consume the media at their own pace, over time, in naturalistic settings. Generalizability is a major concern in the aforementioned laboratory experiments since these studies often rely on student samples, artificially limit distractions, employ time constraints that prevent self-paced newspaper reading, and/or hold the quantity and quality of information available in newspapers and television constant (see, e.g., Neuman et al., 1992; Eveland et al., 2002).

A Research Strategy

I deal with the aforementioned methodological hurdles by investigating television and newspaper coverage of a single campaign in a single market. I then explore the impact of coverage on voters' campaign specific information, controlling for virtually all individual factors and alternative information sources and accounting for generalization issues.

Specifically, I content analyze how two local newspapers and four local television stations covered the 2000 Minnesota Senate campaign. I then use an election day exit poll to test for the effect of coverage on learning. By content analyzing the coverage, I know what information each of the media included: I am able to focus on locally oriented Senate campaign information that is clearly available, but not too widely so. On

the exit poll, I measured voters' knowledge about the relevant information, newspaper reading and television viewing habits, individual attributes that affect learning, and access to alternative information sources such as interpersonal discussion and the campaigns themselves. Finally, in terms of generalization, the exit poll offers a heterogeneous, representative sample of voters who had access to the different media in naturalistic settings. The main drawback of the study is that it involves a single campaign in a single market, thus limiting some aspects of its generalizability; I will later return to a discussion of this issue.

The 2000 Minnesota Senate Campaign

The 2000 Minnesota Senate campaign pitted Republican incumbent Rod Grams against Democratic challenger Mark Dayton. Grams had been a local broadcast news personality until 1992, when he was elected to the U.S. House. He won his Senate seat in 1994, and was known as a "doctrinaire conservative" (Salisbury, 2000, p. H4). During the campaign, the *Congressional Quarterly* labeled Grams as the most vulnerable of incumbent senators. Dayton, heir to the Dayton Department Store family fortune, had held numerous state government posts, most notably state auditor from 1991–1995, and was seen as an "equally doctrinaire liberal" (Salisbury, 2000, p. H4). The race received considerable national attention, given its closeness and the possibility of an incumbent defeat. Dayton pulled forward in the final weeks, and won with 48.8% of the statewide vote, compared to 43.3% for Grams.[5]

Newspaper and Television Campaign Coverage

The first step in analyzing learning from media is to determine what information the media offered. I did this by assembling a team of content analyzers who analyzed the two major local newspapers—the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*—every day from September 13 (the day after the primary election) through November 7 (election day) (see Dalton et al., 1998; Kahn & Kenney, 2002). The team also analyzed a (randomly chosen) news broadcast each evening from each of the four main local television stations: affiliates for ABC, CBS, NBC, and UPN (from September 14 through November 6). The team thus analyzed 112 newspapers (56 days for each of the two papers) and 216 broadcasts (54 broadcasts for each of the four stations). Coders identified every newspaper article on the Senate campaign, or, in the case of television news, every story on the Senate campaign (see Kahn, 1991).

All coders participated in a detailed training session that included practice coding. Then, for each day of coding, I randomly assigned one of the coders to analyze all of the articles on the Senate campaign from one of the papers for that day (for each paper), and another coder to watch and analyze an evening broadcast of the local news on one of the four channels (for each channel). The coders coded the article or story for a number of characteristics including length, position (e.g., lead or not), type (e.g., editorial, news story), and so on. They also analyzed the content of each story; they coded each paragraph in the case of newspapers or each story in the case of television news as covering any of 28 issues (e.g., defense, social security), 11 candidate personal or image characteristics (e.g., leadership, honesty, empathy), and 13 strategic elements (e.g., poll results, ads, fundraising).[6] Finally, they coded each article or story as predominantly using an issue frame (e.g., focus on candidates' issue positions, important campaign issues), personal frame (e.g., focus on candidates' morality, integrity, background), strategy

frame (e.g., focus on polls, campaign tactics, candidate travel, ads), or other frame (e.g., an ad watch) (e.g., Just et al., 1996, p. 99; Kahn & Kenney, 2002).

To assess the reliability of the coding, I randomly sampled approximately 35% of the articles for each paper (43 *Star Tribune* articles and 31 *Pioneer Press* articles) and nearly 25% of the broadcasts for each station (13 broadcasts for each of the four stations). I then had a second coder, who did not do any of the primary coding, code these articles or broadcasts. I discuss specific reliability statistics for each measure in the notes below. Importantly, the reliability statistics range from .84 to 1.0, with an average near .97, thereby exceeding the .80 standard in all cases (see Riffe et al., 1998, p. 131; Neuendorf, 2002, p. 143).

Before turning to the results, I note two items. First, because all of the media outlets serve the same general Minneapolis and St. Paul market (see, e.g., http://www.accessabc.com/reader/ for details), I can compare media coverage holding the campaign (i.e., the news event) and the market constant. As a result, any differences in coverage will constitute solid evidence of media differences (and not distinctions driven by campaign or market variations) (see Bovitz et al., 2002; Hamilton, 2004).

Second, the goal of the content analysis is to capture the quantity and content of information in the different media, with the expectation that, compared to television, newspapers will contain more coverage, and that coverage will focus more on issues and less on personal characteristics. In presenting the results, I merge the two newspapers and the four television stations; the results reported here are robust if I instead look at each outlet individually (see Druckman & Parkin, in press, on other differences between the two newspapers).

Quantity

I begin by testing the hypothesis that newspapers provide more election coverage than television. In Table 1, I report averages across the given types of outlets.[7] The table shows that newspapers include significantly more coverage than television news. For example, the average newspaper carried 106.5 distinct articles over the period, compared to just 22.5 stories for the average television station. This translates into nearly 2 articles a day for the average paper, and not even a half story a day for the average network, $t(108) = 26.86$, $p \leq .01$ (two-tailed t test). Also, the average newspaper had 7 days of no coverage while the average network had 35.5 days of no coverage, $t(108) = 46.49$, $p \leq .01$ (two-tailed t test). Although not shown in Table 1, I find that, overall, newspapers included Senate campaign coverage on 88% of the days coded, while television news did so only 34% of the time ($z = 9.29$, $p \leq .01$, for a two-tailed differences of proportions test). Even when the average network included a story, it lasted only about 71 seconds on average, which translates to an average of 29.5 seconds of coverage over all newscasts.[8]

Content

I next report the overall frame used for each article or story. As explained, following extant work on framing and campaigns, coders recorded the overall focus of an article or story as being in one of four categories: issue, personal,[9] strategy, or other.[10] In Table 2, I report the percentage of frames used across articles and stories.[11]

The table shows that the two types of media offered exactly the same number of stories (21%) using a personal frame.[12] I also find some evidence that newspapers

Table 1
Amount of campaign coverage

	Local newspapers	Local TV news
Number of outlets coded	2	4
Days coded	56	54
Total number of Senate campaign articles or stories (merging outlets)	213	90
Average total number of Senate campaign articles or stories (for an outlet)	106.50 (21.92)	22.50 (5.45)
Average number of Senate campaign articles or stories on a given day (for an outlet)	1.90 (.39)	.42 (.10)
Average number of days with NO Senate campaign coverage (for an outlet)	7.00 (2.83)	35.50 (3.57)
Average number of lead Senate campaign articles or stories (for an outlet; for all days coded)	8.50 (2.12)	3.75 (2.50)
Average number of paragraphs or seconds per Senate campaign article or story (for an outlet)	17.68 (4.39)	70.94 (11.79)

Note. Standard deviation are in parentheses.

employ issue frames more often than television—31% compared to 21% ($z = 1.77$, $p \leq .1$, for a two-tailed differences of proportions test). This is not an overwhelming difference, and moreover, even newspapers employ an issue frame much less than half of the time (e.g., comparing 31% to 50%, $z = 5.55$, $p \leq .01$, for a two-tailed differences of proportions test). Perhaps the most eye-catching finding is that both media used a strategy frame significantly more often than any other single frame (e.g., comparing the strategy frame with the issue frame which was the next most used frame: for newspapers: $z = 2.98$, $p \leq .01$; for television, $z = 4.45$, $p \leq .01$ [two-tailed differences of proportions tests]. Also, the media did not significantly differ in the extent to which

Table 2
Frames in newspapers and television news

	Local newspapers ($n = 213$) (%)	Local TV news ($n = 90$) (%)
Percentage of Senate campaign stories with issue frame	31	21
Percentage of Senate campaign stories with personal frame	21	21
Percentage of Senate campaign stories with strategy frame	45	53
Percentage of Senate campaign stories with other frame	3	5

they used the strategy frame ($z = 1.27$, $p \leq .2$, for a two-tailed differences of proportions test).

These results concur with the findings of the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2004a, 2004b). (a) Newspapers employ issue frames only slightly more often, (2) there are no major differences in the use of personal frames, and (3) strategy frames tend to be the relative focus of both media.[13] In addition, these findings substantiate claims of a media overly focused on strategy (e.g., Patterson, 1993; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Paletz, 2002, p. 221), and they show this to be the case across media (although see Vinson, 2003, p. 156).

I also investigated variation across media in their coverage of specific issues, personal attributes, and strategies (i.e., coverage of the 28 issues, 11 personal characteristics, and 13 strategic elements that were coded). These specific data are available from the author (see also Druckman, 2004). I do not present the details here because the message is generally the same as that found with the frame data. While the media marginally differ from one another, the overwhelming trend is one of across media similarity in terms of foci on the same specific issues, personal items, and strategies. For example, newspapers and television news focused on the same top five issues (i.e., health care, social security, taxes, education, and gun control) and personal items (i.e., biographical material, integrity, scandals or gaffes, leadership, and voting record). To summarize, in covering the 2000 Minnesota Senate campaign, newspapers provided significantly *more coverage* than television; however, the two media *provided generally similar information in their coverage* (with slightly more issue coverage in newspapers) (see also Dalton et al., 1998, p. 124).

The Impact of Media on Information Acquisition

Despite that content similarity, newspapers still might impart more information due to the quantity of coverage and the fact that newspaper readers, unlike television viewers, can process the content at their own pace. I will explore both relative learning between outlets and absolute learning by readers and viewers.

A compelling test requires the inclusion of controls for individual level factors that affect learning, the inclusion of controls for alternative information sources, the selection of information that was available in the different media but not too widely available from other sources, and the use of a generalizable sample, stimuli, setting, and timing. In what follows, I describe when, where, and how I tested the hypotheses, showing how my data satisfy the requirements.

I dealt with the generalizability issues by implementing an exit poll on election day. The exit poll allows me to include a broadly representative sample, which to varying degrees was exposed to the actual alternative media in naturalistic settings, and to probe the role of coverage over the entire campaign precisely at the end of that coverage (and thus I do not miss critical coverage, as is possible on a preelection survey). I conducted the poll by assembling 17 teams of two student pollsters. I randomly selected polling locations throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area; the polling places included both city and suburban locales. Each polling team spent a randomly determined 2- to 3-hour daytime period at their polling place. A pollster asked every third voter to complete a brief, self-administered questionnaire in exchange for $3.

In Table 3, I report descriptive statistics of the sample. Impressively, the vote totals of 55% for Dayton and 37% for Grams almost perfectly match the actual totals that the candidates received in the metro area (where Dayton received 54% and Grams received

Table 3
Description of exit poll respondents

Variable	Sample data
Senate vote choice	Voted for Dayton: 55% Voted for Grams: 37%
Interest in politics	On a 1–7 scale, ranging from not interested to extremely interested: 1: 3% 2: 8% 3: 11% 4: 28% 5: 20% 6: 17% 7: 14%
Education	High school or less: 13% Some college: 30% College degree: 32% Advanced degree: 25%
Political knowledge	0 correct: 31% 1 correct: 25% 2 correct: 44%
Household income	<$30,000: 27% $30,000–$70,000: 43% >$70,000: 31%
Age	18–24: 18% 24–34: 23% 35–44: 21% 45–54: 20% 55–64: 9% 65–74: 7% 75+: 3%
Gender	Male: 50% Female: 50%
Ethnicity	White: 84% African American: 3% Asian American: 3%Hispanic: 2% Other or no answer: 9%
Party identification	Democrat: 54% Independent: 24% Republican: 23%

36%).[14] The table also shows that the respondents came from diverse backgrounds in terms of education, age, gender, and party identification (these sample data approach area figures).

In selecting a measure for learning, I built on an established research agenda by focusing on the correct placement of the candidates' issue positions (e.g., Zaller, 1992; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; see also Weaver & Drew, 1993, 2001; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Norris & Sanders, 2003). I asked respondents to rate each candidate's position on labeled 7-point scales for the top four issues covered in both media: health care, social security, taxes, and education (see Salisbury, 2000; Druckman, 2004; also, data on issue

salience are available from the author). Unlike most prior analyses of learning, I know, from the content analyses, that both media covered the candidates' positions on these issues. Moreover, on each of these issues, the candidates took clear, distinct positions.[15]

For each issue, I coded a respondent's answer as correct if he or she placed the candidates in the correct relative order (e.g., Dayton as closer to supporting universal health care than Grams), and then summed the number of correct placements, ranging from 0 through 4 (see Zaller, 1992, pp. 337–338). If a respondent chose not to rate a candidate, I recorded it as an incorrect answer for that issue. This approach follows prior work (e.g., Zaller 1992, p. 339, Gilens, 2001, p. 381) and seems valid for two additional reasons. First, failure to rate a candidate strongly relates to general political knowledge, which in turn often predicts domain specific knowledge (Gilens, 2001). Second, the number of nonresponses on these questions far exceeds nonresponses on all other questions in the exit poll (including questions that asked respondents to place themselves on the issues), despite the fact that these questions appeared at the beginning of the questionnaire.[16]

The distribution of the four-item information measure is as follows: 0 correct, 41%; 1 correct, 15%; 2 correct, 14%; 3 correct, 14%; and 4 correct, 16%. Perhaps the most notable result concerns the 41% who scored 0 on the information test. This is not that surprising, however, given that a correct answer required learning both candidates' issue positions during a campaign that also included a presidential race. It also matches the results from analogous studies (e.g., Weaver & Drew, 1993; Norris & Sanders, 2003).

To measure exposure and attention to the newspapers—a key independent variable—I asked each respondent whether he or she subscribed to or frequently read either of the two major papers (*Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press*) and how many days over the last 2 months, on average, he or she had read the front-page and (or) metro sections of the paper.[17] The variable thus measures how many days a respondent reads one or both of these newspaper sections. I focus on the front-page and metro sections because Senate coverage in both papers appeared exclusively in these sections. I use an analogous measure for television news exposure and attention that asked each respondent whether he or she watched local television news (and which station or stations he or she watched) and, if so, how many days over the last 2 months, on average, he or she had tuned in. I use the number of days of reading or watching since I expect that more reading or watching indicates increased exposure and attention to the coverage and, consequently, more learning (e.g., Kahn & Kenney, 2002, pp. 390–391).

Of course, any self-reported survey-based measure of media exposure is imperfect. Price and Zaller (1993, pp. 135–137) point to the following four problems. First, respondents often have a difficult time recalling levels of their media usage (e.g., they may not recall watching television while spending time with family members). My measures fare well on this count insofar as they ask directly about specific habitual behaviors, rather than asking about "regular" general usage (as is typical with many measures; see Bartels, 1993, p. 269). People presumably know whether they subscribe to a particular local newspaper (they pay the bill and receive it daily) and also whether they regularly tune in to the nightly news on a given station, and they have some reliable sense of how often they typically do so (Putnam, 2000, p. 218). As Bartels (1993, p. 269) states, "newspaper reading appears to be a sufficiently stable behavior."

Second, media usage measures that merge distinct outlets can be problematic when those outlets differ in news quality (e.g., the *New York Times* is distinct from *USA Today*). This is not a problem for my measures since they ask about the specific newspapers and television stations. Third, Price and Zaller warn against merging multiple questions that

combine different media—something that I do not do. The final difficulty concerns the possible inaccuracies in measuring attention and the equating of attention with processing. While this is a potential problem for my measures, I do what Price and Zaller (1993, p. 137) and Bartels (1993, p. 269) recommend by including controls for individual level attributes such as general political knowledge. In short, my media usage measures seem as valid and reliable as any other possible survey-based measures. Table 4 displays patterns of media usage, showing a similarity between newspaper reading and television news viewing, although more voters are at the extremes for newspaper reading. (The correlation between newspaper reading and television viewing is .18 [$p \leq .01$].)

As discussed, it is critical that I also control for individual causes of information acquisition and alternative sources of information. The exit poll included a broad set of these variables, capturing the main measures used in prior work (see Zaller, 1992; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 180; Gilens, 2001). For individual level variables, I include measures for interest in politics (on a 7-point scale, with higher values indicating increased interest), education (on a 5-point scale, with higher values indicating increased education), income (on a 3-point scale, with higher values indicating increased income), age (on a 7-point scale, with higher values indicating increased age), gender (0 = female, 1 = male), minority status, party identification (on a 7-point scale, with higher values indicating more Republican), and, most important, general political knowledge.[18] Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics for these variables.

The main alternative information source was the campaigns themselves, and thus I include measures that indicate the following: whether the two campaigns directly contacted the respondent (via the phone or mail), how many political advertisements the respondent recalled (Weaver & Drew, 1993; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996), and the number of debates the respondent watched (0 through 6) (Weaver & Drew, 2001; Druckman, 2003). Finally, I include a measure of how many days in an average week the respondent reported discussing the campaign with his or her family or friends, since interpersonal discussions constitute a major alternative information source (e.g., Beck et al., 2002; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Druckman, 2004).

If I find a significant relationship between newspaper reading or television viewing and information, I can be fairly confident—because of the control variables—that it is not the spurious result of a respondent acquiring the information from another source.

Table 4
Voters' media habits

Number of days	Newspaper reading (%)	Television news viewing (%)
0	16	10
1	9	6
2	9	8
3	10	11
4	8	11
5	10	19
6	7	9
7	31	26

Note: These data include subscribers and watchers *and* nonsubscribers and nonwatchers.

Moreover, most of what voters learned presumably occurred *during* the campaign. Dayton was not currently holding a political office, and voters were unlikely to know his positions prior to the campaign. Some evidence on this point comes from a small exit poll that I conducted on primary election day (the day before the content analyses began). That poll asked voters to state their own and the main Democratic primary election candidates' positions on health care and social security.[19] Seventy percent of respondents chose not to rate Dayton's position on health care (i.e., "don't know" response), and 72% did not rate Dayton on social security ($N = 63$).[20] On the election day exit poll, the respective percentages of voters who did not rate Dayton on each of those issues were 43% and 41% ($N = 409$) (for health care: $z = 3.99$, $p \leq .01$; for social security: $z = 4.60$; $p \leq .01$ [two-tailed differences of proportions tests].

I recode all independent variables 0–1, and using an ordered probit, I regress the information measure on the media and control variables. The aforementioned hypotheses suggest that there will be a positive and significant relationship between information and the amount a respondent reads a newspaper, and either a significantly smaller positive relationship between television viewing and information or a nonsignificant relationship between those two variables.

I begin with Model 1 in Table 5, which includes only the control variables. The major individual level determinants of information acquisition display highly significant and substantively large effects. This includes interest in politics, education, and general political knowledge (see Price & Zaller, 1993). The insignificance of the other individual variables, especially age, gender, and minority status, is not too surprising; these variables are less proximate to political information and often fail to be significant when controlling for more direct indicators of individual ability and motivation (e.g., interest, education, general knowledge) (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 180). These results give me confidence in the validity of the exit poll in assessing voters' information.

Interestingly, none of the three campaign variables or the discussion measure display significant effects. Voters did not learn about the candidates' issue positions directly from the campaigns or from discussing the campaigns with friends and family. It may be, given the campaigns, that discussions of candidate integrity (which was a focus of many candidate advertisements) overwhelmed issue attention. It also means that the mass media constituted one of the only possible sources of issue information.

Model 2, which includes only the two media variables, suggests that this was indeed the case. I find strong support for the hypothesis that increased newspaper reading leads to significantly more information. Also, television viewing has a significantly smaller impact on information acquisition than newspaper reading, and, in fact, there is no significant relationship at all—watching the local news does not impart information. Given the content analysis, this result suggests that it is the quantity of the content and the ability to control the pace of consumption that make newspapers unique relative to television.

Model 3 adds the controls (from Model 1), and the newspaper reading finding sustains (specifically, with $p \leq .056$ for a two-tailed test), as do all of the findings reported from Model 1.[21] In short, those with the motivation (interest) and ability (education and prior knowledge) to learn about the candidates appeared to do so via reading the newspaper.

In Table 6, I present the predicted probabilities of providing 0, 1 or 2, or 3 or 4 correct answers for an average voter who never reads a newspaper and an average voter who reads a newspaper every day (i.e., I set all other variables at their means).[22] Given the results reported earlier regarding the distribution of the information measure, it is not

Table 5
Knowledge of candidate issue positions

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Newspaper reading	—	.60**	.32*
		(.15)	(.17)
Television news viewing	—	–.01	–.14
		(.18)	(.20)
Interest in politics	.73**	—	.71**
	(.26)		(.26)
Education	.72**	—	.71**
	(.25)		(.25)
Political knowledge	.49**	—	.45**
	(.15)		(.15)
Income	.18	—	.17
	(.17)		(.17)
Age	.22	—	.14
	(.24)		(.25)
Gender	–.01	—	–.04
	(.12)		(.13)
Minority	–.06	—	–.04
	.22)		(.22)
Party identification	.18	—	.21
	(.19)		(.19)
Campaign contact	.09	—	.08
	(.14)		(.14)
Ad recall	.17	—	.19
	(.25)		(.26)
Debate exposure	.22	—	.23
	(.30)		(.30)
Discussion	–.02	—	–.05
	(.21)		(.22)
τ_1 through τ_4	—[a]	—[b]	—[c]
Log likelihood	–540.99	–563.34	–538.14
Number of observations	383	383	383

Note. Entries are ordered probit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable: Correct relative placement of candidates on four issues (0 to 4).

[a]For model 1, the coefficient and standard errors for τ_1–τ_4 are as follows: 1.33 (.27), 1.74 (.27), 2.15 (.28), and 2.68 (.29).

[b]For model 2, the coefficient and standard errors for τ_1–τ_4 are as follows: .11 (.14), .49 (.14), .87 (.15), and 1.36 (.15).

[c]For model 3, the coefficient and standard errors for τ_1–τ_4 are as follows: 1.34 (.28), 1.75 (.28), 2.17 (.29), and 2.70 (.30).

*$p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .01$ (two-tailed).

Table 6
Predicted information probabilities

	Never read a newspaper	Read a newspaper every day	Difference
0 correct	.47	.35	.12
1–2 correct	.30	.32	.02
3–4 correct	.23	.33	.10

Note: All other variables are set to their means.

too surprising that a plurality of both types of voters are likely to get 0 correct. The shifts between voter types, however, are impressive. Compared to never reading the paper, reading it every day decreases the probability of getting 0 correct by 12% and increases the probability of getting a majority correct by 10%, and importantly this shift occurs when holding *all* other variables, including general political knowledge and education, constant. Analogous shifts for general political knowledge are 17% and 15%, respectively, and for education they are 27% and 22%, respectively. While these are larger shifts, the intriguing point is that regularly reading the paper for 2 months can compensate for a lack of about two thirds of general political knowledge and nearly half of education. Clearly, newspapers—although perhaps not as powerful as de Tocqueville suggests—play a substantial role in informing voters.

Conclusion

Scholars, politicians, pundits, and citizens have long discussed the relative merits of different media when it comes to political coverage. Perhaps the most subscribed to viewpoint sees television as a bane and newspapers as a boon for democratic functioning. Yet, I argue that prior research has not successfully dealt with the methodological requirements of clearly documenting media differences, and as a result prior work consists of a range of conflicting evidence (Mondak, 1995, p. 76).

I attempt to overcome the methodological hurdles by holding the market and campaign constant when assessing coverage and then analyzing learning by selecting appropriate information, controlling for individual and source factors, and doing so in a generalizable way. I find that television news and newspapers differ substantially in the quantity of coverage, but do not drastically differ in terms of content. This accentuates the importance of differentiating quantity from content. Perhaps more importantly, I find that newspapers, and not television news, play a significant role in informing the electorate.

The main drawback of my approach involves its generalizability insofar as it is a case study of a single campaign. On the one hand, I see my methodology as one that can and should be replicated in different markets with different campaigns at different times. On the other hand, I do not mean to suggest that future work should be limited to case studies. Rather, the point is that all studies need to carefully consider the various methodological considerations highlighted here. For example, future content analyses should be wary to aggregate across markets and events, and studies of learning need to carefully consider what types of information to explore and where that information is available. When a study finds no learning effect, does it indicate that the particular

medium plays no role in informing its audience, or does the medium play a role but only in specific types of information (e.g., local election information)? Do newspapers inform voters on regional or local but not national elections (e.g., compare my results with Price & Zaller, 1993; Mondak, 1995; Weaver & Drew, 2001)?[23] When do contextual circumstances matter, such as across country variations in media (Norris & Sanders, 2003)?[24] When do other sources of information, such as interpersonal discussion, matter?

Another question is how to best measure media usage. As discussed, all survey-based measures of media usage are imperfect and may result in an underestimation of media effects (Bartels, 1993, p. 271). Future work needs to be devoted expressly to these measurement issues (e.g., what item or items are best?) and, relatedly, to identifying moderating forces (see, e.g., Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele, 2002). It is on these issues that experimental approaches may be particularly strong as a complement to surveys.

My results suggest that local newspapers constitute an important outlet from which voters can learn; yet, newspapers also have limitations in that they compete with other media. This competition makes attracting a broad readership difficult; it also means that local newspapers must work to fill a unique niche of providing locally relevant information such as coverage of state or local campaigns (see, e.g., Vinson, 2003; Moy et al., 2004). Likewise, despite my nonfinding on learning from television, it may very well be the case that television news serves alternative functions that I did not explore here (e.g., shaping candidate image perceptions). The advent of the Internet and the proliferation of cable television may further narrow and change the niches of traditional media. As a result, newspapers should not be seen as a universal remedy for all political ills, but, rather, as a realistic option from which voters can learn certain types of information.

Notes

1. Others argue that television news pays greater attention to campaign strategy such as the horse race (e.g., Pattersons & McClure, 1976); however, Iyengar and Kinder (1987, p. 127) explain that the "networks appear to be no more preoccupied with winning and losing, with campaign strategy and hoopla, than are daily newspapers."

2. See, for example, Bartels (1996) and Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) on the value of political information.

3. My focus is on the overall impact of television news and newspaper coverage, accounting for differences in medium, content, and so on. Other work that focuses exclusively on the medium of communication finds that television visuals can work to facilitate learning (relative to no visuals, all else constant) (see, e.g., Graber, 2001; Druckman, 2003).

4. Local newspapers largely rely on wire services for national and international stories, and thus their national and international coverage will often include only stories that are available more broadly (Ansolabehere et al., 1993, p. 40; Just et al., 1996, p. 103; see also Shaw & Sparrow, 1999). A related point is that the functions of newspapers vary across national settings (see, e.g., Norris & Sanders, 2003).

5. The ballot also included five minor party candidates from the Independence, Constitution, Libertarian, Grassroots, and Socialist Workers parties. The most successful of these was James Gibson of the Independence Party, who received 5.8%. All other minor party candidates received less than 1%.

6. Details on the categories are available from the author.

7. I computed the figures for each outlet independently and then averaged. To evaluate the reliability of these interval level variables, Riffe et al. (1998, p. 133) recommend using Pearson's product-moment correlations, and suggest that correlations that exceed .80 indicate sufficient reliability.

I also calculate the average differences between the coders in their counts, as an indicator of agreement. For both newspapers and all four television networks, I find 100% agreement and correlations of 1.0 for the number of stories, days with no coverage, and number of lead stories. I also find perfect 100% agreement and a correlation of 1.0 for the number of paragraphs in the *Star Tribune*. For the number of paragraphs in the *Pioneer Press*, I find an average difference (per article) of .23 paragraphs (SD = .97) and a correlation of .995 ($p \leq .01$ for a two-tailed test). The average difference in the number of seconds of a story, across all four networks, is 5.00 (SD = 3.86, where the stories range from 10 seconds to 210 seconds) and the correlation is .996 ($p \leq .01$ for a two-tailed test). Given the objective nature of these statistics, it is not surprising that the reliability in coding is so high (i.e., nearly perfect).

8. It is difficult to directly compare newspaper quantity (e.g., measured in column inches) with television quantity (e.g., time). However, the number of days with no coverage, average number of stories, and number of lead stories accentuate the greater quantity in the newspapers.

9. In coding, I separated biographical stories from other personal stories, but I group them here.

10. To assess the reliability of the frame classifications, I calculate the percentage of agreement between coders as well as Cohen's kappa which accounts for chance agreement (see, e.g., Riffe et al. 1998, pp. 127–133). For the newspapers, I find 91% agreement and a kappa value of .85 (std. error = .10; z = 8.28, $p \leq .01$ for a two-tailed test) for the *Star Tribune*, and 94% agreement and a kappa value of .90 (.12; z = 7.32, $p \leq .01$ for a two-tailed test) for the *Pioneer Press*. For the four television networks (which I merge given the limited number of stories on each network), I find 90% agreement and a kappa value of .84 (SE = .15; z = 5.71, $p \leq .01$ for a two-tailed test). These statistics suggest a high degree of reliability. Details are available from the author.

11. In contrast to Table 1, in Table 2, I do not average the frames used by each outlet (across newspapers and television, respectively); instead, I compute percentages out of all articles and stories. I take this approach because it facilitates the use of statistical significance tests. The results are virtually identical if I instead compute each outlet independently and then take averages. The results also are the same if instead of focusing on overall frames, I calculate the aggregate percentage of space devoted to issues, personal items, and strategy in each article or story.

12. It is important to note that this refers exclusively to content; television may be more personality focused due to the visual imagery inherent in television (e.g., Lang & Lang, 2002, p. 220).

13. Newspaper and television use of "other frames" do not significantly differ from one another (z = .86, $p \leq .4$ for a two-tailed differences of proportions test).

14. The Independence candidate, James Gibson, received 6% among survey respondents.

15. Details on the candidates' specific positions are available from the author.

16. If I instead treat these as missing data, the results are the same, and even a bit stronger.

17. Consistent with the content analyses, I merge the two papers and four television news programs, since the relevant coverage (concerning issues) did not differ within media.

18. I coded self-identified African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Hispanics as minorities. I measured general political knowledge with two questions: one asking about the length of a Senator's term, and another asking about who determines if a law is constitutional. Other details on the specific measures are available from the author.

19. These issues were covered in the League of Women's Voter's primary election handbook.

20. These figures may underestimate the percentage of general election voters who did not know Dayton's positions prior to the campaign. Indeed, the average primary voter is probably more informed than the average general election voter. (Statewide turnout on primary Election Day was 17% compared to 69.4% for the general election.)

21. Twice the difference in log-likelihoods is distributed as a chi-square with the difference in the number of parameters as the degrees of freedom. Given that, model 3 constitutes a significant improvement over model 1 ($\chi^2(2) \geq 5.7$; $p \leq .1$).

22. I compute these probabilities using *Clarify* (Tomz et al., 1999) based on model 3. I do not report standard deviations because *Clarify* provides probabilities for each dependent variable value (0 through 4), and I sum the probabilities for 1 and 2, and 3 and 4. Details are available from the author.

23. This would be consistent with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's (2004b) annual report that finds that local news focuses largely on local stories (e.g., over 75% of their coverage). Also, Vinson (2003) finds that local media outlets exhibit a strong tendency to "localize" stories.

24. Moy et al. (2004) find that local television and newspapers do not significantly differ in the extent to which they inform the electorate. P 541 suggest that this may be due to the fact that if the information is easily identifiable than even television news may inform. The intriguing point is that they do not exam campaigns specifically, and thus, there may be a distinction between campaigns and other types of local information.

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