Political Science 146 – Public Opinion and Mass Media: Citizens’ Democratic Basics

Loren Collingwood, Political Science

November 6, 2017
Selective Exposure: Motivated selection of pro-attitudinal messages and the motivated avoidance of counter-attitudinal messages.
Selective Exposure: *Motivated* selection of pro-attitudinal messages and the motivated avoidance of counter-attitudinal messages.

- Why would people do this?
Selective Exposure: *Motivated* selection of pro-attitudinal messages and the motivated avoidance of counter-attitudinal messages.

Why would people do this?

Selective exposure (SE) does not always occur. Different contexts can affect extent to which SE occurs. You may be a Democrat but want to be exposed to weak arguments to support a Republican candidate. That confirms your world view. You may want to avoid strong arguments to support a Republican candidate.
Selective Exposure: *Motivated* selection of pro-attitudinal messages and the motivated avoidance of counter-attitudinal messages.

- Why would people do this?

Selective exposure (SE) does not always occur. Different contexts can affect extent to which SE occurs. You may be a Democrat but want to be exposed to weak arguments to support a Republican candidate. That confirms your world view. You may want to avoid strong arguments to support a Republican candidate.

Politics inspires a greater degree of selective exposure than other topics. Why?
Media Fragmentation

- Selective Exposure: *Motivated* selection of pro-attitudinal messages and the motivated avoidance of counter-attitudinal messages.
  - Why would people do this?

- Selective exposure (SE) does not always occur. Different contexts can affect extent to which SE occurs. You may be a Democrat but want to be exposed to weak arguments to support a Republican candidate. That confirms your world view. You may want to avoid strong arguments to support a Republican candidate.

- Politics inspires a greater degree of selective exposure than other topics. Why?
  - Reason – politics sparks emotions and feelings of self-identity
Evidence suggests that many citizens now turn to media outlets that match their political predispositions.
Evidence suggests that many citizens now turn to media outlets that match their political predispositions.

If someone tells you where they turn to news, you can guess quite accurately their partisan affiliation/preference.
Evidence suggests that many citizens now turn to media outlets that match their political predispositions. If someone tells you where they turn to news, you can guess quite accurately their partisan affiliation/preference. Democrats more likely to name CNN/MSNBC as their main television sources.
Partisan Selective Exposure

- Evidence suggests that many citizens now turn to media outlets that match their political predispositions.
- If someone tells you where they turn to news, you can guess quite accurately their partisan affiliation/preference.
- Democrats more likely to name CNN/MSNBC as their main television sources.
- Republicans more likely to name Fox News.
Evidence suggests that many citizens now turn to media outlets that match their political predispositions. If someone tells you where they turn to news, you can guess quite accurately their partisan affiliation/preference. Democrats are more likely to name CNN/MSNBC as their main television sources. Republicans are more likely to name Fox News. Moreover, research indicates that political leanings help predict which newspapers people read, radio shows they listen to, as well as websites they like.
Partisan Selective Exposure

- Studies: Political leanings related to which magazines people browse in a waiting room
- Studies: People vary in their likelihood to read news articles just based on whether the source is Fox News, vs NPR vs CNN
- However, one study has demonstrated that some people who surf internet articles enjoy reading both left and right-leaning news
- But multiple other studies have demonstrated that Internet users tend to gravitate towards like-minded political information
- Social Media: Some evidence of ideological clustering on college students' Facebook pages
- Pew Research Center found that 9% of adults have blocked, unfriended, or hidden someone because they posted something about politics/issues they disagreed with or found offensive.
- In short, partisan selective exposure is present to various degrees across all news mediums
Partisan Selective Exposure

- Studies: Political leanings related to which magazines people browse in a waiting room
- Studies: People vary in their likelihood to read news articles just based on whether the source is Fox News, vs NPR vs CNN
Partisan Selective Exposure

- Studies: Political leanings related to which magazines people browse in a waiting room
- Studies: People vary in their likelihood to read news articles just based on whether the source is Fox News, vs NPR vs CNN
- However, one study has demonstrated that some people who surf internet articles enjoy reading both left and right-leaning news
Partisan Selective Exposure

- Studies: Political leanings related to which magazines people browse in a waiting room
- Studies: People vary in their likelihood to read news articles just based on whether the source is Fox News, vs NPR vs CNN
- However, one study has demonstrated that some people who surf internet articles enjoy reading both left and right-leaning news
- But multiple other studies have demonstrated that Internet users tend to gravitate towards like-minded political information
Partisan Selective Exposure

- Studies: Political leanings related to which magazines people browse in a waiting room
- Studies: People vary in their likelihood to read news articles just based on whether the source is Fox News, vs NPR vs CNN
- However, one study has demonstrated that some people who surf internet articles enjoy reading both left and right-leaning news
- But multiple other studies have demonstrated that Internet users tend to gravitate towards like-minded political information
- Social Media: Some evidence of ideological clustering on college students’ Facebook pages
Partisan Selective Exposure

- Studies: Political leanings related to which magazines people browse in a waiting room
- Studies: People vary in their likelihood to read news articles just based on whether the source is Fox News, vs NPR vs CNN
- However, one study has demonstrated that some people who surf internet articles enjoy reading both left and right-leaning news
- But multiple other studies have demonstrated that Internet users tend to gravitate towards like-minded political information
- Social Media: Some evidence of ideological clustering on college students’ Facebook pages
- Pew Research Center found that 9% of adults have blocked, unfriended, or hidden someone because they posted something about politics/issues they disagreed with or found offensive.
Partisan Selective Exposure

- Studies: Political leanings related to which magazines people browse in a waiting room
- Studies: People vary in their likelihood to read news articles just based on whether the source is Fox News, vs NPR vs CNN
- However, one study has demonstrated that some people who surf internet articles enjoy reading both left and right-leaning news
- But multiple other studies have demonstrated that Internet users tend to gravitate towards like-minded political information
- Social Media: Some evidence of ideological clustering on college students’ Facebook pages
- Pew Research Center found that 9% of adults have blocked, unfriended, or hidden someone because they posted something about politics/issues they disagreed with or found offensive.
- In short, partisan selective exposure is present to various degrees across all news mediums
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality

- Cognitive Dissonance (CD): People can experience discomfort when they hold two ideas that conflict. Everyone has experienced this at some point – you probably recall an incident where you've learned something that didn't square well with ideas you held to be true.

- When people experience CD, they are typically motivated to reduce this feeling. Selective exposure is one strategy.

- Cognitive Miser (CM): SE result of desire to minimize use of our cognitive resources. Learning about politics takes time, resources (money), and energy. Few people do this, almost everyone takes shortcuts. We can rely on partisan labels, polling data, endorsements.

- Engaging counter-attitudinal information is mentally taxing. Coming up with counter-arguments requires careful thinking.

- Like-minded information fits well with existing thought processes. No need for counter-argument. SE is easier – we're lazy!
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
  - Cognitive Dissonance (CD): People can experience discomfort when they hold two ideas that conflict. Everyone has experienced this at some point – you probably recall an incident where you’ve learned something that didn’t square well with ideas you held to be true.
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

▶ Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
  ▶ Cognitive Dissonance (CD): People can experience discomfort when they hold two ideas that conflict. Everyone has experienced this at some point – you probably recall an incident where you’ve learned something that didn’t square well with ideas you held to be true.
  ▶ When people experience CD, they are typically motivated to reduce this feeling. Selective exposure is one strategy
Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality

- Cognitive Dissonance (CD): People can experience discomfort when they hold two ideas that conflict. Everyone has experienced this at some point – you probably recall an incident where you’ve learned something that didn’t square well with ideas you held to be true.

- When people experience CD, they are typically motivated to reduce this feeling. Selective exposure is one strategy

- Cognitive Miser (CM): SE result of desire to minimize use of our cognitive resources. Learning about politics takes time, resources (money), and energy. Few people do this, almost everyone takes shortcuts. We can rely on partisan labels, polling data, endorsements.
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
  - Cognitive Dissonance (CD): People can experience discomfort when they hold two ideas that conflict. Everyone has experienced this at some point – you probably recall an incident where you’ve learned something that didn’t square well with ideas you held to be true.
  - When people experience CD, they are typically motivated to reduce this feeling. Selective exposure is one strategy
  - Cognitive Miser (CM): SE result of desire to minimize use of our cognitive resources. Learning about politics takes time, resources (money), and energy. Few people do this, almost everyone takes shortcuts. We can rely on partisan labels, polling data, endorsements.
  - Engaging counter-attitudinal information is mentally taxing. Coming up with counter-arguments requires careful thinking
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
  - Cognitive Dissonance (CD): People can experience discomfort when they hold two ideas that conflict. Everyone has experienced this at some point – you probably recall an incident where you’ve learned something that didn’t square well with ideas you held to be true.
  - When people experience CD, they are typically motivated to reduce this feeling. Selective exposure is one strategy
  - Cognitive Miser (CM): SE result of desire to minimize use of our cognitive resources. Learning about politics takes time, resources (money), and energy. Few people do this, almost everyone takes shortcuts. We can rely on partisan labels, polling data, endorsements.
  - Engaging counter-attitudinal information is mentally taxing. Coming up with counter-arguments requires careful thinking
  - Like-minded information fits well with existing thought processes. No need for counter-argument. SE is easier – we’re lazy!
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
  - SE occurs because we want to pick the highest quality information sources.
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
  - SE occurs because we want to pick the highest quality information sources.
  - We have select something, when so many choices, so we might as well select the source we think is the best.

Like-minded sources seem to fit much better with our current understanding of the world. Since the information seems more correct, we infer that these sources are higher quality.

People who view like-minded news see it as less biased than news that counters their partisan beliefs. Thus, conservatives see more bias in CNN than Fox News, and liberals see the opposite.
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
  - SE occurs because we want to pick the highest quality information sources.
  - We have select something, when so many choices, so we might as well select the source we think is the best.
  - Like-minded sources seem to fit much better with our current understanding of the world. Since the information seems more correct, we infer that these sources are higher quality.
Psychological Basis for Selective Exposure

- Theories: Cognitive dissonance, cognitive misers, information quality
  - SE occurs because we want to pick the highest quality information sources.
  - We have select something, when so many choices, so we might as well select the source we think is the best.
  - Like-minded sources seem to fit much better with our current understanding of the world. Since the information seems more correct, we infer that these sources are higher quality.
  - People who view like-minded news see it as less biased than news that counters their partisan beliefs. Thus, conservatives see more bias in CNN than Fox News, and liberals see the opposite.
Outcomes of Partisan Selective Exposure

- Reinforcing political self-concepts (via partisan selective exposure) may help people make political decisions more easily rely on what like-minded partisans believe.
Outcomes of Partisan Selective Exposure

- Reinforcing political self-concepts (via partisan selective exposure) may help people make political decisions more easily rely on what like-minded partisans believe

- Voters who rely heavily on partisan media sources make their candidate-decisions earlier than people who do not. Thus, people may feel more committed to a particular candidate – which can be a good thing – they may be more likely to participate in politics, become engaged in the process
Outcomes of Partisan Selective Exposure

- Reinforcing political self-concepts (via partisan selective exposure) may help people make political decisions more easily rely on what like-minded partisans believe.

- Voters who rely heavily on partisan media sources make their candidate-decisions earlier than people who do not. Thus, people may feel more committed to a particular candidate – which can be a good thing – they may be more likely to participate in politics, become engaged in the process.

- As noted, partisan SE related to high levels of political participation – which is imperative in a representative democracy.
Outcomes of Partisan Selective Exposure

- Reinforcing political self-concepts (via partisan selective exposure) may help people make political decisions more easily rely on what like-minded partisans believe.

- Voters who rely heavily on partisan media sources make their candidate-decisions earlier than people who do not. Thus, people may feel more committed to a particular candidate – which can be a good thing – they may be more likely to participate in politics, become engaged in the process.

- As noted, partisan SE related to high levels of political participation – which is imperative in a representative democracy.

- Since progressive era, parties (party machines) have been relatively weak and turnout/participation not as high during machine-based partisan politics days. Partisan SE era may be analogous to older era.
Outcomes of Partisan Selective Exposure

- Reinforcing political self-concepts (via partisan selective exposure) may help people make political decisions more easily rely on what like-minded partisans believe.

- Voters who rely heavily on partisan media sources make their candidate-decisions earlier than people who do not. Thus, people may feel more committed to a particular candidate – which can be a good thing – they may be more likely to participate in politics, become engaged in the process.

- As noted, partisan SE related to high levels of political participation – which is imperative in a representative democracy.

- Since progressive era, parties (party machines) have been relatively weak and turnout/participation not as high during machine-based partisan politics days. Partisan SE era may be analogous to older era.

- In sum, evidence shows strong relationship between partisan selective exposure, early vote choice, and high political participation.
Information and Partisan Selective Exposure

- Does using like-minded news facilitate or hamper citizens' learning about politics?

One study (based off 2004 data) found no difference in knowledge of political candidates between people who use like-minded news and people who did not use like-minded news.

Thus, factual political knowledge about presidential candidates may not be at risk when people use like-minded media.

But, misinformation about other political facts exist:

- San Diego residents who listened to conservative talk radio believed more false info about issues such as: teen pregnancy, unemployment, and illegal immigration compared to those who listened to moderate talk radio.

- Fox News viewers more likely to [falsely] believe Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and close links to al Qaeda before Iraq war vs. people who listened to NPR/watched PBS.

When facts are contested, Democrats, Republicans usually rely on different sources – the media people use are related to what they believe.
Information and Partisan Selective Exposure

- Does using like-minded news facilitate or hamper citizens’ learning about politics?

- One study (based off 2004 data) found no difference in knowledge of political candidates between people who use like-minded news and people who did not use like-minded news.

- Thus, factual political knowledge about presidential candidates may not be at risk when people use like-minded media.

- But, misinformation about other political facts exist:
  - San Diego residents who listened to conservative talk radio believed more false info about issues such as: teen pregnancy, unemployment, and illegal immigration compared to those who listened to moderate talk radio.
  - Fox News viewers more likely to [falsely] believe Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and close links to al Qaeda before Iraq war vs. people who listened to NPR/watched PBS.

- When facts are contested, Democrats, Republicans usually rely on different sources – the media people use are related to what they believe.
Information and Partisan Selective Exposure

Does using like-minded news facilitate or hamper citizens’ learning about politics?

One study (based off 2004 data) found no difference in knowledge of political candidates between people who use like-minded news and people who did not use like-minded news.

Thus, factual political knowledge about presidential candidates may not be at risk when people use like-minded media.
Information and Partisan Selective Exposure

▶ Does using like-minded news facilitate or hamper citizens’ learning about politics?

▶ One study (based off 2004 data) found no difference in knowledge of political candidates between people who use like-minded news and people who did not use like-minded news.

▶ Thus, factual political knowledge about presidential candidates may not be at risk when people use like-minded media.

▶ But, misinformation about other political facts exist:
Information and Partisan Selective Exposure

▶ Does using like-minded news facilitate or hamper citizens’ learning about politics?
▶ One study (based off 2004 data) found no difference in knowledge of political candidates between people who use like-minded news and people who did not use like-minded news.
▶ Thus, factual political knowledge about presidential candidates may not be at risk when people use like-minded media.
▶ But, misinformation about other political facts exist:
▶ San Diego residents who listened to conservative talk radio believed more false info about issues such as: teen pregnancy, unemployment, and illegal immigration compared to those who listened to moderate talk radio.
Information and Partisan Selective Exposure

► Does using like-minded news facilitate or hamper citizens’ learning about politics?
► One study (based off 2004 data) found no difference in knowledge of political candidates between people who use like-minded news and people who did not use like-minded news.
► Thus, factual political knowledge about presidential candidates may not be at risk when people use like-minded media.
► But, misinformation about other political facts exist:
► San Diego residents who listened to conservative talk radio believed more false info about issues such as: teen pregnancy, unemployment, and illegal immigration compared to those who listened to moderate talk radio.
► Fox News viewers more likely to [falsely] believe Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and close links to al Qaeda before Iraq war vs. people who listened to NPR/watched PBS.
Information and Partisan Selective Exposure

- Does using like-minded news facilitate or hamper citizens’ learning about politics?

- One study (based off 2004 data) found no difference in knowledge of political candidates between people who use like-minded news and people who did not use like-minded news.

- Thus, factual political knowledge about presidential candidates may not be at risk when people use like-minded media.

- But, misinformation about other political facts exist:
  - San Diego residents who listened to conservative talk radio believed more false info about issues such as: teen pregnancy, unemployment, and illegal immigration compared to those who listened to moderate talk radio.
  - Fox News viewers more likely to [falsely] believe Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and close links to al Qaeda before Iraq war vs. people who listened to NPR/watched PBS.

- When facts are contested, Democrats, Republicans usually rely on different sources – the media people use are related to what they believe.