

Supplemental Appendix for “Rethinking the Role of Political Information”

This appendix presents additional details and supplementary results for the paper “Rethinking the Role of Political Information.”

Variable Definitions and Coding Rules, 1992-1994-1996 NES Data:

Political Information: Political information is measured as an additive factual index of items common to all three waves of the 1992-1994-1996 NES data. These items are: placing the Democratic and Republican parties on the liberal-conservative scale, identifying the occupation of four leading political figures (the U.S. Vice-President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the leader of Russia, and the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court), the party currently in the majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate (respondents are asked about each chamber separately), and the NES interviewer’s subjective assessment of the respondent’s level of political information (here, I use the post-election interviewer’s assessment to be consistent across all 3 waves, given that 1994 only contains a post-election interview). The interviewer rating item (a 5-point scale) is recoded to lie in the [0,1] interval, so it contributes equally to the other questions in the index.

Turnout: 1 if the respondent reported voting in the November election, 0 otherwise.

Campaign Activities: Respondents are asked if they talked to anyone about voting for a particular candidate or party, wore a button or displayed a sign for a candidate/party, attend any political meetings or rallies, worked for a candidate, or gave money to a candidate/party. If voters engage in 2 or more activities, they are a campaign activist.

Strength of Partisanship: using the 7-point party ID scale, respondents are categorized as independents, leaning partisans, weak partisans, or strong partisans. Higher values indicate stronger partisan identification.

Birth Cohorts: based on birth year, respondents are coded into one of 5 birth cohorts: pre-New Deal (born 1914 or earlier), New Deal (born 1915-1930), post-New Deal (born 1931-1945), baby boomer (born 1946-1961), or generation X (born 1962 or later). Note that in the models reported throughout, the cohort effects are offsets relative to the generation X cohort.

Income: Using reported household income, respondents are classified as being in the top, middle, or bottom third of the income distribution.

Mobilized: 1 if the respondent reported being contacted by either political party during the election season, 0 otherwise.

Male: 1 if the respondent is a male, 0 otherwise.

Education: the respondent’s highest level of reported formal education. Categories are as given in the NES: (1) 8th grade or less, (2) some high school, no degree, (3) high school diploma, (4)

some post-secondary schooling, (5) Junior/community college degree, (6) bachelor's degree, (7) post-graduate degree.

South: 1 if the respondent currently lives in one of the 11 states of the former confederacy, 0 otherwise.

Media Usage: Average of the number of days in which the respondent watches the TV news and reads a newspaper.

Political Interest: Average of the respondent's reported level of campaign interest, general political interest, and the amount they care which party wins their House election.

Political Discussion: number of days during the past week in which the respondent discussed politics with family or friends.

Variable Definitions and Coding Rules, Youth-Parent Socialization Data

Political Information: Additive index of 6 factual knowledge items: the length of a U.S. Senate term, the nation headed by Marshal (Josip Broz) Tito, the number of justices on the U.S. Supreme Court, the nation responsible for the concentration camps in World War II, the political party of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the more conservative U.S. political party.

Turnout: 1 if the respondent reported voting in the last presidential election, 0 otherwise.

Campaign Activities: Respondents are asked if they talked to anyone about voting for a particular candidate or party, wore a button or displayed a sign for a candidate/party, attend any political meetings or rallies, worked for a candidate, or gave money to a candidate/party. If voters engage in 2 or more activities, they are a campaign activist.

Strength of Partisanship: using the 7-point party ID scale, respondents are categorized as independents, leaning partisans, weak partisans, or strong partisans. Higher values indicate stronger partisan identification.

Income: Using reported household income, respondents are classified as being in the top, middle, or bottom third of the income distribution.

Male: 1 if the respondent is a male, 0 otherwise.

Graduated College: 1 if the respondent graduated from college by the time of the interview, 0 otherwise.

Attended College: 1 if the respondent attended college (even if no degree was earned), 0 otherwise.

South: 1 if the respondent currently lives in one of the 11 states of the former confederacy, 0 otherwise.

Media Usage: Average of the number of days in which the respondent watches the TV news, listens to news on the radio, reads newsmagazines, and reads a newspaper.

Nota Bene: I do not use political interest in this dataset because it is only asked of a sub-sample of respondents in the 1997 wave.

Matching Methods

In the body of the paper, I included a series of results based on matching methods. More specifically, I used the “coarsened exact matching” (CEM) algorithm (Iacus, King and Porro, 2009) to conduct the matching. In the 1992-1994-1996 NES data, I used 1996 information levels as the treatment variable, with 3 different definitions of treatment: (1) being in the bottom tercile of the distribution of political information, (2) being above the mean level of political information, and (3) being in the top tercile of political information. This allows me to consider the effects of information on behavior for low, middle, and high information respondents. I conducted a parallel analysis for the Youth-Parent Socialization Data, except here the treatment variable is the 1973 information level (wave 2).

To construct the matches, I have the software perform exact matching the following variables in the 1992-1994-1996 NES data: on lagged information level (1994 information level, split into terciles), gender, race, region (South/non-South), birth cohort, income tercile, and level of formal education. In the Youth-Parent Socialization data, I match on the same set of variables, with a few minor exceptions. First, given that all respondents come from the same birth cohort, I cannot match on birth cohort. Second, given that all respondents have at least 12 years of schooling, I match on whether the respondent attended college, and whether they graduated from college (the two variables are matched separately). Finally, here, I matched on lagged information quintiles. I also matched on variables to try and capture political socialization: the number of civics courses taken by the respondent, whether or not he discusses politics with his family, and the parent’s educational attainment (here, expressed as two variables: (1) high education households where both parents went to college and (2) low-education households where neither parent graduated from high school). Doing so results in balance between treated and control units, see tables 1 and 2 below.

[Insert table 1 about here]

[Insert table 2 about here]

As tables 1 indicates, in the 1992-1994-1996 NES data, before matching, the treated and control units (i.e., more and less informed respondents) are extremely different from one another. But after matching, they are extremely similar. Tables 1 and 2 report the balance metrics for the means, but one nice feature of coarsened exact matching is that they not only balance on the means, but also across the distribution as well (Iacus et al., 2009). Further, the multivariate balance metrics also suggest that there is a large degree of overlap between the aggregate distributions (here, “good” balance means small numbers close to 0 for the multivariate imbalance metric, and values close to 100% for common support; note that the reported multivariate values are for the matched variables only). For example, there is effectively complete overlap between the distributions of baseline covariates in the 1992-1994-1996 NES

data: that is, the treated and control units all come from the same part of the covariate space (though there is somewhat less multivariate balance for the Youth-Parent Socialization data). This is helpful, because it means that there should be less model-based extrapolation in my analyses (see tables 1-3; for detailed descriptions of the multivariate imbalance metrics, see Iacus et al., 2009).

For the Youth-Parent Socialization Data, there is good balance, but it is substantially worse than the balance in the NES data. This might help to explain why the NES data performs more consistently here than the Youth-Parent Socialization data.

Difference-in-Differences Estimates

As mentioned in the body of the paper, I can also generate difference-in-differences estimates, that is, I can estimate:

$$(y_{it} - y_{i,t-1}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{inf}_{i,t} - \text{inf}_{i,t-1}) + (u_{it} - u_{i,t-1})$$

where y is the outcome of interest, inf is the respondent's level of political information, and all other terms are as defined in the body of the paper. Tables 3 and 4 give the results.

[Insert table 3 about here]

[Insert table 4 about here]

Gainers Analysis

I can also estimate an equation where I examine the effects of gaining information; that is, look at respondents who become more informed between 1992 and 1994 (this is Sekhon's 2005 empirical strategy). Tables 5 and 6 give the results.

[Insert table 5 about here]

[Insert table 6 about here]

In the interest of space, I do not discuss the differences-in-differences or gainers analysis. I simply note that these results reinforce the results given in the body of the paper.

Supplemental Information, Table 1

This explains where I obtained the information in table 1 on previous studies of political information.

Bartels (1996): see table 3, page 216; results are from simulations based on equations 1 and 2 as described in his text.

Althaus (1998): see figure 1, page 551. Uses model estimates from simulated data, see the model in his table 1.

Delli-Carpini and Keeter (1996), Voter Turnout: tables 6-2 and 6-3, discussion on pages 226-7. Effect sizes are taken from reports in the text. Controls for standard demographic variables, efficacy, engagement, and residential tenure.

Delli-Carpini and Keeter (1996), Campaign Activity: discussion of figure 6.2 on pages 224-5. Seems to report raw data, not model estimates.

Claasen and Highton (2006): discussion of the information simulation of page 417. From a model predicting policy opinion as a function of a variety of different factors.

Variable	Difference, Pre-Matching	Difference, Post-Matching
1996 Information, Mean Level of Information		
Lowest Third, 1994 Information	-0.54	0
Highest Third, 1994 Information	0.44	0
Male	0.15	0
White	0.14	0
South	-0.09	0
Pre-New Deal Birth Cohort	-0.03	0
New Deal Birth Cohort	0.01	0
Post-New Deal Birth Cohort	0.001	0
Baby Boomer Birth Cohort	0.07	0
Lowest Third, Income	-0.29	0
Highest Third, Income	0.28	0
Education	1.4	0
Media Usage	0.72	0.15
Political Interest	0.49	0.2
Multivariate Imbalance Metric	1.0	0
Percent Common Support	0	100
1996 Information, Bottom Tercile of Information		
Lowest Third, 1994 Information	-0.67	0
Highest Third, 1994 Information	0.40	0
Male	0.12	0
White	0.18	0
South	-0.17	0
Pre-New Deal Birth Cohort	-0.02	0
New Deal Birth Cohort	0.03	0
Post-New Deal Birth Cohort	0.04	0
Baby Boomer Birth Cohort	0.04	0
Lowest Third, Income	-0.30	0
Highest Third, Income	0.28	0
Education	1.47	0
Media Usage	0.79	-0.15
Political Interest	0.46	0.17
Multivariate Imbalance Metric	1.0	0
Percent Common Support	0	100
1996 Information, Top Tercile of Information		
Lowest Third, 1994 Information	0.38	0
Highest Third, 1994 Information	-0.50	0
Male	-0.19	0
White	-0.10	0
South	0.07	0
Pre-New Deal Birth Cohort	0.03	0
New Deal Birth Cohort	0.03	0
Post-New Deal Birth Cohort	0.007	0

Baby Boomer Birth Cohort	-0.11	0
Lowest Third, Income	0.26	0
Highest Third, Income	-0.27	0
Education	-1.4	0
Media Usage	-0.50	0.11
Political Interest	-0.45	0.11
Multivariate Imbalance Metric	1.0	0
Percent Common Support	0	100

Table 1: Pre- and Post-Matching Balance metrics, 1992-1994-1996 NES Data

Variable	Difference, Pre-Matching	Difference, Post-Matching
1973 Information, Mean Level of Information		
1965 Information Level	1.70	0.13
Male	0.10	0
White	0.12	0
Lowest Third, Income	-0.05	0
Highest Third, Income	0.07	0
College Graduate	0.30	0
Attend College	0	0
Discuss politics with family	0.15	0
Civics courses	-0.01	0
High education household	-0.15	0
Low education household	0.28	0
Media Usage	0.16	0.005
Multivariate Imbalance Metric	1.0	0.47
Percent Common Support	0	43
1973 Information, Bottom Tercile of Information		
1965 Information Level	1.89	-0.05
Male	0.16	0
White	0.17	0
Lowest Third, Income	0.05	0
Highest Third, Income	0.10	0
College Graduate	0.24	0
Attend College	0	0
Discuss politics with family	0.04	0
Civics courses	-0.0005	0
High education household	0.26	0
Low education household	-0.18	0
Media Usage	0.26	0.27
Multivariate Imbalance Metric	1	0.28
Percent Common Support	0	61
1973 Information, Top Tercile of Information		
1965 Information Level	-1.71	-0.20
Male	-0.10	0
White	-0.11	0
Lowest Third, Income	-0.03	0
Highest Third, Income	-0.003	0
College Graduate	-0.26	0
Attend College	0	0
Discuss politics with family	-0.14	0
Civics courses	-0.07	0
High education household	-0.24	0
Low education household	0.08	0

Media Usage	-0.08	0.16
Multivariate Imbalance Metric	1.0	0.39
Percent Common Support	0	55

Table 2: Pre- and Post-Matching Balance metrics, Youth-Parent Socialization Data

	(1) Turnout	(2) Activist	(3) Any Activity	(4) Number of Activities
Information Differences	0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Constant	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.04 (0.01)	-0.06 (0.02)
Observations	1942	2056	2056	2056

Table 3: Difference-in-Differences Estimates, 1992-1994-1996 NES Data.

Note: The estimates are OLS estimates, with robust standard errors in parantheses.

	(1) Turnout	(2) Any Activity	(3) Activist	(4) Number of Activities
Information Differences	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.05 (0.03)
Constant	0.07 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	0.06 (0.01)	0.22 (0.03)
Observations	1815	1817	1817	1817
R-Squared	0.0001	0.001	0.005	0.003

Table 4: Difference-in-Differences Estimates, Youth-Parent Socialization Data.

Note: The estimates are OLS estimates, with robust standard errors in parantheses.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Turnout	Turnout	Turnout	Turnout
Gain Information	0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.04 (0.04)
Lowest Third, Income	-0.10 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.06)
Highest Third, Income	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	0.08 (0.06)
Male	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	0.03 (0.06)
White	0.03 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.08)
South	-0.05 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.06)
Pre-New Deal Birth Cohort	0.20 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.12 (0.07)	-0.31 (0.14)
New Deal Birth Cohort	0.21 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	-0.11 (0.10)
Post-New Deal Birth Cohort	0.13 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.09)
Baby Boom Birth Cohort	0.12 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.13 (0.07)
Media Usage	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Political Interest	0.19 (0.02)	0.10 (0.02)	0.21 (0.02)	0.40 (0.04)
Political Discussion	0.01 (0.00)	0.02 (0.00)	0.02 (0.01)	0.05 (0.01)
Education	0.04 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.05 (0.02)
Mobilize		0.12 (0.02)	0.12 (0.03)	0.34 (0.06)
Intercept	0.05 (0.07)	-0.27 (0.06)	-0.23 (0.08)	-0.80 (0.16)
Observations	1365	1364	1364	1364

Table 5: Information Gainers Analysis, 1992-1994-1996 NES Data.

Note: The estimates are OLS estimates, with robust standard errors in parantheses.

	(1) Turnout	(2) Activist	(3) Any Activity	(4) Number of Activities
Gain Information	-0.02 (0.02)	0.05 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.12 (0.07)
Lowest Third, Income	-0.05 (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.09)
Highest Third, Income	0.01 (0.02)	0.05 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.06 (0.09)
Partisan Strength	0.05 (0.01)	0.08 (0.01)	0.07 (0.01)	0.34 (0.04)
Media Usage	0.02 (0.01)	0.07 (0.02)	0.09 (0.02)	0.17 (0.06)
College Graduate	0.10 (0.02)	0.15 (0.03)	0.11 (0.03)	0.47 (0.09)
Male	0.03 (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	0.06 (0.03)	0.15 (0.10)
White	0.04 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.10 (0.19)
Constant	0.59 (0.06)	0.03 (0.08)	0.27 (0.07)	0.20 (0.26)
Observations	1535	1534	1534	1534
R-Squared	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.09

Table 6: Information Gainers Analysis, Youth-Parent Socialization Data.

Note: The estimates are OLS estimates, with robust standard errors in paranetheses.