

Inverted Demand for a More Informative Press

Andrew Trexler

University of Wisconsin–Madison

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Abstract

The U.S. news media have long been criticized for reflexive use of conflict narratives, horse-race coverage, clickbait, and similar techniques in political news reporting. Media organizations and some scholars argue that these approaches can broaden their audience and entice some relatively disinterested consumers to engage with political news. I argue that approaches instead deepen engagement from a narrow subset of the public, while failing to engage audiences that are less interested in politics. I provide empirical evidence of this dynamic with two experiments. First, in a preregistered conjoint experiment conducted with a national non-probability sample ($n = 2,101$), I ask respondents to make news consumption decisions between pairs of headlines ($n = 19,081$) and find that “public interest” style headlines which convey the public import of news stories in plain language are preferred by less politically engaged consumers, whereas highly politically engaged consumers prefer headlines that use conflict frames, specialized political jargon, forecasting predictions, or clickbait language. Second, in a preregistered field experiment conducted in collaboration with a national news aggregator in which I randomize headlines included in thrice-weekly email newsletters ($n = 1,717$), I similarly find that less politically engaged consumers prefer public interest headlines while their more politically engaged counterparts prefer jargon- and prediction-focused headlines. While news outlets have financial incentives to cater to the most engaged consumers, this study suggests that doing so may in fact drive away less engaged consumers, while simultaneously threatening democratic accountability mechanisms by producing news that is ultimately less informative.

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Contact: Andrew Trexler, atrexler@wisc.edu.

Audience demand is a key component of the news business (Hamilton 2004). In the era of online news, audience demand is carefully tracked with a variety of digital markers: clicks, views, likes, shares, and so on (Petre 2021). Ever hungry for an audience, news outlets learn from these metrics to adapt their news content to better attract consumers to their particular product (Dodds et al. 2023; Mukerjee, Yang and Peng 2023) over the offerings of countless competitors (Hindman 2018). A common tactic is to make the news more entertaining and attention-grabbing. Such efforts are often conceived as attempts to broaden and diversify the audience for news about public affairs. The proliferation of media choice in the internet age has enabled people who are relatively disinterested in politics to select out of consuming news about it (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Prior 2007; Stroud 2008). Thus because “public affairs-oriented ‘hard news’ is often unappealing to politically inattentive individuals” (Baum and Jamison 2006, 946) that outnumber attentive individuals (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), the “chase for additional consumers means that content will often reflect the preferences of those least interested in hard news” (Hamilton 2004, 2), and therefore the media must make coverage of public affairs more entertaining to draw “entertainment fans” in addition to “news fans” (Prior 2007). Entertaining political news like horse-racing polling coverage proliferates (Rosenstiel 2005; Hillygus 2011; Toff 2017) precisely because it grows the consumer base and brings in revenue (Baum and Jamison 2006; Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn 2004).

I propose an alternative theory of the media’s enduring preference for entertaining and attention-grabbing stories about politics. Rather than successfully appealing to disengaged consumers through entertaining coverage, I argue that news outlets instead use this strategy—intentionally or not—primarily to serve the audience that is already most attentive to politics: political hobbyists. Avid consumers of political news are a decidedly unrepresentative slice of the American public: they are typically more partisan, more ideological, wealthier, more highly educated, and less racially diverse than the general population (Hersh 2020; Hopkins 2018; Klar 2014; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022; Prior 2007; Usher 2021). Yet these few con-

sumers contribute a large percentage of the clicks, subscriptions, and other demand metrics that news outlets track (Tyler, Grimmer and Iyengar 2022), and aggregated estimates of audience demand in general are heavily influenced by their preferences. Far from seeking news about public affairs purely for its information value, these most consistent consumers of political news often instead seek offerings that gratify their personal identities as partisans (Hopkins, Lelkes and Wolken 2024), as ideologues (Mason 2018), and as in-the-know politics experts (Hersh 2020; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022). That is, politics junkies are exactly the consumers most attracted to entertainment-oriented politics coverage, because they primarily follow politics as a sport (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011) and a hobby (Hersh 2020; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022)—with all its inside-baseball norms and nomenclatures—rather than for a fundamentally civic purpose.

In contrast, for people who are relatively disinterested in the political aspects of public affairs, attempting to draw their attention by making coverage more entertaining is akin to committing a category error. Such consumers should not be presumed to seek “entertainment” in a purely abstract sense, where the label “entertaining” can garnish any kind of content. Rather, when seeking entertainment, these consumers should be expected to seek content that they find *inherently* entertaining or interesting, which is usually not politics—at least not as politics is commonly conceived by political journalists. Nevertheless, these consumers should not be assumed to be disinterested in public affairs or civic life in general. And while jazzing up political coverage to make it seem more exciting may fail to draw their attention, accessible political coverage about public issues relevant to their lives, values, and interests may be more successful at eliciting their attention.

In short, I argue that the most politically engaged consumers prefer less substantive and more entertaining political news content, whereas less engaged consumers prefer the most accessible and informative forms of coverage. This stands in stark contrast with a widespread belief that substantive coverage of politics is under-provided by the market because only an elite, knowledgeable few have any taste for it.

I provide empirical evidence of these dynamics with two preregistered experiments. First, in a preregistered conjoint experiment conducted with a large national non-probability sample ($n = 2,101$), I ask respondents to make iterated consumption decisions between pairs of politics headlines ($n = 38,162$) which vary in coverage approach (i.e., entertainment-oriented or more accessible, policy focused “public interest” style coverage). Second, in a preregistered eight-week field experiment of U.S. adults ($n = 1,717$) conducted in partnership with a national nonpartisan news aggregator, I systematically vary the coverage style of news headlines in a thrice-weekly email newsletter about current events and track clickthrough rates for each headline. In both experiments, I find that participants who were less politically engaged at baseline express a relative preference for public interest news stories, whereas the most politically engaged participants prefer when the same stories are presented in more entertaining styles that emphasize partisan conflict, signal savviness with specialized political jargon, engage in political forecasting, or use clickbait techniques to elicit engagement. While news outlets have clear short-term financial incentives to cater to their most engaged consumers, these results suggest that doing so may in fact drive away less engaged consumers, while simultaneously threatening the media’s normative functions in a democracy by producing news that feeds political hobbyism but is ultimately less informative about public affairs (Trexler 2025*c*).

Appealing to News Junkies

Beyond the allocation of reporting resources to specific *content* that attracts the attention of prolific news consumers—e.g., election news, scandals, gaffes, etc. (Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn 2004; Patterson 1993; Traugott 2005)—outlets can package and present news about nearly any public affairs story in a *style* that gives priority to certain elements of the story over others, often with intent to spur consumer engagement. After all, many such stories include information about partisan jockeying as well as policy substance, and news producers must necessarily choose which aspects of the story take precedence over

the others. Coverage style thus includes not only the application of specific frames to put forward a chosen narrative interpretation (Entman 1993), but also (more simply) constitutes choices over which components of a story are prioritized in the headline and lede, and which are buried as details in the body.

In this paper, I examine four coverage styles that are particularly well-suited to attracting the attention of political news junkies: the *conflict* style, the *insider jargon* style, the *prediction-as-news* style, and the *clickbait* style. The conflict style dramatizes competition between political players, depicting the news in terms of “winning, losing, strategy, and tactics” (Dunaway and Lawrence 2015, 44), not only for campaign coverage (Patterson 1993; Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn 2004; Dunaway and Lawrence 2015) but also substantive policy issues like reproductive rights (Han and Federico 2018), campaign finance reform (Gross and Brewer 2007), and anti-poverty policy (Lawrence 2000). By wrapping political news in the language of sports (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011), this style can potentially appeal to the strong partisan identities of highly-engaged news junkies (Krupnikov and Ryan 2022) to draw their attention to how their team is performing. The jargon style—which references specialized political lingo, acronyms, figures, and processes with little context or explanation—is suited to appeal to engaged consumers’ self-perceptions as savvy political experts, hawking a news product made by and for those already “in the know.” Similarly, both the prediction style (which uses current news events to speculate about the outcome of future political events) and the clickbait style (which strategically withholds key information to elicit a click; Molyneux and Coddington 2020) can appeal to news junkies’ impulsive need to know (that is, to maintain their expertise; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022) by dangling a potentially juicy news morsel in the headline.¹ Each of these four styles, by giving priority to an entertaining or erudite aspect of politics, necessarily de-emphasizes or otherwise obscures the policy and governance issues at the heart of a given news story.

¹Though each of these four styles bears unique markers and qualities, news outlets frequently combine these styles for single stories; for example, news stories about partisan election polling is often presented with a blended conflict and prediction style.

I contrast these four news styles with an alternative fifth style, which intentionally targets the normative functions of public journalism (Haas 2007; Haas and Steiner 2006; Patterson 1993; Trexler 2025*c*). This *public interest* style aims to communicate the major substantive facts of a news story and its public import (for public policy, government performance, democratic norms, etc.) in simple and accessible terms, making it easy to understand without much cognitive effort—and with or without engaging further than the headline. This style is potentially appealing to consumers because the information quotient is high: the headline credibly signals the newsworthy content of the story and directly conveys valuable information that requires little cognitive effort or prior knowledge to understand. Given that news-seeking is ostensibly about obtaining information, I consider the possibility of a broad-based preference for public interest style news, despite a prevailing industry sentiment in the opposite direction.

H1: Consumers prefer to engage public interest style headlines relative to headlines with conflict, jargon, prediction, or clickbait styles.

For news junkies, though, the identity-based appeals encapsulated in more entertainment-oriented headline styles may be more effective because these consumers hold dearer and stronger political identities, and because they derive more intrinsic entertainment value from politics. In contrast, for consumers who engage with the news incidentally or infrequently—who outnumber the core political news audience—the political identities that these four styles tap into are typically less salient. Their partisan and ideological attachments are weaker, and following politics as an end unto itself has less of a draw. Individual-level taste for politics—that is, habitual political engagement—may thus act as a key moderator for consumption preferences:

H2: Individual political engagement moderates preference for public interest style headlines, such that higher political engagement reduces preference for public interest style headlines and increases preference for conflict, jargon, prediction, and clickbait styles.

I test these hypotheses with two distinct experiments, a conjoint experiment in a traditional survey experimental setting (Study 1) and a field experiment that uses randomized headlines in email newsletters (Study 2). I detail the experimental design, procedures, and results of each study separately before considering the sum of the evidence in the Discussion.

Study 1

Study 1 entails a preregistered conjoint experiment which asked respondents to make multiple consumption decisions between pairs of news stories.² I recruited a large national non-probability sample of 2,148 U.S. adults via the Prolific survey respondent marketplace. The survey was fielded on April 26, 2024. Respondents were paid \$2.55 to complete the survey, which lasted 13 minutes for the median respondent. I removed 47 observations for failing multiple preregistered quality checks; this procedure provided a final sample for analysis of $n = 2,101$. Appendix D provides additional details regarding the sample composition and exclusion criteria.

After providing informed consent, respondents answered background questions related to their news consumption habits and political opinions.³ I use a subset of these responses to estimate baseline engagement with (and interest in) politics. I adapt the approach from Johnston, Lavine and Federico (2017) to create a weighted political engagement index from three components. The first component is a simple average of two questions, each measured on a 5-point scale: how often the respondent pays attention to politics, and their level of interest in political campaigns. The second component is the self-reported number of days per week that the respondent consumes news about politics. The third component is the number of correct answers to seven factual political knowledge questions that vary widely in difficulty (see item response theory models reported in Appendix C). For each component,

²Anonymized preregistration materials for this experiment are available [here](#). Note that the results of hypotheses 3 and 4 specified in the preregistration are reported elsewhere (see Trexler 2025b). This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of [REDACTED] under protocol [REDACTED]. I further affirm that this research adheres to the American Political Science Association’s Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research.

³The full survey questionnaire is provided in Appendix D.2.

I rescale the component to vary between 0 and 1. As preregistered, I then weight the first two (subjective) components at 0.25 each and the (objective) knowledge component at 0.5 to generate the final index score for each individual respondent.⁴

Respondents were then shown a series of pairs of headlines and were asked which of the two stories they would prefer to read. Respondents were told that they would be asked to actually read one of the stories that they selected, to encourage them to express real preferences in each decision task. Respondents answered on a balanced a 4-point scale in which they could indicate a “strong” or “slight” preference for story A or story B; as preregistered, I collapse this scale for each profile to indicate whether the profile was preferred (1) or not (0). Each decision task presented two story profiles (A or B) that included four independently randomized attributes: the headline style, the issue area and specific story topic, the source outlet, and the expected reading time. In contrast to classic conjoint designs that present two or more profiles with randomized attributes arranged in a standard grid format (e.g., Bansak, Hainmueller and Hangartner 2016; Graham and Svobik 2020; Jenke et al. 2021; Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014; Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto 2015; SoRelle and Laws 2023), each profile was formatted to visually mimic (Vecchiato and Munger 2024) how common news aggregators like Google News or Yahoo!News present individual news stories. Each profile thus embedded both the content and style attributes within the headline itself, and presented the randomized source outlet and expected reading time below the headline in lighter text. This format increases the salience of the headline relative to the other attributes, much like actual news aggregators do. An example decision task is shown in Fig. 1.

The randomized headlines were adapted from recent news coverage. I first identified

⁴Following Clifford and Jerit (2016), I ask participants to pledge to complete the knowledge items without any outside assistance. Following Motta, Callaghan and Smith (2017), I also include an additional final knowledge question, which is open-ended and asks respondents to identify the year in which an obscure Supreme Court case was decided. I assume that correct answers to this final question indicate cheating (i.e., looking up the answer). For respondents who either do not make the pledge or do provide a correct answer to the obscure Supreme Court question (total $n = 48$), I drop the knowledge component from the engagement index and take the simple average of the two subjective components instead.

Please look carefully at each story's headline. Then choose which of the two stories you would most prefer to read.

<u>Story A</u>	<u>Story B</u>
Senate Republicans block border security bill, adding to Biden's immigration woes <i>Politico</i> 3 minute read	Learn what's behind the latest uptick in the annual inflation rate (hint: you probably buy it) <i>The New York Times</i> 4 minute read

Which article would you most prefer to read?

Strongly prefer to read [Story A](#)
☐

Slightly prefer to read [Story A](#)
☐

Slightly prefer to read [Story B](#)
☐

Strongly prefer to read [Story B](#)
☐

Figure 1: Figure displays an example decision task between two story profiles.

five broad policy issue areas to include in the study: the economy, the environment, foreign affairs, immigration, and public health. These topics vary on two important dimensions. First, at the time of fielding, the economy and immigration were commonly identified by Republicans as major problems, whereas the environment and public health were commonly identified by Democrats as major problems, while foreign affairs news was less likely to favor one party over the other.⁵ Second, the *New York Times* Index assembled by the Comparative Agendas Project (Jones et al. 2023) suggests that foreign affairs typically receives high news coverage by prominent U.S. news outlets, while the economy and public health typically receive a moderate amount of news coverage, and immigration and the environment typically receive comparatively low news coverage. For each of these five issue areas, I selected four then-current news stories from recent news coverage relating to that issue area (that is, 20 total news stories across the five issue areas). For each story, I adapted the

⁵See, for example, contemporaneous polling data from Gallup and from Pew Research Center.

headline five different ways, generating a story-specific headline for each of the five coverage styles of interest (conflict, jargon, prediction, clickbait, and public interest). The five styled headlines for a foreign policy story on Ukraine are shown below in Table 1. In addition to the 100 political headlines (5 issue areas x 4 stories x 5 styles), I also adapted five apolitical entertainment, lifestyle, and science headlines from contemporary news stories. The headline for each profile in each decision task was selected from among all 105 headlines by simple random assignment.⁶

Table 1: Example Headlines Shown in Decision Tasks

Issue Area	Topic	Style	Headline
Foreign Affairs	Ukraine	Public	Congress approves new military aid package for package for Ukraine in bipartisan votes
Foreign Affairs	Ukraine	Conflict	Congress approves new Ukraine funding, delivering Biden victory over GOP objections
Foreign Affairs	Ukraine	Jargon	Johnson pushes through Ukraine aid bill despite objections from Freedom Caucus
Foreign Affairs	Ukraine	Predict	The House Speaker’s push to approve new Ukraine funding might cost him his job
Foreign Affairs	Ukraine	Clickbait	Here’s how the House Speaker got around far-right opposition to secure Ukraine aid

The remaining two attributes were independently determined by simple random assignment. The purported source outlet was selected from among six possible values: CNN, Fox News, *The New York Times*, Politico, *The Wall Street Journal*, or *The Washington Post*. These outlets are all major national news publishers but encompass a range of perceived ideological slants. Finally, the signaled article length, expressed as reading time, was randomly assigned from among four possible values: 1 minute read, 2 minute read, 3 minute read, or 4 minute read.

Respondents completed 12 consecutive decisions choosing between two random story

⁶The text of each possible headline is presented in Appendix D.2.

profiles. The first two decision tasks used distinct sets of possible headlines (reported in Appendix D.2); the first decision task was intended as a warm-up for respondents to get accustomed to the task, while the second involved content for a separately-randomized experiment that is reported elsewhere (see Trexler 2025b); unknown to participants, this second decision task determined which article they were asked to read later in the survey. As pre-registered, I do not analyze the data from these first two decision tasks to test H1 and H2. I consider only respondent preferences over the $n = 38,162$ profiles in the remaining 10 decision tasks to estimate the average marginal component effect (AMCE; Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014) of each level of each attribute on selection decisions.⁷

Results

To test H1 and H2, I estimate the AMCE of each headline style by regressing binary indicators for each style on the binary reading preference outcome, holding the public interest style as the reference group.⁸ I use an ordinary least squares (OLS) estimator and cluster the standard errors at the respondent level. I first consider whether consumers in general prefer public interest headlines over contemporary alternatives (H1). Figure 2 shows the estimated AMCE of each headline style relative to the public interest style; full results are reported in Appendix Table A.1.1, column 1. While H1 expects that the AMCE for each other style should be negative, Figure 2 shows that this is only true of the insider jargon style (estimate -0.028 , $p = 0.001$), with the conflict, prediction, and clickbait styles selected about as frequently as the public interest style on average across the whole sample.

Are story preferences different for individuals who are politically engaged versus those

⁷As preregistered, this total excludes all profiles from any decision task that included one or more apolitical headlines. These headlines served primarily to confirm that individuals with low political engagement prefer apolitical news, while individuals with high political engagement prefer politics coverage. I report analyses affirming these differences in Appendix A.2.

⁸Analyses of AMCEs for other attributes (reading time, source outlet, issue area) are reported in Appendix A.2. Because these attributes were randomized independently (and are therefore equivalent in expectation), as preregistered I do not include these factors in the main models. Nevertheless, they provide a useful confirmation that respondents were expressing considered preferences: respondents indicated preferences for shorter news articles, Democrats preferred stories purportedly from *The New York Times* while Republicans preferred Fox News, and less politically engaged respondents eschewed foreign affairs stories while more politically engaged respondents were drawn to them.

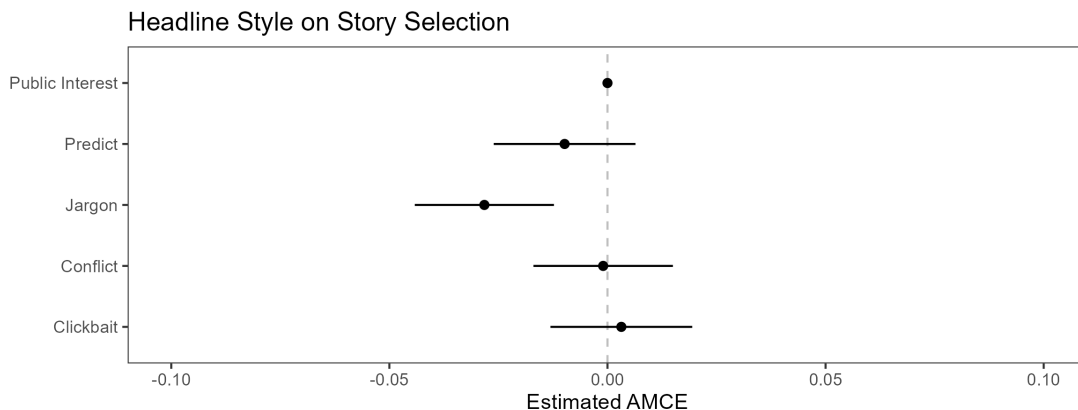


Figure 2: Figure displays the estimated AMCE of headline style on story selection. The error bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Analysis excludes decision tasks that included one or more apolitical headlines. For full results, see Appendix Table A.1.1, column 1.

who do not follow politics closely? To assess H2’s expectation that individuals highly engaged with politics should prefer entertainment-oriented headline styles and less engaged individuals should prefer public interest style headlines, I interact the binary indicator for each headline style with baseline political engagement. The lower panel of Figure 3 shows the base coefficients for each style (which H2 expects to be negative) in this interacted model, while the upper panel shows the interaction terms (which H2 expects to be positive).⁹ The results strongly support H2: for the conflict, jargon, and prediction styles, the base coefficient (that is, for less-engaged individuals) is negative, whereas the interaction term (high engagement individuals) is positive. The exception is the clickbait style, for which the point estimates are in expected directions and similar to those of other under-informative styles, but narrowly miss the preregistered significance threshold (base coefficient estimate -0.0421 , $p = 0.095$; interaction term 0.0743 , $p = 0.053$).

To show how headline selection differs across the spectrum of political engagement, Figure 4 shows the predicted probability of preferring a story with each headline style over the range of political engagement from 0 (least engaged) to 1 (most engaged). The median respondent in this non-probability sample had a baseline political engagement of 0.625, as

⁹Full results are reported in Appendix Table A.1.1, column 2.

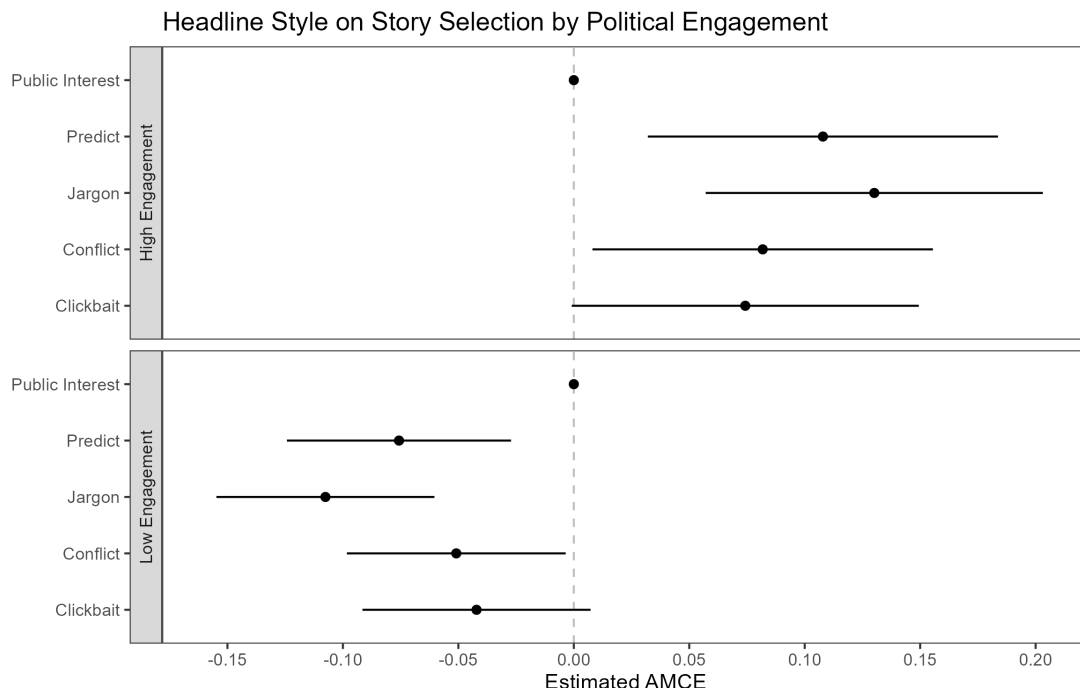


Figure 3: Figure displays the estimated AMCE on story selection of headline style interacted with baseline political engagement. The lower panel displays the estimated base coefficients for each style and the upper panel displays the estimated interaction terms. The error bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Analysis excludes decision tasks that included one or more apolitical headlines. For full results, see Appendix Table A.1.1, column 2.

indicated by the grey vertical line in Figure 4. Respondents below this median value on political engagement were much more likely to prefer a news story with a public interest headline, with a predicted relative preference of about five to ten percentage points over the other styles among the least politically engaged respondents. In contrast, respondents above the median political engagement tended to prefer under-informative styles, by about five percentage points for most styles (and about three percentage points for the jargon style) relative to public interest style headlines for the most politically engaged respondents.

Why might these differences in individual preferences for news styles be so stark? After respondents completed all 12 conjoint decision tasks, I showed each respondent a series of three random headlines (drawn without replacement from all 105 possible headlines, including the five apolitical headlines) and asked them to evaluate to what extent each headline

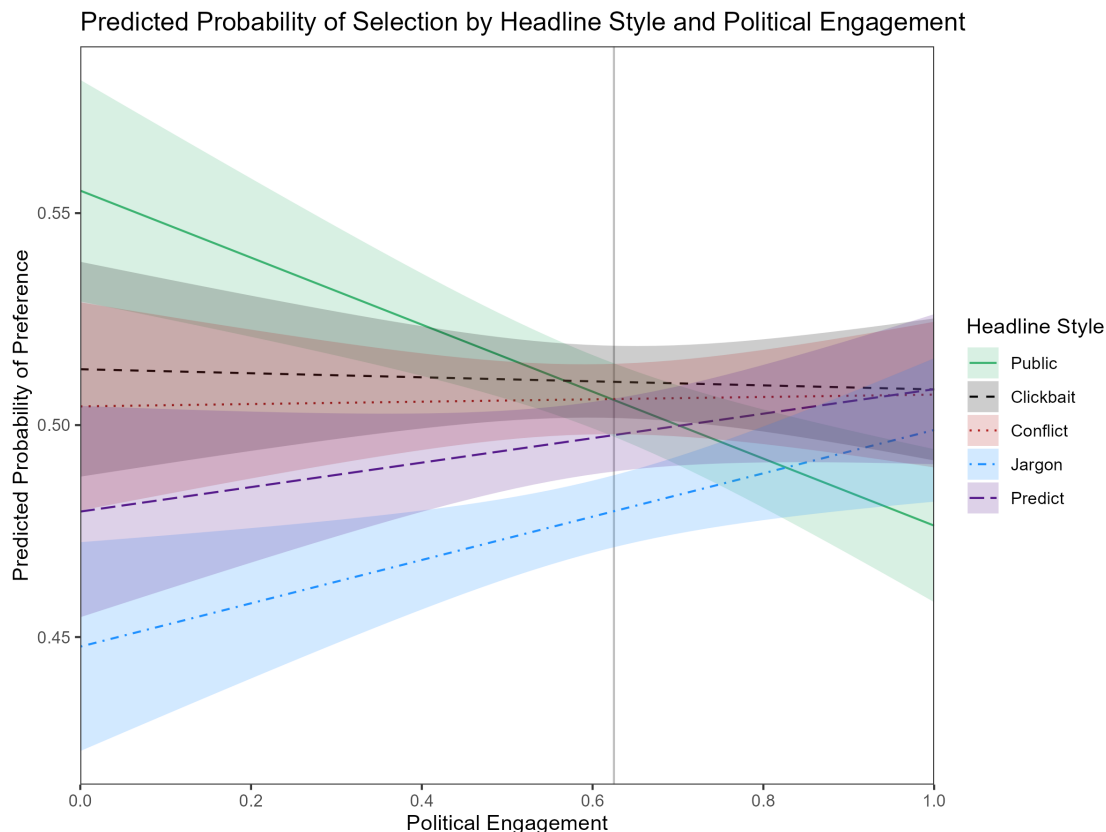


Figure 4: Figure displays the predicted probability of preferring a news story with each headline style by baseline political engagement. The error bars indicate 90 percent confidence intervals. Analysis excludes decision tasks that included one or more apolitical headlines. The vertical line indicates the sample median on baseline political engagement.

was “informative,” “easy to understand,” “biased,” and “entertaining,” with each dimension measured on a 5-point scale from “not at all” to “a great deal,” which I rescale to vary between 0 and 1.¹⁰ Figure 5 shows the mean evaluation on each dimension for all headlines with each style across the full sample of respondents (also reported in Appendix Table A.1.2. Public interest headlines were perceived to be the most informative, the easiest to understand, and the least biased—but, critically, also the least entertaining. Further, while the primary pattern of the evaluations on these dimensions did not significantly differ by respondents’ baseline political engagement, public interest headlines were perceived by

¹⁰I also asked respondents to evaluate each headline on four other dimensions reported in Appendix Table A.1.2, which served to confirm that each headline style successfully manipulated the intended concept.

the most politically engaged as substantially more informative (estimate 0.131, $p < 0.001$) and substantially less entertaining (estimate -0.072 , $p = 0.052$) relative to the perceptions of the least politically engaged respondents. Because more politically engaged individuals find politics intrinsically interesting and personally entertaining (Hersh 2020; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022; Prior 2007), they would sensibly seek news about politics that provides entertainment value rather than simply information value. News junkies can thus rely on volume of engagement rather than quality to accumulate political information by directing most of their attention to the entertaining aspects of politics coverage, and only incidentally gaining valuable political information as a byproduct.

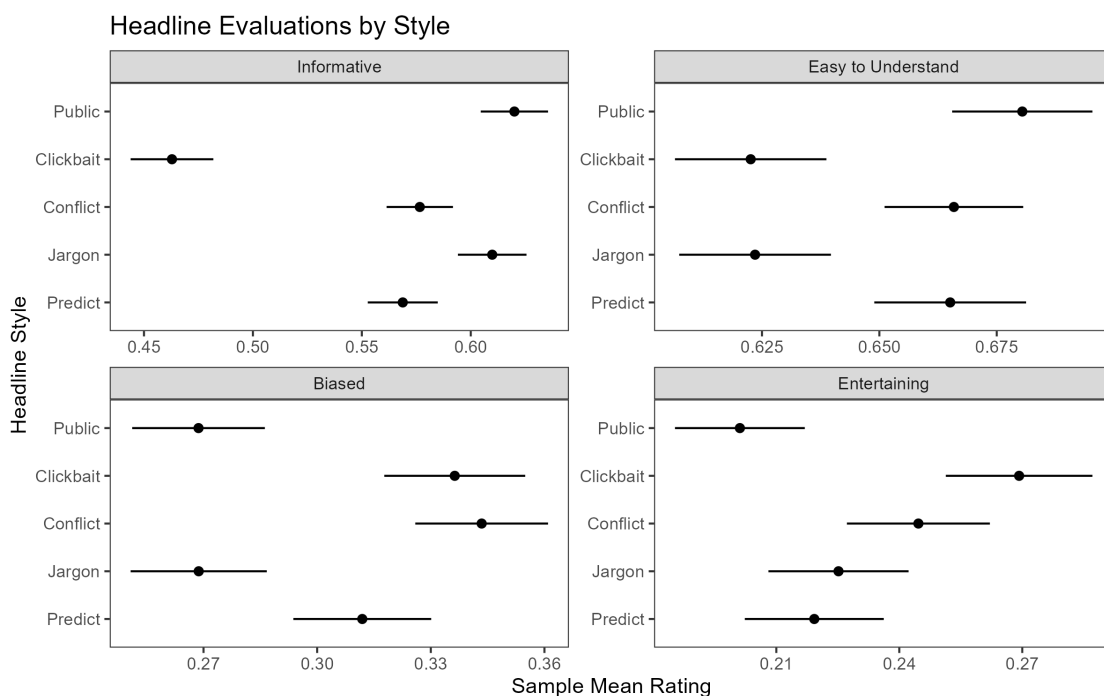


Figure 5: Figure displays the mean rating for all headlines of each style (excluding apolitical headlines) on four qualitative dimensions. The error bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. For full results, see Appendix Table A.1.2.

Study 2

Study 1 presents evidence that, in contrast to common perceptions, regular consumers of political news are the most likely to demand entertainment-oriented news headlines, whereas

Americans who do not to follow politics as regularly actually prefer more informative public interest headlines. This suggests that there may be some significant demand for public interest style news coverage, which is currently under-served by the news market because outlets have primarily focused on serving the (unusual) preferences of their most prolific customers. There is thus an enticing possibility that news organizations could both expand their audiences to include more consumers while simultaneously better serving their democratic function of informing the public, broadly defined.

The evidence in Study 1 has a few critical limitations, however. First, the conjoint experiment prioritizes internal validity to identify clear causal effects, relying on forced choices to do so. Participants thus provide signals of demand preferences when forced to make a choice between two possible news stories, but news consumers navigating the actual market have many more options and are not required to engage with any news stories at all. While informative, these strict features of the experimental design means that the effects of style variation on demand may not translate well to less-controlled settings.

Second, the experiment relies on a non-probability convenience sample recruited from an opt-in panel of survey respondents maintained by Prolific. Non-probability samples are generally appropriate for experimental purposes and can provide informative estimates of treatment effects (Jerit and Barabas 2023; Coppock, Leeper and Mullinix 2018). Importantly, the Study 1 sample offers substantial variation in individual political engagement (see Appendix D.1), allowing for the estimation of heterogeneous effects of style on demand along this dimension (Coppock, Leeper and Mullinix 2018). Nevertheless, opt-in respondents from online panels like Prolific systematically differ from the U.S. adult population on several dimensions such as political ideology (Valentino et al. 2020) and (mean) political engagement (Karp and Maarja 2016), so effect magnitudes may not generalize even if the direction of effects is correct (but see Jordan, Ollerenshaw and Trexler 2025). Likewise, respondent quality and attentiveness also varies across panel vendors (Stagnaro et al. 2024), so the intensity of participant reactions to experimental stimuli may not generalize to news

consumers writ large.

Third, Study 1 relies on measurement of outcomes in a single survey at a single point in time. Respondents are forced to make immediate choices between pairs of headlines without actually reading the underlying articles. In the actual information environment, preferences over content may be sequentially dependent (that is, what one prefers to consume next depends on what one consumed previously). Preferences may also drift over time, either as consumers become more (or less) accustomed to encountering specific news styles (e.g., inducing novelty or familiarity heuristics) or accumulate knowledge about which news styles suit their needs best.

Study 2 addresses these limitations with a preregistered field experiment that provides more generalizable evidence of broad-based demand for public interest style news. In this field experiment, I partnered with a national nonpartisan news aggregator, Ground News, to systematically vary the style of news headlines included in a thrice-weekly newsletter about current events emailed to participants by Ground News. These newsletters were sent to a sample of U.S. adults (the F24 sample of $N = 1,717$ respondents) for approximately eight weeks, during which Ground News tracked email opens and headline click rates to measure engagement with the randomized news styles.

Participants in this field experiment were free to choose what content in the newsletters to engage with (if any at all), in the context of their existing media diets. Rather than an expression of demand preferences only when forced to choose between just two options as in Study 1, engagement decisions in this setting are much more organic and occur in an environment much more ecologically similar to how many people regularly consume news—that is, through email newsletters.¹¹ Systematic differences in newsletter engagement with public interest style news versus other styles can thus tell us much more about how consumers might respond to shifts in style choices by news providers. That is, this experiment can

¹¹For example, the Pew Research Center reports that about one third of Americans say they often or sometimes get news information from newsletters (Shearer et al. 2024), and the Reuters Institute reports that many news organizations are planning to use this news format more frequently in the future to meet demand (Newman 2024).

provide evidence whether there is untapped demand for public interest style news that is under-supplied by the contemporary news market.

For this field experiment, I rely on a mixed sampling design that recruited from two distinct sources: an address-based probability sample of U.S. registered voters recruited to the study by mail ($n_p = 688$), which I supplement with a non-probability convenience sample of U.S. adults ($n_c = 1,029$) recruited via advertisements placed in an existing Ground News newsletter with approximately 400,000 U.S. subscribers. By randomly sampling directly from the universe of U.S. registered voters (approximately 214 million records), this design avoids the risk that unobserved individual characteristics related to the propensity to join an online survey panel are distorting the effects of news style on consumption preferences. The supplementary convenience sample, while certainly less representative of the U.S. general population, nevertheless grants access to a pool of U.S. adults roughly four times larger than Prolific’s then-active U.S. respondent pool, provides substantial variation in political attitudes and attention, and lends valuable statistical power to the experiment.

The field experiment’s eight-week treatment period overcomes the third key limitation of Study 1: the reliance on measurement at a single point in time. Because respondents are iteratively treated with dozens of randomized newsletters over nearly two months, participants can accumulate familiarity with different news styles and gravitate towards the styles that they come to like. The long treatment period also provides the opportunity to assess how repeated exposure to different styles of news coverage affects broader attitudes towards politics and government. In Study 2, I thus test whether exposure to more public interest style news (H3) increases support for core democratic norms and (H4) increases internal political efficacy (i.e., feelings of personal competency in understanding and navigating political participation) relative to exposure to conflict, jargon, and prediction style news.¹²

The field experiment thus provides a harder critical test of the implications for news organizations of increasing public interest style news coverage. If political engagement acts as

¹²These hypotheses are specified in the preregistration as H5 and H6, respectively.

a critical moderator of demand for public interest style news, then adapting news coverage towards the public interest style could potentially weaken consumption among news outlet’s most consistent customers. Even more worrisome, greater interest from less politically engaged consumers may be anemic outside of a forced-choice experimental setting, given the broad availability of apolitical content in today’s expansive media environment. An essential question for news providers is thus whether the dip in consumption from highly-engaged audiences is shallow enough, and gains to consumption from less-engaged audiences is broad enough, that providing more public interest style news coverage can make business sense in addition to normative sense. The engagement-optional design and the wide variation in political engagement among the combined study samples allow a critical investigation of this potential trade-off.

Experimental Design

I recruited a sample of 1,717 U.S. adults to participate in the study,¹³ recruited via two separate sampling efforts. The first is a probability-based random sample of 36,000 registered voters drawn from the L2 voter file. L2 maintains a approximately complete list of all current U.S. registered voters (approximately 214 million records), including name and address information for each, identified from both public records and cross-referenced commercial data. I mailed a letter (provided in Appendix E.4) to each sampled voter’s recorded address inviting them to enroll in the study by completing an online onboarding survey. To encourage enrollment, I obtained verified email address information where possible (11,887 records, about one third of the invited sample) and sent three follow-up invitation emails to these sampled voters. From these sampled voters, a total of 798 individuals entered the onboarding survey, of which 706 successfully completed it (AAPOR RR1 minimum response rate of 2.0 percent).

¹³Anonymized preregistration materials for this experiment are available [here](#). Note that the results of hypotheses 3 and 4 specified in the preregistration are reported elsewhere (see [Trexler 2025b](#)). This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of [REDACTED] under protocol [REDACTED]. I further affirm that this research adheres to the American Political Science Association’s Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research.

To supplement the address-based sample, I recruited a convenience sample of U.S. adults by placing advertisements for the study in Ground News’ weekly Blindspot Report newsletter. This newsletter was sent to about 500,000 subscribers, approximately 80 percent of which are U.S. residents. This newsletter included a series of news headlines covered predominantly by right-leaning news sources or predominantly by left-leaning news sources (potential news “blindspots”). An advertisement (see Appendix E.4) inviting readers to “Participate in a media study” was included in this newsletter for three consecutive weeks. The ad provided a link to the onboarding survey where participants could enroll in the study. A total of 2,215 individuals entered the onboarding survey, of which 1,041 successfully completed it.¹⁴

For both samples, as preregistered, I took steps to ensure that respondents were eligible to participate in the study and would provide quality responses. After providing consent to participate, respondents were first screened for eligibility; respondents who indicated that they were less than 18 years of age or did not reside in the United States were excluded. Participants recruited via the newsletter advertisements were additionally required to pass a Captcha check and an attention check¹⁵ as part of the screening process. At the end of the onboarding survey, respondents were also asked to commit to completing the entire study, and were not enrolled in the study if they expressed uncertainty about their ability to complete it ($n = 22$). Finally, a small number of respondents were removed from the analysis sample for extreme speeding (completing the onboarding survey in less than one third of the median time) or for failing at least two additional quality checks (described in Appendix E). These exclusions provide final analysis samples of $n_p = 688$ and $n_c = 1,029$ (respectively) and a combined sample of $N = 1,717$.

The study was fielded from July 9 to October 23, 2024. Figure 6 shows the study timeline.

¹⁴The vast majority of those who entered the survey but failed to complete it broke off at the consent page (26 refused consent and 862 simply broke off). Another 106 entrants either failed the screening criteria or broke off during screening, with the remaining 180 passing the screening questions but breaking off later in the onboarding survey. Respondent-level treatment was assigned only after successful completion of the onboarding survey.

¹⁵Specifically, participants were excluded if they reported purchasing an airline company, visiting a space station, or having a fatal heart attack in the past 30 days, or failed to report using a computer, tablet, or phone in the past 30 days or eaten a meal in the past 30 days. See Appendix E.3 for exact question wording.

L2 drew the 36,000-record voter sample on June 17, 2024; invitations to these sampled voters were mailed on July 12, with follow-up reminder emails sent to these voters’ verified emails (if available) on July 26, July 30, and August 2. Contemporaneously, advertisements for the study were placed in Ground News’ “Blindspot Report” newsletter on July 9, 16, and 23. The onboarding survey was opened for participants to enroll in the study on July 9 and closed on August 5.

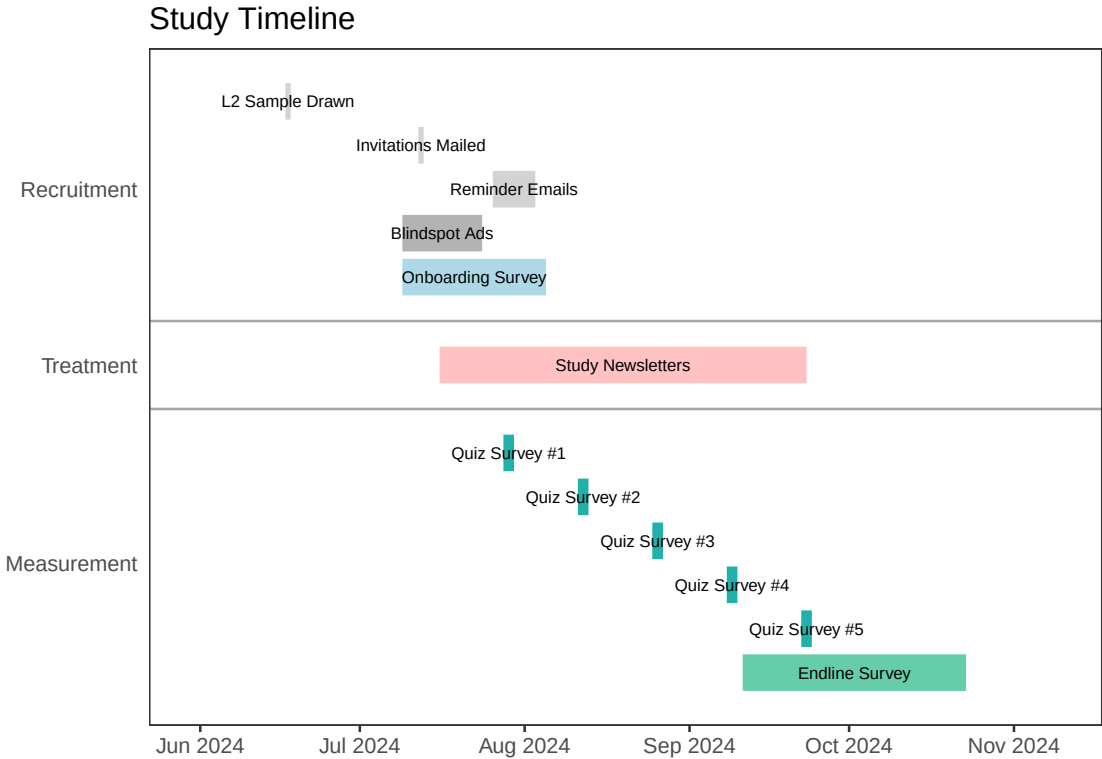


Figure 6: Figure displays the study timeline in three phases: sample recruitment and onboarding, treatment delivery, and outcome measurement.

In the onboarding survey,¹⁶ respondents were informed that they would receive \$5 for completing the study, as well as up to \$5 in additional bonus payments that they could earn during the study; to further incentivize participation, ten participants would also be selected by random lottery to receive a separate bonus payment of \$100. After consenting to participate in the study, respondents provided an email address at which they would

¹⁶Exact survey instruments are provided in Appendix E.3.

receive newsletters as part of the study. Respondents answered questions about a host of pre-treatment attitudes and behaviors, including news consumption habits, perceptions of the media, partisanship, ideology, perceptions of the Democratic and Republican parties, political knowledge, political efficacy, and support for democratic norms. As in Study 1, I use pre-treatment measures of interest in politics, self-reported political news consumption, and generalized political knowledge to assemble a composite index of pre-treatment political engagement.¹⁷ Respondents then answered several basic demographic questions and were asked to confirm their email address and affirm their intent to complete the entire two-month study. The instructions noted that participation involved receiving three email newsletters per week and that respondents would be incentivized to read them, but also explicitly stated that “[r]eading these newsletters is not required” to emphasize that engagement was ultimately optional. After committing to complete the entire study, respondents then received an automated email confirming their enrollment and providing additional details on the study timeline and payment procedures.

Respondents were block-randomized to one of four treatment conditions, corresponding to the public interest, partisan conflict, insider jargon, or prediction-as-news coverage styles.¹⁸ To help ensure balance in treatment assignment on critical pre-treatment covariates, I blocked on three variables: partisanship (Democrat versus Republican versus Independent, including leaners as Independent), gender (male versus female or non-binary), and education (less than 4-year college degree versus 4-year degree or higher). Appendix E.2 provides tests of covariate balance at assignment and later stages of the study.

Each week during the onboarding period, Ground News subscribed the newly enrolled study participants in a “Special Edition” newsletter, modeled after Ground News’ existing

¹⁷The index differs only slightly from the measure used in Study 1, in that the generalized political knowledge component of the index uses nine items instead of seven (these additive items still account for 50 percent of the final composite measure). Additional information on these items is provided in Appendix C and in Appendix E.3. As in the Study 1 sample, I exclude the knowledge component for respondents who fail to pledge to answer the items without assistance or show evidence of cheating ($n = 25$).

¹⁸Unlike Study 1, the clickbait style is not included in Study 2 because Ground News avoids clickbait headlines where possible as a matter of policy. Reducing the number of treatment arms also improves statistical power to detect differences between the remaining four.

“Daily Ground” newsletter on daily top stories, on a rolling basis. The study newsletter included five news stories with randomized news headlines, along with brief (non-randomized) blurbs with some basic details about each story and links to read further on the Ground News website.¹⁹ The newsletters included some additional content further down, including a brief “Blindspots” section highlighting two stories with imbalanced coverage by left- or right-leaning outlets, a one-question news quiz, and links to subscribe to other Ground News newsletters; this additional content was not randomized and is not discussed further here. An example excerpt from a randomized newsletter is shown in Figure 7.

The Special Edition newsletters were emailed to active study participants each Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday during the treatment period from July 16 to September 21, with most participants receiving newsletters for eight weeks (24 newsletters in total).²⁰ For each newsletter, Ground News selected five news stories to include, chosen from among the top news stories at then end of the previous day.²¹ I then adapted the headline for each selected story to conform to the public interest, conflict, jargon, and prediction styles (that is, four different headlines per story). In many cases, style-specific headlines were taken verbatim or nearly verbatim from real headlines used for the same story by Ground News or other news outlets.

The headline for each story, and the order in which the stories appeared in the newsletter, was randomized for each respondent. Four of the headlines in a given newsletter were

¹⁹As a news aggregator, Ground News does not provide full-article text directly. Instead, Ground News trawls news sites for daily stories and uses a proprietary algorithm to group articles on the same story together. The Ground News landing page for any given story includes a headline and brief summary generated by artificial intelligence on the basis of the underlying news articles, followed by the complete list of source articles identified by Ground News as covering that story (including original headlines and links to the original content).

²⁰In the endline survey, I asked respondents if they recalled receiving these newsletters; 90.5 percent of respondents answered affirmatively. A small number of participants ($n = 166$), enrolled in the last week of the onboarding period, received the newsletters for seven weeks instead of eight; newsletter recall in this small group is slightly lower at 86.0 percent. Recall also differs slightly by sample, with existing subscribers to Ground News (perhaps unsurprisingly) more likely to recall receiving the Special Edition newsletters at 94.8 percent relative to 82.9 percent in the address-based sample. Recall does not significantly vary by treatment arm.

²¹Specifically, Ground News randomly selected one of the five top-performing stories at 5:00PM Eastern time on the previous day, along with the four news stories just below the top five.

You are receiving this newsletter as part of the Media & Opinion Study conducted by Duke University and Ground News.

Recent Stories

1 | 95 Sources

Georgia Election Board rules that all ballots must be hand-counted, likely delaying election results



Georgia's State Election Board on Friday voted to approve a new rule that requires poll workers to count the number of paper ballots by hand.

2 | 150 Sources

Secret Service report details multiple errors that preceded July assassination attempt against Trump



Communication breakdowns with local law enforcement hampered the Secret Service's performance ahead of a July assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump, according to a new report that lays out a litany of missed opportunities to stop a gunman who opened fire from an unsecured roof.

Figure 7: An example excerpt from a Special Edition newsletter used in Study 2.

assigned to the coverage style corresponding to the respondent-level treatment arm—that is, for participants assigned to the public interest condition, four of the five headlines in each newsletter used the public interest style. The remaining headline (which could be for any of the five stories, and in any position in the newsletter) was randomly assigned to use any of the four styles, with equal probability. This randomization design serves two purposes. The vast majority of the headlines each participant received used the same coverage style,

allowing me to assess how repeated exposure to more content using that style affects attitudes and consumption behaviors over time. At the same time, the dozens of newsletters each participant received include useful variation in available styles, allowing me to assess within-subject preferences for different styles of news coverage.

On a rolling basis beginning September 11, the study newsletters were stopped for each participant after eight weeks of treatment. The participant was then invited by email to complete the study’s endline survey,²² with reminder emails sent by email every four to seven days. Text message reminders²³ were also sent weekly after all participants had been invited to complete the endline survey. The survey asked respondents about many of the topics measured in the onboarding survey—providing a measure within-subject change on those dimensions to improve statistical precision (Cox and McCullagh 1982; Clifford, Sheagley and Piston 2021; Jordan, Ollerenshaw and Trexler 2025)—as well as some evaluative questions about the Special Edition newsletters. After completing the endline survey, participants were thanked for their participation and issued their completion and bonus payments via electronic Amazon gift cards. The endline survey was closed on October 23 and completed by 1,184 participants, for a re-interview rate of 67.7 percent.²⁴

I use two outcome measures of engagement with the styled news content in the newsletters. The first is the click: whether the respondent clicked on a given headline link to engage further. This binary outcome variable is measured at the headline level, nested within newsletters and within respondents, and headline treatment (news style) is also observed at the same level. For most respondents there are 120 observations of this variable over the course of the study (total $n = 201,675$).²⁵ The second measure is the email open rate:

²²Note that several “quiz” surveys were administered to participants on a biweekly basis during the fielding period; these provided outcome measures for hypotheses 3 and 4 specified in the preregistration, the results of which are reported elsewhere (see Trexler 2025*b*).

²³Respondents could optionally provide a phone number in the onboarding survey to receive text reminders of subsequent study surveys; 64.4 percent of respondents chose to do so.

²⁴Re-interview rates were slightly different between the two samples: in the address-based sample, 430 participants completed the endline survey (60.9 percent re-interviewed), compared to 752 in the convenience sample (72.2 percent re-interviewed).

²⁵As noted above, a small subset of respondents received seven weeks of treatment instead of eight, and thus provide 105 observations instead.

whether the respondent chose to open the newsletter email at all. This binary outcome is measured at the newsletter level, nested within respondents; for most respondents, there are 24 observations of this variable (total $n = 39,547$).²⁶ Here, because the majority of the headlines in a given newsletter use the news style of the respondent’s assigned treatment arm, treatment is at the level of the respondent. These two measures of (incentivized but ultimately optional) engagement with the newsletter content enable me to test the expectations of H1 and H2 regarding demand preferences for different styles of news coverage.

Results

I first test the effect of news style on engagement with the newsletter content. H1 expects that engagement with the public interest style will be greater overall, while H2 expects that baseline political engagement will moderate preferences for news styles, such that people who follow politics more regularly at baseline will engage more with the conflict, jargon, and prediction styles. Beginning with the click rate, I regress the binary (headline-level) click variable on binary variables for style assignment (also at the headline-level), clustering the standard errors within each respondent. I hold the public interest style as the reference category (meaning that H1 predicts a negative coefficient on each of the other three style indicator variables). To test H2, I then interact each style indicator with baseline political engagement; H2 predicts negative coefficients on the base indicators and positive coefficients on the interaction terms.

Beginning briefly with the base model (H1), I find no statistical difference in the click rate across the four styles overall, as shown in Appendix Table B.1.1 (no support for H1). The click rate is generally low, at 3.49 percent on average—making it a rather noisy measure—and the overall rate does not vary significantly across styles, ranging from a low of 3.19

²⁶This digital trace measure should be treated with some caution. Some email systems mask the open trace or send a false signal to the email sender. For example, an automatic filter or filing rule can falsely indicate that an email has been opened, even if never actually seen by a human. Accordingly, I observe 611 clicks for newsletters where the email open variable is 0; an unknown number of observations are recorded where the open variable is 1 but should be 0. Ideally, this problem simply introduces random noise into the estimates of treatment effects on email opens (i.e., this problem is not related to treatment assignment), but at a minimum it does make any such estimates less precise.

percent among public interest headlines to a high of 3.87 percent among prediction style headlines. In other words, I do not find that one style of news coverage is clearly dominant over the others in terms of aggregate consumer demand in the study sample.

As in Study 1, however, baseline political engagement substantially affects what participants choose to click on. In the interaction model, shown in Figure 8 (base coefficients are shown in the lower panel, interaction coefficients in the upper panel), less politically engaged respondents clicked substantially less on jargon-style headlines (estimate -0.038 , $p = 0.057$) and slightly less on prediction-style headlines (estimate -0.027 , $p = 0.116$), while their more politically engaged counterparts clicked on these same jargon-style (estimate 0.055 , $p = 0.051$) and prediction-style (estimate 0.049 , $p = 0.064$) headlines with much greater frequency. In contrast to Study 1, I do not observe this same dynamic with conflict-style headlines: the difference in click rate is negligible compared to the public interest style, and this persists across the spectrum of baseline political engagement. On this measure, I observe partial support for H2.²⁷

To underscore this point, I analyze the total number of clicks provided by respondents at different levels of baseline political engagement over the entire experiment, as shown in Table 2. Respondents in the bottom tertile of baseline political engagement clicked most frequently on the public interest style headlines. In contrast, moderately engaged respondents in the middle tertile preferred the conflict and prediction styles, while the most politically engaged respondents in the upper tertile preferred the jargon and prediction styles. Among the most-engaged tenth of the sample, the preference for the jargon style is particularly stark: these respondents clicked on jargon-style headlines more than the headlines for any other two styles combined.

Turning to the second measure of engagement with the newsletter content, the email open rate, I regress the binary (newsletter-level) email open indicator on indicator variables for

²⁷I also conduct this analysis on each subsample separately, reported in Appendix Table B.1.2. Although doing so reduces statistical power, the pattern of results is substantively similar for both the address-based sample and the convenience sample.

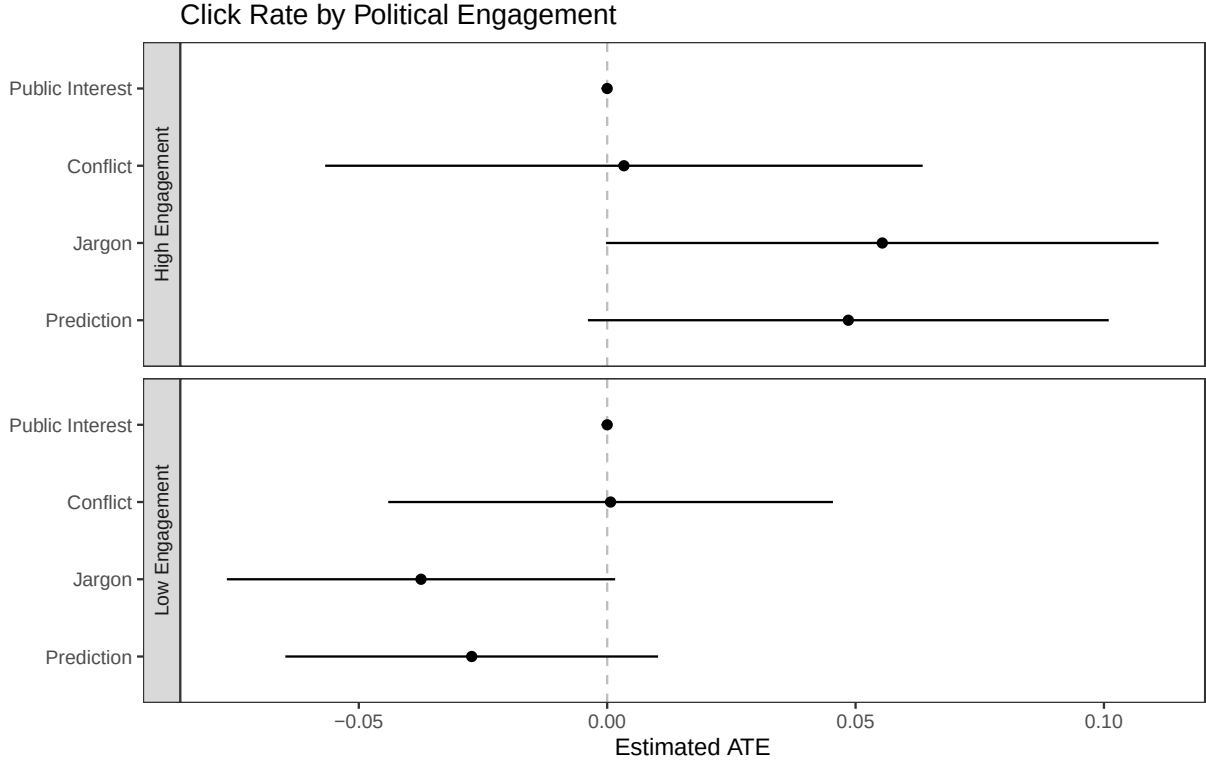


Figure 8: Figure displays the estimated ATE of headline style on the story click rate, interacted with baseline political engagement. The lower panel displays the estimated base coefficients for each style and the upper panel displays the estimated interaction terms. The error bars indicate 90 percent confidence intervals. For full results, see Appendix Table B.1.1.

the treatment conditions (respondent-level), clustering the standard errors at the respondent level. I again hold the public interest condition as the reference category. In contrast to the expectations of H1, I find that the email open rate is higher in the conflict (estimate 0.017, two-tailed $p = 0.009$), jargon (estimate 0.019, two-tailed $p = 0.004$), and prediction conditions (estimate 0.037, two-tailed $p < 0.001$), although the overall open rate is quite high (69.0 percent in the public interest condition, the lowest) and these differences are therefore substantively small.²⁸ In the interaction model, I observe mixed support for H2. The most politically engaged respondents at baseline open the newsletters more frequently if assigned to the prediction condition (interaction estimate 0.076, $p = 0.015$), accounting for much of the difference in that arm's overall open rate relative to the public interest condition.

²⁸See Appendix Table B.1.3 for full results.

Table 2: Total Clicks by Headline Style and Political Engagement

Sample Segment by PE	Public Interest	Conflict	Jargon	Prediction
Top 10%	146	113	337	184
Top 33%	603	520	793	769
Middle 33%	512	842	581	710
Bottom 33%	436	332	296	363
Total Sample	1,551	1,694	1,670	1,842

Note: Table displays the total aggregate clicks to news headlines employing the respective news style (columns), segmented by sample quantiles for political engagement (rows).

However, respondents who are less politically engaged at baseline are slightly more likely to open the newsletters when assigned to the conflict and (somewhat paradoxically) jargon conditions, as shown in Appendix Table B.1.3.

From a practical perspective, it should be noted that clicking on individual stories requires exposure to the newsletter itself. In this sense, the two behaviors are not fully independent: observing a click is theoretically dependent on self-selection into opening the newsletter email. One possible explanation for the heterogeneous effects of headline-level treatments on the click rate is that respondents at various levels of political engagement respond differently to the respondent-level treatment assignment in terms of opening the newsletters, and then the balance of clicks is purely a function of more headlines with a certain style being present to click on. This calls for modeling the click outcome as a two-stage function of first choosing to open a given newsletter, then choosing to click on a headline with one style versus another within the newsletter.

I preregistered and favor the unconditional models presented above (as quasi intent-to-treat estimands) because the email open data is not fully reliable; as noted earlier, some email systems falsify this trace data in one direction or the other. About one in ten observed

clicks also record the email open for that newsletter for that respondent as 0, and there are an unknown number of other observations where the email open dependent variable is 1 and should be 0 (or vice versa). This problem is not likely to be related to the treatment assignment (and in any case the differences in the open rate are small across treatment arms), meaning that the errors only introduce statistical noise without biasing the estimates, but it does make selection models considerably less precise.

Nevertheless, as a robustness check, I estimate two Heckman selection models (Heckman 1979), which first model the email open dependent variable as a function of treatment arm interacted with baseline political engagement in the first stage, then model the click dependent variable as a function of headline style (for H1) and an interaction with baseline political engagement (for H2). As shown in Appendix Table B.1.4, in both models I find that the point estimates for the effect of headline style on the click rate are very similar to those in the unconditional models, but with less precise standard errors. Further, ρ , the correlation between the error terms in the selection and outcome stages, is very small in both models (and, in the H2 interaction model, not statistically distinguishable from zero), indicating that selection-related bias in the unconditional models is likely minimal.

I therefore consider the headline style itself to have a meaningful effect on respondents' click behavior, beyond the broader effects of treatment assignment on decisions to engage with the newsletters at all. In view of the evidence across both measures of content demand, in both the unconditional and Heckman estimation models, I consider H2's expectations on relative demand for the public interest style best supported with respect to the prediction style, partially supported with respect to the jargon style, and not supported with respect to the conflict style.

Beyond participant behavior with respect to individual headlines, the extended duration of Study 2 allows me to examine the effect of repeated exposure to different news styles on broader attitudes towards politics, government, and the media. I test the expectations of 3 (public interest style news increases support by democratic norms) and H4 (public interest

style news increases internal political efficacy) by regressing the endline measurement of the respective index on indicators for treatment condition and include the pre-treatment index measurement as a covariate. I hold the public interest condition as the reference category; H3 and H4 thus expect negative coefficients on the treatment indicators.

I observe a slight decline in mean support for democratic norms across all respondents by the end of the experiment,²⁹ though from a very high baseline (from 0.942 to 0.937, max scale range is from 0 to 1). In the public interest condition, the mean within-subject change is effectively zero. In contrast, the mean within-subject change is negative in all other conditions, though this difference is only significant with respect to the jargon condition (estimate -0.009 , $p = 0.053$; see Appendix Table B.1.5). This suggests that public interest style news can serve to reinforce democratic norms while other, more common styles of news coverage risk degrading that support. I thus find partial support for H3.

I observe a slight increase in mean internal political efficacy across all respondents over the course of the experiment (from a mean of 0.713 to 0.725, max scale range 0 to 1), reflecting the long-established relationship between news exposure and internal political efficacy (e.g., Morrell 2003; Tewksbury, Hals and Bibart 2008; Wolak 2018). This increase is concentrated among respondents assigned to the public interest condition, whose average within-subject change is from 0.707 to 0.730. The mean within-subject change is positive within each condition—suggesting a positive benefit from engagement with the newsletters overall. But the gains are smaller in the other three conditions, though the difference is again only significant in the jargon condition (estimate -0.018 , $p = 0.059$; see Appendix Table B.1.5). I thus find some evidence that repeated exposure to public interest style news increases feelings of internal political self-efficacy, partially supporting H4.

Finally, I also measure a wide array of other attitudes about media and politics on both the pre-treatment and endline surveys, allowing me to conduct exploratory analyses of the effect of different news styles on these outcomes. These include external political self-efficacy,

²⁹This may well have been a function of the caustic campaign environment—and ample rhetoric hostile to democratic norms—in which the experiment took place.

trust in government, confidence in the media, news-will-find-me attitudes (Gil de Zúñiga and Diehl 2019), and affective polarization. I find no evidence of within-subject change on these variables from repeated treatments to specific news styles in the newsletters; for these outcomes, the public interest style appear to neither help nor hurt. However, I observe some evidence that the public interest style slightly reduces news avoidance, while the jargon and (to a lesser degree) prediction style slightly increase it—particularly among respondents who are less politically engaged at baseline. Regressing a post-treatment self-reported measure of news avoidance on treatment (and the pre-treatment measure), I find that the jargon style causes a significant increase in news avoidance relative to the public interest control (estimate 0.034, two-tailed $p = 0.019$).³⁰ In an interaction model with baseline political engagement, both the jargon (estimate 0.151, two-tailed $p = 0.006$) and prediction (estimate 0.099, two-tailed $p = 0.068$) treatments elevate news avoidance at the low end of political engagement. This gaps winnows to near zero at the high end of political engagement (jargon interaction estimate -0.156 , two-tailed $p = 0.031$; prediction interaction estimate -0.107 , two-tailed $p = 0.141$).

Discussion

Survey and laboratory experiments on behavior are challenged by the unusual setting in which the behavior under study takes place. The evidence of consumer demand for public interest style news presented in Study 1 ought therefore be met with a certain skepticism. Would people who are not regular consumers of political news really be willing to engage with public interest style news, if given the option to avoid doing so entirely? Are the gains to political learning from exposure to public interest style news simply a product of presenting news content inside a survey, quite unlike how people actually consume news in their day-to-day lives? Even if encountered through normal information streams, would any gains actually endure?

³⁰See Appendix Table B.1.6 for full results.

Study 2 makes substantial progress towards answering these questions. Rather than forcing consumers to make choices (and between just two options at that), this field experiment gave respondents the opportunity to engage with the randomized news content at their leisure, allowed them to engage with the content in the context of other streams of information in their daily news diets, and provided the explicit option to avoid engaging with any experimental content at all. Both the treatment and measurement of key outcomes were also much less obtrusive here: the randomization of style in the headlines less detectable to the respondent, given no repetition of the same news stories (unlike the conjoint setting), and that digital trace tracking of clicks and email opens made measurement of engagement nearly invisible.

Despite the experiment’s much lighter-touch design, I find substantial evidence to confirm the key findings on news demand in Study 1. The results are clear: there is a demand for public interest style news. While demand for public interest style news does not dominate more typical approaches—H1 is not supported—consumers who are currently the most disengaged from politics express a clear preference for this style relative to the jargon and prediction styles. Notably, this pattern of demand is present for both the probability subsample of registered voters recruited by mail—a more diverse sample on many demographic and political attributes—and the convenience subsample of consumers accustomed to receiving email newsletters. As a complement to Study 1’s sample of online survey panelists, the field experiment provides valuable progress towards generalizability. However, the field experiment also offers a caution: in contrast to the findings of the conjoint experiment in Study 1, I find little evidence that demand for the conflict style differs much from demand for public interest style news at either end of the political engagement spectrum. This may be because interest in this style is concentrated among the moderately engaged, as Table 2 tentatively suggests.

What do the findings mean for news outlets? Both Study 1 and Study 2 show that demand for political news is qualitatively different for people who are less versus more engaged

with politics: the least engaged consumers strongly prefer news headlines that convey the basic public import of a news story in accessible language, whereas news junkies express a clear preference for headlines with a more exciting hook. From the point of view of each consumer, these preferences appear rational. For the disengaged, who consume relatively little political news day-to-day (Edgerly 2022; Forman-Katz, Naomi 2023; Prior 2019; Toff, Palmer and Nielsen 2023; Tyler, Grimmer and Iyengar 2022), being able to understand the core of a news story immediately from the headline facilitates consumption—as does conveying the substantive import of the story rather than its political intrigue. Far from being fundamentally disinterested in substantive issues relative to the drama of politics (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; Zaller 2003), these consumers have a distaste for politics as it is popularly conveyed by the media: as sport (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011). While non-political stories are generally of greater interest to them (see Appendix A.2), to the extent that they wish to follow public affairs these consumers prefer a news style that provides the most relevant information (Lupia 2016) in a “condensed and easy-to-digest” fashion, without feeling the need to clothe every story in a garb that screams politics.

In contrast, the most politically interested individuals, who consume a near-continuous stream of political news every day (Krupnikov and Ryan 2022; Tyler, Grimmer and Iyengar 2022), the basic policy issue at the heart of most political news stories is either easily detectable from a headline by reading “between the lines” or already known from prior exposure. That is, heavy news consumers can rely on volume of exposure to accumulate an understanding of the issue at stake, or make an educated guess from a single headline based on their existing knowledge of the mentioned political figures, institutions, and terminology. The rational preference, then, is to seek out news content that seems to provide something entertaining (conflict, clickbait), something new (prediction, clickbait), or something that makes one feel smart (jargon, prediction).

For news producers, these preferences present something of a paradox because the most consistent (and informed) customers demand content that under-serves the public. To

broaden the audience for political news requires producing public interest style news—but because these consumers are currently disenchanted and not intrinsically entertained by politics, they will likely still engage less frequently than news junkies. After all, I observe slightly fewer total clicks on public interest style headlines than the other three styles in Study 2 (see Table 2). In an attention-drive industry where engagement metrics are made integral to news production (Dodds et al. 2023; Mukerjee, Yang and Peng 2023; Munger 2020; Petre 2021) and few consumers are actually willing to pay for news (Chyi and Ng 2020; Hopkins and Gorton 2024; Trexler 2025a), shifting to produce *only* public interest style headlines may not be prudent—today’s more typical approaches for coverage clearly have their audiences.

But just as clearly, the public interest approach has an audience too. Public interest style news provides a valuable opportunity for news outlets to broaden their audiences beyond just the news junkies who so love the jargon style. As the financial model for news production continues to shift towards subscriptions as a replacement for falling (click-dependent) advertising revenues, a greater emphasis on the public interest approach may be able to reduce news avoidance, growing the potential pool of subscribers by convincing less-attentive audiences that the news media can actually serve them.

And perhaps most importantly, the public interest approach to coverage can help news outlets regain their critical normative functions in a democracy under threat. Not only does this approach help consumers learn—and retain—valuable information (Trexler 2025c) that is “central to issues of governing” (Patterson 1993, 29), but it also serves to directly reinforce public support for essential norms of healthy democracy. In contrast, the standard approaches for covering politics risk undermining the public’s commitment to such norms, giving anti-democratic actors greater leeway to abandon them. The reality is that the news media cannot be simply a business: the media are an essential democratic institution, and with that comes responsibilities to the public. This study offers compelling evidence that the public interest style of news coverage can provide a viable path to fulfill them.

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Online Appendix to
Inverted Demand for Under-informative News

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Supplemental Results for Study 1

Tabular Results

Table A.1.1: Estimated AMCE of Headline Style on Reading Preference

	Base Model (1)	Engagement Interaction (2)	All Attributes (3)
Style: Conflict	−0.001 (0.008)	−0.051* (0.024)	−0.049* (0.024)
Style: Jargon	−0.028*** (0.008)	−0.108*** (0.024)	−0.104*** (0.024)
Style: Prediction	−0.010 (0.008)	−0.076** (0.025)	−0.073** (0.025)
Style: Clickbait	0.003 (0.008)	−0.042† (0.025)	−0.043† (0.025)
Political Engagement		−0.079** (0.025)	−0.078** (0.025)
Conflict*Engagement		0.082* (0.038)	0.079* (0.038)
Jargon*Engagement		0.130*** (0.037)	0.125*** (0.037)
Prediction*Engagement		0.108** (0.039)	0.103** (0.039)
Clickbait*Engagement		0.074† (0.038)	0.075† (0.038)
Outlet: Fox News			−0.094*** (0.010)
Outlet: NYT			0.021* (0.009)
Outlet: Politico			−0.009 (0.009)
Outlet: WSJ			0.012 (0.009)
Outlet: WaPo			0.003 (0.009)
Issue: Environment			−0.006 (0.009)
Issue: Foreign Affairs			−0.028** (0.009)
Issue: Immigration			−0.005 (0.009)
Issue: Public Health			0.023* (0.009)
Length: 2 minute read			−0.029*** (0.007)
Length: 3 minute read			−0.037*** (0.007)
Length: 4 minute read			−0.049*** (0.008)
Profile Position: B			−0.018* (0.007)
Constant	0.507*** (0.005)	0.555*** (0.118)	0.617*** (0.124)
Observations	38,162	38,162	38,162

†p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Note: Data from 38,162 profile observations from 19,081 decision tasks that did not include one or more apolitical headlines. Standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Public interest style held as the reference category.

Table A.1.2: Estimated Mean Headline Evaluation by Style

Style	<i>Evaluation Dimension:</i>							
	Informative (1)	Easy to Understand (2)	Biased (3)	Entertaining (4)	About Public Policy (5)	About Conflict (6)	About Forecasting (7)	Clickbait (8)
Public Interest	0.620 (0.008)	0.680 (0.008)	0.269 (0.009)	0.201 (0.008)	0.513 (0.010)	0.364 (0.010)	0.298 (0.009)	0.283 (0.009)
Conflict	0.577 (0.008)	0.666 (0.008)	0.343 (0.009)	0.245 (0.009)	0.533 (0.009)	0.458 (0.010)	0.289 (0.009)	0.333 (0.010)
Jargon	0.610 (0.008)	0.624 (0.008)	0.269 (0.009)	0.225 (0.009)	0.508 (0.010)	0.361 (0.010)	0.298 (0.010)	0.284 (0.010)
Prediction	0.569 (0.008)	0.665 (0.008)	0.312 (0.009)	0.219 (0.009)	0.513 (0.010)	0.406 (0.010)	0.462 (0.010)	0.333 (0.010)
Clickbait	0.463 (0.010)	0.623 (0.008)	0.336 (0.009)	0.269 (0.009)	0.459 (0.010)	0.344 (0.010)	0.345 (0.010)	0.488 (0.012)
Apolitical	0.478 (0.017)	0.705 (0.016)	0.193 (0.016)	0.512 (0.018)	0.086 (0.012)	0.114 (0.013)	0.180 (0.015)	0.479 (0.021)
Observations	6,303	6,303	6,303	6,303	6,303	6,303	6,303	6,303

Note: Data from 6,303 observations headline evaluations. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level.

Evidence of Credible Stated Preferences

In addition to the 100 political headlines used for the primary analysis, I included 5 apolitical headlines (see Appendix D.2) to confirm that baseline political engagement should be positively associated with preference for political news stories over non-political news stories. Column 1 of Appendix Table A.2.1 below shows the results of regressing headline type (apolitical held as the reference category) and its interaction with baseline political engagement, while column 2 shows the results of regressing headline style (with apolitical headlines included and held as the reference category) and its interaction with engagement. In both analyses, less politically engaged respondents strongly prefer apolitical news stories relative to all five styles of political headlines, while the reverse is true for more politically engaged respondents. These results lend confidence that respondents were making credible stated preferences in the decision tasks.

Analyses of the other randomized attributes (reading time, source outlet, and policy issue area) also suggest credible stated preferences. As shown in Appendix Table A.2.2 respondents indicated preferences for shorter news articles. As shown in Appendix Table A.2.3, Democrats preferred stories purportedly from *The New York Times* while Republicans preferred Fox News. And as shown in Appendix Table A.2.4, less politically engaged respondents eschewed foreign affairs stories while more politically engaged respondents were drawn to them.

Table A.2.1: Estimated AMCE of Non-political vs. Political Headlines on Reading Preference

	By Type (1)	By Style (2)
Political Headline	−0.157*** (0.037)	
Political Engagement	−0.362*** (0.053)	−0.362*** (0.053)
Headline Type*Engagement	0.381*** (0.055)	
Style: Public		−0.104** (0.039)
Style: Conflict		−0.149*** (0.039)
Style: Jargon		−0.209*** (0.039)
Style: Prediction		−0.174*** (0.040)
Style: Clickbait		−0.148*** (0.040)
Public*Engagement		0.303*** (0.059)
Conflict*Engagement		0.381*** (0.060)
Jargon*Engagement		0.431*** (0.060)
Prediction*Engagement		0.406*** (0.060)
Clickbait*Engagement		0.381*** (0.060)
Constant	0.649*** (0.035)	0.649*** (0.035)
Observations	42,020	42,020
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Note: Data from full sample of 42,020 profile observations. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Apolitical headlines held as the reference category.

Table A.2.2: Estimated AMCE of Article Length on Reading Preference

	Base Model (1)	Engagement Interaction (2)
2 Minute Read	−0.029*** (0.007)	−0.056* (0.023)
3 Minute Read	−0.037*** (0.007)	−0.062** (0.022)
4 Minute Read	−0.049*** (0.008)	−0.092*** (0.023)
Political Engagement		−0.040 (0.022)
2 Min*Engagement		0.044 (0.035)
3 Min*Engagement		0.041 (0.034)
4 Min*Engagement		0.070* (0.035)
Constant	0.529*** (0.005)	0.553*** (0.014)
Observations	38,162	38,162
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Note: Data from 38,162 profile observations from 19,081 decision tasks that did not include one or more apolitical headlines. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. “1 minute read” held as the reference category.

Table A.2.3: Estimated AMCE of Source Outlet on Reading Preference

	Base Model (1)	Party ID Interaction (2)
Fox News	−0.095*** (0.010)	−0.190*** (0.014)
New York Times	0.021* (0.009)	0.031* (0.013)
Politico	−0.009 (0.009)	−0.013 (0.014)
Wall Street Journal	0.012 (0.009)	−0.002 (0.014)
Washington Post	0.002 (0.009)	−0.005 (0.013)
Party ID		−0.049** (0.018)
Fox News*PID		0.250*** (0.028)
New York Times*PID		−0.026 (0.026)
Politico*PID		0.011 (0.028)
Wall Street Journal*PID		0.038 (0.028)
Washington Post*PID		0.021 (0.026)
Constant	0.512*** (0.006)	0.530*** (0.009)
Observations	38,162	38,162
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Note: Data from 38,162 profile observations from 19,081 decision tasks that did not include one or more apolitical headlines. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. CNN held as the reference category.

Table A.2.4: Estimated AMCE of Policy Issue Area on Reading Preference

	Base Model (1)	Engagement Interaction (2)
Environment	−0.006 (0.009)	−0.042 (0.027)
Foreign Affairs	−0.028** (0.009)	−0.157*** (0.027)
Immigration	−0.005 (0.009)	−0.094*** (0.027)
Public Health	0.023* (0.009)	0.047 (0.026)
Political Engagement		−0.075** (0.027)
Environment*Engagement		0.059 (0.042)
Foreign*Engagement		0.212*** (0.041)
Immigration*Engagement		0.146*** (0.042)
Health*Engagement		−0.039 (0.041)
Constant	0.503*** (0.006)	0.549*** (0.017)
Observations	38,162	38,162
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Note: Data from 38,162 profile observations from 19,081 decision tasks that did not include one or more apolitical headlines. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Economy news held as the reference category.

Supplemental Results for Study 2

Tabular Results

Table B.1.1: Estimated ATE of Headline Style on Click Rate

	Base Model (1)	Engagement Interaction (2)
Style: Conflict	0.003 (0.005)	0.001 (0.027)
Style: Jargon	0.002 (0.005)	−0.037 (0.024)
Style: Prediction	0.007 (0.005)	−0.027 (0.023)
Political Engagement		0.014 (0.029)
Conflict*Engagement		0.003 (0.037)
Jargon*Engagement		0.055 (0.034)
Prediction*Engagement		0.049 (0.032)
Constant	0.032*** (0.004)	0.022 (0.022)
Observations	193,505	193,505
†p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Note: Data from F24 analysis sample of 193,505 headline-level observations of potential clicks. Standard errors clustered at the respondent level ($j = 1,717$). Public interest style held as the reference category. Table reflects two-tailed p-values.

Table B.1.2: Estimated ATE of Headline Style on Click Rate by Subsample

	Prob. Subsample		Conv. Subsample	
	Base Model	Interaction	Base Model	Interaction
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Style: Conflict	0.011 (0.010)	-0.006 (0.043)	-0.002 (0.005)	0.003 (0.031)
Style: Jargon	0.012 (0.010)	-0.042 (0.034)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.029 (0.034)
Style: Prediction	0.009 (0.009)	-0.026 (0.031)	0.006 (0.006)	-0.028 (0.035)
Political Engagement		0.036 (0.046)		0.006 (0.040)
Conflict*Engagement		0.024 (0.062)		-0.007 (0.039)
Jargon*Engagement		0.076 (0.054)		0.036 (0.045)
Prediction*Engagement		0.051 (0.049)		0.047 (0.045)
Constant	0.040*** (0.007)	0.016 (0.031)	0.027*** (0.004)	0.022 (0.032)
Observations	74,905	74,905	118,600	118,600
†p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001				

Note: Data from F24 analysis subsamples: the address-based probability sample ($n_p = 688$) and the Ground News subscriber convenience sample ($n_c = 1,029$). Standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Public interest style held as the reference category. Table reflects two-tailed p-values.

Table B.1.3: Estimated ATE of Headline Style on Email Open Rate

	Base Model (1)	Engagement Interaction (2)
Style: Conflict	0.017** (0.007)	0.043 [†] (0.025)
Style: Jargon	0.019** (0.007)	0.067** (0.025)
Style: Prediction	0.037*** (0.007)	−0.016 (0.026)
Political Engagement		0.160*** (0.025)
Conflict*Engagement		−0.040 (0.034)
Jargon*Engagement		−0.071* (0.034)
Prediction*Engagement		0.076* (0.035)
Constant	0.690*** (0.005)	0.578*** (0.018)
Observations	39,257	39,257
[†] p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Note: Data from F24 analysis sample of 39,257 newsletter-level observations of potential email opens. Standard errors clustered at the respondent level ($j = 1, 717$). Public interest style held as the reference category. Table reflects two-tailed p-values.

Table B.1.4: Heckman Selection Modeling of Clicks, Conditional on Opens

	Base Model (1)	Engagement Interaction (2)
Selection Equation (Email Opens):		
Arm: Conflict	0.126 (0.252)	0.125 (0.252)
Arm: Jargon	0.171 (0.252)	0.179 (0.251)
Arm: Prediction	-0.078 (0.251)	-0.070 (0.251)
Political Engagement	0.463 [†] (0.246)	0.460 [†] (0.246)
Arm: Conflict*Engagement	-0.115 (0.344)	-0.115 (0.343)
Arm: Jargon*Engagement	-0.179 (0.345)	-0.190 (0.344)
Arm: Prediction*Engagement	0.271 (0.351)	0.259 (0.351)
Constant	0.203 (0.178)	0.205 (0.178)
Outcome Equation (Clicks):		
Style: Conflict	0.006 (0.006)	0.010 (0.035)
Style: Jargon	0.003 (0.006)	-0.034 (0.029)
Style: Prediction	0.008 (0.006)	-0.031 (0.029)
Political Engagement		0.024 (0.038)
Style: Conflict*Engagement		-0.005 (0.048)
Style: Jargon*Engagement		0.051 (0.041)
Style: Prediction*Engagement		0.055 (0.041)
Constant	0.046*** (0.005)	0.024 (0.027)
ρ	-0.062***	-0.017
Observations	193,505	193,505
[†] p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Note: Data from F24 analysis sample of 193,505 headline-level observations of potential clicks, estimated with Heckman selection within 39,257 newsletter-level observations of potential email opens. Standard errors clustered at the respondent level ($j = 1, 717$). Public interest style held as the reference category. Table reflects two-tailed p-values. This analysis was not preregistered.

Table B.1.5: Estimated ATE of Headline Style on Attitude Change

	Internal Efficacy (1)	Support for Norms (2)
Style: Conflict	−0.007 (0.012)	−0.006 (0.006)
Style: Jargon	−0.018 (0.012)	−0.009 (0.006)
Style: Prediction	−0.010 (0.012)	−0.002 (0.005)
Pre-treatment Int. Efficacy	0.630*** (0.022)	
Pre-treatment Support for Norms		0.761*** (0.039)
Constant	0.285*** (0.018)	0.224*** (0.038)
Observations	1,176	1,176

[†]p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Note: Data from F24 analysis sample of 1,176 endline respondents. Public interest style held as the reference category. Table reflects two-tailed p-values.

Table B.1.6: Estimated ATE of Headline Style on News Avoidance

	Base Model (1)	Engagement Interaction (2)
Style: Conflict	0.012 (0.014)	0.071 (0.066)
Style: Jargon	0.034* (0.014)	0.151* (0.061)
Style: Prediction	0.021 (0.013)	0.099 [†] (0.059)
Political Engagement		−0.090 (0.058)
Pre-treatment Avoidance	0.646*** (0.026)	0.570*** (0.028)
Conflict*Engagement		−0.078 (0.084)
Jargon*Engagement		−0.156* (0.079)
Prediction*Engagement		−0.107 (0.077)
Constant	0.103*** (0.012)	0.193*** (0.047)
Observations	13,361	13,286
[†] p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Note: Data from F24 analysis sample of 1,176 endline respondents. Public interest style held as the reference category. Table reflects two-tailed p-values. This analysis was preregistered as exploratory.

Item Response Theory Models

In this appendix, I present the results of item response theory (IRT) models of pre-treatment factual knowledge questions asked of respondents in both Study 1 and Study 2. Each model uses binary data (1 for a correct answer and 0 otherwise) for a set of variables that make up a single knowledge measure (a single pre-treatment measure, and one recall measure for each of the three vignette news stories) to estimate three parameters for each item in a logistic model (a “3PL” IRT model). The discrimination parameter α describes how well each individual item relates to the overall scale (formally, the maximum slope of the logistic curve); in this context, α indicates how well the item contributes to discriminating between those with more or less knowledge. Ideally, this parameter is positive and large for all items. The difficulty parameter β gives an indication how easy or difficult the item is (formally, the point at which likelihood of a correct answer crosses 50 percent, assuming no guessing), and accordingly where on the knowledge scale that item is likely to distinguish between more and less knowledgeable individuals. In this setting, a range of positive and negative β values across items is preferable, to be able to distinguish between low and very low knowledge as well as between high and very high knowledge. Finally, the pseudo-guessing parameter γ describes the estimated probability of a correct answer via guessing (formally, this raises the floor of the logistic function). In this setting, lower γ values are preferred because the scale is better able to capture actual knowledge rather than guesswork. The tables below provide the parameter values for each item used in each scale in each study.

For all scales, the estimated IRT models indicate that the items all strongly related to what the scale measures, provide a useful range of difficulty parameters to capture differences at many points along the scale, and show acceptably low guessing parameters on nearly all items.

Table C.0.1: IRT Model for Pre-treatment Political Knowledge Batteries

Item	<i>P24 Sample</i>			<i>F24 Sample</i>		
	α	β	γ	α	β	γ
House Speaker	2.830	-0.195	0.002	1.835	-0.808	0.000
Senate Term	1.753	-0.407	0.227	1.721	-0.322	0.117
Chief Justice	3.322	-0.200	0.067	3.294	-0.690	0.000
Vice President	0.853	0.901	0.000	0.935	-0.298	0.000
State Governor	1.297	-2.095	0.001	1.306	-2.839	0.000
State Legislature	0.790	-1.357	0.000	0.734	-2.289	0.000
Next Election	1.918	-0.772	0.727	0.736	-4.242	0.000
NATO Sec. Gen.	—	—	—	1.120	1.119	0.000
SCOTUS Balance	—	—	—	1.135	-0.451	0.000

Note: Data from 2,053 respondents (Study 1) and 1692 respondents (Study 2) who pledged to answer honestly and did not show evidence of cheating.

Study 1 Information

The data for this study come from a non-probability convenience sample of the U.S. general adult population ($n = 2,148$) recruited from the Prolific respondent pool via quota sampling to ensure a gender-balanced sample. The study was conducted by the author and funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The study was fielded on April 26th, 2024, via the Qualtrics online survey platform. The study was approved by Duke University’s Institutional Review Board under protocol 2024-0323. Respondents received \$2.55 to complete the survey; the median respondent completed the survey in 13.5 minutes. Preregistration materials for this study are available [here](#).

After consenting to participate in the study, participants were screened for eligibility in several ways. First, they were asked to correctly identify a single-digit number shown in an image on the screen. Second, they were asked to verify their age and state of residence. Third, they were asked whether they would answer the survey honestly. In total, 9 respondents failed to correctly identify the number on the screen (all breakoffs), 1 reported being less than 18 years of age, and 7 did not agree to answer the survey honestly. These were terminated from the study, while 14 additional respondents broke off from the survey during screening. A total of 2,286 respondents passed these screening questions and were recruited into the study. Following screening, 3 additional respondents failed a pre-treatment attention check, which asked respondents to correctly select the letters “B” and “E” from among five options, and were terminated from the study. A further 135 respondents failed to reach the last page of the study, and are not included in the analyses. The total number of complete valid responses is thus 2,148.

Finally, 47 respondents were excluded from the analysis for failing an extreme speeding check (completing the survey in less than 1/3 of the median time, or 270 seconds or less) or failing at least two of the following additional quality checks: self-reported age and birth year do not correspond, within a tolerance of ± 2 years; self-reported state of residence and zip code do not match; non-sequitur or item non-response to an open-ended question about preferred news source; reporting “a lot” or “some” use in the past week of a social media platform that does not exist; speeding, defined by completion in less than 1/2 of the median time (or 405 seconds or less); scoring less than 0.65 on Qualtrics’ internal reCaptcha measure; or partially failing the pretreatment attention check by selecting either “B” or “E” but not both. All of the screening and exclusion criteria were preregistered. The exclusions reduce the final

analysis sample to $n = 2,101$ respondents. Appendix D.1 provides descriptive statistics for the sample. The observations are not weighted. As with all survey research, the design and collection of data has limitations, and resulting estimates may involve unmeasured error that limits representativeness to the target population.

Sample Characteristics

Table D.1.1 provides the sample characteristics on selected demographic and political variables. Figure D.1.1 shows the sample distribution on the baseline political engagement index, indicating substantial variation in this key moderator.

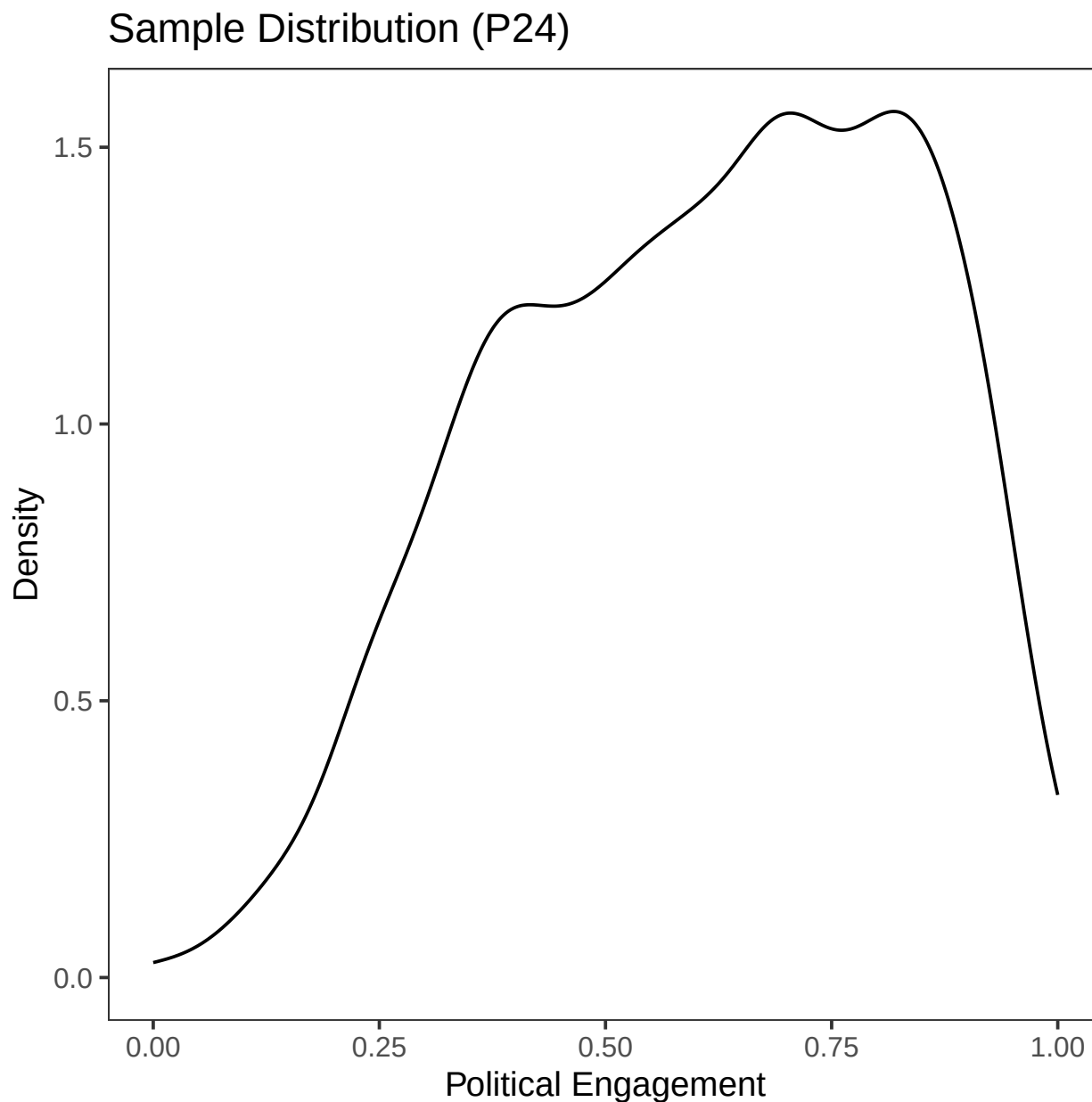


Figure D.1.1: Figure displays the P24 sample distribution on the baseline political engagement index.

Table D.1.1: Conjoint Study P24 Sample Characteristics

		Percent of Sample
Age	18–29	18.7
	30–39	31.9
	40–49	20.1
	50–59	18.6
	60+	10.7
Gender	Male	48.1
	Female	50.0
	Other Gender	1.9
Race	Asian or Asian-American	11.8
	Black or African-American	15.3
	Hispanic or Latino	7.9
	Middle Eastern	0.6
	Native American or Alaska Native	1.8
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.4
	White	69.9
	Other Race	0.9
Education	Less than High School	0.7
	High School or GED	11.4
	Some College	20.8
	Associate’s Degree	9.7
	Bachelor’s Degree	39.0
	Postgraduate Degree	18.5
Employment	Full-time	58.4
	Part-time	15.6
	Unemployed	8.4
	Retired	5.3
	Homemaker	5.3
	Student	3.6
	Something Else	3.4
Household Income	Less than \$20,000	8.7
	\$20,000 to \$39,000	15.2
	\$40,000 to \$59,000	16.7
	\$60,000 to \$79,000	16.1
	\$80,000 to \$99,000	12.3
	\$100,000 to \$149,000	18.7
	\$150,000+	12.2
Partisanship	Democrat	45.6
	Independent	34.4
	Republican	19.9

Note: Data from analysis sample of 2,101 respondents.

Survey Questionnaire

Consent and Screening

Thank you for your interest in participating in this survey by researchers at Duke University. This research study will ask you to answer a series of questions about you and your opinions about topics in the news. We expect this survey to take about 15 minutes to complete. After completing the survey, you will be paid \$2.55 for your participation. You may withdraw at any time and you may refuse to answer any question, but you must proceed to the final screen of the survey in order to receive payment. In accordance with Prolific policies, we may reject your submission if the survey was not completed correctly, you fail to complete an attention check appropriately, or the instructions were not followed. Your participation is voluntary. We do not ask for your name or any other information that might identify you. Although collected data may be made public or used for future research purposes, your identity will always remain confidential. If you have any questions about the research, please contact the researchers at [omitted]. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, contact Duke's Campus Institutional Review Board at [omitted]. If writing to the Campus IRB, please reference protocol ID #2024-0323.

- I consent to participate, begin the study.
- I do NOT consent.

We have just a few questions to confirm your eligibility for the survey. [Image of the number 3 in a box.] Please select the number shown in the box above.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

What is your age in years? Please enter a whole number:

- (Text box.)

In which state do you currently reside?

- I do not reside in the United States
- Alabama
- ...
- Wyoming

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *"I will answer this survey honestly."*

- Completely disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Moderately agree
- Completely agree

News Consumption

Thanks! You have qualified for the survey. We want to begin by asking you some questions about topics in the news. Politics can be fast-paced, and many people do not follow every new story. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in politics, if at all?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Not at all

Generally speaking, how interested are you in political campaigns, if at all?

- Not at all interested
- Slightly interested
- Moderately interested
- Very interested
- Extremely interested

During a typical week, how many days, if any, do you watch, read, or listen to news about politics?

- 0 days
- 1 day
- ...
- 7 days

In the past week, have you... (please check all that apply)

- Used social media (such as Facebook or YouTube)
- Watched news on television
- Read a newspaper (in print or online)
- Listened to a radio news program, talk radio, or news podcast
- None of these

How much, if at all, have you used the following social media platforms in the past week? [*Options: A lot; Some; Not at all*]

- Facebook
- X (Twitter)
- YouTube
- Instagram
- JiveMojo
- TikTok

What source of news do you use most often?

- (Text entry.)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *“I can be well-informed even when I don’t actively follow the news.”*

- Strongly agree
- Moderately agree
- Slightly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *“I don’t have to actively seek out the*

news because when important events happen, I will hear about them.”

- Strongly agree
- Moderately agree
- Slightly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

How often do you think you can count on the news media to be accurate, if at all?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

How often do you consider the news media to be trustworthy, if at all?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

How often do you find the news media to be informative, if at all?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

How often, if at all, do you find yourself actively trying to avoid the news these days?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

Political Attitudes

Next, we would like to ask you some questions about yourself and your opinions. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Other party (please specify)

[If Democrat] Would you call yourself a strong Democrat, or a not very strong Democrat?

- Strong

- Not very strong

[If Republican] Would you call yourself a strong Republican, or a not very strong Republican?

- Strong
- Not very strong

[If Neither] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic Party or to the Republican Party?

- Closer to the Democratic Party
- Closer to the Republican Party
- Neither

Where would you place yourself on this scale?

- Extremely liberal
- Mostly liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Mostly conservative
- Extremely conservative

Which of the following describes your beliefs and attitudes? Please check all that apply.

- Conservative
- Environmentalist
- Green
- Liberal
- Libertarian
- Nationalist
- Progressive
- Socialist
- Traditional
- None of these

Political Knowledge

Next, we're going to ask you some questions about public affairs. Many people have trouble answering questions like these, so if you can't think of the answer, please select "I don't know." It is important to us that you do NOT use outside sources like the Internet to search for the correct answer. Will you answer the following questions without help from outside sources?

- Yes
- No

Who is the current Speaker of the US House of Representatives?

- Mike Johnson
- Nancy Pelosi
- Kevin McCarthy
- Paul Ryan
- I don't know

How long is the term of office for a US Senator?

- 2 years
- 4 years
- 6 years
- 8 years
- I don't know

What job or political office is now held by John Roberts?

- Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- Senate Majority Leader
- Chair of the Democratic National Committee
- Chair of the Republican National Committee
- I don't know

Who is the current President of the U.S. Senate?

- Kamala Harris
- Elizabeth Warren
- Chuck Schumer
- Mitch McConnell
- I don't know

Is the [governor] of [your state] a member of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or neither?

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Neither
- I don't know

Which political party currently controls most seats in the [lower chamber] of [your state]?

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Neither
- I don't know

In what year will the next election for President of the United States take place?

- Year: (Text box.)
- I don't know

In what year did the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decide the case *Hill v. Wallace*?

- Year: (Text box.)
- I don't know

Attention Check

What are the second and fifth letters of the English alphabet? This is an attention check question and the correct answer is B and E (please select both).

- A
- B
- C
- D

- E

Conjoint

Thanks! Now we will move on to another set of topics. For the next set of pages, we are going to show you some news headlines adapted from recent stories in the news. On each page, you will see two headlines. Your task is to look carefully at each headline and **decide which of the two stories you would prefer to read**. You will make 12 separate decisions between pairs of headlines. Afterwards, you'll have the chance to read one of the stories that you selected.

Possible conjoint attribute values (randomized):

Headline (Task 1):

- “Don’t believe that survey saying Americans think chocolate milk comes from brown cows”
- “No, Millennials don’t really think that Judge Judy is a Supreme Court justice”
- “What the latest fundraising reports tell us about the November election”
- “What the latest polling results tell us about the November election”

Headline (Task 2):

- “Texas legislature imposes unique election laws on Houston, its largest city”
- “Texas Democrats wage fierce court battle against new Republican election laws”
- “New York approves new voting maps, largely keeping party-neutral lines set in 2022”
- “New York approves new voting maps, finally ending a lengthy partisan court battle”

Headline (Tasks 3-12):

- “Iowa passes law allowing state officials to arrest and deport some immigrants”
- “Iowa joins other red states claiming direct immigration authority, escalating fight with Biden”
- “Iowa follows Texas, mints new law granting deportation authority to state judges”
- “Iowa passes new immigration law that is likely to face swift challenges in court”
- “You’ll never guess what’s in Iowa’s new immigration law (unless you’re a Texan)”
- “Texas is bussing migrants to cities like New York and Denver, overwhelming local shelters”
- “Texas Republicans are bussing migrants to liberal cities, overwhelming local shelters”
- “Abbott makes good on threat to export migrants to big cities, overwhelming local shelters”
- “Texas policy of bussing migrants to big cities might doom several mayors’ reelection bids”
- “Sending them where? Here’s what Texas is doing with newly arrived migrants”
- “Senate Republicans block border security bill, leaving immigration policy in limbo”
- “Senate Republicans block border security bill, adding to Biden’s immigration woes”
- “GOP leaders kill border security deal, leaving chief architect Lankford fuming”
- “Immigration remains a key election flashpoint as Republicans block border security bill”
- “Here’s what one Republican Senator had to say about the stalled border security bill”
- “Influx of 3.3 million immigrants in 2023 helped to grow U.S. economy and labor force”
- “Influx of 3.3 million immigrants in 2023 fuels tense partisan debate, labor force growth”
- “Influx of 3.3 million immigrants in 2023 helped U.S. growth outpace all G7 economies”
- “Influx of 3.3 million immigrants in 2023 will ensure immigration stays top election issue”
- “You won’t believe how much the U.S. immigrant population grew in 2023—or its economic impact”
- “Federal government sets first limit on hazardous “forever chemicals” in drinking water”
- “In a win for Biden, EPA sets first limits on “forever chemicals” in drinking water”

- “EPA issues rule setting first-ever limits on PFAS in drinking water”
- “As EPA imposes limit on “forever chemicals” in drinking water, critics foretell ballooning costs”
- “What are “PFAS” chemicals and why does the government say they’re bad for you?”
- “Florida lawmakers propose limiting considerations of climate change in energy policy”
- “Pushing the culture war, Florida is going after mentions of “climate change” in state law”
- “Florida Speaker backs proposal to strike references to “climate change” from Florida law”
- “Florida legislature looks likely to double down on oil and gas in proposed bill”
- “Here’s what removing just eight mentions of “climate change” from Florida law would do”
- “Biden administration tightens limits on car emissions to accelerate electric vehicle transition”
- “Biden pushes back on automakers and Republican critics with new limits on gas-powered cars”
- “EPA finalizes new rule on hybrids and EVs in bid to curb automobile emissions”
- “Biden administration’s new regulation on electric vehicles will help convince young voters”
- “Biden administration set new rules on “tailpipe emissions.” Here’s why that might be a problem.”
- “Federal government blocks mining company’s proposal to build industrial road through fragile Alaskan wilderness”
- “Courting environmentalists, Biden administration blocks mining company’s planned road through fragile Alaskan wilderness”
- “Interior Department blocks road-building plan for Ambler Access Project through fragile Alaskan wilderness”
- “Industry groups likely to take Biden administration to court for decision blocking road-building plan in Alaskan wilderness”
- “Why did Biden block a road-building plan in Alaska? It might not be for the reason you expect.”
- “China subsidizes opioid production and fuels U.S. overdose deaths, Congressional report says”
- “House committee finds that China is fueling U.S. opioid crisis, urges Biden to get tough”
- “House committee finds that China’s CCP is subsidizing fentanyl production, export to U.S.”
- “House report on China’s role in opioid crisis could contribute to a breakdown of U.S.-China relations”
- “How responsible is China for opioid deaths in the U.S.? Here’s what a new House report says.”
- “Congress approves new Ukraine funding, delivering Biden victory over Republican objections”
- “Johnson pushes through Ukraine aid bill despite objections from Freedom Caucus”
- “The House Speaker’s push to approve new Ukraine funding might cost him his job”
- “Here’s how the House Speaker maneuvered past far-right opposition to secure Ukraine aid”
- “Congress approves aid package for Israel alongside humanitarian funding for Gaza”
- “Congress approves aid package for Israel and Gaza, despite partisan qualms on both sides”
- “Congress approves aid package for Israel and Gaza, a victory for Johnson as much as Biden”
- “Aid package for Israel approved by Congress will deepen Biden’s struggles with Muslim-Americans”
- “See what’s in the new aid package for Israel and Gaza (and what isn’t)”
- “As Venezuela’s leader imprisons opposition candidates, U.S. considers stricter oil embargo”
- “On Venezuela, Biden wants to impose oil embargo, but is wary of increasing gas prices or refugees”
- “U.S. considers reimposing strict oil sanctions on Venezuela after brokered deal falls apart”
- “Biden’s decision on Venezuela oil embargo may cost him crucial votes in November”
- “How a new oil embargo on Venezuela might work—and why it might matter in November”
- “Measles outbreaks among unvaccinated pose increasing threat to U.S. infants, CDC warns”
- “Recent measles outbreaks renew public debate on polarized issue of infant vaccination”
- “CDC warns that spike in measles cases pose threat to ‘elimination status’ in U.S.”
- “U.S. measles cases have already doubled since last year—and will probably keep rising”
- “Here’s what’s happening with measles cases in the U.S.—and why the CDC is worried”
- “Arizona set to enforce 1864 law banning nearly all abortions after state court ruling”
- “Trump and Biden trade blows regarding Arizona law that bans nearly all abortions”

- “Arizona’s Court of Appeals rules territory-era abortion prohibition enforceable”
- “Arizona’s 1864 abortion law puts issue at center stage in a key battleground state”
- “Arizona left its abortion law on the books for 160 years—since before AZ was even a state”
- “Congress investigates health sector security after cyber-attack disrupts care at most U.S. hospitals”
- “GOP House and Dem-controlled Senate launch dueling inquiries after cyber-attack disrupts U.S. hospitals”
- “Congress to investigate Change Healthcare cyber-attack that derailed insurance payments across U.S.”
- “Congress begins inquiries after major health sector cyber-attack, but systems remain ‘a prime target’”
- “‘A prime target’: here’s how many U.S. hospitals say they were disrupted in recent cyber-attack”
- “U.S. issues new regulations to protect miners from dust that causes black lung disease”
- “Long stalled by politics, U.S. issues new rule to protect miners from dust that causes lung disease”
- “Federal government issues new regulation limiting ground silica dust, linked to lung ailments”
- “New regulations on mining dust linked to black lung disease will be costly for the industry”
- “What the government’s new regulation on mining dust means for workers and the economy”
- “Annual inflation rate increases slightly to 3.5% in March, driven by food and energy prices”
- “Bad news for Biden: U.S. annual inflation rate increases slightly in March, to 3.5%”
- “Consumer inflation rate climbs to 3.5% in March, core CPI inflation dips slightly to 3.8%”
- “Annual inflation rises to 3.5% in March, dashing hopes that Fed will cut interest rates soon”
- “Learn what’s behind the latest uptick in the annual inflation rate (hint: you probably buy it)”
- “U.S. annual economic growth rate rose to 3.4% in last months of 2023, new government estimate says”
- “Good news for Biden: new estimate says annual economic growth was 3.4% in last months of 2023”
- “U.S. Commerce Department revises estimated annual GDP growth rate to 3.4% for Q4 of 2023”
- “U.S. annual growth estimate at 3.4% for last months of 2023, a sign of continuing economic strength”
- “What the latest GDP numbers tells us about the state of the U.S. economy—and Biden’s chances”
- “U.S. economy added 303,000 jobs in March as unemployment rate falls slightly to 3.8%”
- “Democrats cheer March jobs report: economy added 303,000 jobs, unemployment at 3.8%”
- “March jobs report: BLS says employers added 303,000 jobs, unemployment dips to 3.8%”
- “Signs of continuing job growth in March: economy added 303,000 jobs, unemployment at 3.8%”
- “What the latest jobs report means for workers, the presidential election, and more”
- “Average gas prices climb to \$3.61 per gallon in March, contributing to stubborn inflation”
- “Gas prices climb to \$3.61 per gallon in March, fueling consumer resentment over economy”
- “Price at the pump climbs to \$3.61 in March, contributing to uptick in CPI inflation rate”
- “Gas prices climb to \$3.61 per gallon in March, and are likely to keep rising heading into summer”
- “See where average gas prices changed the most in March, in your state and across the country”
- “10 Easter eggs hidden in Taylor Swift’s new album ‘Tortured Poets Department’”
- “Dodgers star Shohei Ohtani shows no sign he’s distracted by translator’s gambling scandal”
- “Massive Disneyland expansion will add new rides and amenities to California theme park”
- “Astronomers discover a massive black hole less than 2,000 light years from Earth”
- “Our most satisfying, inexpensive weeknight dinner recipes from 2023”

Source Outlet:

- CNN
- Fox News

- The New York Times
- Politico
- The Wall Street Journal
- The Washington Post

Reading Time:

- 1 minute read
- 2 minute read
- 3 minute read
- 4 minute read

Please look carefully at each story's headline. Then choose which of the two stories you would most prefer to read.

<u>Story A</u>	<u>Story B</u>
Senate Republicans block border security bill, adding to Biden's immigration woes <i>Politico</i> 3 minute read	Learn what's behind the latest uptick in the annual inflation rate (hint: you probably buy it) <i>The New York Times</i> 4 minute read

Which article would you most prefer to read?

Strongly prefer to read Story A
☐

Slightly prefer to read Story A
☐

Slightly prefer to read Story B
☐

Strongly prefer to read Story B
☐

Figure B.2: Example decision task. Participants repeated this task 12 times. This image is an example decision task, for which the values shown in each field are randomized.

Programming note: The first decision task, intended as a warm-up, randomized only 4 possible headlines such that 1 profile always included a headline about polling on public ignorance and 1 profile always included a clickbait headline about the election. The second decision task, which determined which story would later be shown to the respondent in the vignette, randomized only 4 possible headlines such that 1 profile always included a conflict headline, 1 profile always included a public interest headline, 1 profile always included a Texas headline, and 1 story always included a New York headline. For this decision task, the reading time signal was fixed at "2 minute read" for both profile (this being an accurate estimate of the reading time for all possible vignette articles at typical reading speeds; see Brysbaert 2019).

Vignette

Thanks! On the next page, we will show you one of the stories that you selected earlier, adapted from

recent coverage in the news. You can spend as much or as little time reading it as you like.

Programming note: One of two possible stories was presented in the vignette (Texas election law or New York redistricting), which corresponded with the respondent's story preference in the second decision task. However, the style of the article (including headline, framing snippets in the lede, and the ordering of the body paragraphs) was randomized to reflect either a conflict style or a public interest style. If assigned to the conflict (public interest) style, the conflict (public interest) snippets were used in the lede and the conflict (public interest) paragraph appeared first, with the other three body paragraphs randomly ordered. Both stories are presented here with the body paragraphs arbitrarily ordered public interest, conflict, jargon, prediction (framing snippets are provided in the same order, excluding the jargon and prediction snippets).

Texas Public Interest Headline or Texas Conflict Headline

A new election law in Texas [now allows extraordinary interference in local Houston elections by state officials / now allows extraordinary interference in local Houston elections by state officials], with key implications for [democratic rights / partisan matchups] in the 2024 elections.

The unusual election policies adopted by the Republican-controlled state legislature apply only to the 4.8 million residents of Houston's home county—but not other Texas voters. The change gives an unelected official, appointed by the Republican governor, extraordinary powers to remove two locally-elected officials from office and to directly administer local elections. Voting rights advocates say the law undercuts principles of self-government, denying local voters their choice of representatives.

After adopting the new rules for the Democratic stronghold, Texas Republicans defended the measures by accusing Houston Democrats of bungling prior elections. GOP lawmakers observed that some polling sites opened late on Election Day in 2022, making some voters wait or miss voting. But local Democrats say they've already fixed those problems, calling them rare, and lambasted Republicans for a naked power grab that they are already fighting in court.

Jane Nelson, a former Republican state senator and current Secretary of State appointed of Governor Greg Abbott, now enjoys new authority in Texas's Harris County. Under the new law, Nelson can remove the County Clerk and County Assessor of Harris County, and directly oversee election administration and voter registration in the county, upending the traditional roles these two local offices have held in Texas elections.

The new election rules in Houston are expected benefit Republicans seeking to retain their slim three-seat majority in the House of Representatives in Washington, as well as their majorities in both chambers of the state legislature. With Republican state officials taking over elections in the liberal stronghold, Democrats fear that the shift will create enough voter confusion to tip several races to Republicans this year.

or

New York Public Interest Headline or New York Conflict Headline

New York's legislature has approved new Congressional district maps, [largely keeping party-neutral lines that a state court imposed in 2022 / ending a legal war Democrats and Republicans had waged for years]. The surprising result reflects a new emphasis on [election fairness / campaign strategy] as the November election nears.

In 2022, New York’s Court of Appeals ruled that the Democrat-controlled legislature unfairly favored Democrats when drawing new Congressional district lines, a practice known as “gerrymandering” that is prohibited by the state constitution. The 2022 districts were drawn by a neutral, court-appointed official to make elections more competitive. The new voting maps approved by the state legislature are barely changed from the neutral court-ordered maps drawn in 2022.

After the 2020 Census, both parties accused each other of hijacking the normal redistricting process for partisan gain, leading to a cascade of lawsuits in courtrooms across the country. While Democrats pushed to revise New York’s maps, which enabled Republicans to flip four House seats in 2022, North Carolina’s Republican-led legislature successfully overturned that state’s court-ordered maps. Ultimately, New York’s legislature opted for only modest changes.

The litigation over New York’s district maps was extensive. First, Republicans successfully sued to overturn the Democrat-led legislature’s original maps, resulting in a special master drawing court-ordered maps for the 2022 election. Then Democrats sued to overturn those maps; an appellate court ruled in Democrats’ favor in July, which New York’s top court upheld in December. But since few changes were made, Republicans say they will not litigate further.

The new district lines are a potential disaster for Democrats, who hope to retake the House of Representatives this year. While some slight revisions will help Democrats in a few races, after spending millions of dollars suing for a chance to revise, the updated maps do much less than expected—leaving several Republican-held swing districts largely untouched. Election polling in the coming months will show just how steep those costs are.

Next, we’d like to ask you a few questions about the story you just viewed.

[If Texas story:]

According to the article, the new election law in Texas...

- ...allows the Texas Secretary of State to remove elected officials from office
- ...increases the number of times the Texas Governor can run for re-election
- ...imposes new term limits on Texas state Senators
- ...prohibits early voting in off-cycle special elections
- ...requires each Texas county to provide an annual report on election fraud

According to the article, voting rights advocates have criticized the new Texas law because it...

- ...undermines principles of self-government
- ...increases election administration costs
- ...will reduce transparency in campaign spending
- ...will lead to more election fraud
- ...makes filing to run for office more difficult

According to the article, the new Texas law will directly affect...

- ...the city of Houston
- ...the city of El Paso
- ...rural counties
- ...areas along the state’s border with Mexico
- ...the entire state

According to the article, the new Texas law gives election powers to...

- ...an official appointed by the Texas Governor
- ...the Texas Governor
- ...the state legislature
- ...local county officials
- ...a non-governmental election watchdog organization

[If New York story:]

According to the article, New York's Congressional district lines used in the 2022 elections were drawn by...

- ...an independent court-appointed official
- ...a bipartisan court-appointed panel
- ...Democratic state lawmakers
- ...the state's Independent Redistricting Commission
- ...a bipartisan committee of state lawmakers

According to the article, New York's Congressional district lines used in the 2022 elections were drawn with specific intent to...

- ...increase election competitiveness
- ...favor Democrats
- ...favor Republicans
- ...increase the number of majority-minority districts
- ...always conform to county lines

According to the article, the New York state constitution...

- ...prohibits partisan gerrymandering
- ...prohibits public funding of political campaigns
- ...provides public campaign funding for an incumbent governor
- ...requires a new election if less than half of eligible voters cast a ballot
- ...requires amendments to obtain two-thirds approval of the voters

According to the article, the latest Congressional district maps approved by the New York legislature...

- ...are very similar to the maps used in 2022
- ...are likely to help Democrats flip as many as 6 House seats
- ...are likely to help Republicans flip as many as 6 House seats
- ...are likely to be struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court
- ...force three popular incumbent Representatives to compete in the same district

Headline Evaluations

Thanks! Next, we'd like to get your thoughts on a few headlines you may have seen earlier.

Programming note: Three random headlines were drawn without replacement from the 109 possible headlines for decision tasks 2-12, and presented to respondents one at a time to evaluate on all eight dimensions in a grid format question.

Please consider the following headline: [Randomized Headline]

To what extent, if any, would you say that this headline is...

Entertaining

- Not at all
- Very little
- A moderate amount
- Quite a bit
- A great deal

Informative

- Not at all
- Very little
- A moderate amount
- Quite a bit
- A great deal

Easy to understand

- Not at all
- Very little
- A moderate amount
- Quite a bit
- A great deal

About forecasting

- Not at all
- Very little
- A moderate amount
- Quite a bit
- A great deal

About conflict

- Not at all
- Very little
- A moderate amount
- Quite a bit
- A great deal

About public policy

- Not at all
- Very little
- A moderate amount
- Quite a bit
- A great deal

Clickbait

- Not at all
- Very little
- A moderate amount
- Quite a bit

- A great deal

Biased

- Not at all
- Very little
- A moderate amount
- Quite a bit
- A great deal

Demographics

Finally, we have some background questions for statistical purposes. Which of the following best describes your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Something else

What race or ethnic group best describes you? Please check all that apply.

- Asian or Asian-American
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Middle Eastern
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Something else

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- Less than a high school degree or equivalent
- High school degree or equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college, but no degree
- 2-year college degree (Associate's degree)
- 4-year college degree (Bachelor's degree)
- Postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)

What is your current employment status?

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Full-time homemaker
- Student
- Something else

In what year were you born? Please enter a 4-digit number.

- (Text box.)

Which of the following describes your total annual household income from 2022—that is the total income everyone living in your household made together, before taxes, in 2022?

- Less than \$20,000
- \$10,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$59,999
- \$60,000 to \$79,999
- \$80,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$119,999
- \$120,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 or more

In which zip code do you currently reside? Please enter a 5-digit number.

- (Text box.)

Thank you for completing this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Please share any comments you have about the survey. We welcome your feedback. When you are finished, the next screen will return you to Prolific.

- (Text box.)

Study 2 Information

The data for this study come from a sample of 1,717 U.S. adults recruited via two separate sampling strategies: an address-based random (probability) sample of U.S. registered voters, and a convenience sample of existing U.S. subscribers to Ground News’ Blindspot Report newsletter (approximately 500,000 subscribers). The study was conducted by the author and funded by the Rapoport Family Foundation, by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, by the Democracy, Institutions, and Political Economy Fund of the Department of Political Science at Duke University, and by Bass Connections at Duke University. The study was fielded from July 9th to October 23rd, 2024. The study was approved by Duke University’s Institutional Review Board under protocol 2024-0101. Respondents received \$5 for completing the study, plus up to \$5 in bonus payments earned during the study; ten participants selected by random lottery received an additional bonus payment of \$100. Preregistration materials for this study are available [here](#).

For the probability-based sample of U.S. registered voters, 36,000 records were randomly sampled from the L2 voter file. L2 maintains a approximately complete list of all current U.S. registered voters (approximately 214 million records, including name and address information for each) identified from both public records and cross-referenced commercial data. Sampled voters were mailed a letter (see Appendix E.4) to their recorded mailing address, inviting them to enroll in the study by completing an online onboarding survey. Verified email address information was obtained for approximately one third of the sampled voters (11,887 records); these invitees were sent three follow-up invitation emails. From this recruitment process, a total of 798 individuals entered the onboarding survey, of which 706 successfully completed it (AAPOR RR1 minimum response rate of 2.0 percent).

A supplementary convenience sample of U.S. adults was recruited by placing advertisements for the study in Ground News’ weekly Blindspot Report newsletter. This newsletter was sent to approximately 500,000 subscribers, approximately 80 percent of which were U.S. residents, and included a series of news headlines covered predominantly by right-leaning news sources or predominantly by left-leaning news sources (potential news “blindspots”). An advertisement (see Appendix E.4) inviting readers to “Participate in a media study” was included in this newsletter for three consecutive weeks and provided a link to the onboarding survey where participants could enroll in the study. A total of 2,215 individuals

entered the onboarding survey from this link, of which 1,041 successfully completed it.

As preregistered, participants recruited from both samples were screened for eligibility and quality responses in several ways. After providing consent to participate, respondents were first screened for eligibility; respondents who indicated that they were less than 18 years of age or did not reside in the United States were excluded. Participants recruited via the newsletter advertisements were additionally required to pass a Captcha check and an attention check as part of the screening process. This screening process eliminated 7 mail invitees and 90 newsletters invitees. The attention check asked respondents to self-report several behaviors in the past 30 days; participants were excluded if they reported purchasing an airline company, visiting a space station, or having a fatal heart attack in the past 30 days, or failed to report eating a meal or using a computer, tablet, or phone in the past 30 days. At the end of the onboarding survey, respondents were asked to commit to completing the entire study, and were not enrolled in the study if they expressed uncertainty about their ability to complete it. This removed 13 mail invitees and 9 newsletters invitees.

Finally, a small number of respondents were removed from the analysis sample for extreme speeding (completing the onboarding survey in less than one third of the median time, or 369 seconds or less) or for failing at least two of the following additional quality checks: self-reported age and birth year do not correspond, within a tolerance of ± 2 years; self-reported state of residence and zip code do not match; non-sequitur or item non-response to an open-ended question about preferred news source; reporting “a lot” or “some” use in the past week of a social media platform that does not exist (JiveMojo); or speeding, defined as completion in less than $1/2$ of the median time (or 553 seconds or less). These checks eliminated 5 respondents from the address-based sample and 3 from the convenience sample, providing final analysis samples of $n_p = 688$ and $n_c = 1,029$ (respectively) and a combined sample of $N = 1,717$.

Appendix E.1 provides descriptive statistics for the address-based and convenience sub-samples, the combined enrolled sample, and the combined post-treatment sample. The observations are not weighted. As with all survey research, the design and collection of data has limitations, and resulting estimates may involve unmeasured error that limits representativeness to the target population.

Sample Characteristics

Table E.1.1 provides the sample characteristics on selected demographic and political variables, in both the baseline and endline surveys and by sampling design subsamples (address-based versus convenience). Figure E.1.1 shows the sample distribution on the baseline political engagement index, indicating substantial variation in this key moderator.

Table E.1.1: F24 Sample Characteristics

		Baseline Survey			Endline Survey		
		% Total	% ABS	% GNS	% Total	% ABS	% GNS
Age	18–29	20.5	17.9	22.3	19.2	14.8	21.8
	30–39	16.8	16.3	17.1	16.7	15.9	17.1
	40–49	14.2	15.5	13.4	14.3	15.4	13.6
	50–59	15.4	16.9	15.1	15.9	16.2	15.7
	60+	33.1	33.4	32.1	33.9	37.7	31.8
Gender	Male	51.8	49.0	53.6	52.5	48.9	54.5
	Female	45.2	50.6	41.6	44.9	50.8	41.5
	Other Gender	3.0	0.4	4.7	2.6	0.2	3.9
Race	Asian / Asian-American	4.4	5.2	3.8	4.6	6.1	3.7
	Black / African-American	5.2	7.3	3.9	4.4	6.3	3.3
	Hispanic / Latino	6.8	7.8	6.0	6.3	6.6	6.1
	Middle Eastern	1.3	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.5
	Native American / Alaska Native	2.4	2.6	2.3	2.1	2.6	1.9
	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.3	0.6	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.1
	White	87.1	81.4	90.9	88.1	83.6	90.7
	Other Race	2.3	3.1	1.8	2.1	2.8	1.7
Education	Less than High School	0.8	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.8
	High School or GED	7.0	7.6	6.6	5.9	6.1	5.7
	Some College	19.0	20.8	17.8	17.6	18.0	17.4
	Associate’s Degree	8.4	9.6	7.6	7.7	8.7	7.1
	Bachelor’s Degree	33.6	31.7	34.9	34.7	34.0	35.1
	Postgraduate Degree	31.3	29.4	32.6	33.4	32.6	33.9
Employment	Full-time	47.9	50.7	46.0	47.4	49.9	46.1
	Part-time	9.2	7.4	10.4	9.5	7.0	10.9
	Unemployed	3.8	2.9	4.4	3.7	3.5	3.9
	Retired	25.2	28.9	22.7	25.6	30.9	22.6
	Home-maker	3.5	3.2	3.7	4.1	3.5	4.4
	Student	6.0	3.3	7.8	5.6	2.3	7.5
	Something Else	4.4	3.5	5.1	4.0	2.8	4.7
Household Inc.	Less than \$20,000	5.3	5.4	5.2	4.7	4.9	4.5
	\$20,000 to \$39,000	10.3	8.9	11.2	9.4	7.3	10.7
	\$40,000 to \$59,000	11.4	11.6	11.3	10.9	10.8	10.9
	\$60,000 to \$79,000	13.2	10.8	14.9	12.9	10.5	14.3
	\$80,000 to \$99,000	11.2	12.8	10.2	11.6	13.1	10.8
	\$100,000 to \$149,000	22.0	22.8	21.4	22.1	23.7	21.2
	\$150,000+	25.7	26.3	25.4	27.4	28.3	26.8
Partisanship	Democrat	38.1	40.4	36.6	38.8	42.6	36.4
	Independent	46.0	34.3	53.7	46.5	33.0	54.2
	Republican	15.9	25.3	9.6	14.7	24.4	9.2

Note: Data from analysis samples of 1,717 respondents in the baseline survey and 1,176 respondents in the endline survey, respectively. The “ABS” and “GNS” columns refer to the address-based probability subsample and Ground News convenience subsample, respectively.

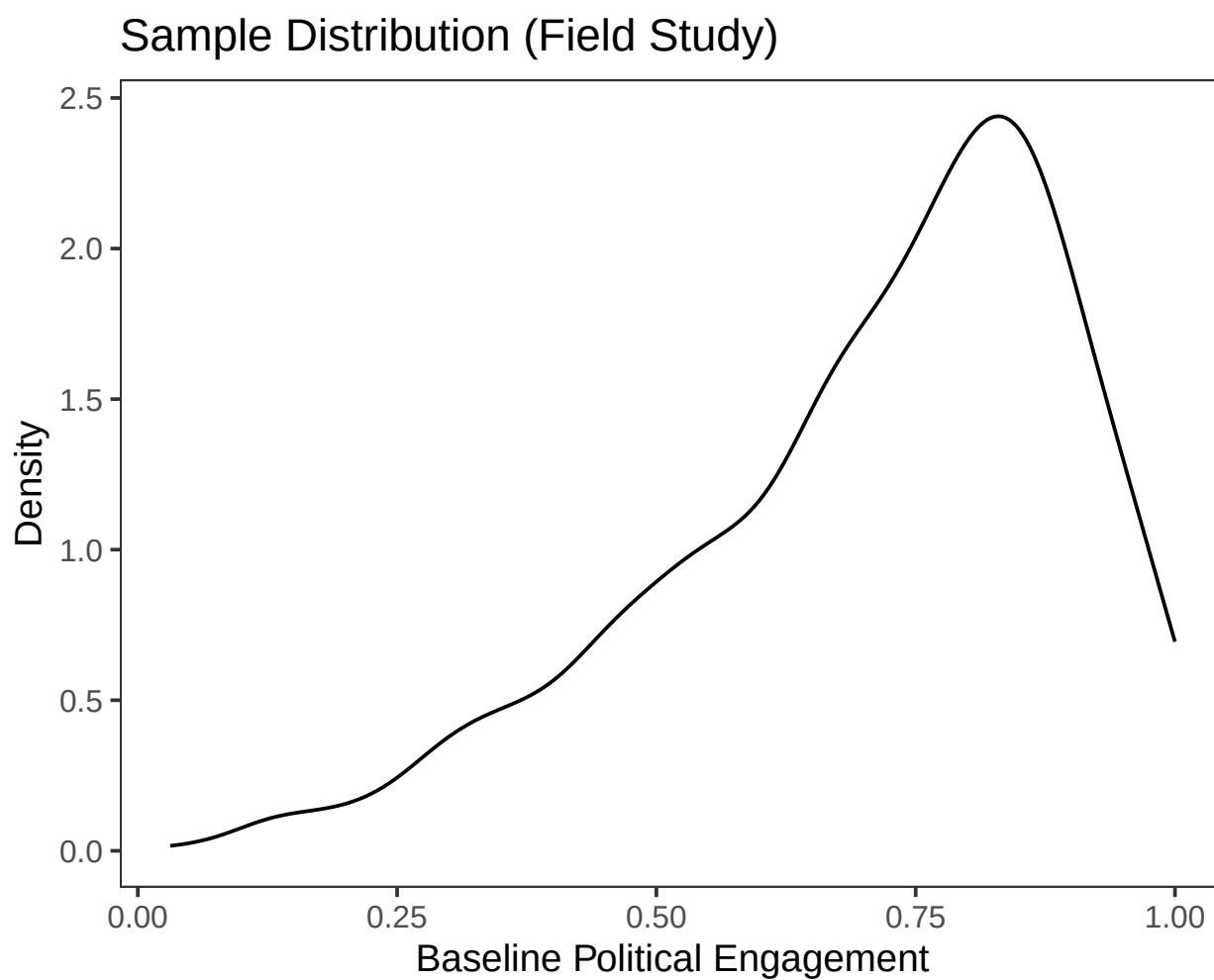


Figure E.1.1: Figure displays the F24 sample distribution on the baseline political engagement index.

Balance Tests

Table E.2.1 provides balance tests of treatment assignment with respect to the control covariates (demographics and pre-treatment measures of political attitudes and engagement) at baseline; Table E.2.2 displays the same tests with respect to the endline survey sample. These tests indicate good balance across the treatment arms and successful randomization. Of 54 tests, only one shows a statistically significant difference (baseline education is slightly higher for the jargon style treatment arm).

Table E.2.1: Balance Tests at Baseline

Variable	Control	<i>Conflict</i>		<i>Jargon</i>		<i>Prediction</i>	
		Diff.	<i>p</i>	Diff.	<i>p</i>	Diff.	<i>p</i>
<i>Age</i>	48.661	0.037	0.977	0.275	0.826	−0.428	0.735
<i>Male</i>	0.532	−0.007	0.844	−0.036	0.291	−0.015	0.670
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.225	−0.042	0.123	−0.016	0.572	−0.042	0.131
<i>Education</i>	3.535	0.035	0.696	0.218	0.014*	0.042	0.646
<i>Unemployed</i>	0.042	−0.011	0.375	0.006	0.644	−0.011	0.400
<i>Income</i>	4.273	0.157	0.353	0.164	0.332	0.080	0.643
<i>Party ID</i>	3.271	−0.002	0.987	−0.053	0.692	0.107	0.434
<i>Ideology</i>	0.390	0.000	0.989	−0.007	0.745	0.012	0.573
<i>Pol. Eng.</i>	0.700	0.019	0.145	0.013	0.339	0.001	0.916

Note: Data from 1,717 respondents in the onboarding survey. The table displays the mean value of each variable for the control group, and the mean difference from the control mean for each treatment group and the associated p-value of a t-test comparing these means.

Survey Questionnaires

This section provides the instruments for the onboarding and endline surveys, presented jointly. In this section, items marked with (*) were fielded on the onboarding survey only, (**) on the convenience sample version of the onboarding survey only, and (***) on the endline survey only. All other items were fielded on both the onboarding and endline surveys.

Consent and Screening

(*) Key Information Protocol ID#: [REDACTED] **Thank you** for your interest in participating in this research study about news and opinion. This study is being conducted by researchers at Duke University in collaboration with Ground News, a nonpartisan media organization. You are specially invited to take part in this study to represent the opinions and experiences of people [**readers] like you. **What is it for?** This is a scientific research study to better understand people’s views about media and current events. This study will give you access to a special Ground News newsletter on news you may have missed, and will ask you to complete some brief surveys periodically throughout the study.

Table E.2.2: Balance Tests at Endline

Variable	Control	<i>Conflict</i>		<i>Jargon</i>		<i>Prediction</i>	
		Diff.	<i>p</i>	Diff.	<i>p</i>	Diff.	<i>p</i>
<i>Age</i>	48.340	1.565	0.307	1.050	0.477	0.481	0.748
<i>Male</i>	0.533	0.016	0.699	-0.016	0.689	-0.029	0.476
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.201	-0.019	0.566	-0.014	0.671	-0.018	0.575
<i>Education</i>	3.671	0.028	0.795	0.129	0.223	-0.050	0.646
<i>Unemployed</i>	0.042	-0.010	0.521	0.001	0.947	-0.008	0.624
<i>Income</i>	4.453	0.211	0.308	0.029	0.890	-0.018	0.933
<i>Party ID</i>	3.246	0.006	0.969	-0.111	0.484	-0.006	0.971
<i>Ideology</i>	0.378	0.001	0.961	-0.007	0.778	0.004	0.857
<i>Pol. Eng.</i>	0.721	0.018	0.246	0.011	0.475	-0.004	0.800

Note: Data from 1,176 respondents in the endline survey. The table displays the mean value of each variable for the control group, and the mean difference from the control mean for each treatment group and the associated p-value of a t-test comparing these means.

How long will it take? The study will last about 8 weeks, during which time you will have access to a special Ground News newsletter. In addition to completing this initial 10-15 minute onboarding survey now, you will be asked to complete 4 short surveys (less than 5 minutes each) about once every other week during the study and a final survey (about 10-15 minutes) at the very end of the study. **Why participate?** Your insights are important and participating will make the study more accurate. In appreciation of your participation, you will be paid \$5 for completing the study, and you will also have the opportunity to earn up to \$5 in bonus payments during the study by correctly answering questions about the newsletters. Additionally, if you complete the study, for each survey you completed (up to 6 total), you will be entered into a drawing at the end of the study to win 1 of 10 bonus gift cards, each in the amount of \$100. **How do I participate?** This research study will ask you a series of questions about you and your opinions about topics in the news. After completing this initial survey, you will be enrolled in a special Ground News newsletter, which you will receive by email 3 times per week. Participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time and you may refuse to answer any questions, but you must complete the final survey at the end of the study in order to be paid, including any bonus payments you may win during the study. **Are there any risks from participating?** We know of no risks resulting from participating in the study. We will store your survey responses separately from information that could personally identify you, such as your name, mailing address, and email address [****separately from your Ground News account information**]. Although collected data may be made public or used for future research purposes, your responses will always remain confidential, and any reported data from the study will not include information that could individually identify you. Once we have completed data collection, all personally-identifying information will be destroyed. **Who do I contact if I have questions?** If you have any questions about the research, please contact the researchers at [REDACTED]. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, contact Duke's Campus Institutional Review Board at [REDACTED]. If writing to the Campus IRB, please reference protocol ID #[REDACTED].

- I consent to participate, begin the study.
- I do NOT consent.

(***) Key Information Protocol ID#: 2024-0101 Thank you for your interest in participating in this follow-up survey by researchers at Duke University. **This survey is the last part of the study** and should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Your responses will always remain confidential, and any reported data from the survey will not include information that could individually identify you. After you complete this survey, within 72 hours you will receive by email a digital gift card worth \$[AWARD], which includes your \$5 participation payment and \$[BONUS] that you earned in bonus payments earlier in the study. You will also be entered for another chance to win 1 of 10 bonus gift cards, each worth \$100. We will notify you by email if you win a bonus gift card. If you have any questions about the research, please contact the researchers at [REDACTED]. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, contact Duke's Campus Institutional Review Board at [REDACTED]. If writing to the Campus IRB, please reference protocol ID #2024-0101.

- I consent to participate, begin the survey.

(*) We have just a few questions to confirm your eligibility for the survey. What is your age in years? Please enter a whole number:

- (Text box.)

(*) In which state do you currently reside?

- I do not reside in the United States
- Alabama
- ...
- Wyoming

(**) Which of the following have you done in the past 30 days? Please check all that apply.

- Watched TV
- Eaten a meal
- Purchased an airline company
- Read a book
- Visited a space station
- Had a fatal heart attack
- Used a computer, tablet, or phone

Email Address

(*) Thanks! You have qualified for the survey. A valid email address is required to participate in this study. Please enter the valid email address that you wish to use to participate in this study. This information will be kept confidential. **Please ensure that this is an email you check regularly.** We will use this email address to contact you throughout the study, including to notify you of additional surveys in later parts of the study. We will also use this email address to provide your participation payment at the end of the study.

- (Email entry.)

News Consumption

Thanks! We want to begin by asking you some questions about your media use. In the past 7 days, have you... (please check all that apply)

- Used social media (such as Facebook or YouTube)
- Watched news on television
- Read a newspaper (in print or online)
- Listened to a radio news program, talk radio, or news podcast
- None of these

How much, if at all, have you used the following social media platforms in the past week? [*Options: A lot; Some; Not at all*]

- Facebook
- X (Twitter)
- YouTube
- Instagram
- JiveMojo
- TikTok
- Reddit
- WhatsApp

Politics can be fast-paced, and many people do not follow every new story. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in politics, if at all?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns, while others follow campaigns closely. Generally speaking, how interested are you in political campaigns?

- Not at all interested
- Slightly interested
- Moderately interested
- Very interested
- Extremely interested

During a typical week, how many days, if any, do you watch, read, or listen to news about politics?

- 0 days
- 1 day
- ...
- 7 days

During a typical day, how many hours, if any, do you spend watching, reading, or listening to news about any topic?

- None
- Some, but less than 1 hour
- 1 hour
- 2 hours
- 3 hours
- 4 hours

- 5 hours
- 6 hours or more

When you are watching, reading, or listening to a news story, how often, if at all, do you typically watch, read, or listen all the way to the end of the story?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

What source of news do you use most often?

- (Text entry.)

How often, if at all, do you find yourself actively trying to avoid the news these days?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

Generally speaking, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? *“I can be well-informed even when I don’t actively follow the news.”*

- Completely agree
- Moderately agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Completely disagree

“I don’t have to actively seek out the news because when important events happen, I will hear about them.”

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

How often, if at all, do you think you can count on the news media to be accurate?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

How often, if at all, do you consider the news media to be trustworthy?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes

- Never

How often, if at all, do you find the news media to be informative?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

(*) What is one (1) thing that you particularly like or appreciate about the news media today?

- (Text entry.)

(*) What is one (1) thing that you particularly dislike or find frustrating about the news media today?

- (Text entry.)

Political Attitudes

Next, we would like to ask you some questions about yourself and your opinions. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Other party (please specify)

[If Democrat] Would you call yourself a strong Democrat, or a not very strong Democrat?

- Strong
- Not very strong

[If Republican] Would you call yourself a strong Republican, or a not very strong Republican?

- Strong
- Not very strong

[If Neither] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic Party or to the Republican Party?

- Closer to the Democratic Party
- Closer to the Republican Party
- Neither

Where would you place yourself on this scale?

- Extremely liberal
- Mostly liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Mostly conservative
- Extremely conservative

Which of the following describes your political beliefs and attitudes? Please check all that apply.

- Liberal

- Progressive
- Green
- Conservative
- Traditional
- Libertarian
- Socialist
- Nationalist
- Environmentalist
- None of these

We would like you to rate your feelings toward some groups of people on a 0 to 100 scale, where 0 means you feel very cold towards them and 100 means that you feel very warm towards them. How would you rate your feelings towards...

...Democratic Party leaders?

- (Text box.)

...Democratic Party voters?

- (Text box.)

...Republican Party leaders?

- (Text box.)

...Republican Party voters?

- (Text box.)

In your opinion, how much, if at all, are each of the following groups committed to principles of democracy?

...Democratic Party leaders?

- Strongly committed
- Mostly committed
- Somewhat committed
- Barely committed
- Not at all committed

...Democratic Party voters?

- Strongly committed
- ...
- Not at all committed

...Republican Party leaders?

- Strongly committed
- ...
- Not at all committed

...Republican Party voters?

- Strongly committed
- ...
- Not at all committed

Political Knowledge

Next, we're going to ask you some questions about current events. It is important to us that you do NOT use outside sources like the Internet to search for the correct answer. Will you answer the following questions without help from outside sources?

- Yes
- No

Who is the current Speaker of the US House of Representatives?

- Nancy Pelosi
- Hakeem Jeffries
- Kevin McCarthy
- Mike Johnson
- I don't know

How long is the term of office for a US Senator?

- 2 years
- 4 years
- 6 years
- 8 years
- I don't know

What job or political office is now held by John Roberts?

- Chair of the Democratic National Committee
- Senate Majority Leader
- Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- Chair of the Republican National Committee
- I don't know

What job or political office is now held by Jens Stoltenberg? *Note: after Stoltenberg stepped down on October 1, 2024, this question was changed to "was held by Jens Stoltenberg earlier this year" in the endline survey.*

- Secretary of the U.S. Treasury
- Prime Minister of Sweden
- Secretary General of NATO
- Chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve
- I don't know

Who currently holds the title of "President of the U.S. Senate"?

- Elizabeth Warren
- Kamala Harris
- Chuck Schumer
- Mitch McConnell
- I don't know

Is the [governor] of [your state] a member of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or neither?

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Neither

- I don't know

Which political party currently controls most seats in the [lower chamber] of [your state]?

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Neither
- I don't know

Of the nine (9) justices currently appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court, how many were appointed by a Republican president?

- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- I don't know

In what year will the next general election for President of the United States take place?

- Year: (Text box.)
- I don't know

(*) In what year did the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decide the case *Hill v. Wallace*?

- Year: (Text box.)
- I don't know

(***) In what year did the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decide the case *Shaw v. Kellogg*?

- Year: (Text box.)
- I don't know

Efficacy and Trust

Now we will move on to another set of topics. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? *"I can trust the government to do what's right."*

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

"The government is responsive to the concerns of the public."

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

"I feel my voice is heard in government decisions that affect me."

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

"Most elected officials in government ignore what people like me think."

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

“I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues debated today.”

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

“Sometimes, political issues seems so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.”

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

Democratic Norms

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? *“All adult citizens should have equal opportunity to vote.”*

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

“States should be allowed to draw legislative district lines to give advantage to one political party.”

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

“Political candidates should respect the results of a free and fair election, even if they dislike the outcome.”

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

“Elected officials should be prosecuted if they commit crimes while in office.”

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

“Government officials should be allowed to arrest journalists that publish unfavorable news coverage.”

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

“It is justified for elected officials to reward campaign donors with government jobs.”

- Completely agree
- ...
- Completely disagree

Newsletters

(***) In the next section, we want to ask you some questions about the email newsletters that you received from Ground News as part of this Media & Opinion Study. Each of these newsletters included “Ground News Special Edition” in the subject line. Do you recall receiving newsletters like this from Ground News during the study?

- Yes
- No

(***) [If Yes] To what extent, if at all, did you find these newsletters to be... [*Options: Not at all, Very little, A moderate amount, Quite a bit, A great deal*]

- Entertaining
- Informative
- Easy to understand
- Biased
- Interesting

(***) [If Yes] What is one (1) thing that you particularly liked about the newsletters?

- (Text entry.)

(***) [If Yes] What is one (1) thing that you particularly disliked about the newsletters?

- (Text entry.)

Demographics

(*) Now we have some background questions for statistical purposes. Which of the following best describes your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Something else

(*) What race or ethnic group best describes you? Please check all that apply.

- Asian or Asian-American
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Middle Eastern
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Something else

(*) What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- Less than a high school degree or equivalent
- High school degree or equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college, but no degree
- 2-year college degree (Associate’s degree)
- 4-year college degree (Bachelor’s degree)
- Postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)

(*) What is your current employment status?

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Full-time homemaker
- Student
- Something else

(*) In what year were you born? Please enter a 4-digit number.

- (Text box.)

(*) Which of the following describes your total annual household income from 2023—that is the total income everyone living in your household made together, before taxes, in 2023?

- Less than \$20,000
- \$10,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$59,999
- \$60,000 to \$79,999
- \$80,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$119,999
- \$120,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 or more

(*) In which zip code do you currently reside? Please enter a 5-digit number.

- (Text box.)

Denouement

(*) Thanks! This is the last section of this survey. Starting in the next few days, you will be enrolled in an email newsletter from Ground News, which will be sent to your email 3 times each week. Reading these newsletters is not required, but will help you earn bonus payments in follow-up surveys later in the study. As part of the study, we will be inviting you to take more surveys in the weeks ahead. Every other Sunday for the next eight weeks, we will email you a brief survey. These surveys are short (less than 5 minutes each) and you will have the opportunity to win up to \$1.25 in bonus payments during each survey. Additionally, for each survey you complete, you will be entered to win 1 of 10 bonus gift cards, each in the amount of \$100. If you complete all of the surveys, you will have 6 chances to win. Please check your email regularly so that you don't miss the newsletters or the surveys. The email address you provided earlier is: **EMAIL**. Is this email address correct?

- Yes, this is my correct email
- No, I want to use a different email (Text entry.)

(*) We are grateful for your participation so far. If you participate beyond this point, it's extremely important that you finish the whole study. Dropping out after this point can really damage the entire study. Finishing the whole study means: You will receive an email newsletter 3 times per week for the next two months. You will do your best to complete each of 4 short surveys that will be sent to you every other Sunday during the study. You will have a chance to earn up to \$5 in bonus payments in these surveys. You will complete a final survey at the end of the study (about two months from now),

after which you will be paid \$5 for your participation, plus up to an additional \$5 in bonus payments earned. If you finish the whole study, you will be entered into a drawing to win 1 of 10 bonus gift cards, each worth \$100. You will be entered once for each survey you complete (including this one), up to a total of 6 chances to win. Do you commit to finishing the whole study?

- Yes, I commit to finishing the whole study
- I'm not sure I can complete the whole study. It's probably best for me to drop out now.

(*) [If Confirmed] Thank you for confirming your intention to complete the whole study. We appreciate the time you have taken to participate so far. You will receive an email from us confirming your enrollment in the study after you submit your response below. We would also like to send you text alerts when each new survey is available for this study, so that you do not miss any chances to win bonus participation payments. Providing a phone number is completely optional and does not affect your eligibility for this study in any way. This information will be used solely for communication regarding this study, will always be kept confidential, and will never be shared with any other party. If you agree to receive text alerts about this study, please provide your mobile number (format: XXX-XXX-XXXX).

- (Text box.)

(*) [If Confirmed] Finally, if you have any comments about this initial onboarding survey, please share them below. We welcome your feedback.

- (Text box.)

(*) [If Not Confirmed] Thank you for letting us know that you may not be able to complete the whole study. We appreciate the time you have taken to participate in this survey. If you have any comments about this survey, please share them below. We welcome your feedback.

- (Text box.)

(*) *Note: following submission, confirmed participants saw the following message on the screen. The referenced email is shown below in Figure E.3.1.* We appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey for the Media & Opinion Study. Your response has been recorded. You will receive an email with more information about participating in the study and how you will be paid for completing the study. Please check your email regularly. If you do not hear from us within 48 hours, please email us at [REDACTED]. You may close this page.

(***) Thank you for completing this survey. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated. Once you click the button below to submit your response, you will receive an email confirmation with information regarding your participation payment. If you have any additional comments about this survey, or the Media & Opinion Study more generally, please share them below. We welcome your feedback.

- (Text box.)

(***) *Note: following submission, participants saw the following message on the screen:* You have now completed the Media & Opinion Study. Thank you for your participation. You will receive an email within 72 hours with your participation payment, in the form of a digital gift card. Please check your email regularly. If you do not receive this email within 72 hours, please email us at [REDACTED]. Additionally, once all data collection for this study is complete, we will select 10 participants by random lottery to each receive a bonus gift card of \$100. We will notify you by email if you have been awarded one of these bonus gift cards. Thank you again for being part of our study. You may close this page.

Media & Opinion Study: Enrollment Successful



Media & Opinion Study <media.study@[REDACTED]>
To [REDACTED]

Thank you for enrolling in the Media & Opinion Study, conducted by researchers at [REDACTED] in collaboration with Ground News. You will be invited to participate in more surveys over the next two months.

This email contains important information about how we will pay you for completing these surveys. Please read it carefully.

We will send you a short new survey about once every two weeks. In these surveys, you will have the opportunity to earn \$1.25 in bonus payments. These surveys are short and should take less than 5 minutes to complete.

At the very end of the study, you will be invited to a final survey (about 10-15 minutes to complete), which you must complete in order to be paid for your participation, including any bonus payments you earned up to that point.

Additionally, if you complete the study, you will be entered to win 1 of 10 bonus gift cards, each in the amount of \$100. You will be entered once for each survey you completed (that is, up to 6 times).

Invitations to complete each short survey will be sent on Sundays, and will remain open for 48 hours only. Please check your email regularly so that you don't miss a survey. The surveys will be emailed to you with the subject line "NEW SURVEY: Media & Opinion Study."

After completing the study, you will be paid via an electronic gift card that will be sent to this email address.

Thank you again for your participation. Please email us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Figure E.3.1: Figure displays the confirmation and instructions email sent to participants following enrollment and submission of the onboarding survey.

Recruitment Instruments

Figure E.4.1 provides the recruitment blurb placed in Ground News' "Blindspot Report" newsletter to recruit the convenience sample. Figure E.4.2 provides the recruitment letter mailed to registered voters randomly sampled from the L2 national U.S. voter file.



The image is a recruitment blurb for a research study. At the top, there is a collage of newspaper clippings with visible headlines such as "bankruptcy", "Job search", and "Hourly Jobs". Below this collage, the logos for "GROUND News" and "Duke UNIVERSITY" are displayed side-by-side, separated by a vertical line. The "GROUND News" logo is in a bold, black, sans-serif font, while the "Duke UNIVERSITY" logo is in a blue, serif font. Below the logos, there is a small, black-and-white photograph of a young child in a stroller, holding up a newspaper. The background of the entire blurb is a light gray with a subtle pattern of small dots. Below the photograph, the text "Participate in a media study" is written in a large, bold, black font. Underneath this, a paragraph of text invites participation in a research study about news and opinion, conducted by researchers at Duke University in collaboration with Ground News. The text mentions that participants will be paid and that the opportunity is limited to U.S. residents. A link labeled "Learn more here." is provided at the end of the paragraph.

GROUND News | **Duke**
UNIVERSITY

Participate in a media study

You are specially invited to take part in a research study about news and opinion, conducted by researchers at Duke University in collaboration with Ground News. Get paid to share your opinions. Opportunity limited to U.S. residents. [Learn more here.](#)

Figure E.4.1: Figure displays the recruitment blurb placed in the Ground News “Blindspot Report” newsletter.

Your Invitation

SUMMER 2024 MEDIA & OPINION STUDY

[Name]
[Address Line 1]
[Address Line 2]
[Address Line 3]



Dear [Recipient First Name],

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study of public opinion about current events, conducted by researchers at [REDACTED]. You are among a small number of registered voters who have been chosen to participate in this research study to represent the opinions and experiences of people like you.

What is it for? This is a scientific research study to better understand people's views about media and current events. The study will give you access to an email newsletter about current events that is produced by Ground News, a nonpartisan media organization.

How long will it take? The study will last about 8 weeks, during which time you will be enrolled in the Ground News email newsletter. You will be asked to complete an initial 10-minute onboarding survey online, 4 short surveys (less than 5 minutes each) once every other week during the study, and a final survey (about 10 minutes) at the very end of the study.

Why participate? Your insights are important. Participating will make the study more accurate. In appreciation of your participation, you will be paid \$5 for completing the study, and you will also have the opportunity to earn up to \$5 in bonus payments during the study. Additionally, for each survey you complete (up to 6 total), you will be entered into a drawing at the end of the study to win 1 of 10 bonus gift cards, each in the amount of \$100.

How do I participate? To enroll in the study, please go to the survey website printed below and enter your personal access code. A valid email address is required to participate in the study, and a computer or smartphone is required to complete each survey. The surveys cannot be completed by email or over the phone, and the study is currently only available in English.

Survey Website: tinyurl.com/[REDACTED]MediaStudy
Your Personal Access Code: [000000]

Who can I contact with questions? If you have difficulty accessing the survey or have other questions, please email us at [media.study@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:media.study@[REDACTED]).

Thank you for considering being part of this study. The onboarding survey is available now. We would appreciate it if you could respond no later than **August 4th, 2024**.

Sincerely,

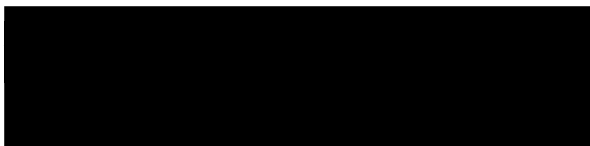


Figure E.4.2: Figure displays the recruitment letter that was mailed to registered U.S. voters.